

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Dr. Samuel Hagner. This is tape number two side A. And we were talking about your experience and how-- just to back up a little bit, you were not given any preparation or any-- you had no knowledge ahead of time. Your leaders did not tell you anything.

So when you first walked in, were there any precautions that they told you to take? Did they give you any helpful advice? What was that when you walked in as a group? Did they give you any instruction?

I don't remember any specific instructions except now you're juggling something in my memory or jogging something. Could it have been that we were told not to get too close to the prisoners? That rings a bell. And I wonder why.

Whether they ever thought that we might pick up a disease. I don't know. But there is something now that you're touching, not to get too close to them.

Were you wearing any protective uniform or clothing?

No. No. I don't even remember having gloves, rubber gloves. And we didn't have any special uniform, no. No, I wasn't part of the typhus inoculation team. Now maybe they did have gloves. I don't know. They must have been using-- I hope they're using sterile equipment.

But no, we were the DDT spray team and we didn't have any special clothing or garments. I don't recall being told anything else other than that we couldn't feed them, that that had to be done by somebody else. And that we couldn't feed them regular food. That I can remember. But that wouldn't have been my job anyway.

No. I think the fact that we weren't warned as to we were coming into, I don't think they knew. Maybe they did and just weren't telling us. But I don't think my particular, I don't think the officers in my unit knew. I think they were in the dark just as much as-- the maybe the seventh army knew, but they weren't telling us.

But I can't think of anything else. As I said, we were housed only in the camp. I'm not quite sure where. All I remember are these sweeping, sweeping out barracks, empty barracks and then moving into them. That's all I can remember.

I don't I don't remember where we ate. Must have set up a vessel somewhere. That's all I remember. I think so much of that has been wiped out by the memories that have persisted.

Speaking about where you ate, what is it like?

I can't even remember taking a bath or how we washed or brushed our teeth. Probably didn't.

Do you remember what it was like for a 19-year-old to eat food after seeing people-- what was it like for a 19-year-old young man to sit down and eat food after seeing people whose-- how do you do that? How does one do that?

You don't do that. We could hardly. I don't think we ate much at all. It was terrible. No, there was no appetite. Couldn't sleep either, as I recall.

The whole thing seemed like a dream, like just a dumb dream. Just walking around and looking at this thing and being told, hey, go do this, go do that. And then that rage. But there's so few visual memories of that anymore. Is that common? I remember the ovens.

Did you know what they were for?

Oh, yes. Yes.

How did you know?

We saw the gas, gas chambers too while they were still warm. The ovens were still warm. And the gas chambers are obviously gas chambers. What else would they have been for? They're supposed to look like showers.

To this day, I don't know if that's my own imagination or what. But somehow, something sticks in my mind about where they're hot air ducts running from the crematory ovens to the German soldiers' barracks. Maybe I'm making that up. I don't know. But I would think somebody could verify that. And I'd like to know. It's one thing you might do for me. See if you could find out whether that was true or not. And I just didn't make it up.

To warm the barracks?

Yes, to warm the barracks. Exactly.

Were you able to talk to any of the survivors?

No. No. We were not able to. I think that was part of the soldier, do your job, and just don't get too close to them, and just keep moving. So somehow that's my impression that we were just told to do it and that was not our job to talk to them.

So what were your specific duties?

We were there, as I say, my specific duty was to be part of a DDT spray team and to go into the barracks and spray these prisoners. There was another group that formed the typhus inoculation team. I was not part of that.

I don't even remember much about how many we sprayed. What do you do with 30,000 people? 30,000 people. I don't think we even got through a tenth of the barracks. I don't know. I don't know.

I think somewhere what must have happened, the army realized, finally, it's great insight-- if you hear in there some bitterness in there, you're right. I never completely admire the army for its expertise. As parenthetical comment, we often used to say that we won the war not because we were smarter. But because we had more money and more supplies. Back to Dachau.

So you would go into a barrack with a DDT spray gun type of thing?

It wasn't very sophisticated. Just a spray gun. I can't tell you any more than that, because it's a little black after that.

And would you wear anything special yourself?

No.

You would be breathing in the DDT?

Yeah, we didn't wear any masks that I recall. I could be wrong about that. I don't know. What I remember is doing that and I just see these people in the bunks. And as I said, the stuff going down the bed posts.

Two and three in a bunk. They were so weak, they couldn't even get out of the bunks. And I think that is just so overwhelming that I hardly remember anything else.

And you before this experience, had you ever seen a dead body before?

No. No. Maybe I did somewhere on the way to Dachau as I saw-- someplace I saw an American soldier's body. Must have been in a morgue. It was set up in a tent.

I remember that being, hey, that's the first dead body I've ever seen. Because I come from a family of long, long lives,

long lived, I should say. And my grandparents were still alive. I had a great grandmother still alive, I think, when I went to service. No, I had never seen a corpse before.

I wish I could tell you more of the details. But it was all blotted out, I think, by just these two overwhelming. One, the visual and the other the internal, emotional. That just took over.

Did you in your group talk over what you were all experiencing?

I'm sure we did. I'm sure we did, we talked amongst ourselves. I don't remember anything specific. I do remember all of us just walking around gazed, dazed. But I can't remember any specific conversations. I don't even remember sitting down and writing those two letters, one to Doris and the other to my parents.

