

-TITLE-BILLY TAYLOR

-I_DATE-

-SOURCE-HAWAII HOLOCAUST PROJECT

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT

-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES-

-KEY_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-

-PERSONAL_NAME-

-CORPORATE_NAME-

-KEY_WORDS-

-NOTES-

-CONTENTS-

00:00:00 Captain Billy Taylor, late of the 522 Field Artillery Battalion, at the outrigger West, in Honolulu.

00:00:30 Born, Oct. 15, 1912 in Oklahoma, where his grandfather had homesteaded in 1899.

00:01:00 Moved to Kansas at 13, then back to Oklahoma, where he lives now. Grew up on a farm.

00:01:30 kind of a suburb of Oklahoma City.

00:02:00 Attended University of Oklahoma.

00:02:30 Had planned to study geological engineering, but became interested in petroleum engineering.

00:03:00 Joined the ROTC - horse drawn artillery - because he liked horses.

00:03:30 Received his lieutenant's commission in 1935. Jobs were hard to find, and he was offered a job with the Conservation Corps. [CCC]

00:04:00 Was assigned to a position in Oregon, but before he took it up, got a job in the oil fields. After much difficulty was able to get out of the assignment.

00:04:30 After his release in 1937, went to work on the Gulf, was married in 1938.

00:05:00 MARRIED Opal, from Oklahoma, and they have been married 51 years.

00:05:30 In 1938, was transferred south of Houston.

00:06:30 Expecting war, joined armed forces in March 1941

00:07:30 When war broke out, he and some others were quarantined prior to being sent to Hawaii.

00:08:00 But some of us were considered too low rank to be part of a headquarters battalion, and we were told we would go to any unit we wanted. So I went back to Fort Sill to be an instructor.

00:08:30 No sooner I was there, they sent me back to where I came from, to the 155 Howitzer Battalion.

00:09:00 Became captain of an Arkansas unit of the National Guard. But then, when they decided to form a unit of Japanese Americans.

00:09:30 Another fellow and I were selected for secret duty at Camp Shelby.

00:10:00 When we arrived there, there was nothing but pine trees. (Camp Shelby, Miss.)

00:10:30 Did not know that the unit would consist of Japanese-Americans. The first who arrived were from California, and the remainder were from Hawaii.

00:11:00 Enjoyed the experience. Enjoyed doing something like that.

00:11:30 He didn't know what to call them when he made the first inspection. Had never known any Japanese - Americans before.

00:12:00 Shoes, uniforms didn't fit very well.

00:12:30 Spent a year there, to the day, left in 1944. When they first got there, had to build their own buildings.

00:13:00 There was just pine woods there, and everything had to be built. They were an ambitious bunch. They wanted to show that they could do the work.

00:13:30 The majority of the men were between 18 and 19 years old - younger than me.

00:14:00 They were loyal and they wanted to prove it. Had to go through a whole lot of training in that year.

00:14:30 They had to combine basic training with other training because they didn't have basic training. They did well and did even better in combat.

00:15:00 Left for the Mediterranean from Norfolk. Took 28 days and a lot of people, including the officials, were sick.

00:15:30 The Liberty ships were quite small, and quite crowded.

00:16:00 We landed in Brendizzi, and they didn't have transport for us to the staging area, in Naples. So they put us in what we called "40 & 8s" like they used in WWI to transport 40 men and 8 mules.

00:16:30 We travelled to Naples in these box cars, and went to the staging area at the University of Naples.

00:17:00 Gives details of units formed.

00:17:00 Overall unit was 442 Combat Team, but we were the 522 Artillery. We were the close support in artillery.

00:18:00 Went into combat north of Rome.

00:18:30 In training, we were told not to take cover in buildings, but to dig in. When we tried, it was rock and we had to use dynamite.

00:19:00 I said we would have to do better, and I and another officer were given the job of finding places to bed down.

00:19:30 Had a lot of training, and as far as the surveying was concerned, I had studied that in school.

00:20:00 Our officers never said anything about the troops being Japanese Americans. Our officers were mostly from the South.

00:20:30 They made good officers.

