This interview is being taped on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is with Jack Rubin. The interviewer as Nancy Alper. The date is February the 23, 1998, tape number two, side A.

Jack, we were talking about your crossing the Rhine River and going through this agricultural area of Germany that seemed to be in pretty good shape. And then you came across a large number of German soldiers with their commanding officer wanting to surrender. Could you please talk a little bit more about that?

Well, this looked almost like a drill formation with the unit marching in this order. The commanding officer came up to our colonel and tried to offer some token of surrender. Our colonel wouldn't even talk to him. Our colonel just said-- motioned to him just continue going on to the rear. Continue going on to the rear. We had much more important business to attend to than to take care of this number of prisoners.

So we just sent them on through our lines walking as we were riding in our vehicles, and we didn't even pay any attention to them. And I assumed that the units in the back eventually put them in the prisoner of war camps. We never saw them before, but we saw individual soldiers, and up to this whole battalion, a group surrendering at this time.

What kind of condition were they in when you were confronted by them at that point in time?

They looked to be in pretty good condition. They looked like they were well-fed. They were well-clothed. They all had shoes. They all had uniforms, and they didn't appear to be wounded. There didn't appear to be any casualties of any type amongst them. They were just soldiers in marching condition, just like we'd seen in the American camps, like the American soldiers.

Were they bringing with them any military vehicles or other armaments, or were they just simply marching without any weapons of any kind?

They were just simply marching. They had no weapons. They had no vehicles. They didn't have anything with them. There was no arms. They were in uniform. And they did have their designation, their military classification on them, but that was all.

Did you have any indication why they were surrendering? Was there any communication that you were privy to indirectly or directly that would have given you more information about them as you were moving forward?

No. I never did have any idea why they were surrendering. I never did speak with any of them or have an opportunity to speak with them. We were-- we didn't even get off-- get out of our vehicles. We just continued on our Jeeps into the area.

When you moved into these villages, I assume there was a set way of moving in with some possible assumption that you might be attacked by the locals. Did that ever occur?

Well, what we would do is we would establish a perimeter, and the perimeter would be a guard post. And then this would be established by the rifle companies. Then we would be behind that perimeter in the village. And we didn't have any indication of any attacks beyond that.

Once in a while the lead companies would run into some armed conflict, but not too much. When they would, then we'd regroup, we'd attack, we'd eliminate the area of resistance, and then continue from there. Sometimes we'd call in artillery support, whatever was needed. But it didn't last very long. The Germans were pretty well disintegrated at that point.

Were any of these scattering of attacks from local citizens as opposed to soldiers?

I never experienced that whatsoever. The local citizens seemed almost glad to see us. And after we were in a village for a couple, three days, they were very glad that we were there. When they saw that we were not there to harm them, that we were not persecuting them, that we were not putting them in concentration camps or anything of that nature, they

seemed to be very accepting of our being there.

While you were moving across east of the Rhine, and if there's any way to pinpoint a location that would be helpful, did you see any people who now you would look back and characterize as camp inmates or prisoners who were easily by their appearance differentiatable from the local German citizenry?

No. We didn't see any of that until we started approaching the Ohrdruf concentration camp. That's the first we saw of any inmates. We did see at one point the-- our Air Corps had come upon a horse-drawn military establishment. And they had eliminated this military establishment, and there were bodies on both sides of the road. And some of those bodies did look like prisoner of war bodies, but we did not see any live prisoners of war or people of that nature at all. We didn't come across any of them.

What would have made you assume that they-- what was it about them that led you to conclude that they look like prisoners of war as opposed to fighting soldiers?

It was their dress. They were dressed in striped uniforms. And that made us assume that they were prisoners of war that were with this unit. I don't know what kind of a unit it was. That's all we know. That's all I knew was that there were horses killed, and there were wagons, horse-drawn wagons along the side of the road. So I don't know what kind of a unit that the Air Corps had found at this time, but they were just lying there as we went by.

So you're assuming that they had bombed-- they had been bombed by the Allied Air Corps.

Either bombed or strafed. I'm not quite sure which one.

