

Senator if you could start out talking about what you expected to find when you got into Europe when you were going in opposed to what you actually found when you got to the camps, the concentration camps.

Thurmond: Well I was with the first army all through the war in Europe and the first Army uncovered the Buchandwald concentration camp which is located some miles from Leipiz and I've never seen the like in my life what I saw there. I was told that the attorney general of Luxembourg had been there and many other prominent officials and many Jewish people and I was just amazed what I

heard. For instance I was told for instance that the wife of the commandant of the camp there liked tattooing and when they found anybody with tattooing on their arms or their back that when they died she would have them skinned to make lamp shades out of that tattooing or use them for other purposes. Well, in looking over the camp there I was told that most people died from starving and there must of been several hundred people who had died from starvation stacked up like cordwood - a big pile of dead people and some of them were not dead. Some were barely living and some of our doctors were able to save some of those people. I never saw such a sight in my life. Now I guess they were mainly three ways that they got rid of these people. One was mainly starving. The information we had was that they'd give them a bowl of thin pea soup a day and that's all gradually starving them to death and that must of been the case because so many had starved there. Now also another way sometimes someone would put out the word that you might be able to get over the fence and get away . And when they attempted to get over the fence and get away, they'd shoot them . As a second way . And the third way was they had a box there like a telephone booth . You could go in from the front or the back. And I walked through that box and except it was deeper than a telephone booth and there I saw a big old mallet. And I said how did it happen. He said well these people would come in -walk in into it and then after they got in there a big SS would take this mallet and hit them over the head and kill those people. So those were the three ways mainly to kill those people. It's amazing how difficult it was to tell if those who were stabbed to death on the ground whether they were living or dead. And as I said the doctor did save a good many, but I never saw such a sight in my life and I couldn't imagine how anybody could be so cruel to people as to treat them like that . Now of course in some other concentration camps over there they gassed them to death and that's when it' s very clear that there was the only source of killing people there at those. At this particularly camp, Buchanwald, as I stated it was a combination of ways they killed them there and unless the people of the U.S. could actually see what went on there they couldn't imagine the inhumanity that occurred in those places.

I:

Senator, before you got to Buchanwald how did you hear about it . Did you hear about it in the United States Or

T:

No I had heard probably when I first got over there mainly

I:

When did you get over there

T:

Well I landed on D Day with the 82nd Airborn Division in Normandy and we took that part of the country there in France then worked our way on through St. Loire into Paris . We camped on the peace grounds as we went through Paris and then we went on Into Belgium that's when the battle of the bulge occurred and we were stopped in

Belguim and we had to drop back to ----Belgium and going back the Germans were dropping those bombs on the people going back. and several were just a couple of cars from me a bomb dropped and killed a lot of people and just as I crossed the street in Leage from one side to the other a bomb dropped there. So I'm pretty lucky I think . I didn't get killed . At that time it was extremely cold. The ice was I guess looked like it was four to six feet thick maybe . Extremely cold but anyway that was a terrible fight that Battle of the Bulge but we stopped them and were able to succeed and turn the situation around . Then we went back through Belgium and went on and Ark was one of the cities some of them churches were destroyed and other things. That city was about 85 % destroyed and ours tried not to destroy churches if they could and I know they had specific instructions about that were we went from there on from one place to another finally crossed the Rhine river. The bridge had been blown up before we got there. We crossed on a pontoon bridge and went from there on into Germany. And one city after another into Germany as far as we could go and then we got to near Berlin and sat on the banks of the river while the Russians took it . I don't know why in the world it w as ever given to let the Russians take Berlin . The Germans, I think, knew they were going to lose and were hoping we were going to take it because they hated the Russians and they knew they'd be punished a lot more and a lot more of them would be killed if the Russians took it but that was the order General Eisenhower gave and whether he made that decision or whether the president made that decision I don't know anyway that's what happened and I know we were just itching to take Berlin cause we had fought our way through from D. Day on and we were disappointed we didn't have the honor of taking Berlin

I:
And then you went on from Berlin to Buchenwald.

T:

Yeah that's right

I: And you got to Buychenwald had anybody been there with the 82 Airborne. The first people in

T: No the 82nd Airborne had gone on another assignment and I remained with the first Army

I: I see and then the First Army came to Buchanwald and you liberated the camp

T: We got there right after it was liberated .