And actually, now that I think about it, I may not have written the letter to my parents from Dachau itself. It must have been when had left. That would make sense now that I think about it. We went in on the 1st or 2nd of May. And I dated that May 11th. We were there a week.

We must have already left Dachau when I wrote that letter. So correct my note, my comment on that. But the one Doris, I think I wrote for the camp.

What do you think kept you going during that week that you were there?

I didn't have very much choice. I was there. I was under military order, under military control. I didn't have a choice. If I were to imagine if I hadn't been under military order, would I run away? I don't know.

Interesting questions. What did keep us going, or what did kept me going, you ask. I think there was a-- it's funny to say-- but there was some kind of a dedication too. Dedication to duty, whatever. And that was part of the duty, wasn't it?

In some respects, I think I felt that I was even I feel this sometimes now. And I'm a very emotional person. But I think I also felt that I always had a certain wellspring of strength on what's to draw. Like that like walking guard that even I was petrified. I still felt I could handle it, I suppose, in some funny way.

And maybe thinking back, way, way back to what I first decided to take the stand in the army, even though part of it frightened me-- frightened anybody, of course-- but I think something said to me, you could handle it, I think. I don't know.

Did you have any thoughts about your philosophy of being a conscientious objector when you were standing in the middle of Dachau?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I didn't waiver before with the good captain who want to be the walk guard by the gun. I didn't waver then, though I was scared.

But I sure wavered at Dachau. Because that unspeakable rage, I thought, my Lord, if I could feel like I could kill right now, because I'm so angry and this rage is so murderous, what does this say for your pacifism, buddy? Big joke. Big joke.

And there it started, a conflict that has never ended. I couldn't solve it in my later, my own personal psychoanalysis. I make a comment to the group at Oakland in 1995, this will probably never be resolved to my satisfaction.

Because on the other hand, I still abhor war all the more, I suppose. But yet, it's down to the personal level. There I was entertaining all kinds of fantasies of revenge, fantasies that scared me, terrified me. That's why I thought I was going crazy for a while there, like everybody else.

It's funny you mention that. But on the way down here, I told you on Wednesday night, I spent the night with a fellow who had served in the same unit with me. On Tuesday night, I spent the night with a former medical school classmate. I

hadn't seen him in 30 years. He was a conscientious objector also. But that's long before I knew him in medical school, of course.

He refused to register. He went to jail. He served two or three years as an 18-year-old, mind you. Well, Tom and I were talking the other night around the dinner table after dinner. Tom is now 77, 78-- 75, I think he said-- no, 76, 76.

Tom's retired first, as a general practitioner and then as a psychiatrist himself. But we got talking about that period before we knew what the concentration camps were really like. He thought they were a hoax. Can you imagine that? I thought they were propaganda. He thought they were a hoax. He used the word hoax.

And he looked at me just a couple of nights ago, he said, when I found out they were not, he says, Sam Hagner, you have no idea. He looked at me. I said, I know, Tom. I know.

It's funny, as I was leaving his house and Wednesday morning, he said, you a little bit scared of going down there? And I said, yep. I'm scared. He says, good luck. That's good. This is beside the point.

Was there any older person or anybody else in Dachau that you could turn to to help you talk these things over at the time?

No. No, we had a chaplain, but I never felt that close to him. I don't know. I never thought of going to him. I think I thought it was just simply something that I had to work out with my peers.

Except the minute as I left, as I said to you earlier, And a 28-year-old seemed older. Like Mark Stark. No, other than that.

You had talked about some of the things that you had seen. Are there any sounds that stay with you from that time?

There's this one sound only. and I'm not sure is it's my imagination or not, the screams of an SS trooper being thrown into the prison compound. And that may be strictly imagination. I don't know.

But no, the rest is silence. Just looks, people standing there looking at you. That's it or staring. Those eyes, you've seen those eyes.

At Dachau, there were medical experiments going on. Was that part of your introduction or did you learn anything about them when you were there?

I knew nothing about the medical experiments, no. I didn't learn about those until later. I don't think I learned about them until later. They certainly were not part of my immediate experience.

Did you feel 19 or did you feel much older?

I felt both. I felt 98 and I felt 19. Both, if that's possible. I felt like I had suddenly aged 100 years. And yet, another part of me said, oh my god.

Somehow, I guess, the idea of age, of being 19, didn't really occur to me that much. It did later and it does now when people like you talk to me and say, well, you're only 19.

Somebody not too long ago at home, a neighbor, said something about when I happened to mention I was coming down here, you were already 19 years old. Why, you were just a baby. Oh, yeah, I guess, I was, wasn't I? But I didn't feel that at the time. I think my mother felt it.

I had an opportunity not to go overseas, at least not with my unit. My mother wanted me to play it for all it's worth. And I refused. I never told her that. I refused. It's funny, I just thought of that now. I hadn't remembered this for years.

Before we were moving up to camp Kilmer, we had a last weekend pass from Kimberley, Virginia. So there are five of us from Philadelphia, including the first Sergeant. And one of us had a car. He said, fellas, let's go home for one last weekend.

So we drove all the way from Camp Lee in Petersburg, Virginia to Philadelphia. Can you believe this? We left on a Friday after-- Friday 5 o'clock and had to be back by reveille on Monday morning. Crazy. And we drove in order to have what? One day at home.

