

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with George Leonard. This is tape 2, side A. And you have been telling me about encountering a German patrol and then making your way away from them.

The Americans I contacted were not my own division or company, and they would not believe that I was an American because there had been many, many, many Germans, particularly back a few miles. And the experience of the Bulge, many Germans who had been found in American uniforms and speaking perfect English and confusing the situation terribly, and were responsible probably for many American deaths.

Any rate, to make a long story short, they wouldn't believe me and they asked me questions over and over again, and they weren't satisfied with that. So I said, well, take me back to my captain and he'll identify me. Well, they did and Captain [? Kirkabeau ?] identified me.

The next morning, we kicked off at around 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning in the darkness without any pre-bombardment. No artillery, no nothing. Just quietly. No vehicles, no nothing toward the Siegfried Line, the hill. And it was a terrible, terrible experience because they had booby trapped the entire side of the hill we were walking up in the darkness. And the booby traps were called bouncing Bettys. The bouncing Bettys, when you tripped a wire, would bounce up about three or four feet high and go off. And there were cries of medic, medic, medic, and so on and so forth.

And gradually, we kept on going through. Miraculously, I didn't trip any wires nice had no problem in that regard. And finally, we got to the side of the hill that we were going to dig in on. And there were lots of prisoners being sent back at that point to get to the rear, just down the road, with their hands on head. Nobody had the time to usher them or anything. And the Germans we found there were particularly glad to be out of it. They weren't going to make any trouble.

They were wrecked pillboxes on the Siegfried Line. They were wrecked because the Air Force had bombed them repeatedly. And the company took up a wrecked pillbox as its headquarters, and one for medical cases, wounded. And we dug in, started to dig in, and shale rock. And when dawn came, there were still guys that weren't anywhere near dug in yet because of the hardness and shale, and it was cold and miserable.

The side of the hill that we were on was a defilade position, meaning that as you go to it toward the top of the hill, you could see over the surrounding countryside, but we were down and back of that, which means a defilade position. And the 88s, most of them, the 88 Our artillery-- it was not artillery. It's a tank gun shells used by the Germans-- would mostly go over the top of the hill and away, down back. But enough of them landed right alongside side of the hill, there whereby we were constantly getting bombarded, constantly having casualties.

And the captain was getting increasingly furious over not having tank support or anything at that point. Radioed back, and the tanks did not want to come up because they were afraid of getting lambasted with the German equivalent of the bazooka, which was a very strong anti-tank shell. The bazooka looked like one of those big musical instruments, a long, hollow tube, and it rested on two men shoulders in order to fire.

At any rate, Captain [? Kirkabeau ?] was so angry that he said that he was going to go back and fight with the battalion headquarters over not having proper-- this was after two or three days, by the way, after two or three days of taking constant mortar and fire, what we call Screaming Mimi fire, which I keep motioning with my hands. I'm sorry. Screaming Mimi fire, which is a particular rocket, which made a weird sound as it came down. And General 88 and small arms fire a machine gun fire, and Germans creeping on their stomach up toward us.

At any rate, he told me to make sure that I got to all of the platoon sergeants and lieutenants, and tell them-- and he gave me specific instructions to each one about what they were supposed to do-- and to tell them that he would be back up later after fighting with the commander of the battalion to get some tank support and other support.

So I started going from hole to hole. I had reached the third platoon hole with one to go when a mortar fire came in and small arms fire at the same time. And I jumped into the hole, practically breaking the leg of a sergeant that was in there, and started telling him about the instructions.

It was daylight at that point. And he turned me around and he said, you've got blood on the back of your jacket. I said, well, I don't feel anything. He said, well, let me look. And he looked and he said, well, you've got some sort of a penetrating wound there. And he said you've, got shrapnel bits over parts of your skin, which I didn't feel either.

So he said, well, you better go to the aid station, which is the wrecked pillbox about 50 yards over there. So I said, OK, I will, but I got to get this fourth message to the last platoon and it's on the way. Oh, no problem. It's on the way. So I did it, got to finally reach the aid station. The aid station had a Jeep coming up with two other guys in it, and they stuck me on the back and they took off for a rear town, where I got hot food and everything. It was great again.

