

HOLOCAUST INTERVIEWS

CLAUDE HIPP

(Interviewer) Claude, please tell us your full name. (Claude) Well, my full name is Claude Johnson Hipp. (Interviewer) Uh, where were you born? (Claude) Born in a small hamlet called Cross Hill, South Carolina. (Interviewer) Uh, at what date were you born? (Claude) Born in 1923. (Interviewer) Tell us just a little bit about your family life back then, before you got into the army. (Claude) Well, well, I uh, uh, before I joined the army, I attended high school in Greenwood, South Carolina, and then uh, went to Clemson, what do you called it, (college) in those days. Now, it's called Clemson University. At the uh, end of our junior year, we volunteered to into active service, and the Government, very obligingly let us in to uh, to be privates uh in uh certain different armed forces. I was uh assigned to the uh infantry. And uh, in a short period of time, we were sent to officer candidate school, and graduated in the summer of 1944. (Interviewer) So, that was between '42 and '42? (Claude) Between, uh, in...college...between '40 and '43, and in the army until uh, 'til that time...at which time...I...on graduation...uh from uh officer candidate school, we were assigned to our infantry divisions, and I was assigned to the 89th Infantry, at fort Buttner, North Carolina, and then subsequently, our division was sent overseas, to France. (Interviewer) And uh, when was that? Was that, was the beginning of the war? (Claude) Uh, that was uh, (?) (interviewer talks over Claude) and then uh, we were shipped overseas in January of nineteen uh '44.

(Interviewer) '44...I'm sorry. Uh, what happened then? Were you...uh, where were you shipped first? What area? What town? (Claude) Uh, we were shipped uh, on uh, on cargo carriers. Uh, and our division was landed in (La Harve) the port of La Harve, which had been captured. And uh, had been made safe. And uh, were taken uh, uh, this was in a winter, the worst winter I believe Europe had had in quite a number of decades. Uh, we were sent to camp, in uh, camping area, uh, where we were in small tents in the snow for several weeks until all of our division arrived with our equipment, and then were sent into action. Uh, the 89th Infantry uh at that time, was a new division, not having been in combat, and we were uh, rushed right after the bulls, to an area called (Trear) uh, in Luxembourg, uh in, in Luxembourg, and uh, we were first committed in the Mozelle Valley against the Germans. (Interviewer) About when was that? (Claude) That was uh, about the first of March, in, in that year. We uh, we were combat ready. Uh, we had uh, uh, felt that due to the French climate, and the wintertime, we were thoroughly accustomed to Europe and the winter by then. So uh, we went uh in to, we were committed into the Mozelle Valley, uh, to sweep out the Germans from that area. they were thoroughly entrenched, and our division was put to work then. (Interviewer) After that? (Claude) After that, uh, we were uh, thoroughly uh, the generals were thoroughly satisfied with our initial engagement in the Mozelle Valley uh, of clearing up Germans in that area. And then we were sent to the Rhine River where we uh, were one of the first in our uh army to have crossed the Rhine River early one,

early one morning, before dawn. And we having arrived at the real heart of Germany, uh, we continued to mop up the Germans and fight them, as we went, as we thought we were going to Berlin. Of course, we never arrived uh due to being held back, uh by our army, and, and the desire for the Russians to take Berlin, but we were well on the way through there. (Interviewer) Do you remember some of the towns in the area? (Claude) Yes I do, It's been forty...hard to believe...forty-six years since we were involved in combat there. But, I do remember the small hamlets, the larger towns, and some of the uh, giant towns that uh, that we went through. Um, we uh, uh, mainly were combat troops, and were assigned to units of, what you call an Army Division. Uh, in those days, we were in the third Army going through Germany, and the uh, General Patton believed in armor as well as connecting with infantry. And we were formed, we were formed into combat teams. Certain number of infantry men in our battalion along with uh, maybe a platoon of tanks. And we were to march as fast and as far as we could to seize the initiative from the Germans rather than being a constant sort of a static type affair. And this was most successful and we moved for hundreds of miles in very short while, and allowed troops behind us, the infantry, to mop up areas that we couldn't uh, bust up you might say. (Interviewer) I see. (Claude) But it was a fast, fast, vigorous uh way of uh taking enemy ground, and it was very successful. (Interviewer) Um, did you have the opportunity to see many of the natives in the area or talk to them? (Claude) The uh, the natives at that time uh, the