And we were to meet again Sunday night and drive all night long and get back by reveille. We made a mistake. We let the one guy do all the driving, the guy that owned the car. Well, he insisted, I think. So he went off the road somewhere near Richmond, Virginia. And we rolled over and rolled over a couple of times. And we ended up in the Richmond General Hospital.

The driver went through the windshield. The guy riding shotgun went out the door. Three of us in the back seat, the first Sergeant in the middle, he saved us in the back seat. He was awake. I was sound asleep. But when he saw what was going to happen, he put out his elbows and wedged us tight, so that we rolled over, we never even moved. It landed right side up.

But I suffered some kind of a bruised hip or whatever and the hospital wouldn't let me go. The two guys that were hurt, of course, I don't know what happened to them. I never saw them again. I remember the screams of the one guy in the emergency room. He was sewn up.

But I was submitted for x-rays with this hip. For some reason it hurt and I could walk on it. I limped. And so I was there for a week or more. My mother came roaring down from Philadelphia. She said, son, here's your chance. I said, what do you, Ma? What's my chance? Here's your chance, you don't have to go. Play this for all it's worth.

And I looked at her, no, Ma, you don't understand. I didn't say that to her. I was thinking it. What she didn't understand was that I was convinced that this was not permanent. And that if I didn't get back to my outfit, I'd be put into a replacement depot, what we called a repo depot. And I could be assigned to any unit after that.

And if I were going to go, I want to go with the guys with my train. These are men I knew, including the first Sergeant from Philadelphia. So I said, Ma, we'll see what the doctors say. So she went on back to Philadelphia thinking that I've agreed with her. And I didn't.

Next day, the doctor came in and I said, get me out of here. Give me a cane. Give me anything. I'm leaving. He said, OK, soldier. Gave me a cane and discharged me. So I went down to the bus station. This is an interesting little episode. I'm not sure but this pertains to everything else. Well, it tells you about me. That's what you want to know, is it? You don't know about Dachau. You want to know about me.

Both.

I got on the bus in Richmond, took go back to Petersburg. And little old me, I forgot all about Jim Crowism. So I got on the bus and there's a soldier in the back, a Black soldier. But he was a soldier. He was the only soldier on the bus. So I went back and sat down next to him. And we're starting to talk, waiting for the bus to leave the terminal.

The bus didn't leave. And I'm not paying attention. I'm talking to him. What outfit are you from? Blah, blah, blah, you know how soldiers do. Suddenly, I realize people are turning around staring at us. I think the Black fella knew before I do what was happening.

Then the bus driver said, hey, you white soldier, you move forward. That's for Black people. But he did say Black, because he said colored or something like that. Black didn't come into being till later. I looked at him and I was shocked. Because there were no seats in the white section. But there were seats in the back.

I had to get up with that cane and walk forward and stand all the way to Petersburg. Do you think anybody will get up

and give me a seat? Not at that point. Not those white, white people. I stood all of my way 40 miles to Petersburg. And I bet everyone had laughed all the way.

I go back to the outfit. I walked into the day room. It was at night. And that came, first Sergeant was sitting there, the guy that saved my life, probably. He said, what are you doing back, back here? I said, I'm here, Sarge. With a cane? What am I supposed to do with you with a cane?

I said, I'll throw it away then. I'm afraid you're leaving soon. And I don't want to go without you. If I have to-- whatever I said. He said, we're leaving in the morning. I was about to strike your name. He said, all right. All right, Sam Hagner, I'll take you. Even if I have to carry you to support myself. And he did.

And that's when I went, went to war. I threw away the cane. He said, you've got to get rid of that cane. I can't take up the guy playing with the cane.

Did he go with you to Dachau?

Oh, yeah. No, wait a minute. He might not have been at Dachau itself. Because he was always at headquarters. And headquarters wasn't always where we were. So I don't know whether he was there or not. I can see what you're thinking, maybe I could have talked to him. I don't think he was there.

He was a nice guy. He didn't have to carry me. I walked. That's a funny little episode. I could never tell my mother. Maybe that's another reason why I couldn't tell her some other things, that I lied to her. I lied to her. I said, oh, yeah, Ma. I'll play it for what it's worth.

Was there any burial of the bodies when you were there?

No, they weren't even touched. I don't know why they did that. But they didn't move anything while I was there.

Did any townspeople come into the camp?

No, I recall-- all I recall is this armed guard around the camp. And nobody in, and nobody out, but authorized personnel.

And you said you stayed within the camp during that week.

I'm pretty sure we did. I don't remember going anywhere else. We didn't have tents-- we had tents, but I don't think we used them. We stayed in-- must have been barracks of some sort.

Were you concerned that you would become ill from what you were in contact with?

No, I was not concerned about becoming ill. Somehow, that didn't cross my mind. There's too much else going on.

Do you think the other soldiers, the young soldiers that you were with, felt the way you did?

I can't speak for everybody. I think some of them did. I'm sure that some of my friends did. I wasn't friends with everybody in the unit, obviously. Perhaps some of them didn't. I don't know. I think the fellas with whom I felt empathy felt the way I did. People that I called my friends or else they wouldn't have been my friends.

But you're saying you don't remember the sitting around and talking about what you were going through?

No. No, I don't. All I remember is going to work in the barracks, on the details, as we called them. Coming back, I guess, we did stand around and talk. I remember this picture of standing around and talking. And then trying to sleep. And writing a letter, that must have been to Doris.