The doctor said something about-- well, he said it's a penetrating wound, but we don't want to take any chances with it. And they picked out some of the shrapnel bits that were here and there, and it was no big deal at all. And I found out later that the sergeant I'd been talking to in the third platoon had put me for the Silver Star with the words, "without regard for"-- I'm laughing here, not crying-- "without regard for my life," et cetera, et cetera. I did this, that, and the other thing, which I candidly say was not really true. I felt a little bit better when the awards committee-- I found out later, when we were in Australia at the end of the war, the awards committee felt that they had not enough-- what do you call it?

Corroboration.

Corroboration is exactly the right word. Corroboration, so they knocked it down to a Bronze Star, and I was happy anyway. So I was off the line for seven weeks. And when I came back, the division, our battalion, anyway, was in the German city of Worms. Worms, W-O-R-M-S, on the Rhine. And we stayed there two or three days and then kicked off again for Frankfurt, Darmstadt, and other points.

At that point, it became a different war. It was not a question of slogging horrible, horrible battles, in which it was practically-- I never experienced man to man fighting, thank God, but it was the closest thing to that, where you actually saw the Germans and you were getting fired on, and it was really wicked.

Now it became a question of getting out on the highway and stopping and having a run and gun fight and getting shells, and so forth, but you weren't holed up for three or four days in a row in miserable weather, and things like that.

We went up, as I remember, to Erfurt, Gotha, those cities, in the northern part of just above Bavaria. And all of a sudden, we had some opposition there in each one of those places. And then we turned quickly down a little bit over toward the Czech border, and then down to Graff and [? Mor, ?] and so forth, and ultimately Passau, German city, before we went into Austria.

The fear was always great. We had problems at night of counter attacks. We were counterattacked in Oberhof and in the [? Thoringenvald. ?] And the counterattacks are fearful because you never know where they're coming from or never know in what way they, what form they're going to take.

And I had an experience in Oberhof, not only the experience of my guide mentor, John Doles, tapping me on the heel and helping me come through it. But we were there two days, and on the second morning, I heard from the-- most of our squads were all around the town, ringing in the town, protecting the tanks, protecting against counterattacks.

The captain and I were holed up in a house, where we heard about a house nearby where 30 or 40 German kids had been sent to get them away from the Ruhr and other bombing centers, Dresden and Ruhr, places like that. Just like in England. They sent the English kids to places in the country.

And so it seemed logical. The captain supported the idea of filling my helmet with C-rations, chocolate, things like that. And I went over and knocked on the door, and this very hostile, stiff, young lady answered. And I told her who I was. She was like a governess to this group. And she said, come in. So I went in, dumped the chocolate on the table.

And the kids were brought in and they all stood around, and she said something to them, a signal. And they all said, Heil

Hitler, with their hands raised. And I just turned and walked out, and that was the end of that. So there was still feeling on their part, on some of their part, particularly some of the younger people.

We went into a town north of Passau, where the captain and I and the driver and the big radio operator, Lucas Sevich, were billeted. And usually, we were told, in no uncertain terms, to kick the people out regardless. Just get rid of them. No civilians in the house with you.

But there were five or six young women, who later it came out that they were either the wives or mistresses of SS officers, high ranking SS officers, who had been brought down from northern areas. And one of them was a Dutch young woman, beautiful, absolutely gorgeous. So the captain said, well, they can sleep in the attic. So then we made up plans for guard duty, and I had the first shift of two hours.

By then it was about midnight. Two hours, 12:00 to 2:00. And I'm on guard duty and everyone else is sleeping. And the Dutch girl tiptoes downstairs and tries to inveigle me to come up. And I am absolutely-- I tell this anecdote to show the fear and frozen this that you can go through. Even if I had been willing to, I wouldn't have been capable of even making love with her or anything by having sex, and I just dismissed her and told her to get her neck back upstairs.

Then we went down to Passau. And by then, all along the road, we were getting signs of the Holocaust. We were getting striped clad people on the road, begging, climbing all over the half-track, looking for food. We gave them what we had, which, as I said before, was not a good idea because of their real needs.