But there were no soldiers, SS around at the time?

There were none. There were none.

Do you remember where this was in a general sort of way?

I can't remember. I can't remember where that was at all.

These were essentially villages that you were going through on your way to Ohrdruf?

Yes. Yeah, they were small villages, maybe a couple hundred to 1,000 people at the biggest. And they were like isolated farming communities. They didn't seem to have any manufacturing or anything of that nature.

What was your first indication that you were approaching something other than a village?

We were stopped at-- we were at a overnight stop, and we received a message from the front that the scout troop-- we had a scout troop out in front of us-- had entered into some kind of a prisoner of war camp. And they were asking for support in order to make sure that they would be able to secure this prisoner of war camp. And we didn't know-- and I relayed that message on to our colonel. And we didn't know what was there or what was going on there. And he then proceeded to go forward to this camp.

Do you recall what was described to you by the scouts that led them to conclude that this was some sort of a prisoner of war camp?

They said that there were people coming out of the gates in striped uniforms, and that the people were begging for food, and that they were seen very, very-- just in terrible condition. And they just didn't know what to do with them. They had no way of communicating with them. And they didn't know who they were or anything.

But they-- and were saying that there was a camp or there was a village up ahead that they were going to get into.

And how far away do you think, roughly, you were from Ohrdruf at that point in time?

We were probably about 5 or 10 miles west of Ohrdruf at that time. Because typically, the scouts would be out about two or three miles, five miles ahead of the main unit in order to determine if there was going to be any fighting, anything of that nature.

And what were the specific instructions to them after they'd relayed this information to you about what they ought to do?

They were told to secure the camp-- to enter the camp, that they would have reinforcements arrive very, very quickly, and that we would be there just as quickly as we possibly could. And the colonel immediately dispatched an infantry company plus the heavy weapons company, and told them to proceed in support of the scout troop that was out in front.

And were you with that group that was sent to the camp?

No, I wasn't. I was back with the main battalion, main part of the battalion. And therefore, by the time I got there, the gates had been open for some times. I did see a few people straggling out in the uniforms. They didn't talk to us. They didn't have anything. They were just walking away from the camp. I'd have no idea where they were going, and then we started to enter the camp.

The people that you saw coming out of the camp as you approached, I assume, the gates, what did they look like?

They looked like just the dregs of salvation. They were emaciated. They were unkempt. They were unwashed. Their hair was all over. They just looked like they were in terrible, terrible condition. I can still see them in my mind walking out of the-- not walking, but just kind of getting out of the camp, and not striding, but just slowly, slowly walking.

And what were they wearing on their feet, on their bodies, on their heads?

They had scarves. They had caps on their heads. Their feet, as I remember it, were in sandals, some kind of sandals, and with big, heavy stockings on their feet. They were just in terrible condition.

Were these men and women?

Far as I could tell, yes. But it was very, very difficult to distinguish between men and women, because they all were so downtrodden. They all had such heavy clothing on, that they just-- it was very difficult to tell whether they were men or women.

Did you see anyone who looked like a child or groups of children?

No. I didn't see any children at all. I didn't see any children at all.

What did the gate and the perimeter of the camp look like, if you recall it?

The gate-- the perimeter of the camp to me looked like a set of tree stumps that had a tree poles-- the trunks of trees that had encircled a large area. And there was a big gate in the front there that we went through. And as you went through it, there were wooden shacks on both sides of the gate. And the wooden shacks were both open and closed. Some of them had open not haylofts, but open sheds on the side of them.

And in these sheds were stacked human bodies. And the human bodies were just laid one on top of another without any kind of burial attempt or anything like that. They just were like pieces of wood like you'd stack lumber, like you'd stack tree trunks in a barn. And at that time I was fortunate. I had liberated a Leica camera, and I took some pictures of it. And those are the pictures that are here now in the museum.

When did you donate the photos of what you saw at Ohrdruf to the museum?

