

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ARTHUR JOHNSON
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Jewish Community Relations Council,
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HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

Q: Mr. Johnson, would you tell me please who you are and where you came from? Start with your full name and where you grew up.

A: All right. I'm Arthur L. Johnson. I was born and reared in Hudson, Wisconsin, twenty miles east of St. Paul. Finished high school there and then I went to college at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Graduated in 1941. And then Uncle Sam called me into his service as a draftee in October, '41, and I spent four years in the U. S. Army, actually fifty months. We went over to England in January '44. I was in ammunitions supply company, an officer, and we landed in Normandy with the invasion there on D plus twelve, that's June 18, I recall. Then across northern Europe with General Bradley. First army troops, in the Battle of the Bulge, and then up into the Rhine area. And I recall when we caught the bridge across the Rhine at Remagen on March 9. But the event that I want to share with you - it was one of the most indelible memories of that war experience - my visit to Buchenwald concentration camp.

I was not a liberator. We were not combat troops. I was in the supply services. Our company maybe handled a hundred, two hundred thousand tons of ammunition that was backing up our forces. But at the time of that period there, of mid-April, when the war was winding down and we had jumped across the Rhine and were flooding out across that plain there and moving eastward, it so happened that in mid-April, the Buchenwald concentration camp was the first of the big concentration camps that we had overrun. Because they obviously were interior. And that struck quite a blow, I remember, in the press. The Stars and Stripes had tried to keep us informed as best they could of timely data and this was one of the shockers that bewildered all of us. We thought we'd seen some inhumanity, and perhaps suspected, by our propaganda, that the Japanese might be barbarians, but here were the Germans, a civilized Western people, and the reports coming out of Buchenwald, I remember seeing in the Stars and Stripes or on the radio at the time, was almost unspeakable in what was reported, of what had occurred there. And of course that was the first and that set the tone. We didn't find out until actually the war was over about others that were overrun - Dachau and Auschwitz and places like that. But anyway, my experience was a vivid one that's still with me now, after forty-one years.

It so happened that, at first of course, it was medical purpose to go in and rescue all those that were still alive because they ran out of fuel and food and so on and

people were dying like flies at the time when we overran Buchenwald. And we reported the bodies were piled up just like cordwood over on top of the walls there because they ran out of fuel to run the furnace to incinerate the bodies. But Eisenhower was committed that the world should know about this atrocity, it shouldn't just be hidden, or a secret.

Q: You say that Eisenhower was committed. How did you know that?

A: Well, in the Stars and Stripes it was reported. It wasn't just the military, the health personnel, the MP's, the legal ones. Eisenhower wanted the world to see this. So people came, civilians from Washington and other places, to observe and see. The reporters went in and then it was opened up so others could see, you know, what was going on there in Buchenwald. And so that's how I happened to be in a jeep one day heading for business up in Weimar and - this has to be my best guess, now, it has to be about two weeks after we overran Buchenwald - and now other people could come in that didn't have business for being there. The dead and the dying and the critical had been removed, and so on. But now it was open for others to see what had happened in Buchenwald. And those are some of the events that are still pretty indelible in my mind, that I want to share with you.

Q: There were still former prisoners there.

A: Oh, yes. Many of them were still there because they were too weak to move, and there was no place to go, and this was shortly before the war was finished out. Yes, now how many occupants were there? I would say the majority of the inmates were still there. They were there at the time it was liberated.

Q: Being cared for by the U. S.