Germans as we knew them then, were extremely fearful of any American. Uh, they uh, they were uh, totally humble. They lost their arrogance, suddenly, when they were occupied in their towns and uh, i their units, we captured thousands and thousands of German soldiers, quite docile when apprehended. Uh, they uh, they were a very uh, kind, sort of a kind of people that uh, kowtowed to authority. And once uh, once American, and uh, The American Army moved in, they were readily assimilated into...we used to call..."Good Germans" in a hurry, you know. Uh Generally uh, our contact with Germans at that time in combat was limited to uh taking of prisoners and assigning civilians certain areas that they must go to during uh, the taking of a town, or uh of certain activities that we had to undergo, involving supplies and ammunition. Um, they uh, they stayed out of the way most of the time. They ran and hid, and as a result our contact was very, very limited. Uh, we did notice in their homes and in their villages, an extreme plenty of everything. Uh, we hadn't seen the French homes too much ...we'd been (?) there before combat..but we were impressed with the lavish farms and all of the food stuffs. Sausages, meats, eggs, things that the rest of Europe didn't have...these Germans seemed to have a great abundance. And their homes that we (billeted?) in were waxing fat with the finest of possessions. Furniture, rugs, tapestries and....uh the Germans seemed to be uh, high on the hog in those days as we went through and continued to occupy each town. Uh, we got to know Germans later, after the war....and during the period of time that we uh were involved in

combat, uh, there were a non-fraternization rule, that we were not to mingle and deal with the German people. Uh, this was later relaxed after the war, uh, after a period of time, but uh, we didn't really get to know them until later.

(Interviewer) You were, at that point, your uh, unit was going through west, toward the south of Germany or in that area? (Claude) Well, through the center of Germany. Uh, we uh, we call it, central, central Europe. And it was an area through Wiesbaden and straight on through uh, until you reach uh....continuously, until you reach a town called (Euhrfurt). Euhrfurt was a highly industrialized center. And uh, en route to uh, en route to our final destination, where we were finally held up until the Russians were permitted to move in...into Berlin...uh we uh encountered some very, very horrible sights and I'd like to tell you about those. (Interviewer) Please do. (Claude) In uh, the first week of April, that year, uh, we were moving hurriedly, as I mentioned on a combat team in our division. Through an area uh, that none of us know or knew of, and still don't really know, except it was near a large German town called (Gotha). And our division moved forward. One of our regiments stumbled into one of the greatest sores...scabs....in Europe, that you could imagine. And it was a work camp that had been run by the German SS. Uh, outside a small town called (Ohrdurf) (?) UH, this camp, we found out later was called "Stalagnord" Ohrdurt, and it was two or three miles from one of Germany's largest Officer Candidate schools tat they had just closed down in December. and only two or three miles from one of the largest munitions plants. Even

though this was a small town. The Germans had used hundreds and hundreds or workers, that had been drafted as slave labor from all over Europe. Particularly Eastern Europe, Poland..uh, Latvia, quite a number of Russians. An uh, even we found later, and American Flyer who had uh, who had been shot down and had been enclosed in this work prison. The uh, the workers were forced to work in a munitions plant. And they were held in a compound. It was wired in, about a couple of acres in size. And uh, when our unit went in, we found this compound completely filled uh, with hundreds of dead bodies. Uh, it was a sight I've never seen before and hope to never see again in my life. Uh, it impressed me so greatly, that uh, I care enough to tell you about it now. Otherwise, I would rather be quiet, because I brings a lot of sadness to me, to know uh, what man can do to man. I took an English course under Professor John Lane at Clemson and I remember he used to talk about man's inhumanity to man with poems and things of that sort, and I never really realized what it meant, until I found this area, and we marched through the camp Ohrdurf. Uh, it's hard to describe uh, different bodies that are lying on top of each other. Uh, it's hard to describe the railroad ties that had been set up. Uh, the way we were told that it happened, uh by broken english, uh, by a couple of the camp guards that had been uh, prisoners themselves, I guess in today's prison, we would 'em a trustee, except that I sometimes wondered as I saw how fat and well fed they were, just whose side they were really on. Uh, they did describe to, to those in broken english, that the camp had been run for supplying labor to the

munitions plant, and that these workers numbering in several hundreds, were extremely, poorly fed. Uh, I have a picture here that came um, with some of my belongings back from overseas that I really didn't want to keep, but I'm glad it did uh, it was retained, so that I could remember uh, what man's hate can do to man. These are some of the bodies that we saw in (Ohurdrufl). [he shows pictures] the workers, many, many hundreds had been starved over a period of time, or they were taken by disease. And these trustees were describing that over the last two years, that when these poor people, these poor slave workers were to die, they would be taken to a big area, behind the concentration area, and buried in a hole. Uh, it was estimated, we'll never know, that there had been about nine-thousand workers that had been placed and bull dozed...ground over, to cover 'em up. And that the uh SS (?) corps....assigned to guarding this camp, had heard that the Americans were moving fast in, and they had recently buried several hundred of these poor people that had been whipped or beaten or starved. And they forced some of the other laborers to dig them up and bring them out and put 'em on these railroad ties so that their bodies could be burned and the evidence destroyed. Uh, I think I held up this picture here. This is one of those groups of railroad ties. And what bodies were remaining there when we, when we were asked to view this camp. Uh, I can't tell you what a human body that's decomposed smells like. It's indescribable. But the scent of those bodies uh, uh, for, I'd say hundreds of yards, before we reached the camp, were in the air, and it took us days after walking through there to get the aroma out of