You have to be careful, of course, with people who have been starved or something. But these people were not starved like the ones in the concentration camp. These were ones who were real work camps. They were generally healthier, but just plain hungry because they had flowed out of their camps with the coming of the Americans, and the SS were starting to save their skins and leave.

It got worse and worse and worse. I mean, more and more were on the road, and orders came that we would not, under any circumstances, let them come in the track. We were not to give them food because there already had been word passed back to echelons to bring up extra kitchens and bring our best nurses.

I've got to say, and I'll say this later again, as a group, the most magnificent group I came across, if you've got it categorized by group and make generalizations, were the American nurses. Several miles west of Mauthausen, somewhere in between Passau and Mauthausen, word came by radio that Mauthausen existed. They described what they could of the camp, that is, many, many, many thousands were in there they knew and it had the reputation of being one of the three worst death camps.

The 41st cavalry and reconnaissance groups in our division, with some moving armored vehicles and the usual Jeeps and everything, had come across some SS men leaving. Saw them a few miles away. They engaged in a running gunfight, and they took loads of prisoners. The prisoners were sent back in some way. I forget how they were dealt with.

At any rate, the reconnaissance wanted to make sure that we understood that the camp was there exactly where it was, and the fact that the SS seemed to have left. We got the word because, again, we're point of the whole division. And I don't know why our battalion was the point of the whole division so much, but it was.

We were told to regroup down the road a ways from Mauthausen and make a military presence, and go in there and restore order. The 41st cavalry, and others up there on the scene, had said that they couldn't do anything. They weren't equipped to do it. And all they could do was go on and protect the area like reconnaissance, reconnoiter, like they'd been doing.

So our job was to go up there and bring order and bring those who had been spilled out from the camp back into the camp, release the immediate environs. So we did it, and there was three tanks in front of the half-tracks.

OK, we're back. We had a brief interruption when someone came to your door. You were talking about the three tanks in front of a half-track and then the door stopped.

When the division got word of the presence of Mauthausen, the orders were being given us by radio from battalion. The tracks and tanks behind us were all stopped along the road, and Captain [? Kirkabeau ?] made sure that two or three tanks came up ahead of the half-tracks and that all of the men dismounted from the tracks.

And they were ordered to march up to the camp, holding their rifles at port arms, to make sure that everyone understood that it was a military situation and that the Russian explosion in the camp, which we had heard about, was to be quelled. In other words, the Russian prisoners in the camp were taking over things and then exploding and being authoritarian, et cetera, et cetera.

So all these considerations, plus the possibility that there were some SS or other guards left behind, had to be planned for and dealt with. I want to skip this for one second. I go back to tell about something that happened between Passau and Mauthausen. The captain and I were holed up in a house with no other person present. The driver was taking care of his half-tracks in place, and so on and so forth.

Well, we were alone, and a knock came at the door, one that we least expected. Because although we had a firefight the day before, we did not dream that there was anyone, any of the enemy, within two or three miles at least. It turned out to be a middle ranking SS officer and his aide. And the aide said that the SS officer had the tattered remains of an SS division out in the woods and they wanted to surrender to the Americans.

We knew from radio reports that the Russians were coming some miles to the east and that they weren't far away. And we knew, putting two and two together, that the SS divisions and others were being squeezed in the middle and they wanted to surrender to us.

The captain said, OK, surrender. And the man said, the middle ranking German officer said, very stiffly, that under no circumstances could he surrender to an American officer of less than equivalent or superior rank. And the captain struck him very hard in the face and knocked him down and told him to get his ass back to the woods where his men were. We found out later that probably they had been picked up by the Russians.

Going on ahead to the military presence that we were asked to give, going into Mauthausen, the men walked in military formation up the road to Mauthausen. The captain and I jumped on the first tank. He asked me to join him. And we had been used to sitting on moving tanks anyway, going through the forests of Belgium, and so on and so forth.

When we reached the general area of the camp, we saw that the situation was rather almost hopeless, as far as restoring immediate order, because so many had burst out of the camp. They were all over the place. And we saw dozens and dozens of badly clad individuals with these striped uniforms, et cetera, stumbling about. We saw them dying, dying on the road actually.