A: The MP's were in charge of the security, health personnel were there. They had set up mess kitchens and things there for their feeding, clothing and so on. Many were still wearing their prison garb, their striped uniforms; others had picked up strays of American fatigues or American O.D.'s, wool clothes, and so on. But the thing that struck me, the memories, at least the few that I can reconstruct are one, the inmates, the people who were there. When we visualize our American prisons, we know they're horribly overcrowded, two or three times the normal number of occupants they're designed to handle. But this area in Buchenwald, the best way I can put it, imagine it's an overcrowded American prison with ten times the number of occupants, to be closer. And primitive housing conditions - bins and shelves, in these little barrack areas. I still have a vivid image of the men. Some were too weak to move. But the things that impressed me from looking at them were their faces...two things. One, sure, there were the gaunt faces, the people who were emaciated, and their sunken eye sockets, and things of that sort. But even so, in the midst of that, two things, there was a smile on their face. They were liberated now, and they had hope. You know, it was something that they hadn't had for years. And thankful that at least now they

were liberated. So even though many couldn't speak, they might grab your hand; I remember that. And here they were and they commented - can't remember now, my memory's too dim on that - how many of them spoke English or how many spoke through an interpreter. But I remember my knowledge was translated by someone who was conversant in English, telling about the sleeping quarters, obviously the filth and the stench. There's one little spigot for a water fountain for four hundred men, or something like that, or a thousand, it could have been. One bathroom or minimum toilet facilities; obviously dysentery was rampant. There was no food. And the sleeping quarters - many crawled under dead bodies to keep warm. They pushed up, and crawl under, because maybe fifteen or six or eight were in one little cubicle. And they'd crawl underneath there just for warmth. And the dead bodies were removed, and others supplanted them, the next day. And I remember sitting and talking to some of those there, and we felt almost kind of numb. This was home to them, so they felt safe and secure here. Later, of course, they would be free to go, but this was within, I suppose, when I was there, a week or two before the end of the war wound up. It had to be about a week or ten days before...I'm estimating it was the end of April when I was there, about two weeks after it was liberated.

But so, seeing the faces and feeling, certainly, if there was any reason for a just war, this was one - just like you saw right there, in the Nazis. So I have an indelible impression of some of the people who were there, who were the inmates, who had survived and who hadn't died after liberation, and were now starting the slow process of recovery back to full health. So that's one memory I had.

One of the bitter, or shocking ones I had - talk about cognitive dissonance, and it still puzzles me today even after forty years - here was Buchenwald, this woods, this forested area, and this concentration camp, and all these people who claimed they didn't know anything about it or what was going on, just ten or fifteen miles from Weimar. And the irony of it. Here's Weimar, the founding place of the Weimar Republic...it had a short life from the monarchy up until Hitler in '33, so this was a glimmer of hope of a republic here in Weimar, some of the best hope of Germany after World War I. It was also the hometown of Goethe, perhaps the most distinguished intellectual that came out of Germany, the equivalent of England's Shakespeare, I suppose. So here's the irony of it. Here's the same area that could produce such a genius, the power of intellect and contribution to mankind of a Goethe, and the degradation we saw there in this concentration camp, of man's inhumanity to man. It was just almost indescribable, how these people could be caught up into that type of thing. And I've pondered on it many times since, how thin that veneer of civilization is, and how quick even we could slip into that type of horror. So I'm not pleased about that. Well, certainly that was one very vivid memory, was the people and the irony. Now I can't recall the inscription on the gate coming in. It was in German, German script. It was something to the effect of "might makes right" or "the end justifies the means." I don't recall the exact expression, but at the time I thought it was a phony

argument. I never bought it, or any others subsequently. Sure, look at the means, look at the ends, and so on. No illicit means can justify the kind of ends that people are talking about. So I never bought that kind of extremism since. I still remember it looked like the entrance of the gate or stockade of a wild west movie. You come into this kind of camp, and inside, or course, there's a double row of barbed wire fences and machine guns at the corners guarding the gates of the military compound. So that was vivid. And then I remember a compound. So that was vivid. And then I remember a tour over into the commandant's house, where the commandant's wife, I recall she was known as the "bitch of Buchenwald"...and I forget her name.

Q: Ilse.