Writing that letter, I remember trying to write it and wondering whether it was going to be censored and wondering how

to write it so that I wouldn't be censored. Because I didn't want anything to be censored. And yet, I didn't know what the officers would allow.

I think why they allowed-- why the letter you see now that I sent to my parents was not censored was that it didn't really contain any military information, like how many troops, how many were stationed here, whether we're going to move there. That's more what they're concerned about, I think. Nor was I really castigating the army. I didn't say anything about that. Though, I had pretty strong feelings about some of that, as we all did.

What was it like to hear that you were going to be leaving Dachau?

Relief. Because I was aware that we couldn't do much for these people. We didn't have the sophistication that a general hospital would have, the personnel, the equipment, the size, the brute size to deal with the immensity of 28,000 people.

Though, I was glad to leave. I was glad to leave for my own personal-- what's the word-- equanimity. But I was glad to leave too, because I knew that we were not the people for it, that we couldn't-- simply couldn't do the task, meet the task, do the job. So I was glad to leave.

Did you sense that any of the prisoners were grateful to see you?

I have no recollection of that. I have no recollection of that. I would assume they would. But that doesn't come true.

Did you see any prisoners who were your age?

No, I don't think so. Interesting question. I don't have any memory of that. Of course, even a 19-year-old would look pretty old after being in that place for a while.

And where did your group go to?

The next episode was not very pleasant. We went to and commandeered a German hospital, small community hospital, I guess, we would call it now, staffed by German nuns. They didn't have any patients. But they were there because that was where they live. It was inside a cloister.

And we took over the hospital with the idea of treating displaced persons, taking care of them, what we could find and bring them in. Treat them for what they needed.

What town was this in?

I have no idea. I have no idea what town. Somewhere-- that memory is lost. What I do remember is that we were there possibly a week. And then we weren't doing that much, so they decided-- maybe that's what we got orders to move to France.

Did you keep any kind of a journal while you were in the service?

No, I didn't. I should have, but didn't. I don't know why it didn't occur to me to keep a journal. I wish I had. Any way, as the day came to leave this hospital, and the very miserable, disgusting thing happened, the ugly Americans.

In the laboratory of this cute, cute little hospital-- and it was a cute little hospital. It was just beautifully equipped and the nuns were taking this beautiful care of it. In the laboratory was a by binocular microscope, a Zeiss microscope, the best in the world.

If you may or may not recall, that back during the war, I don't think even the US we had many binocular microscopes. They must be nonocular. Anyway, one of the officers decided that he wanted that microscope. So he gave orders for a couple of guys go up take it and put it in a crate and take it with us.

I remember the nuns coming out and pleading with him, don't, sir. Don't, please, don't take our microscope. But he turned a deaf ear. I could have spit in his face. I can still see those nuns. Those nuns standing there begging and crying. And he said, nope, to the victors belongs the spoils, I suppose. And That must have been when we were on our way to southern France.

Let's back up a little bit. When you were in Dachau, do you think that the older medical people, the doctors in your group had any different response than you did? Because they were older. They had had medical training. They were educated to save lives and they come in and they see this.

I don't know. I would guess that from a theoretical point of view, yes, I would think that they would have had different responses. But I really don't know. Because we didn't have that kind of contact with the officers. We took orders from them. We worked with some of them, but we were not friendly.

What did they do, the doctors? You all did the typhus injections and the DDT spraying. What did they do?

I have no idea what they did other than tell us how to do this. But whether they went with us, I don't think they did. But maybe they did. I have no idea what they did. I have no idea.

Was your group made up only of men or were there any women in your group?

The only women were nurses, registered nurses who are officers. We had, I think, approximately 30 nurses with us. In fact, in one of those photographs you saw, there's a nurse standing in one of those Dachau photos.

Did you talk about any of this over with the women?

No, we had no contact with the nurses either. They were officers. We were enlisted men. You don't fraternize with nurses in the army. No. Now whether if one of us had tried and whether they would have been receptive, I have no idea. But it wouldn't have occurred to us to even try, because that was crossing the lines. We were second class citizens, if you recall.

And yet the people in charge didn't feel the need to sit down with all of you in Dachau and talk about what you all were experiencing?

They certainly did not. No, I can't credited with any sympathy there.

Each of you are on your own to deal in the way that you could deal with this.

Absolutely. Each of us was on his own, other than what we could do for each other as buddies. Each of us had a buddy usually. The army has a buddy system. There's a reason for that. You and your buddy, you kind of pair off. You look after each other.

And so you protect each other to the insipid little things like if one of you wants to go take a shower or take a bath, you leave your wallet and your watch with your buddy.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum volunteer collection interview with Dr. Samuel Hagner. This is tape number two side B. You are talking about the buddy system in the army. And when you were in Dachau, did you and your buddy have any kind of special relationship and talk about what you were experiencing?

I'm sure we did. I don't have any specific memory of that. But I'm sure we did, because we talked about a lot of things constantly. I still remember him. He was an old man of 25 or so from Fostoria, Ohio, Avery Hall. Very quiet.

Do you think the others were as deeply affected as you were?

I'm sure some of them must have been. I don't think-- I don't know how many special talents in that area other than that,



as you can see, I'm easily moved to tears. But I don't think I have any deeper insights or awarenesses than anybody else does.

Now to get back, so you left the nuns' hospital. And then went where did you go?