And the gates were already opened, the big swastika above the gate, big soaring gate, and everybody clustered around us. And the captain tried to make sure that they understood that they were to back off and give us room. And he singled out somebody that clearly spoke English and asked him to relay orders that we were there to help them only. We were there to help them only. This was stressed over and over again.

The captain gave orders to the one lieutenant that was left, and the platoon sergeants, as to what they were to do. And he said, come with me, and we took off running. He led the way through every single cubicle and space around there. We went first to the oven, and the oven door was open, and the bodies were like cordwood inside.

We went to a woman's sick ward, to a men's ward, where they smiled weakly at us from bunks, and waved. Some of them waved. We went out into the main enclosure and began listening to people. And the captain wanted to see some more, so he asked an English-speaking person what else he should immediately see in order to get a grasp of what the camp was like. And the English-speaking person said, I'll take you. And I don't recall what it was after the men's ward and the woman's sick ward, the general sleeping ward, and the eating places.

High smells everywhere. I mean, the odors were absolutely terrific. It was what I had come to recognize, going through

Europe, as the smell of death. Even though that was a figment of my imagination, because although death was where I was in Europe, the smells only became associated with the smell of death because they were there also. For example, the gunfire, the smoke from burning buildings, these things.

At any rate, we kept on running around, running around, running around. The captain was the most inquisitive person that I had found anywhere in my company or division. He wanted to know, and he wanted to with a great feeling of empathy, because he cried. The reason I am taken by surprise by this is because he was a guy with no education, particularly, who would come up the hard way in the Army Command. But he was a very neat guy.

When this two-hour period was over-- I say two hours because some of it's blank in my mind. I don't remember everything. I really don't. I was absolutely so stunned that I can remember the highlights and that's all. I do recall that he was bellowing into a radio when a half-track came up with a command radio, bellowing about making sure that enough kitchens in the area and medical groups in the area. But he had been assured already that this had been put in process, but he wanted to make sure. And he suggested to me that I go down into the town.

Oh, OK, a very important step. He gathered, quickly, a couple of the technical sergeants of platoons and asked them to get up a group, picking from each patrol, to go into the town with rifles and bayonets fixed and order all healthy civilians to come up with shovels and other equipment of that nature-- spades, shovels, pitchforks, et cetera.

The idea was to show, first of all, everyone in the town what had taken place next to them, if they did not know it. Most of them did. The other thing was to get some work done because bodies had to be buried, et cetera, et cetera. He immediately started them on a vast, vast burial spot out on the grounds.

By this time, battalion had come up. Battalion approved of what he was doing. As a matter of fact, they emphasized it. And more people were brought up from the town, able-bodied people, women, older children, men on up to age 80 or 90, et cetera. Some of them, of course, showing their--

Let me just stop the tape. I'm out right now.

[INAUDIBLE]

Yeah.

This is a continuation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with George Leonard. This is tape 2, side B. And you were talking about bringing civilians in for the burials, and I would like you to please continue along those lines.

The captain suggested to me that I go down into the town and find billets for them. And another matter he wanted to take care of was they had-- this was later in the day. I'm skipping ahead a little bit. Later in the day, they found out that there were what was being called werewolves, which Nazi fanatics were up in the hills making trouble. And it came to light, I guess, during the day because some stray shots had come into the town, snipers.

So another duty, another task he wanted to accomplish was to get a group to go up and dig them out, which he did. My part in that was simply to get some of the guys to agree to go up. No matter how horrible the war had been for us, you always get some who are willing to take on more. Not through some sort of a selflessness, but because it was their nature. They were needed for this job, and they did a good job of digging them out. Within days, there were no problems of outside interference from werewolves.

I went down into the town. There was a street, a dead ending, at the bottom of the slight hill, which we could clearly see from the grounds of the camp. And I went to that street-- I'm going to skip ahead to getting a house first before I go to the first house. I got a house for us, the third house. It was a dentist and his family who lived there, and I told him to get out fast.

