

Quiet, please. Tape is rolling.

1, 2.

The 542nd field artillery battalion was engaged in many distinguished events throughout the course of the war and particularly in Germany. Could you tell us?

Yes, our 522nd field artillery battalion was the only Nisei unit to fight in Germany.

OK, thank you.

Mr. Shimazu, it's my understanding that the 522nd was also the only-- well, one of the first American battalions to liberate the concentration camps in Germany, and in particular, Dachau. When did you first come in contact with a concentration camp in Germany?

Gee I should remember the day, but I don't. But anyhow, when I personally got there, I remember, the gates were already open. Prisoners were milling around in all directions. And I remember going into this particular one. And of course, which of all the many Dachau and this one was, I'm not sure. But there were no homes anywhere in sight outside of this concentration camp.

But inside, we went into, I would think, what was then the administration building, where everybody coming in would check in, that sort of thing. I was able to go in that. And sitting on the couch in the living room was a guy that from all my high school days, I remembered as the Reverend Martin Niemoller. This guy was so calm, cool, and collected. Everybody else is running around. He, in spite of his emaciated condition, was very alert and just very calmly sitting there. He really impressed me.

But anyhow, in this Dachau area, I think our headquarters battery bivouacked very close to it. It must have been well within walking distance. So we had many people in our area.

But orders were out to everybody that we are not to feed these freed prisoners because they were really skin and bones already. And the whole digestive tract is incapable of handling any kind of food that we consume. And being a staff sergeant, it was my duty to also enforce all the commands. So I did not personally feed, even though some others might have.

But it was a very painful experience because that day at the evening meal, we had a place designated for disposing of all of our food scraps. It was a hole in the ground or something. And I also went over there to scrape out of my mess kit all the leftovers. And there were two or three of these prisoners standing around and in their German asking, Warum? Warum? Why are you throwing that food instead of giving it to us?

Oh, it was really very painful. You see, our insides, we want to help them any way we can, give them the food. But we had orders from high up not to feed them, that proper food will be prepared for them in very short order. So don't. That was a real sad experience.

These people were really walking skeletons already. And they had their striped clothing on. Their hair was all cropped kind of short. I recall, eyes were sunken. And yet, they were alert. These people were very alert. And I admired the fortitude they had in having survived all the terrific treatment they had.

But we didn't stay there very long, I think just overnight. And the next day, already, we were on the road. Now, others have said that they've seen dead horses being torn and eaten by these people. I didn't see that personally.

But from there, we-- of course, incidentally, the Dachau concentration camp we entered was very close to Munich. And I think it was within a 10 mile radius, and more on the north side of Munich. So we went into Munich. And while there, we had the good fortune of liberating one of the German breweries. And for the time we were there, we had all the beer

we wanted.

But the situation was fast-moving. From there, we went on to places like Berchtesgaden, Bad Tolz, and on into Austria. We went as far as a place called Waakirchen. And we were there maybe a little bit beyond that too. But while we were there, I, as the ranking noncom, accepted the surrender of a German major general. It's written up as Major General Steinmeier.

But he came with a busload of troops, leading them in a staff car of his own with a white flag flying. This was five days before the end of the war. But they must have been watching us from all the wooded areas up above. And they felt, well, I think these guys won't shoot us. And they came out. They surrendered to us with everything they had.

And for a short while, we had the privilege of driving in a comfortable Daimler Benz I think it was, a staff car. But we got to headquarters. We want that. Of course, it was all-- once we capture something, it's government property. We had to turn it over. Then from there, of course, I think we pulled back to a place called Stepa.

OK. Mr. Shimazu, could you describe-- I understand that you were one of the members who was actually there at the gates of Dachau when it was opened, when the lock was shot off, and the gates were opened, and the 522nd liberated Dachau.

No. I was not in that party that may have blown the lock off. I was not. When I got to that area, the gate was already open. People were out. So I'm not sure who might have done that.

Could you describe the events when you first came in contact with the camp? In other words, you came, you marched up, or you were--

Well, we were in vehicles.

Yes.

Yeah, we came up to it.