We were redeployed-- that was the term-- we were redeployed to southern France with the idea of ultimate redeployment to the Philippines. And it was a staging area for the moving units from Europe to the Pacific.

And so we were at an area outside of Marseilles, France, and spent a number of weeks there crating our equipment, our supplies for shipment across to the Philippines.

In those weeks and months after Dachau, did you think of Dachau?

Dachau never left my mind. Never left my mind, hasn't even yet. But we became busy with getting our stuff packed up. And I became seriously ill at one point in southern France at that area. And I'm sure that took some of my attention, too.

I got into some bad water and I developed the bacillary dysentery. Spent three weeks in the hospital. And they had no antibiotics those days. So we just had to sweat it out. I went from 140 pounds down to 110.

I was a sight. Someone took a photograph of me. And I think I have that still. I look almost like the people that I left in the concentration camp. That's a bad joke.

Speaking about photographs, did you have a camera with you in Dachau?

No, I did not. No, I did not.

You said you wrote your letter May 11th to your parents about your experience. Where were you? Do you remember where you were when you wrote the letter? And you were still in Germany?

We were still in Germany. We might have been at that hospital run by the nuns that I just mentioned. I don't recall exactly where we were. But we were in Germany still, yes, because the letter suggests that we were looking after displaced persons or trying to-- or seeing them and watching them try to get themselves home and so forth. I think I talk about that in the letter.

What did you do for the displaced persons?

I think this is what we were trying to do at that hospital where the nuns were working. We were trying to bring in those that were ill with whatever diseases they had. But I don't think we really did an awful lot, to be perfectly frank. I don't remember helping that much. Frankly, I think we were doing an awful lot of moving around and not accomplishing very much, to be perfectly frank.

I'd like to read one or two paragraphs from your letter, or would you-- could you read this? And I'd like to know your feelings now.

I haven't changed my mind concerning the German civilians and the bulk of the German regular army. I feel that they were only doing what they were forced to do. The cause of these atrocities most likely lies with a few high end of the SS or Gestapo.

There is the old argument for many, "well, if the German civilians didn't have enough guts to stand up against the Nazi party, they are guilty and deserve the same treatment as the fanatics." Well, this is not logic and doesn't work out that even these are people who have the power or opportunity to revolt against a certain system.

As one friend said, "the remains of people in the US, especially the Midwest, who oppose conscription in 1940. Yet the Bill of Draft went through regardless. If in our so-called democracy things went ahead regardless of the opinions of

millions, how could anybody expect breeds of Germans threatened with death if they opposed to put a stop to Hitler and his doings." I think there is a great deal of truth in this. All of this just about reflects my present status.

Would you write that today also?

No. No, I would not write that today. I think but you see there is the ramblings of a 19-year-old trying to explain how these camps could exist in the first place. And he ended up intellectualizing, pure and simple.

I still would not put the as much guilt on the German civilians as I would on the German military. But I think that the guilt had to have been shared. No, I think that was my attempt to try to explain the unexplainable. I didn't know the term then, but I learned later that's rationalization or intellectualization.

All right, let's continue with your journey after the end of the war.

Somewhere around the middle of August, we left Southern France bound for the Panama Canal and Pacific for Manila. A couple of atom bombs were dropped in the bill of the Atlantic Ocean-- or excuse me-- the atom bombs were dropped on Japan. We were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean steaming towards Panama.

After we heard that the second bomb had been dropped, the war had ended, Japan had surrendered, we waited, and we waited, and we waited. The ship kept steaming towards Panama. Perhaps six hours later, we heard, now hear this, now hear this. The ship's orders have been changed to Newport News, Virginia.

What were your thoughts when you heard the atom bomb dropped?

Interesting question. I was relieved. I thought, thank god, the war is over. A lot of lives would be spared. But the idea of the atom bomb was terribly frightening. I don't think I really understood what it meant at that time, the immensity of the atom bomb. I didn't come to comprehend that until later.

I think mainly it was a very selfish feeling, thank god we're going home. Because if we'd gotten to Manila, we'd have been getting home, maybe years. This meant we were going to be home in a week or so. And we were.

We arrived in Newport News, must have been-- the war ended 15th of August or something like that. I guess, we were in Newport News by the 20th or 21st of August. We were one of the first troops to step on American soil.

And within 72 hours, I was in Philadelphia. And within 48 hours after that, I was on the Jersey Shore walking the sand dunes with a young lady named Doris.

We walked, I talked, and she listened for three straight days. One of the best things that ever happened to me. Because I could do with her what I couldn't do with my parents. And also she was the one that started all this back when we were teenagers, started questioning me.

So here we are, I'm back at the source, so to speak. And now we're talking about it all. I can still remember her. She didn't say a word. She just listened. At one point, I asked her, I said, you said something in your letter about being afraid when I came home. Are you afraid now? She kind of giggled and said, no, that was an exaggeration. But I think she was a little bit.

She did say that I wasn't the same. And I said, well, I'm not surprised. But there was three wonderful day-- wonderful in that allowed me that catharsis that I needed and the support that I needed that only a peer can give you anyway. Yeah, that was very precious time.

Did you go into explicit detail about what you experienced?

Oh, yes. I told her everything. She wanted to hear everything. She wanted no holds barred. And I didn't bar any holds. I think she felt that she had to hear everything. Because if she didn't hear everything, I wasn't going to say everything. So

it was a bargain, a good bargain.