I: I see

T: Some troops ahead of us had just liberated it. And that's when I witnessed these things I'm telling you about . It was -I just can't imagine how any person could be so inhuman as to do to those

people what I saw . It doesn't matter who the people were . Where they were from . How one person could be so inhuman as to treat another human in such a way. but it was just outrageous but that must have been Hitler's orders that he passed down to destroy certain people who disagreed with him and the Jewish people of course and why he did that is various reasons aside but he was out to get them and destroy thousands of them-thousands and thousands and we were so disappointed just to actually see what we did see and to find the conditions as they were

I: Did you get an opportunity to go to any other camps any other concentration camps

T: No that's the only concentration camp I had a chance to go to . I of course I heard about these others and they were mostly gas I think and this was somewhat a miscellaneous group there near Liepiz and Buchandwald and some of the other camps I understood there were mostly Jewish people men women and children . They would make them strip, I was told, and someone said they saved their clothes and made them strip and then they gassed them to death.

I: At Buchanwald did you have an opportunity to speak to any of the survivors or have contact with any of the survivors,

T: Well actually the survivors who did survive were lying on the ground and were so weak they couldn't talk. In other words you couldn't hardly tell whether they were living or dead . The doctors had a difficult time telling whether they were living or dead. but they could detect a few of them that were living and of course they were taken and treated and helped anyway they could.

I: Did you remain there some time

T: No we didn't remain there too long. We remained there long enough to survey the situation and to determine it was all stabilized then and then others came in and took over the actual work of removing the bodies and then they the medical corps still trying to tell who was dead or alive those who were piled up as I said piled up like cord wood great high wall of people some living barely living others dead.

I: Could you tell me what the barracks looked like that the people lived in . Were any of those barracks remaining when you got there

T: Well it was just about as sorry barracks as you could find Just a place to live in there. They were on the floor. Just open barracks. The one's we saw.

I: There were no beds or anything just --Could you tell me some more about how people reacted in your company or in your group

T: Well we wondered why the German people in Leipiz didn't know what was going on. If they did know why they didn't do something

about it and they claimed some of them claimed they didn't even know about it \out there. And they may not but others were scared to do anything . To take any part and some of course were indifferent and were trying to save their own lives look after themselves. For their own survival . It was just a situation something that the world never seen anything like it before in my opinion. Of all world's faults, I can't imagine anything being any more cruel than to treat the people like they did here. Now if you kill people they die immediately and they wouldn't suffer but these poor people were put in there and suffered for weeks and weeks and weeks starved to death become so weak they couldn't stand there and finally would die.

I: Do you recall hearing

T: And they would dispose of them. Of course they had disposed of thousands before we got there but these are the ones by the time we got there that they hadn't disposed of

I: How were they disposing of the bodies the best you could tell

T: Well I didn't see how they disposed of them but we were told that they'd take them out and bury them

I: Had you heard anything about any of these camps before you got to Europe

T: Yes we had heard during the war about these camps but we were not in that particular area. At least my unit wasn't and we were told how they mainly killed people by taking them in these buildings and turning on the gas and killing them and they'd all just fall over dead. They had no way-if they tried to run they'd shoot them and so I guess the people didn't know what to do to survive and most of them I guess submitted because they felt there was nothing else to do .

I: Have you heard about this in South Carolina or in -you were a circuit court Judge before you went into the 82nd

T: Yes mam

I: And had you heard about

T: I hadn't heard about it here before. In fact didn't hear about it until after we got over there. When I first went in the army I went -----with the police battalion and stayed down there until they took me up to Army headquarters to work in G2 it's called-intelligence section-and stayed there about 15 to 18 months and then went overseas with the first army and we were in London for about a year getting ready and then they wanted some volunteers for the 82nd airborne division and I was one of the three that volunteered for that particular mission there and went in with them on D Day.

I: Is there anything else about your experience at Buchanwald you think you would want to

T: I don't think there's anything else I could tell you. It was just a sight of course you'd just never forget to see humans treated like they were. Human beings-men women children just being starved to death or killed with a mallet or shot trying to escape over a fence

I: Do you have any idea how many people were left there when-by the time you got there

T: Well they'd disposed of at determined intervals they'd disposed of them as they died. When we got there this particular pile of people I guess you'd call it like a pile of cordwood must of been several hundred there at that time at that particular place we saw

I: Some of them dead and some of them alive

T: Some dead and some alive-hard to tell whether they were dead or alive

I: Well thank you very very much Senator Thurmond we really appreciate your doing this

T: I'm glad to talk to you

I: It's real valuable thank you