A: Koch...Ilse Koch. The "bitch of Buchenwald." What a diabolical person who got some strange, morbid satisfaction out of making lampshades - I saw them with my own eyes - these lampshades made out of human skin. Because they had interesting tattoos on them and stuff like that. I saw them right there. They had them displayed for people to see. The degradation that can happen to the human spirit! At the same time, maybe in the same room, there were some records of Beethoven, Brahms, maybe not Bach, maybe Wagner, maybe more Wagner than. Of course, it would have been better irony if this had been the home town of Nietzsche, maybe, rather than Goethe. But this is the kind of thing that runs through your mind. How could people take fiendish pleasure or beauty in that kind of thing, and then we were told also how they'd take, of course, the dead bodies...they'd take out their gold teeth, their fillings or anything else and cut off their finger or anything. And then we saw the crematorium, and I'll never forget that. (Starts to cry)

I don't know how large the area was, maybe one hundred or a hundred and fifty feet square wall around it, five or six feet high; I don't know what the material was, brick or stone. They told me - I saw pictures of it - that when we liberated it, it was piled high with bodies, because the incinerators weren't working. But when I got there, when we were there, the bodies were gone. The stench was still there because they hadn't removed some of the stench. The urns were still sitting there, where they took the ashes and sold them to their families, and so on. So that was still there. We saw this area where they put the bodies in, it was kind of isolated, with the smoke stacks stuck up above it, and the inmates said that when they saw the smoke coming up they knew what was going on, they were burning other bodies. But I still remember the guy that told us, that took us through there. That crematorium was the most fiendish, ghoulish thing that I can recall. He described the pattern of what they did. They would take the bodies, either the people who were emaciated or dying or were too weak to work and get anything out of, in some - like a manhole - a big area, maybe two or three feet square and ten feet deep. The people would come in that yard, who were either dead bodies, and were dumped down that hole just like a carcass, or bodies that were still alive; they would take them, and put them up on hooks in the wall just

like sides of beef. It was kind of an L-shaped building; I still remember it vividly, going through that, and that being shown to us, the L-shaped building with hooks on the wall, like meat hooks, where you could hang like a side of beef. So they would hang the bodies up on these hooks, until they were ready to burn them upstairs. And maybe they had room for thirty, forty, fifty bodies in this area in the basement. They brought German prisoners there to clean out the stench of this area, and whitewash the walls, and work on the walls, but even so, you could still see embedded in the walls the stain, the human bloodstain of the shoulder blades, the buttocks and the heels, you know, where some of the peoples' bodies were still dripping blood, to give you some idea of how they were dumped in there.

Well, then they showed us the elevators that would take them efficiently from that basement area up on this elevator up to the incinerator level, where they had these ovens, quite hot, that reduced the bodies to ashes. And then they'd take the ashes out and put them into urns and sell them to their families or relatives and so on, in any kind of way. That image of those furnaces, of that kind of building, still haunts me to this day.

He also told us about the laundry of the building, and how they stripped bodies and put them in there. And this was the picture that was to be replicated and duplicated, that we saw in the other places that were liberated just within a short time after that. Well, I had my driver with me - our company was white officers and black enlisted men, who had also, of course, been deprived a bit - and one of the reasons why I think we had a good guide was that my driver, who was black, was probably one of the first blacks to have a tour here of Buchenwald. He was with me as we went through there. And we share some of those experiences.

Well, there was one thing. That publicity, then, that I could share, that came back with the people who saw Buchenwald. Normally, the war would be winding down. It would be normal for most persons interested in self-preservation not to stick their neck out, to kind of withdraw, to cool it, to just take it easy and not push too hard, and so on. I heard that was true, at the ending stages of World War I, and people would just kind of die down. But that didn't happen here. And I don't know if any witnesses have informed you that. But I think that's important to note on the historical record. Because this provided an opportunity to liberate captives, and we saw how critical it was for food, and help, and so on. And instead of people slowing down in their movement, actually our combat troops accelerated their advance into the interior of Germany, to speed up the liberation, to reach the prisoner-of-war camps, the concentration camps, so they might get there and liberate the people there, who otherwise would die, or the Germans might kill them before we had a chance to liberate them. So instead of holding back, they speeded up and went hell-bent to liberate the camps. I'm sure that happened at Dachau or other places that were in the deepest part. So many of the survivors, and some maybe you've interviewed, are alive today because there was that acceleration, because of finding Buchenwald, people weren't slowing