What about your brothers? Were you able to tell your brothers everything?

Yes, my younger brother, I think, was at a summer camp. I was 19, he was 14. He was at the summer camp still. But my older brother by this time had left the forestry camp at Big Flats, New York. He had begged, and begged, and begged for some kind of significant work. Because what they were doing up there, as I've said before, was stupid.

And if only the government granted him his wish, they sent them to Pownal, Maine outside of Portland and assigned him to what was then called an Institute for the Feeble-minded, what people call a state hospital. He had never had any training or expertise . But they put them on a ward.

And he worked as a ward attendant till the end of the war and then some. I don't think he was discharged about when I was, which is in May of 1946. So he worked until the end of the war as a ward attendant, 12 hours a day, looking after the inmates, the mentally defectives, most of them. They were wards of the state. They had no medications for them, of course.

So I went up to stay with him and his wife. He was married and she was living outside of Portland, a suburb of Portland, and working in Portland. I spent three or four days with them. And he wanted to hear everything. Even though I took a different course than he, I was his brother. And he wanted to hear it all too. So I went through it again with him.

It's interesting, because he couldn't stand the idea of serving in the military. But boy, he wouldn't let me omit one detail. So what do you want to know next?

So what did you do until you got discharged?

Our unit reconvened in Gadsden, Alabama. And we were assigned as a complete unit to the Crow General Hospital outside of Cleveland, Ohio. The whole unit lock, stock, and barrel, went up to be absorbed by this general hospital, which was a plastic surgery center for those who've been wounded by shrapnel, chiefly, and disfigured in one way or another.

And this was an amazing place to be. If I had to stay in the army, which I did, I had to serve for another-- well, until May of 1946. So I had to serve through that fall and winter, end of the spring until I had enough points to be discharged. So I worked at the surgery there as a scrub nurse, for which I had been trained.

But I saw some fascinating things. The US army was footing the bill for-- plastic surgeons were able to try all kinds of things that they wouldn't have dared otherwise. Because they had the time and the money. And I'm sure this gave an impetus to modern day plastic surgery.

But I saw amazing things happening during that winter. And my chief job was to every day scrub up for surgery. When wasn't working in the operating room, then I was free to come and go as I wished. Ironically, Oberlin College was only 20 miles away. So every free moment I had, I was back on campus getting ready to return.

Did you go back to Oberlin after you got discharged?

Yes, I did. I returned to Oberlin in fall of 1946.

And then what happened?

And I graduated from Oberlin in 1949 after a bit of--

How does one go back to a college campus after being in Dachau?

That's an interesting question. I do remember-- OK, that's summer before I went back to Oberlin, I remember having a

hard time getting back into civilian life. OK, this all comes back to me now. I didn't go back to Oberlin until September. But I was discharged in May, so I was home that whole summer with my parents.

I worried them. They were afraid I was sick. They thought I was detached. And I was. They thought I was depressed. I'm not sure I was depressed in a clinical sense, but I was depressed. I was footloose. I remember thinking, how do I get back into this world?

These are civilians. They don't know what happened. And sometimes I'd hear them complain about things. I thought, what are they complaining about? They don't know what to-- there are things out there to really complain about. And I'd get annoyed.

I also had to work through these feelings of feeling having been betrayed by them. And I had a hard time going back to a Quaker meeting and sitting there and looking at that these people who turned the other cheek. I'd think, hey, how can I talk to you anymore? I'm on a different planet. I'm not in the same world with you folks anymore.

And I had a hard time with that. They were very nice people. They come up to me and they'd say, how ist thee, Sam Hagner? We're glad to see you home. Yeah.

So I didn't do much that summer. I read. I thought about Dachau. I remember even trying to write a poem about Dachau. I tried to put a verse, blank verse. I didn't get very far. I just couldn't.

And my mother said, hey, you better take a typing course. You're not doing much else. I went and learn how to type.

Do you remember any of the lines in that poem?

Something about I know I had to put into words. And I couldn't quite do it. Lying in her own excrement with the urine running down the bedposts. That had to be there. And I couldn't make it work. I just couldn't shake it. It wouldn't go away. And it wouldn't go away. I couldn't put it in. I couldn't do anything with it.

That was a tough, tough summer. I think I worked through most of it by time I got back on campus. And back on campus, all these guys are coming back the way I am, so we had a lot in common. The girls, they looked at us like we were a little bit strange, I suppose.

Did you talk to the other soldiers about what you had experienced and found out if any of them had experienced the same?

Yes, my first roommate, I talked to him about it. And the fellows in the-- I lived in a small house. This was a small private house. So there are only six of us that lived in the house. And I talked to them about it and talked about it with them.

I couldn't do that at length, because they really didn't seem to want to hear it. I think they thought, all right, enough of that. The war is over. Let's get on with it. That's pretty much the feeling that I had that they really didn't want to talk about it.

And those who had been in real battle-- because, see, if you think about all this, I never really wasn't a battle. Not with bombs bursting overhead. Except for an occasional strafing of the hospital, I was never fired at. But guys had been and they didn't want to talk about their experiences. I kind of thought, well, I guess, I shouldn't talk about mine either.

What about to the professors?

No. No. Until-- no. Yes, there was one professor. I didn't go into it at great length. But there was a reason for that. I went back Oberlin with the idea of majoring in economics. Because as you may recall, my father was a CPA. My older brother already was a CPA or about to become one. Younger brother later became one. I'm the black sheep.