And what your impressions were.

Well, these people in the striped clothes, I guess they were blue and white stripes or blue and gray. They were all over the place, hundreds of them. And of course, I didn't get to talking to any of them, except, of course, my experience at the food scrap disposal, some-- that was the closest I came to some of these people.

We visited, of course, many years later, in 1984. We went through one of the Dachau camps. And I couldn't recognize-- relate anything I saw in 1984 with what I saw back in 1945. In 1984, there were homes all around this place already.

OK. Mr. Shimazu, who were the prisoners, in terms of nationality? Or were they all Jewish people to your knowledge? Or could you tell?

I'm not sure about that. But I think they were mostly Jews, mostly Jews. Of course, I didn't find that out until many years later, and especially, in 1984.

Did you see any of the extermination facilities?

No I did not take the time to look at the whole camp. I just went in and went up.

Did you come into any actual contact with any of the prisoners when you first walked through the gate?

When you say contact, you mean conversation-wise?

Yes. Or did they come up to you?

No, not except for that one time when they asked me why in German-- Warum. That was the only time I spoke to anybody.

Do you recall any other incidents or reactions to-- well, by the survivors to you and the other members of the 522nd as liberators of Dachau?

No, I'm afraid I didn't have the luxury of sticking around because as survey sergeant and recon sergeant, we had to hit the road.

Were they happy? Did you see any reactions in terms of happiness? And did they express a feeling that they were being liberated by the 522nd?

Well, in terms of trying to fathom the reactions they might have had, it's very hard. These are people who've been incarcerated for so long, they didn't know what to do with themselves, really. Where do they go? Where can they turn?

And seeing a friendly unit like the 522 over there, we were the closest things or closest people to them in that situation. And they looked to us for their help. And I think they got them through proper channels long after we left.

Mr. Shimazu do you see any parallels between the Japanese internment, the internment of Japanese-Americans in the United States, to the concentration camps that the 522nd encountered in Germany in terms of the oppression of minorities for whatever reasons they may be?

Well, if you are asking about man's inhumanity to man, yeah, there are some parallels. And in terms of the kind of barbed wire enclosure, there were parallels. But treatment-wise, I think there was a vast difference. The concentrate-- well, relocation centers of our country, at least they were fed properly, I would think, although the treatment in some cases left a lot to be desired, whereas in the concentration camps in Germany, these were extermination factories, you might say. Yeah.

Do you see any irony or did you feel any kind of irony at that point in Dachau that here, the Japanese-Americans as a minority had been interned on the West Coast, and here were the Japanese-American Nisei soldiers liberating?

Liberating the Jews. Well, that kind of thought, I guess, didn't occur to me at that time.

How about now?

Now, yeah, there is some irony. And I hope that sort of thing never happens again in our country or anyplace else. I really hope and pray that we can live like brothers and sisters in this world.

Mr. Shimazu I have another question. Had you heard of the concentration camps before reaching-- before encountering Dachau? Had you heard about it? Could you explain that to me?

Well, I think we used to learn a little bit of it in school. And I think we used to read some of it in the papers or hear news commentator stuff about it, yeah. But hearing about it and seeing firsthand, it's no comparison-- night and day.

Many people don't believe it. In fact, nowadays, there are some people who say, that never happened. But we saw it with our own eyes, these starving prisoners. And I don't think any of us who saw it will ever forget it.

Anything else?

I wanted to know, Mr. Shimazu, exactly what did you hear about the concentration camps before?

Well, that the gentlemens considering themselves a master race were trying to eradicate all the Jews in Germany. And in

the army, too, we saw some training films, showing that sort of thing.

So actually, this was in '43 or '44 that you had heard about the camps already?

Well, no, I think we may have a little bit earlier too. But in the army, we were exposed to training.

And do you know whether today there have been any times that you can remember where you have been in contact with people who still do not believe that that happened, that there were, in fact, concentration camps, where the Germans had planned to annihilate the Jewish people?

Well, I didn't have any personal contact with people of that ilk. But I read about it in the newspapers. And I can't believe that there are people who feel like that.