And then I went to the first house-- I'd gone there first, actually-- to discover that five young ladies were in it, and they

were obviously camp prisoners, inmates, who had broken out early in the game, probably when the SS officers first left. And they had taken over a house that some of the SS officers had lived in with their families, for one family or two, I'm not sure what.

At any rate, the five girls consisted of, in my writings I've said three Czech. I think it was two Czech and one French. Two Czech, one French, one German-Jewess, and one Dutch. Ellen Luz-- Luz, Lus-- had been sent to a camp, with her husband to another camp. Had been sent there because they were running messages in the German police dog mouth, trying to salvage some of the Jews.

The French girl was a very, very advanced person. I liked her, and so did the American major that I brought in. Two Czech girls, and Gazella. Gazella was the German-Jewess. She was 15 years old. Had been in the camp for something like three to four years, and had been repeatedly saved from the gas chamber by Ellen, the Dutch girl. She had resolved early that-- I found this out from one of the others-- that she resolved early that she would do everything in our power to pull Gazella through.

I have no right to cast illusions here, suspicions, but I want to make it clear that what ran through my mind soon after I got to know them was that there must have been some kapo-- K-A-P-O-- stamp on at least one of them. Probably Ellen, but I don't know. The kapos were the ones who did jobs for the SS. They were prisoners who did jobs for the SS and had authority and lived better than the others.

I think, in the long run, that although I was capable-- and I want to put it right up front, I don't mind saying-- I'm perfectly capable of having an intimate relationship with one or more of them. I avoided it almost totally because of fears, not only health fears, but fears of what I said. I did not want to have anything to do with anyone who was a kapo.

The next day, there were some people in the town who started to give us stories about there's an SS man still here and there, and blah, blah, blah. And I was part of a small team. There were two or three of us that entered the house in response to one woman's complaint, that there was an SS man living there.

And the young man was in there, hardly 19 or 20, and denied it utterly. And the woman who had ratted on him went into the house and upstairs and brought down a Nazi uniform, et cetera, et cetera. So it became almost a clear cut case.

The American Company C pretty much had sway in the town. There was no other company from the battalion or division living immediately in the town. We were the occupiers there, and we had our mess, our kitchen on the waterfront of the Danube in the heart of the town. It was a delightful spot. We enjoyed it. Every so often a boat would come in and the Americans would take it over.

Of course, outright thievery was going on all the time under the guise that because they're the enemy, it doesn't count as thievery. A boat came down the Danube loaded. The hull was loaded with 120 bass accordions, and it didn't take them long to put all the accordions up on the dock and pass them out to anyone who wanted one, any of the soldiers who wanted one. I mean, soldiers were passing it out to the soldiers.

Certain things stand out my mind, hit me emotionally, tremendously. The young German, the Austrian people, were much more harmed by and affected by and astounded by the hill, what went on on the hill, than the adults. I suspect that maybe some of the adults tried to keep word from the young people, I mean the teenagers, although I don't really see how it was very possible. I think maybe they were kidding themselves.

But to make a long story short, there was a small handful of teenagers, led by Trudy, who was a very intelligent, delightful young lady, who they just sobbed and sobbed for days, and said they were never going to have anything to do with their families again. Trudy and two other girls took up living in a rat-infested-- I say that, I'm probably exaggerating-- empty house or building on the Danube, but they lived apart from their families.

I think she ultimately went with an American soldier back to the States, but I'm not sure. I didn't see the other, but I just saw the claims of the statements of the two involved, the girl and the guy.

I would like to talk about the American nurses, [INAUDIBLE].

The American nurses were fantastically empathetic and hard-working group. I'd see them for days and days and days on end working their heads off to accomplish what they could to save those who were teetering on dying and to improve those who were just plain ill and starved.

I got to know many up there. I used to go up in my spare time to talk to people. I talked to a harbor master from the Danube up in Hungary. I talked to many people. A Polish man gave me his cigarette case, which had his girlfriend's names stenciled-- not stenciled, but in metallic raised letters all over the case. And I knew it meant a lot to him, but I felt that he really wanted me to have it, and I still have it.