So I figured GI Bill would see me through college that's all I could expect. And I couldn't really ask for any more than that. And my father didn't have the money. And he wouldn't have approved of going past a bachelor's degree anyway, because he was a guy that had to work his way through night school to become a CPA. And for him, a college education was all the guy needed.

But I wasn't happy in economics. And I was taking all the sociology and psychology courses that I could take. Because at this point-- I missed a very important episode, I'm sorry. When I got off the boat at Newport News, we got back to Philadelphia within 72 hours on a Furlough. My father was alone. And he was in a very bad shape.

He was in what I now know was an acute major clinical depression, what you might call the male menopause. I didn't know it at the time, but I learned later, he was suicidal. I knew he was suicidal, excuse me. I didn't know that he was delusional. But he was.

He was off the wall. And I was terrified. I didn't know what was happening with the old man. I'd never seen him like that in my life. My mother wasn't home. She was out in California attending-- get this-- a seminar on psychology, because she was a Carl Jung fan.

There she was. And my old man, her husband, was off his rocker, crazy as a hood owl. And I was floored. I don't know what to do with him. And of course, my mother, when she heard I was home, she started on her way from California. But it took her a couple of days to get home. So before she arrived, I was alone with him. And I didn't know what to do with him.

Mind you, I hadn't had any medical training at this point. I'm still 19. No medical training, no psychiatric training. I didn't know what was going on. But he was seeing a psychologist. And when she heard I was in town, she wanted to meet me. So I went up the saw her. And she explained what was happening.

She said, your father ought to be in a hospital. I said, he certainly should. In fact, she said, he ought to be getting electroshock treatment. I said, well, what's holding it up? Your mother won't give consent. And she has to give consent. I thought, oh my god, where we go from here? She said, well, I'm seeing him twice a week. I'm trying to keep them alive. I said, well, good. Thanks.

Because as you may recall, there was no specific treatment for that kind of depression back in those days other than electroshock treatment. Very interesting thing happened one night. I borrowed the family car, went out to see a buddy, have a couple of beers, talk about the war.

Came home around 11 o'clock. It was raining cats and dogs. And he met me at the door. He was wild. His eyes were red. He'd been crying. He said, give me the keys. I said, to the car? Yes, god damn it. Why do you want them, Pop? None of your business.

I thought, he's not going out on a night like this in this state. No, Pop. You can't. He said, what do you mean? I'm your father. Give me those keys. And I said no. Something told me he could not go out that night in the car. If he could walk out, OK. But he's not going to drive.

So I have them in my hand. He raised a fist. I thought, oh, boy. Then he dropped his fist, sobbed, and ran upstairs. Went into his bedroom and slam the door. And I stood there. I thought, the child is the father of the man.

My mother got home two days later. And then I was able to get out and visit Doris at the shore, at the Jersey Shore. I was angry with her. What was she doing out in California attending this seminar on psychology? And she's missing the major act back in her own home.

But speaking about that, she did have an influence on me. She used to talk psychology to me. She talked all about Carl Jung and mechanisms of defense, and this, and that, and the other thing. The word projection got to be almost a dinner table by-word. You're projecting now. You're projecting now.

But that had something to do with my becoming a psychiatrist. Even though I disagree with her on a lot of things, she did have an influence on me. And I was close to her. I was the one son that would listen to her. I didn't always agree and I'd argue with her. But at least I would listen to her. My two brothers didn't always. They would just turn her off. That would make her mad.

But to get back to Oberlin, somewhere in my senior year, I was happening to write a thesis on international trade as part of a seminar. And I was having a terrible time writing it and I knew I was in the wrong field. And I thought, I've got to do something about this.

But in meantime, I had to go and see the professor who was my advisor for the thesis. He was the leader of the seminar. He pushed the right buttons. All he said was, you're not doing very much with this thesis. You've got about eight weeks to graduation. And that did it. There was something about him. And I liked him. And I just exploded all over the walls of his office. Not at him, but just at the walls.

When I climbed down off the ceiling, he said, well, what was that all about? I said, I'm in the wrong field. He said, it sounds like it. What would you like to do with your life? Nobody had ever really asked me that. And I said, you're going to laugh at me. He said, try me. I'd like to be a psychiatrist. He said, psychiatrist? He sort of laughed. Then he said, OK.

I said, you don't think that's funny? He said, no. You think I could do that? He said, I think you might. But do you want to graduate or don't you? I sat down and-- oh, wait. I'm getting ahead of myself. I went back to the dorm where my future wife was. She was a Oberlin student then/ She had transferred from Smith the year before.

We were, I guess, they say going study by that time and talking about getting married. So I went back to the door and told her what had happened. And she sat there with a funny smile on her face. I said, you knew this is going to happen, didn't you? She said, hm-hmm.

I said, oh, and he knew this was going to happen? What makes you people so smart and I'm so dumb? And she just laughed. I said, well, if I start thinking about going to medical school, you realize this is going to be one tough road to hoe? I've never had a chemistry course in my life. I would have to go back and pick up some things. She just sat there and smiled.

I said, are you game for this? And she hmm-mm. I said, all right. So I wrote the thesis in eight weeks, graduated. And two weeks later, enrolled in a chemistry course for freshmen at the University of Pennsylvania. And that started it.