Do you know-- do you think the people here today the younger generation are aware of the concentration camps? I know they're becoming more aware right now of the relocation camps, but for many years, people didn't talk about that either.

I think. I think, and unfortunately, a lot of young people growing up today don't know about it.

What do you think we can do to ensure that this never happens again, either for the Japanese, or for the Jews, or for any minority to be that oppressed?

By showing documentaries of these things again, and again, and again.

And thank you so much for helping us to do that.

Thank you, Mr. Shimazu.

One-- thank you.

OK, what is the statement, Judy? He has to say--

What can we do? And he's going to say, what we can today--

What we can do--

To not let this happen again.

--what we can do to not let this happen again.

I think what we can do to prevent this from happening again--

Wait a minute. That's-- hold on.

I think what we can do to prevent this from ever happening again anywhere in this world is to show documentaries of these events over, and over, and over again through all the different media available to us.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Mr. Shimazu, what was it like being a Japanese-American in 1941? Was there any kind of discrimination that you or other Japanese-Americans experienced at that time?

Well, if you're asking me to talk about the time before the war, most of my life was spent on the plantations.

OK.

We don't have very much tape left.

Did you-- Mr. Shimazu, did you know that the Japanese-Americans had been interned in relocation camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

Yes, I think, as it developed--

OK, next one. Don't worry, I'm not cutting you off.

Mr. Shimazu, what was your reaction when you first heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor? Could you relay those experiences to us?

Yes. It was really incredible. I mean--

Next one.

Look through those.

Is there any way to stop it?

No.

OK. I understand that the 522nd battalion was involved in the liberation of Dachau and other concentration camps.

Yes. At the time we went by over there, we thought we were the first, really, of all the Allied units to liberate those prisoners from Dachau.

Could you tell us the experience about the incident with the 522nd, where the general was almost, I guess, hit by one of the shells from the 522nd in Italy?

This was in Italy, yes. We were having a practice exercise--

Can you ask some more questions?

--for the benefit of the division artillery commander.

Ask that one more time.

Mr. Shimazu, could you tell us about the experience, which I have heard about, where the 522nd almost hit the general in Italy?

I was afraid you would ask that. No, but it happened. And I think it was a case where somebody forgot how high that mountain was on which they had the--

Next question.

Was your impression when you first saw Dachau and you saw some of the prisoners there?

Well, the first impression, seeing these people in the condition they were in, was a great pity.

I understand that the 522nd was actually the first-- well, actually, the battalion that rescued the Lost Battalion.

Yes. Few people know about this, but if we had blindly followed the general's orders and--

Go ahead.

Rolling.

Well, in a few seconds. We'll keep looking first.

Speak.

Mr. Shimazu, I understand that the 522nd was an extremely distinguished battalion during the war. Could you tell us a little bit about the history?

Yes. From our combat experiences in Italy--

No nods or anything like looking down.

--and in France, and Germany, we built up a tremendous reputation as an outstanding unit. We were known as the time-fire experts in Italy and an outstanding outfit in Germany. We used to be able to handle three separate simultaneous fire missions over the same radio channel, which no other outfit could do. And to attest to this, we had an observer with wartime experience from Bougainville in the Pacific War.

Next question.

Another question.

Mr. Shimazu, from what I understand from you, the 522nd was the only Nisei battalion to fight in Germany.

Yes, the 522nd field artillery battalion was the only unit made up of Americans of Japanese ancestry fighting in Germany.

OK, next question.

Next question.

Prejudice.

Mr. Shimazu, did you experience any prejudice or discrimination while you were a member of the 522nd from any of your commanding officers or from any of the GIs other than the people in your unit?

All officers, I think, were a very dedicated corps of officers. They--

Anything else you want to ask on the record?

Let's see. What was the question? Mr. Shimazu, have you ever expressed these experiences to your children before?

I have, but not to any detailed extent-- broad overviews, I have given them. But they don't know the details.

And why is that?

Mostly because they've been too busy with their own affairs, studying for their school exams, or going out on their socials, or that sort of thing. Yeah.

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