00:21:00 They didn't show anything, but in some cases they might have resented it.

00:21:30 I was in charge in training, and then on the staff when we went overseas.

00:22:00 What I did mainly in Italy was look for positions for our batteries and for our headquarters.

00:22:30 While doing that, we were subject to fire from the Germans above

00:23:00 The Germans his valley, and they had their SS's and would fire on us and we would have to take cover in a ditch.

00:23:30 We would get the battery commanders and show them the positions we had selected for them, and they would then get their batteries.

00:24:00 Our duty was direct support of the infantry.

00 24:30 We were half a mile to a mile behind the infantry and our job was to fire on the enemy so they couldn't fire on us.

00:25:00 We were in the 5th Army under General Clark and we started north of Rome.

00:25:30 Units to which they were attached, up to Pisa.

00:26:00 More technical details.

00:26:30 I got within a mile of Leghorn, and then we got orders to move along the Arno River to Florence.

00:27:00 From Florence, we were pulled back to Naples to be sent to southern France, Marseilles. But I got sick, started bleeding, shell shock I suppose. Sent to the hospital.

00:27:30 I spent a month in the hospital. In the meantime, our unit went to Marseilles by boat, and was stationed outside Marseilles,

00:28:00 When I was released, they were going to send me to a redeployment center, but I knew about where my unit was. I hitched a ride in an airplane to Marseilles.

00:28:30 We left there for the (ph) Mountains -,that's were we had our worst fighting.

00:29:00 That's where the Germans made a stand before the Rhine. One of our battalions was cut off and we were assigned to rescue it.

00:29:30 That's where we lost a lot of men.

00:30:00 It took us two or three weeks. It was winter time, Oct. of '44.

00:30:30 I had to find a safe place and I found a brothel with the women in it.

00:31:00 We chased the women out. They had been collaborating with the Germans, so the townspeople shaved their hair off.

00:31:30 Our battalion was called on to fire over our own people and not hit the lost battalion.

00:32:00 We knew where they were - we had fired in candy and food, AND THE AIR FORCE DROPPED FOOD.

00:32:30 One of the worst situations was when we were called on to go up and survey so that we would have accurate fire and not hit them.

00:33:00 As we went forward, we saw a lot of wounded coming out with the battalion we were relieving.

00:33:30 We were being briefed, and the general had as his aide, Sinclair Lewis Jr. The general said there was no one up there in front of us.

00:33:00 He said he would go up to the front and look it over, and we both left at the same time, we to do our surveying.

00:33:30 There was a lot of mortar fire and the man in front of me got fragments right across his throat.

00:34:00 We rescued them about two days later. But when we got back, the general was there, and he was covered with blood, and Sinclair Lewis Jr. had been killed.

00:34:30 We got a lot of commendations from that battle.

00:35:00 We lost a lot of men in that battle, casualties and frost-bitten feet. So they sent us to southern France, near the Italian border.

00:35:30 It was warm in southern France, but it was cold in the mountains, the snow hip deep.

00:36:00 We were in a valley on the French side, the Germans were on the Italian side of the mountains. We used a tunnel built during WWI as an observation point.

00:36:30 At the end of the tunnel, they had slits where you could see down on the enemy.

00:37:00 We were relieved by a French unit and that's when we were split up. The 442nd, the infantry, went back to Italy.

00:37:30 The 522nd was sent up north to France and Germany.

00:38:00 We were part of an artillery group, even when we crossed the Rhine at Worms.

00:38:30 We did a lot of firing there because the Germans knew that when they lost there, there would be no stopping us

00:39:00 We crossed the Rhine on a Bailey bridge. Gen. Patton was north of us and he crossed first. We took Mannheim.

00:39:30 We bypassed Heidelberg.

00:40:00 Things were moving so fast we were more or less on our own.

00:40:30 We actually captured six German soldiers.

00:41:00 This was after we left Heidelberg.

00:41:30 They were more or less

00:42:00 Germans were still living in some of the towns and we would have to move them out so we had a place to stay.

00:42:30 When we were on our own, I had come across a compound where Germans had trained 16-year old boys.