I donated them in 1955, the first time that we had come to visit the Holocaust Museum. And the museum people were very nice. They took the originals, but they made copies of it. So I have copies of the pictures. But that was when I donated them was in 1955. 1995. I'm sorry. 1995.

Were you saying that these stacks of bodies were next to the buildings, the wooden buildings that you were describing?

Yes. They were parts-- these shacks, these enclosures were part of those wooden buildings. And that's where the bodies were. They were right next to the buildings. I don't know how they got there. I don't know what they did to them, but this is where the bodies were.

The logs or poles that you mentioned that consisted of the perimeter of the camp, was there wire or other wood connecting those logs?

I didn't notice whether there was or not. These were very close together. They were one right up against each other. I don't know that there was any barbed wire around them. There may have been, but I didn't notice it myself at that time.

Was there a town nearby? And could you tell how close the camp was to the town if there was one?

There was no camp nearby. As far as I can remember the nearest camp was about 5 or 10 miles away-- nearest town was about 5 or 10 miles away. And we traveled for maybe a half hour before we got to the camp after we were notified that they had found the camp. So it was several hours after the camp had been found before we got there. And the prisoners had virtually all gone by that time.

When you went through the gates, what was the first thing that you saw in Ohrdruf?

The first thing I saw in Ohrdruf were the dead bodies. There were dead bodies all around. There were dead bodies on the ground. There were dead bodies on the roads. There were dead bodies on the sides. It was just such a horrifying, unbelievable experience that these people could-- that anything like this could exist. It was just a mind-numbing experience. It was terrible. It was just terrible.

So in addition to the stacked bodies, there were bodies randomly lying in the-- on the ground as you moved into the camp?

Yes. There were bodies all over the place. And I don't know how long they'd been there, but some of them looked like they'd been there for quite a while. Others looked like they'd been there just new. They'd just been there for a short period of time.

Do you remember as to those bodies that were lying in the dirt or on the ground, any indication that any of those people were still alive?

No. I would say that they were dead, and a lot of them looked like they were dead for some time. I don't know how long they'd been dead, but we did not see any who looked like-- who were bleeding or who-- any signs of having been killed very recently. I don't know how long they'd been-- I have no idea how long they'd been dead.

The people who were coming out or shuffling out of the camp that you mentioned, the few who were still remaining, you're saying that they made no attempt to look at you or speak to you or ask you for anything.

No, they did not. They just seemed to be going off on their own. I don't know where they were going or what they were thinking. But they just looked like they were taking care of themselves and going-- just walking off on their own.

I would like to discuss the pictures that you donated to the museum. And looking at them now between us, it looks like there are nine pictures. And I wondered if you could describe them, perhaps by starting with bodies that were burned, as opposed to bodies that were simply stacked, if that was the case.

All the ones that I have are bodies that were dismembered or just lying one on top of another. This may be a group that's burned, but I'm not quite sure. The bodies-- it's unbelievable to see human bodies just stacked one on top of another, without any conscience of what-- whether a person's foot is in another person's face, and the bodies are stacked lying one on top of another, with other people being underneath, being crushed by the bodies on the top of them.

And it just-- some of them looked like they were in terrible dying positions, with their hands clenched and raised in front of them. Others of the bodies are lying on stretchers partially dressed. Some of them are nude. Some of them have hats on. Some of them are just in terrible condition.

When you say the bodies were dismembered, what do you mean?

Some of them looked like the parts of a-- parts of their arms are missing, parts of their legs are separated.

Do you remember the expressions on their faces?

The faces are-- they're not that-- well, it's hard to say. They look like they died without that much pain. But it's unbelievable to me that if they died this way, they weren't gassed. They may have been gassed first, and then just stacked out here.

Others of the bodies are in terrible condition. Here's a man with his fist raised in the air, his mouth open, his whole body just seems to express pain, grief, suffering, torture-- just all torture. Some of them are so decayed that it's just very difficult to interpret what was going on with them.

So at least for the time that you were there, there wasn't enough examination to know exactly how these people had died. You've mentioned gassing, the possibility of burning, or just dying spontaneously.

No, just being killed. They were killed some way-- just different ways that they were killed.