When I first saw the girls in the camp at that house, the five girls, I tried to get a medical person down, but they said, are you out of your mind? I mean, look at what we're faced with up here. So I knew that it was a hopeless situation for the first couple of days, but gradually I got an American major, physician, to come down on a theory that it wasn't very far and that it needed medical state, that it should be an outpost of the camp.

I had put a makeshift thing up, saying that this is an outpost of the camp by order of Captain [? Kirkabeau. ?] The major finally came down, and after talking to the young ladies and making arrangements, he agreed with it and put his own name on the sign. He said I did the wrong thing by giving them food, which I knew, in retrospect, I had.

But they were better off than most anyway. And he called for a hot meal to be sent out to the house daily to them, and made other arrangements. I think he took up with the French girl later himself. In all honesty and practicality, I have to say that people have these things on their mind all the time and it never leaves.

I have some specific questions that I would like to ask you. I'll give you a moment to compose yourself. I'll let you clean up some of the details from some of the things you've already told me. Please tell me the date and the time of day when you entered Mauthausen. I'd like to have the date on that.

I think it was May 5th, which was the-- good Lord. I'm going to check this for you. Not right now because it would take me time to find it. I think it was May 5th, which was right around the corner from the end of the war. As far as the time of day was concerned, I think it was mid-morning.

Do you have any knowledge of how many prisoners were liberated in the camp at that time?

The TO strength of the camp was something like 20,000 to 30,000. Many had died. There had been a big push to have the ovens going full-time before we came. Many ran out into the countryside and died. but probably, there had to have been, above 20,000. But I could check that more conveniently and easily. Do you want me to?

You said the TO strength?

Table of organization. [INAUDIBLE] It's what was expected. TO means table of organization. Like the TO strength of a division was something like 14,000. At the end of the war, it was something like 3,000 or 4,000 of the original numbers.

Would you please describe for me the people that were there? When you came in, was it just men? Was it just adults? Can you give me an idea of the people that were imprisoned?

There were large numbers of all sexes. I say all sexes because the Germans regarded the homosexuals as being among the worst. So there was this homosexual contingency. There were loads and loads of men and women, even younger ones as witness, Gazella. And they were factions galore, ethnically. One of the largest and overpowering factions were the Russian prisoners of war. For some reason or other, they had used Mauthausen to stash an awful lot of these prisoners.

And I was party to observing-- and sometimes helping out in a very minor way, such as giving directions and that type of thing-- the large number of groups that came in to help and to repatriate. The Ukrainians, the Russians, the Poles, et

cetera, all sent in repatriation teams. I saw them everywhere.

I remember speaking to a young lady who was reading a book in the square of Vocklabruck, a town several miles away, where I had an Austrian girlfriend later in the game. And this young lady, I said to her, you're Ruski? And she got furious. She said, no. She said, I'm Ukrainish. I realized then that there was a split, that the Ukrainians did not consider themselves as Russians.

The Russian prisoners had taken over much of the camp much of the time late in the game, and the other prisoners were cowed by them. One of the most moving sights I've ever seen in my life was in back of the house that Captain [? Kirkabeau ?] and I were billeted in, on the street that dead ended right up there at the camp grounds fringe, there was a gravel road going from the camp down to the railroad station into the town.

And the time came when the Russians were moving out, the first contingency, the Russian prisoners. Captain [? Kirkabeau ?] and I stood on the back grass of the dentist's house we were in, looking down on the gravel road where the prisoners were marching down. They came down, marching in formation, singing at the top of their lungs, lustily.

It was very, very moving. And the captain beside me was very moved, too. It was his idea that we watch. He became even more moved when he saw some of the groups that he sympathized more with, because there was great prejudice at that time against the Russians, just as there was against the German military and German officials.

The feelings that the American soldiers had toward Germany changed totally along toward Passau and into Mauthausen. And most of the members of our company, save for a few ultra egocentric guys, were very, very, very consumed with hatred for the SS and very sympathetic with the people that they saw, the people who were hurt by it.

Were there any children in the camp?

By children, I assume you mean like under pre-teen. There were from hearsay, but I never saw them.