00:43:00 They were using 22 ml Hausers and pistols.

00:43:30 Normally when we came on something like that, we just broke

in to find out what was there.

00:44:00 They left in such a hurry that they left their equipment behind.

00:44:30 Because of the equipment we figured it was a training camp.

00:45:00 In '44 and '45 they were short of everything.

00:45:30 We also came across a compound, a stockade, that was full of food from everywhere.

00:46:00 From Norway, Denmark, cheese and liquors. It was piled up high.

00:46:30 Everybody came and got some. After that, we just moved so fast we were on our own.

00:47:00 We got northwest of Munich and Dachau. We were supporting the 101 Airborne, but mainly we were on our own.

00:47:30 Wanders around, verbally.

00:48:00 More wandering.

00:48:30 Some say we found Dachau around the 29th of April.

00:49:00 It could have been a few days earlier. It was a huge compound. I'm told it was a sergeant who shot open the gate.

00:49:30 There weren't too many of the prisoners who could move around because they had taken 8,000 of them out of the camp.

00:50:00 The order was given by Himmler. I saw papers that gave the date as April 14. So between then and when we arrived, they had left.

00:50:30 There were no guards at the gate. There were some people on the ground and some who were able to move around.

00:51:00 This was just one gate of the concentration camp.

00:51:30 I found out later that there were some people who said they arrived there first, but it may have been another part of the camp, or an outlying camp.

00:52:00 This was an old camp and it had handled so many prisoners that it was a big operation. There were other sections that handled other kinds of prisoners.

00:52:30 I had an article by a priest, who lives near me in Oklahoma, and he commented that

00:53:00 He had been taken a prisoner in Poland in 1940 and had been sent to Dachau.

00:53:30 The Jews were political prisoners because they wanted to get rid of them. That is why they were in a death camp. Did not see crematorium.

00:53:30 A lot of them had died and had not been cremated and they were put in these box cars.

00:54:00 Can't recall seeing the box cars but was told about them.

00:54:30 The next day I was CALLED TO GO TO A MEETING OF UNITS THAT HAD BEEN AROUND THERE, MOVING TOWARDS MUNICH.

00:55:00 There were many units - that is why there may have been confusion as to who was first, and who was where.

00:55:30 The meeting was about what to do with the box cars of corpses. It was decided that the engineers would dig trenches with bulldozers and that the box cars would be tipped over into the trenches.

00:56:00 The order probably came from someone in the 7th Army that was responsible for clearing up what we left behind.

00:56:30 It was decided at that meeting that things would be handled by units in the rear. We didn't stay around very long.

00:57:00 as we moved out of Munich we saw all of these planes on either side of the autobahn.

00:57:30 They had run out of fuel for the planes, so the planes were destroyed.

00:58:00 Later, that is, at Dachau, saw prisoners eating by the side of the road.

00:58:30 Q: You mentioned earlier, about the smell when you came across the camp. Could you talk about that?

00:59:00 A: There was this ghastly smell when you came up on the camp. It's hard to describe.

00:59:30 There were no German civilians there.

01:00:00 It was an awful scene there. They were dressed in a kind of cotton grey clothing.

01:00:30 Saw mostly men at Dachau itself. Later some women and families.

01:01:00 This man that I met, he said there were guards, but that they had

surrendered.

01:01:30 This priest (referred to earlier) was there five years, and he was treated much better.

01:02:00 Some of the Polish prisoners were treated better than the Jews. About the box cars, I don't recall seeing them myself.

01:02:30 I did not see the gas chambers or the furnaces, as far as I remember.

01:03:00 I don't remember who was with me; I used different ones on ...
as
we were moving forward.

01:03:30 The next thing you remember is going to the meeting and being told what to do with the box cars. Then what happened?

01:04:00 We headed to Munich and south. We were on the autobahn because the war was just about over. This was May.

AT THIS POINT, THE TAPE REPEATS ITSELF.

01:04:30 Going south, we came to Batos (ph) and Watachi (ph) and all these
political prisoners.

01:05:00 These were the prisoners who had been removed from Dachau. They said there were about 5,000 left from the 8,000 - the rest had been
killed
or had died.