our uniforms. It's uh, it sticks with you, and without being sacrilegious, I'd like to say this that, even today, I don't enjoy barbecuing in the back yard. Uh, they had a whipping shed in this uh, in this camp, uh, where, I guess forty or fifty bodies were stacked like chard. And the trustee, the fat German, the fat worker trustee said that it was normal to put a body of any one who hadn't minded or who had broken the camp rules, in this sort of a shackle, and lean them over a table, and strap them with a heavy cane or a whip. I believe he mentioned a hundred and fifteen times (115)...that number sticks in my mind. And then if they were able to last through, uh, they were put back to work the next day. If they didn't make it, then of course, they were buried behind the camp. Based on what we saw, now this was not what's called a concentration camp, for a purpose of extermination. This was a work camp, and I can't help but think, if this was a work camp, and things like this occurred, what in the world would a concentration camp have been? Uh we left this camp, and went back, went back into the lines again, reformed and moved on ahead, and I, I can remember right now, that, that evening we were out on detail, and guarding our unit at night before we advanced the next day, and I can remember seeing the German moon, and wondering, what and the world can make a man, or men, or people do this to other people? So, that's my experience in seeing (Ohurdru). I was told this later, after we left, that it was such an extreme sight, and obviously this must have been one of the first camps Americans had taken, that uh, the day following, General Eisenhower, who was our general in charge of

the European Operations, and General Bradley and our third army General, General George S. Patton flew in, and uh, they viewed this camp. And I read also that General Patton, whom we all called "Old Blood And Guts", saw this sight, and unlike his reputation, he went out later and threw up repeatedly. He'd never seen such a sight like that before. So uh, that's our, that's my experience in Ohurdorf. And I just, I find it sad to even remember, but I guess what we wanna do is to make sure that this doesn't happen again. (Interviewer) One of the your ways to remember is to have these pictures um, um do you have others? (Claude) No, these are thee only pictures, except um, my squad sergeant. Uh, when we went through Ohurdorf and uh, he had duplicates made later on at uh, at the determination of our facilities, and gave me one of each. they must have been ten or fifteen. And uh, as we were later (?) in a German home, uh, the uh, one of the German families rifled through our personal possessions, and took all of those pictures. The average German told me uh, the few that I could mention to later, after the war, uh, that uh they didn't know anything about it. When, Ohurdorf was taken, the unit commander went to this small town of Ohurdorf, and invited the uh, the mayor and his wife, they call 'em (bergermeisters), and his wife to view this and make some accounting of the fact that, how could you be mayor of a town, and have this going on right outside? And we never knew the particular reason for it, but that night, the (bergermeister) and his wife both committed suicide. That was the guilt that they felt. And a lot of other Germans felt the guilt then, but mostly,

they don't like to talk about it. And I'm finding today, in today's world, I'm beginning to read articles in newspapers and magazines, that might indicate that things weren't quite that bad over there, that they really were just misunderstood people, and that those things really didn't happen, and some of use who say they did are liars. And I resent that bitterly, because they did happen, and they happened to thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people, and this is a message that I'd like to say that I'll repeat as long as I'm around, you know. I was just twenty-one years old then, and as you can see, I'm no longer twenty-one, but I um, as long as I'm around, I'll speak up, and we don't want this to happen again. (Interviewer) Is there anything else you'd like to add that you might have thought about like any contacts with any Germans when you were billeted after or in Ohurdorf...or....(?) (Claude) UH, my contacts with Germans, after uh, after hostilities, uh, was, was very, very limited. Uh, we were shipped uh, after cessation of the war uh, back to France to re-process a shipment of people, and uh, back to, Americans back to uh this country. And then I was re-assigned to Vienna, on General Mark Clark's staff. Uh, there as a very junior officer, I might add. But, uh, there the Austrians, who are Germans, uh, professed that uh, really, it wasn't their fault, that they were really Austrians, and they really didn't have anything to do with it, even though they had as many men in the German Army as the Germans did. They chose not to speak, and I think that's our danger today. People who are

**afraid to speak for right and justice...and honor. (Interviewer) Thank you,
Claude.**

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