gears, they accelerated their gears, to liberate as fast as they could! So that's why, within three weeks, really after liberation of Buchenwald, we met the Russians, and the Germans had surrendered there, the first week in May. So I think that the exposure of Buchenwald, as widespread and horrible as it was, did have the effect of hastening the end of the war, and also facilitated the liberation, and the saving of lives of many others who might have been wiped out, or died of hunger, or lack of medical attention, if that war had been protracted any longer than that. You realize from the time of the invasion of Normandy on June 6 of 1944, it was May 7, 8 - less than eleven months later - that the war ended - in phenomenal kind of speed. And we can be grateful for that part of it. At least, we would not have the survivors, the few that there are, had that not occurred. And so one reason why I'm willing to offer this, my own personal witness, is that we've heard these strange tales - the people saying that the whole Holocaust was a fabrication, and so on, by certain members of the Jewish community. And obviously, as a Scandinavian Lutheran, I can speak that this is pure hoax. I was there. I saw it with my own eyes. I can testify.

Q: Now that was something I was going to ask you. You talked to people who were there. There were some former prisoners who spoke a little English.

A: Oh, yes. French, German.

Q: Did you meet some who were not Jews?

A: Jewish? Oh, yes.

Q: Tell me about that. Who were the prisoners at Buchenwald?

A: There were Polish prisoners.

Q: These would be Polish Catholic, rather than Polish Jews?

A: Yes, oh, yes. Polish Catholics. There were some who had been captured, prisoners-of-war, and so on, had been caught. It was a mixed bag. It was in fact, I would say, at the time, there, that Jews may have been a relative minority, as a group, as far as Buchenwald's concerned. I don't know exactly what the figures were, but my impression is, that Jews were not the predominant group, that they were a mixed bag. There were all kinds of political prisoners there in Buchenwald at the time. Now the numbers, I'm not sure of, but my recollection was that it was only later on as they got further in, because by that time they were fully involved in the Jewish liquidation, so there were more off at other places, moving towards Auschwitz, my guess would be. Now I know the history, but at the time, we were startled and shocked at finding this camp. Not that there weren't Jews there, who weren't used and abused. But my recollection was, in fact, I think Dietrich Bonhoefer had been there and had been executed. I'm not exactly sure on that, but I think he may have been at Buchenwald. But there were others like him,

internal political prisoners. I know we had liberated Polish and other occupation areas the Germans had sent in there, as part of their forced labor, and others for reasons that were politically sensitive.

Q: Now, you said you were a supply person. You were supplying ammunition. That was your assignment with the army. You didn't go into Buchenwald, then, as a professional person who would be supplying food, clothes, other supplies.

A: No. I think I was up there to pick up the payroll, and this was a side trip, and excursion. I heard about this, I saw the sign, I can't remember exactly how it was, but I knew Buchenwald was on my agenda and I chanced to see it. I wanted to see it. In the Stars and Stripes we'd seen pictures of the atrocities, the horror, and it was available now where people who were not there, professionally, had an early chance to see it. And that's why I got in there before the war was over, to see it. After that it opened up, of course, and dissipated. There were people from congressional junkets, other countries, the press was invited in to see, because this was the first of the horrible places that were being uncovered.

Q: And then you said something about, and then they removed the gold teeth; they took clothes off the bodies, and laundered them right there in the laundry so they could reuse them. And then you said something about selling the ashes.

A: Yes. This had been going on in there, probably going way back to their earlier period, where as people would die in the concentration camps, in the earlier time, they would take them in the crematorium, they would put their ashes in an urn, and for a modest fee, fifty marks, a hundred marks, I don't know what the going price was, whatever the traffic would bear, I imagine, would send a letter to the family that so-and-so died and would you like the remains, why for a small fee we'll ship them in this urn to you, and that was a modest moneymaker. Or it could have been - let's put it in the best construction - it could have been for humanitarian concern on the part of some. It could have been mercenary on the part of others, or a mixed bag is probably the safest way of describing it. But I do recall seeing a stack of these urns out there in the yard that had been used for that kind of purpose, but they had run out of fuel, so there was no way they could burn the bodies that were stacked up just like cordwood. And that wasn't the fault of the jailers - they had no choice, because they ran out of fuel, ran out of things, and fled. I still remember the stench of dead human flesh that was still permeating the area, near the ground.