01:05:30 From Dachau to the edge of the Bavarian Alps (tries to show distance on a map), but it doesn't show up on camera.

01:06:00 The distance was about 50 miles and they said they made it in about six days.

01:06:30 The SS had left them at this village. Going in, I saw dead horses, and these people were cutting off pieces and eating it.

01:07:00 They looked malnourished, you could see their ribs. Some had clothes, but some did not have upper wear. It was still winter weather.

01:07:30 There was snow on the ground around Dachau, and best as I remember, there was still snow on the ground around the village.

01:08:00 They hadn't eaten in three days. I guess the Germans were short of rations. They only fed them half the time.

01:08:30 We had orders not to feed them because they couldn't stand the rich food. But they got into the garbage cans. And some of the men fed them. And some died because of the rich food.

01:09:00 We formed a kind of camp for these people - we called it a slave camp, and we were responsible for them at the end of the war.

01:09:30 They were to be sent back to Poland - a lot of them were Polish Jews. I had the job of taking them to the railroad.

01:10:00 The Russians were in charge of the trains because they were headed for Poland, and that was in their jurisdiction.

01:10:30 They paraded up and down the line and they wouldn't let us cross.

They were pretty strict.

01:11:00 They were rough on the prisoners. They wouldn't let them take anything but the clothes on their backs. The prisoners wanted to go back to Poland.

01:11:30 They were glad to go anywhere they would be free. I guess they didn't have much choice though. They weren't from that part of Germany.

01:12:00 Did you talk to any of these people about how they came to be in Dachau?

A: No, except that they were persecuted.

01:12:30 Even while we were in Italy, we heard about persecutions - but that was individual - people being hanged in towns. But this was nothing like that.

01:13:00 Q: Were you given any orders about what to do when you reached these camps.

A: I don't remember.

01:13:30 We were told to expect that we would come on them in that sector,
So we expected it but it was a surprise anyway.

01:14:00 Q: What do you next remember about prisoners or displaced persons.

A: After we had delivered them to the trains and the Russians, we were moved north of Munich.

01:14:30 We set up a check-point to loom for German prisoners, and we were
told to look out for SS troops.

01:15:00 We were told to let the ordinary German soldiers go home, but to turn back the SS and sent them to stockades.

01:15:30 The way we distinguished them, they had a swastika cut under their arm. Those types were sent to the stockade.

01:16:00 We did this for two or three weeks, and then we pulled back to Augsburg (ph) and the Rhine.

01:16:30 We had been told that some women belong to the SS, and one of the men was in ChARGE OF INSPECTING THE WOMEN FOR THE MARK. They resented it very much.

01:17:00 After that, we were in charge of some villages and the surrounding area.

01:17:30 Q: You also were supposed to look for people who pretended they were not SS?

A: Yes. We had been warned that there was a big shot SS loose.

01:18:00 One of our men identified him. We got a commendation for that. Yes, that was one of our duties.

01:18:30 Q: What happened to people like the 5,000 you found from the slave camp?

A: Those were the people we took to the train.

01:19:00 All those people were released to be sent back. They were sent back in groups.

01:19:30 I still remember the camp and how they looked. They lived in a camp we made until they were sent back.

01:20:00 We didn't have any facilities, barracks. They had to live in the open the way we did.

01:20:30 ...uses about where they go to, that is, the army, before the war ended.

01:21:00 Did some travelling on his own in Austria.

00:21:30 More about his travels.

01:22:00 Q: How long were you at Donnewoth (ph)?

A" I was there from late July to Aug". They said I had more than enough points to go home.

01:22:30 I left in September, the unit stayed until November or December.

01:23:00 What would be your assessment of your men?

A: The greatest I have even seen.

01:23:30 It was a great fighting unit. We were recognized all through the army as the greatest fighting unit.

01:24:00 We won more commendations and awards than any unit of our size. We took a lot of casualties. Our unit was exceptional.

01:24:30 Q: I want to ask you about your life after you came back.

A: CAME BACK TO Norfolk, from where we had left. I was sent to Fort Chafee.