Jack, do you have any explanation for why there might have been-- in one picture, there's a picture of a man on a stretcher. Do you recall if he was dead?

As far as I know, yes. I don't know what this is. I think this is a-- this bit was censored. It looks to me like part of the picture was censored. I have no idea why they did it or who did it. But I don't understand that particular--

Did you get near any grouping of people that you think might have been in some sort of an infirmary at the time of their death?

I couldn't tell. No. I couldn't tell whether they were-- it was an infirmary or not.

Did you go into any of the barracks?

We looked inside the barracks. We did not go into any of them.

What did you see when you looked inside?

We saw the-- just complete disarray. The beds were torn apart, the few beds that were left in there. It was just complete-- like a wrecking vehicle had gone through there. The place was just torn apart, just from one end to the other.

Do you remember barracks, bunk beds being lined up on the side, or latrines in the middle, any other things that you would describe about the interior of the barracks looking in?

No, I don't. I don't remember anything else about that.

What was the topography of the land on which this camp was sitting? Do you remember?

To the best of my knowledge it was flat. The area both around the camp and the area of the camp itself was just a piece of flat land looked like had been taken over from a farming operation, looked like it had been a-- at one time may have been a cultivated field. It was just a piece of a flat country.

Could you see a town in the distance?

I couldn't. I don't remember any town in the distance.

Could you see any smoking towers or other sorts of facilities-- factory-like facilities in the distance?

No. No, I didn't. I don't remember that. I don't want to say there wasn't. I just don't have any recollection of it.

How long did you stay wandering around the interior of the camp?

We were only there for three or four hours. And we just wandered around by ourselves. And then we had to go on because the unit was moving on. And we were only there for a very short period of time. We were not there very long. It would be three hours at the most.

Did you know at the time whether medical or other personnel were being requested to come to the camp after your departure?

As far as I knew at that time there was nobody coming. There was no additional personnel, that the camp had been completely evacuated, and that there was nobody left in the camp. And therefore, there was going to be nobody else coming to the camp.

The people who you saw leave were the only people who were alive. Is that correct?

Yes.

In other words, you did not see anybody who would have appeared to be a guard or an officer of any kind or official or administrator of the camp there at the time that you were there?

No. We saw no German personnel whatsoever around the camp. It was-- it was abandoned.

Did you have any sense then of who these people were and why they had been killed?

No. I did not have any sense. I did not know who they were or what they were doing there, where they'd come from or anything. I assumed that they were prisoners of the Germans. They had captured them or something like that. I had no idea where they may have come from or who they were.

After you left the camp, was there any information given out by commanding officers through the Stars and Stripes, through some other form of communication, that was attempting at that time to explain what you had seen there?

There were some articles in the Stars and Stripes. In fact, there was a picture taken about 10 days after we were at the camp of General Eisenhower, General Bradley, and General Patton at the camp looking over the same things that we were looking at, and explaining that they had been at the camp.

We understood it to be a prisoner of war camp, and that this is where the-- this is where the bodies came from, that they were prisoners of war. We thought they were probably Russian soldiers or something of that nature. But I don't believe that the articles in the Stars and Stripes discussed the camps and the real implications of them.

So as far as you knew from the Stars and Stripes, it could have been what you just described it to be. It could have been

just a prisoner of war camp.

Yeah. That's all we knew at that time.

And did that change after Bradley, Patton, and Eisenhower visited the camp?

No. I didn't really see anything until I got back to the United States, and many years later finally discovered what I had been looking at.

Do you remember-- this was a long time ago. Do you remember what it felt like for you then when you walked in and saw what you saw?

It was utterly confounding to walk into that kind of an area and to see this kind of horror and this kind of carnage, this kind of brutality. This kind of lack of consideration for humanity was just absolutely mind-boggling. It was something that was horrifying, and something that you couldn't really accept for yourself that this could happen.

But yet, here it was, and you had to accept it. And the conflict within yourself was just terrible. It just tore you apart. It took your breath away. It just made you feel like you-- this was another world, that this couldn't be the world that you lived in, that this had to be someplace else. And that it was very, very difficult to accept what was happening, what you saw, what you experienced as being a part of life.