Q: After two weeks.

A: Oh, yeah. It doesn't go away, not if it had been there...I forget how long they said, how many weeks before it was liberated they ran out of fuel and the furnaces stopped cooking bodies. My memory was at least two or three weeks, prior to the liberation. So they were having a big pileup, hundreds of bodies. And I've seen pictures subsequently, and you have, too, of the bodies stacked up like

cordwood. Like I say, the irony or the paradox or the contrast between Germany at its best, in its cultural achievements, whether Nobel prize winners or its artistic performers, or its musical heritage. Or the irony, for example, of playing Beethoven, Mozart or even Wagner while this kind of barbarity was going on. How people could have compartmentalized their lives. And, of course, even talking to the Germans in some of the areas later, they didn't know what was going on, the disavowal, of course, the standard technique, and that's only a partial truth. I still have that uneasy feeling, that what happened there could happen here. We think we are above it, but seeing how I felt, how war can dehumanize, and how good propaganda can twist and distort, doesn't give me a lot of comfort and satisfaction. When people get faced and led by diabolical "mystigods," demagogues, how quick they can look for scapegoats, and replicate some of these same...

Q: I was wondering if it had any lasting influence on you. What had you studied at Gustavus before the war, and what did you do after the war?

A: Well, economics, sociology. As a matter of fact, being there, this helped, certainly, in being with black troops. All of our officers were from the north; one was from the south, Mississippi. We had our own internal drama. Our basic cadre were southern negroes. Most of our fillers, the basic corps, were northern Negroes. Put them together, twist us around, send us on maneuvers in Louisiana in the summer of '43 during the Detroit race riots. We had turmoil. We had a strike in England, and mutiny, because they wanted to get rid of the white captain from Mississippi, and so on, and we had our turmoil. We were supposed to land on D plus four, but because of this internal trouble, we landed on D plus twelve. So instead of getting wet and wading ashore on Utah beach, I got in a week later and walked in on shore. We did get shot up by Cherbourg, and our ammunition dump got blown up, and we had casualties there, but we came out relatively lucky. We had a lot of discussion with our troops about liberating Germany and liberating blacks. So it certainly gave me interest in the civil rights movement for all those years, after i got back into sociology as a graduate student after the war. So in a sense it did have an impact in kind of shaping my own professional career identity, and to see part of that fulfilled in the civil rights movement of the '60s.

Q: And so then you came back here after the war.

A: I came back here on the G.I. Bill. After prelimins in '49 I went for about a year to the University of Michigan. Then I came back here and finished up and stayed here. I was deluded by "we found peace in the United Nations," you know, and I was part of that euphoric mood until '49, when we had the Berlin Blockade. That kind of gave me a signal that, hey, things aren't like this, and you'd better be prepared. And the Korean War didn't help a year later. In '53 I joined the Army Reserve, Active Reserve, and was in the Active Reserve for seventeen years. Our area was East Germany; so we were in contact with the military, and they still felt that good intelligence, good defense was the best protection against another