01:25:00 Remained in the Reserve until 1954.

01:25:30 Did some teaching for the reserves. Went back to working at Petroleum engineering.

01:26:00 Q: I want you to say something about your work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

01:26:30 A: Before that, some of us received the Bronze star for the fighting in the mountains, and I received the Croix de Guerre from the French.

01:27:00 My daughter has fixed a frame for all of my medals.

Q: Was there any question about the loyalty of your men?

A: Never. Not at all.

01:27:30 We had a little incident - one of the officers ordered the men to do something they shouldn't have done. He left the unit.

01:28:00 They went overboard to prove their loyalty. In 1963 I took a job with the Interior Department and we moved inland.

01:28:30 I went with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Muskogee Region. I worked with the Five Tribes.

01:29:00 Gives some history of Indian tribes in Oklahoma.

01:29:30 The Osage river a reservation. Others given allotments of land. I myself am part-Cherokee, on my mother's side. My son-n-law is Indian.

01:30:00 Cherokee. My grandchildren are on the rolls so that they can get health protection and other things.

01:30:30 Gives some family history.

01:31:00 I was with the Bureau for three years, selling oil and gas leases for the Indians.

01:31:30 The courts were more or less in favor of the white man. The Bureau was formed to protect the rights of the Indians, who were not educated.

01:32:00 We insisted that they keep half their mineral rights. A lot of oil was discovered in Oklahoma in the '20s and '30s, so they were helped quite a bit.

01:32:30 I was transferred to the Oklahoma City headquarters where I still am in '66.

01:33:00 Then I was with the Geological Survey, looking after Indian and federal lands. I retired in '74

01:33:30 Since then, we have travelled a good deal. In '54, I had a recurrence of the problem I had in Naples and had serious surgery.

01:34:00 Describes operation.

01:34:30 The doctors who operated on me in '54 seemed to think it was from the same problem.

01:35:00 In '61, they rushed me to the VA hospital in Louisiana and they wanted to operate on me again, but the wife didn't want that one.

01:35:30 Intvr: There are some other questions that others want to ask.

01:36:00 Back to the question about the loyalty of your men.

A: There was no question about their loyalty.

01:36:30 There never was any question in my mind. There was some censoring (?) done at the beginning.

01:37:00 There was some censoring of individual mail and questioning of individuals, and there were some few individuals sent from our unit in the very beginning.

01:37:30 But there was never any question in my mind. It goes to show that they were loyal if they volunteered in the first place.

01:38:00 They had been shown a good example by the battalion that went in earlier, in North Africa and Italy.

01:38:30 They were the best soldiers I ever came up with.

01:39:00 Tells about the capture of a German general on the way to Berchtesgaden.

01:39:30 I don't remember much about that.

01:40:00 Came across a lot of Germans, SS and others at the end of the

war.

01:40:30 I don't remember much about the capture of the general.

Q: Is there one event that stands out in your mind?

A: That was in the Voges mountains.

01:41:00 One thing that stands out in my mind about the 522nd in combat was when we were called upon to found the "lost battalion"

01:41:30 The 100th may have had worse at Anzio and Italy but for our unit that was the worst.

01:42:00 The knew that if we got over the Rhine, there was no place for them to defend.

01:42:30 The 101st, the division we were following, had been caught in the
Bulge, in the Ardennes.

01:43:00 That time in the Voges mountains and the Dachau liberation.

01:43:30 Of course, we had some pretty good battles in our first six months in Italy.

01:44:00 Repeats story about problem of digging in, in Italy.

01:44:30 Rambles on about campaigns.

01:45:00 Repeats another story.

01:45:30 More reminisces.

01:46:00 Tells about driving at night and upsetting the jeep.

01:46:30 The jeep went down the mountain, but I was able to hand
tree
after a short while. There were quite a few instances like that.

01:47:00 Q: Was there any particular feeling you recall from the liberation of Dachau?

01:47:30 An awful way to treat people.

01:48:00 I had heard about the camps before. They just starved people to death. Then gassed them and cremated them.

01:48:30 Thank you so much Captain Taylor.
.END.