Do you remember how you and other soldiers reacted after you left there? Was there a change in demeanor or attitude about what you were doing?

No, I can't. I don't remember that we-- other than being in shock and being completely just blown away by this, I don't remember any change in attitude at all of the people. I think I felt a little bit more vindicated, a little bit more supportive for what I had been doing, and knowing that I had been doing the right thing. I knew it all along. But I feel maybe there was a little bit more support after this time to find out what I had really been fighting against.

In case we didn't cover this, what was the date that you arrived at Ohrdruf?

I believe we arrived at Ohrdruf on April 3, 1995. Yeah. 19--

9--

Sorry. It's all right. 1945. It's all right.

OK. We-- this was a pause for a moment, and now we're talking about leaving Ohrdruf. Where did you go after you left Ohrdruf?

We proceeded east from Ohrdruf until we approached the-- it wasn't Czechoslovakia at that time. It must have been Slovakian border opposite Kamnitz. According to the information that was given to us, we were not allowed to cross this border because of the treaty with the Russian government. And we stopped. At that point some of our units, other than the third battalion of the 355th infantry regiment, swung down south. But we stayed right-- as border guards, right along the border. And we stayed there until VE Day in June of 1945.

Were there any other towns that you liberated or took-- towns or cities after you left Ohrdruf and then stopped at the border?

I don't remember any. I just don't remember any at that time. We may have. I'm sure we did take some, but I don't think we went much further east than this.

As you moved a little bit further east, did you see any difference in the condition of the places, the towns that you visited, or the attitudes of the German citizens?

No. They seemed to be in pretty good shape. They didn't seem to be suffering too much from the war. They were operating under fairly good conditions. There was food. There was clothing. There was heat. There was energy. And things didn't seem to go too bad.

Again, did you see-- leaving there, and moving a little bit further east and-- a little bit further east and perhaps south, any more soldiers? Any more inmates of camps?

No. We didn't see any more. This is the only place that we saw them.

Again, further along and while you were at the Czech border, was there any more news coming to army soldiers that had to do with the camps or the Jewish inhabitants of the camps that were being discovered or liberated as time went on?

To the best of my recollection, we didn't get any more news about the plight of the Jewish people in Germany. The Stars and Stripes did not seem to cover that area, and we didn't have any other avenues to get that information. We were getting correspondence from the United States, although it would take some time to get there. Still, I was not aware of what was going on in the other areas about the concentration camps at Buchenwald or the other concentration camps in there.

You had a period there of about-- well, several months anyway. What did you do after you were sort of acting as border guards?

You mean after the VE Day? Or before VE Day?

Yes. Well, either.

OK. Before VE Day, we had the-- our--

This interview is being taped on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The person being interviewed is Jack Rubin. The interviewer is Nancy Alper. The date is February the 23rd, 1998. And this is tape two, side B.

Jack, we were talking about the period of time after you left Ohrdruf and before you were then able to go home. And I'm wondering how your functions changed during that time period, what that time period was?

Well, after we liberated Ohrdruf, we proceeded eastward to the-- as I said, to the Czech border. And we were stopped there, and we became border guards. During that time, we associated with the German people in the-- on the-- in that area.

We didn't have any difficulty. I think they were all afraid of us. They were all glad that we weren't putting them in concentration camps. They were all glad that we were just not persecuting them in any way.

We stayed in-- we stayed there until the VE Day in June-- June 6th of 1945. And after that, we were relocated back to the Paris area, where we operated several relocation camps, where we sent the guys back to the United States with the high-- I've forgotten what--

Is this when you were referring to me the difference between high point and low point divisions?

Yeah. The more high point divisions. That's what-- I'm sorry. I lost that. And we stayed in Paris for-- until almost December of 1945, and I visited Switzerland and Scotland during that time. And then we came back home, leaving Europe in December of-- Christmas of 1945, and returning to New York on New Year's Day of 1946.