thing happening. Not that I was a hawk. (Laughs) I'd seen enough of war, and I didn't want my children and grandchildren to have to go through it. So I was in the Active Reserve and I was called back on active duty during the Berlin crisis in '61-'62, and spent a year at the Pentagon. At that time that was fine, it was considered heroic or acceptable, but by the time I retired from the reserve in 1970 (laughs) military types had a bad image and I was considered persona non grata here, and a traitor and a spy by many of my colleagues and graduate students here. And I recall during April of 1970, after the intrusion into Cambodia and a few other events that happened in the '70s, I still recall some graduate students all exercised and upset over the military, and that it was going to widen the war in Viet Nam, and the Chinese and Russians were going to come in by all of our activity and I said, "No." And I recall telling some rabid, very active groups here that I was more concerned about what was happening in Egypt. They were pooh-poohing, over whether the Russian MIGs were buzzing the Israeli planes on the Gaza strip, and they were ready to take over, until we got word to the Egyptian government about what the Russians were doing, and they kicked them out. But that saved the Middle East. Otherwise, the Russians were ready to take over. And one of the graduate students here some years later, not too many years ago, recalled this. "Remember when you said that you were less worried about our invasion in Viet Nam widening the war than you were about the Middle East and Gaza?" he says. "I have to admit you were right." So I can recall my own career kind of always trying to be in the middle. And one time, standing up against the radical Right, like Gerda Koch, when Arnold Rose rose up and accused her, and I testified at his trial against the crazies and that kind of radical Right accusing him of being a Communist. Somebody had to stand up against the radical Right. Other times I would be standing up against like the radical left, those who were so militant for peace they'd commit violence to make sure they got peace, and in the '70s I thought that was a contradiction. So we've seen those extremes over my own career.

But running all through that, of course, have been some of that gut feeling that I had about my war experiences, that I had as a young guy, an idealist in his twenties, seeing some of those bad, sad experiences. I was relatively lucky, because I never had to aim shells, or shoot anybody. I don't know if I could. But I was spared that. Not that we didn't have a little trauma, but certainly nothing like the combat troops did, so I wouldn't want to pretend. Because most of those that have gone through that kind of trauma, it would be hard to get them to talk about it except to their own buddies.

And it was interesting, you know, just the last few weeks, we went back to Washington and saw the Vietnamese War memorial for the first time. It was the day after Memorial Day, or Armistice Day, we were there. And it was tender, to see those who could identify for the first time, because that was an unpopular war. At least ours we felt was a just cause; it was a righteous war, it was a war of liberation, we felt. We felt somewhat heroic, that we were doing a worthy thing. But I really felt bad, you know, sorry for those who were in the Vietnamese war

and didn't know why they were fighting, and had no support or protection, and the kind of response they got on their return. I respect those who were pacifists, the historic pacifists, Mennonites and Quakers, or through peace churches. Not that I was a pacifist, but I respected their right, and our country, that it would allow that peace position. I'm sure the Israelis have found out, since then, that that same thing is true. You just lie down and be nice, and it doesn't necessarily warm the hearts of your oppressor, as that World War II experience certainly pointed out. Well, what else can I tell you? All I can say is that it is amazing, even after forty-one years, how strong some of those images can be. (Starts to cry again)

Q: Yeah, and to talk with the German civilians afterwards, after what you had seen, and have them say, "No, we didn't really know what was going on."

A: Of course a lot of people are just blind - you don't want to know; if something's going on, you kind of cut yourself off from it. But even in America we found out, I recall, here, after the war, in '46, '47, we were finding out some of the inhumane conditions of our mental hospitals that were similar to the maltreatment there. And even people in a community right near it perhaps didn't know, or didn't want to know, and did little or nothing. So some of the brutality, I can see where some people who were not politically sophisticated or involved, might well have - like a washerwoman or a mother - may not, but many others, obviously, who were living right with it, had to know and this was a protective device. We've even seen that with Kurt Waldheim just in the last few months, how selective memory can operate.

Q: You were talking about -

A: I was just talking about my experience with blacks prior to World War II. I had no experience, being in a small town you see 'em as porters, a few service occupations, but here I was living with them and of course, like many others, I can smile now and laugh at myself, but they all looked alike, you know, they all were a similar experience. But you've got to differentiate.

Q: There were no blacks in Hudson, Wisconsin?