Because I found out that with GI Bill, I could use it if I could get my goals changed by the VA, I could probably get halfway through medical school before I'd have to borrow money. And that's exactly what happened. I went to the VA and told them what I wanted to do. And I said, I have to change my goals. You have to set a goal with the VA. So they approved it on the proviso that I got accepted into medical schools. I said, OK.

Do you think your decision to go to medical school to become a psychiatrist was influenced by what you experienced during the war?

I certainly think it had something to do with it, yes. I think my mother had something to do with it. I purposely mentioned the episode my father. I think that had something to do with it, because I was puzzled by what was happening to him. I think all of these things came into play.

And I certainly-- if I hadn't gone into psychiatry, I would have gone into my own therapy anyway, because I wanted to delve more deeply-- or not more deeply, but more thoroughly, perhaps, into these feelings that had been aroused by being at Dachau, yes. Yes.

I figured, if I didn't make it in psychiatry, I was still going to-- if not analysis, at least get some kind of psychotherapy. I even got some psychotherapy in medical school, a little bit. But when the guy realized that I was thinking of becoming a psychiatrist, he said, hey, why don't you wait and do it the right way? So I waited until later.

So then you went from there then you went on to medical school?

I was accepted not very readily, not very easily-- excuse me. Because I was not a premed major and I was picking up chemistry courses as fast as I could. But I was making applications to medical schools at the same time. A lot of medical schools didn't very much like me. I made 10 applications. I was refused by nine.

And I was the only son at home at that time. And dinner tables became kind of-- dinner table conversations or atmosphere became kind of tense. Because as each rejection would come in the mail, my father would look at me and say, well, now son, what are you going to do with yourself? Well, dad, let's just wait. Haven't heard from all of them yet.

And my mother would back me up. She said, now George, he hasn't heard from everybody yet. It got down to number nine and things are looking pretty grim. I then I a call from Temple University. The Dean wanted me to come down and talk to them. The rest is history.

And then you completed medical school. And then just can you tell me where you lived after that.

I completed medical school in Philadelphia in 1954. Did my internship also in Philadelphia. And I went into a psychiatric residency at Temple University also in Philadelphia. Finished the residency in 1958. Entered private practice in 1958 and also my own psychoanalysis, as I became a postgraduate student in the Philadelphia Psychoanalytic Society.

How much of your analysis was devoted to your talking about Dachau?

I can't give you an exact figure. Certainly, a healthy-- I guess, a healthy amount. It would come up-- I spent a lot of time in the beginning, of course, as he was getting to know me getting and I getting to know him and getting used to the whole experience talked a lot about it. And then later, he would come back in from time to time. So it was like a red thread wound its way through my therapy.

And that was someone you felt who had an understanding of what this meant?

Yes. Yes. My analyst was Jewish. He knew where I was coming from. He also made a comment one day, something about-- how did it go? How the hell it came up-- he said, Sam Hagner, he said, I know where you're coming from. He said, you come from a matriarchal society. You had a strong woman for a mother. I know exactly where you're coming from. I thought, oh, baby, he had a Jewish mother.

And then when did you get married?

I was married actually before I started medical school. We married in the summer of 1950 after I had my acceptance. And I started medical school in the fall of 1950.

Did you talk to your wife about your wartime experience?

Oh, Lord, yes. Lord, yes. I can remember-- poor gal, I put her through some terrible times. I can remember at times as we were courting, if you will, at Oberlin, I tried to tell her how confused I was. And I remember saying things to her like-- or asking her, could you put up with a guy who might or might not defend you if-- the typical question-- what if an intruder came into the house and threatened to rape your wife, would you defend her physically?

And I tried to say to her, you know what problems I have with that? She said, sure. And she accepted that. In fact, in some ways I think she's a better pacifist than I am. When our sons were of age to be drafted, she was urging them to go to Canada.

She said, and if you won't go, or if you want help, your dad will take you across. What she's joking about was that I could lead him through the woods, because I'd become a pretty accomplished hiker by that time.

Let's talk a little bit about your children. As they were growing up, did you ever tell them about what you had experienced?

No, I really found it difficult to talk to my children about it when they were very, very small. Because I didn't think that they could comprehend that kind of thing. And I think I just thought it was too horrible to expose them to that.

When they became grown, I would at times bring it up. But it never went very far with them, because-- I don't know-- maybe it's their generation. They just didn't seem to want to hear much about it. They know I'm here today. My daughter lives 25 minutes from us. She said, dad, I hope it goes all right. But she really didn't go into detail about it.

My two sons, one's in Detroit, Michigan. The other is in Acadia, Maine, Bar Harbor. They really haven't asked an awful lot about it. I don't know if that's their generation or what. I think this their generation and even the one coming up, my granddaughter's generation, they have trouble with this, Gail. They have trouble.

I had a patient once, about 1992. He was a history teacher in high school, one of the local high schools in New Hampshire. Came in one day and told me an amazing thing. He said, doc, I have a class that doesn't believe the concentration camps existed. I said, you're kidding me. He said, I'm not kidding you.

I said, well, I have a letter. I can make a photocopy of it. Or I'll come in and talk to your class. He said, really? I said, yeah. You were there? And I said, yeah. I was there. He said, let me try the letter first. I said, OK. But I'd be glad to go in person. So I made a photocopy. He took it to this class. And apparently, that was enough for him. He was satisfied with that.