Do you-- did you know that you were going to be going home? Or had there been other plans for your division?

We did not know that we were going home after VE Day. We assumed-- we were told, and we were starting to get ready to redeploy to the Eastern theater. Of course, during the redeployment period the war with Japan ended. And when the war with Japan ended, why, then, we were no longer scheduled to go to the European-- to the Eastern theater, and we then got ready to go home.

Do you remember any publicity that was put out by the Allies either to educate the American soldiers, or to educate the German populace about what was being discovered that had occurred at the concentration camps?

I don't recall any publicity that was put out to explain what was happening in the concentration camps. It may be that I just didn't see it. But until I got out of the service and back into the United States and started learning what was going on, I really didn't understand what had transpired in the concentration camps. And I didn't even know that I'd been in one until much later.

Did you ever see any press, reporters, radio broadcasters, people who worked for the army collecting information around, doing this same kind of work?

No, we did not. I did not see that at all. I didn't see any press at all during the whole time that we were in combat.

Given your knowledge of Yiddish, were you ever asked by the Army in lieu of going home to stay and serve some function for them that could put that into use?

Yes. Just as we were-- after the war ended in Europe, there was some inquiry made as to whether or not anyone would want to stay on and remain in the service and do some translations and do some interpretations for the army. But I wanted to get out. I just wanted to come home. I wanted to get home as quickly as I could. And so I did not want to do that, and I did not want to stay.

After you got home, what kind-- what was the rest of your education and job history after the war in brief?

Well, I finally completed my bachelor's degree in economics at UCLA in 1953, and then I went on to get a master's degree from Pepperdine University, and a master's degree in marriage family counseling from the University of San Francisco. And now-- then I went on and I got my doctorate in psychology from the Professional School of Psychology in Sacramento, and I've been practicing as a psychologist for almost 10 years now.

Looking at hindsight, and given your profession, has your feeling about having what you saw at that camp changed?

My fear, my apprehension, my horror, my gut-wrenching, my complete thoughts of abomination that anybody could do something like this to another human being had never changed. And I just cannot go back into that area. I will never go back into that area.

I just cannot forgive. I cannot forgive this magnitude of commission of a crime, of a horrible, horrible crime. I can't-- my body won't forgive it. I can't forgive it. I can't see it again.

Do you think that there is a way for people in professions such as yours to understand or try to explain why all of this happened?

[LAUGHS] No. No. You know, what are we going to say? The guy's crazy. That's no explanation. That explanation-- because it's more than one man. This was the work of tens of thousands, of tens of millions of people.

And tens of millions of people cannot cover themselves by saying, I was following this man. You cannot do that. You have your own moral responsibility for living your life, for acting the way that you know is the way that you act, and acting the way that you want, and leading the life that you want.

Tell me a little bit about your Jewish life after the war, and whether it was influenced at all by what happened to you there?

Well, after the war, I married a second time. My first wife was killed in an automobile accident. And my first wife is a very religious person. By that I mean-- my second wife-- I'm sorry. By that I mean she's a very righteous person, and she is very much involved with seeing that people treat each other as people.

She's a-- she was a legislative representative for the National Council of Jewish Women. And that's the reason I'm here today, because NCJW is having their convention here today. And we are Reformed Jews. We prescribe to that faith, because this is the faith that says you are responsible for your actions, and we all are responsible for our actions.

How many children do you have, and what are they doing now?

Well, we have four children, the oldest of whom is a-- helps provide the University of California at Fresno in their research programs. She's a mathematician, and she helps the people with their research projects. My second oldest daughter is a licensed acupuncturist, and she works in Sacramento. And we are very fortunate to be living there with her husband and her 12-year-old granddaughter.

My third child is a boy. He's a rabbi. He's a rabbi in the Los Angeles area, and he's a very concerned social person, who has many outreaches into the community. And my fourth daughter, the youngest daughter, is a psychologist, and she is married and lives in Puerto Rico, and she practices in Puerto Rico.

This concludes my interview with Jack Rubin Thank you very much.

Thank you. Been a pleasure.