A: Well, there was one. I recall how attitudes changed, even for our white captain. By the time of the Battle of the Bulge we were a pretty unified outfit, and accepted, and this came out from others, we were color-blind, and the important thing now was the color of your uniform, not the color of your skin. And I can recall, during the Battle of the Bulge there, we were right down there, providing ammunition to the 82nd Airborne, who was protecting us. The 101st got the glory in the Bastogne, but the 81st saved our necks. They blunted the penetration. And we were right behind them, praise the Lord and pass them the ammunition. But anyway, we were there ten days and we didn't have one man on sick call and one of our key sergeants, I remember, we had to threaten him with a court martial because he was trying to work a twenty-four hour shift. He didn't want to leave

his men. Everybody worked as long and as hard as they could because we could see 'em, the bombs or shells dropping, like over the horizon there. So we had - and I remember Christmas day, the irony of it - here it was, the sun suddenly started to come out, because the Germans had very bad weather for ten days there, from the 15th to the 25th - the sun started lifting, the airplanes started coming out, bombers started flying, we had supply planes flew right over our heads, C-47's dropping in supplies to Bastogne - I remember it was just about fifteen miles away, and here we were, black enlisted men, serving by their own volition, serving a 24-hour mess line. They served hot meals from six in the morning until ten at night, and coffee and sandwiches from ten at night until six in the morning, not just to black troops, but to white stragglers coming back from divisions overrun by the Germans. So these were white troops mixed up with our black troops, and so on, and some gave up their beds to let them sleep because they'd been out in the mud and the snow and the cold. And I remember them arm in arm, singing Christmas carols there on Christmas day (laughs) while the bombers were flying over and the symbol there of the unity of the races was pretty poignant. I'll never forget that, either. So by the time we got up into Germany, we did have some good discussions about what it was going to be like for us when we get back. We were liberating people here, but what about our liberation back home? I said well, that's the next thing on our agenda. We've got to work on it. So I was grateful, shortly after that, when Truman did produced the order for desegregation of troops in the service. It was the first step. And other steps came about, with the civil rights and the Supreme Court decisions of the fifties, and there were other things in the early sixties. So we did have progress for fifteen or twenty years, up 'til '66 or '67. But I'm sad to say that in the last fifteen or twenty years we haven't had that progress; we've kind of closed the doors. There's been kind of, I think, a retrograde movement on civil rights, when we got swept up into Viet Nam and LBJ said we couldn't have both guns and butter, and so on. So it's kind of a sad picture of what's happened in the condition of civil rights, in my mind. We had such a good start there from '45 to '65, but I can't say that in the last twenty years we've seen anything like what we ought to be doing. But we can still have hope. So I guess we can stop there.

There were displaced persons that worked for us, who were just eager to work and help (laughs) - the Germans, and we liberated others that were used in slave labor. We had two little Polish orphans, two young boys, we gave them American uniforms and they were our permanent KP's and worked there in the kitchen.

Q: These were slave laborers?

A: Yeah, forced labor, on farms and in different factories in Germany. So we liberated some of those from the towns we captured. I forget where they came from. We had fifty of them that worked for us to augment our troops there towards the last month or so of the war. It's really an incredible kind of experience to me, to be part of a military operation that vast, so huge; just the size of the armada that went in on the invasion was almost indescribable - to be

part of that. And just the activity, and the conflict, sometimes just sitting and doing nothing, boredom, and other times frenetic activity and fear and excitement all tied together, just like you're in a different world. I don't remember seeing many things of beauty, there, but there wasn't any time, or anyone I wanted to share it with. But even going back to Europe twice since, I hadn't any desire to see Buchenwald. I had a chance, we were in Munich last summer, but I didn't care to see Dachau, either.

Q: Or show it to your wife or children.

A: No, I knew what it was like. (Cries)

Q: Yes, and so you didn't want to go back. Well, thank you very much for sharing with us. I know it's been hard for you to talk about these things, and the JCRC/ADL is very grateful. This will become part of our book on the Holocaust, which will be used by high school and college students as a textbook to study the era and the events of the Holocaust, and the transcript will also be available in its entirety for scholars who want to research the period, and so we are grateful. Thank you very much.

A: You're welcome. It's a period of history that you hope we can never duplicate, but you hope you can share enough, and burn it into the conscience of enough people, so that they can hopefully prevent something like that from ever happening again. Well, if it has any positive benefits, fine.