Did you personally witness any acts of revenge or retaliation from the inmates to any individuals and Germans who might still be around, or even the camp itself? Did you see any acts of violence or hostility on the part of the people who had been prisoners?

Several days following the liberation. It was the situation on tenterhooks, ready to burst out. And yes, I saw isolated examples. And on the second or third day, a minor-- not a minor, but an under commandant of the camp, whose name I don't remember, had been caught by the prisoners, and his head was put on a pole. I didn't see him beheaded, but I saw the head.

I saw striking and I saw mauling and I saw crowds around one individual. And I'd call, quickly get some of my fellow GIs to get them to pry apart the group and see to it that it stopped. Yes, that happened quite frequently. That happened quite frequently.

It wasn't just the Russians that there were problems with, but it was with the prisoners, kapos, that developed hatreds. And there was much of this. That's one of the reasons I think that those girls took that house, but I have no right to say that that's true because I don't know it to be true. Is it all right to say that? OK.

Did you, by any chance, happen to witness the prisoners taking down the Nazi symbol from the camp, the swastika? I guess it was over the gate. Did you happen to witness that?

Not close, no. I saw it right after it happened, but not close. No.

You had been telling me before about the burials and civilians being brought in to help. Were you there for the actual burials?

Right after our men had gone from house to house bringing up as many as possible, I went up to see what was



developing. I wanted to give a report to the captain. And yes, I saw it beginning, and I saw some of the adults. I saw a couple of women getting sick and ill.

Everyone I saw was pitching in through either fear or compassion, one or the other. Probably a lot of fear, mostly fear, mixed in. I think a lot of them were afraid of what would happen to them if they didn't play ball. So yeah, I saw them working.

With these burials, were the bodies prepared in any way? Did anybody speak over the graves? Can you give me an idea of the actual process of burying the bodies?

There were no great formalities, but I did see at least two examples of individuals speaking a foreign language over the group. That's as far as I can go on that. I don't believe that we had any chaplains up there at that time, but I'm not sure.

And were these graves marked in any way, the burials? Were the graves marked?

They weren't marked individually because they were mass graves. And yes, the answer is that the mass grave is marked.

[INAUDIBLE]

We're going to pause. We're just going to pause for one minute and let you take a break.

OK, we're back now after a brief break. I had asked you about the burials. Did you see any evidence of the mass graves that were left there by the Germans before your arrival in the camp?

I had like a camera. I remember taking some pictures, which most, if not all but one or two, have somehow disappeared. I did see lots of graves, but I have difficulty now distinguishing in my mind the vast grave that I knew was dug by the townspeople, and other smaller ones.

I remember seeing a grave with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of bone-white, chalk-white skeletons, just tossed in. I don't remember, frankly-- I'm inadequate on that-- whether this was what we discovered when we went there or whether it was the later. I can't help you.

You mentioned that you took photos. Were there any official photographs or moving pictures that were taken, that you are aware of, to document what you were finding when you came in?

Yes, in the 11th Armored Division files, there are quite a few of these. I did not go out of my way one at this last reunion, the only one I've ever attempted to take any away with me. I remember sending home some pictures that had been taken by official groups while I was there in Mauthausen. And as I said, I also had taken a few of my own.

I recall some pictures of graves that probably had been dug for the ones killed in the ovens before we got there, but I can't swear to that. I can't at all. The whole thing is a blur in my mind now. I think that I did not try to process this information to keep it. So emotionally staggering was it.

Could you remember if you found-- you individually or the group of you-- if you found any records or photos left by the Nazis?

I have to apologize and go back to your previous question, and say that the gas chamber was the best evidence of a grave. Not a permanent grave, but one that existed before we got there. So if you're looking for evidence that existed before we got there, that nobody could have tampered with, the captain and I were the first ones in that gas chamber of any American alive, any outsider. Because the 41st cavalry did not go in and do these things. They were engaged in firefights outside.

Again, were there any records or photos left by the Nazis that you're aware were at the camp? Because Mauthausen, there were other camps around and that was often a place for records to be kept. Do you remember if any were found, or

were you aware of any that were found?

No.

OK, I think I'm to take this opportunity to pause and change tapes. So let's not go any further now.