

This is a rough transcript of the interview conducted by the Surviving Generations of the Holocaust on July 14, 1995, at a reunion in Seattle 50 years after the liberation of Dachau.

John “Jack” Parry entered the Army in March 1943, assigned as an Army Air Corps cadet, was taking flight training when “they sent us all to the infantry [*grins*] just after the invasion on D-Day and they needed cannon fodder.

“We came in along the Rhine River, Marseille, France, and we walked up and down the Rhine and crossed the Rhine River over to Schweinfurt and towards Munich as the war ended. Ended up in Austria.

“We had a good relationship with the men; I was a squad leader, a rifle company. My assistant squad leader was Dee Eberhart, now a professor at college [<https://www.comiteinternationaldachau.com/en/dee-eberhart?showall=1>]. I think we were the only two of our original squad that are left. Most of them were wounded or killed or went somewhere else. We’ve kept in touch with each other, about five or six of us in the same platoon, for the last 50 years.”

Were you with Mr. Eberhart the whole time?

“Yes. He came as an Air Corps cadet and I came as an Air Corps cadet and went into the infantry.”

Thoughts as you advanced toward the concentration camp?

“We knew nothing about concentration camps. As a rifle squad leader we were told to do this, and this. I was a 19-year-old kid, who had a wife and a child at home, who wanted to get home, so I just did what they told me to do. We never had the big overall picture of what was going on. They tell you too much, well, you know too much, I assume.”

What were your orders specifically as you were coming into the city of Dachau?

“We were in a column, we were getting the first rides we’d had, jumping on tanks and riding instead of walking. We got strafed by a German aircraft — the jets, they had jets before we did, but they didn’t have any fuel. And just after we’d been strafed by these jets, a captain came up to me and asked me if I’d take a squad into that camp over there, which he said was a prisoner camp, and if I would take out the southeast tower, which was just over the moat; he gave me the coordinates and told me to take these men and see if we could take that tower out.

“We were asked to go in there as extras; they thought they had enough men to do it; we had thousands of men, up and down, so then we headed across the fields toward that moat and that tower.

“We passed boxcars that were full of [*pauses*] people [*swallows to regain composure*] — parts of people. We got across the moat from the tower but we didn’t have to take the tower because the inmates were already taking care of the people, SS troops that were in the tower, so we didn’t

have to take that. Captain came up to me and said, Sergeant, that's all we need you for, get back to your unit. We turned around and left.

“Then we headed to Munich, went into Munich— that city treated us as liberators rather than people coming in to capture the city.”

Condition of people inside the camp?

“The people were emancipated; they were in the city of Munich and Dachau, rummaging through the garbage cans. I thought they were political prisoners, in Dachau, but there were Jews, Poles, every nationality, whoever opposed Hitler. We did not know the extent; we only learned of this after the war was over.”

So when you walked in the camp, you must have been pretty shocked.

“I did not walk in the camp, I just went to the moat. But we did go by the railroad cars that had these people in. But we were hurrying, we were running and we were in the skirmish formation.”

You thought the people in the boxcars were political prisoners?

“The Germans were running at this particular time, and actually that's who they were, was people being shipped from other camps to this camp and then just left in the boxcars. They didn't have time at this particular time to do anything with them.”

Did you see anyone alive in there?

“Yes, there were people moving. But there were other people that were over in the boxcars, going through and helping them.”

How has what you saw affected you over the years?

“I haven't talked about it until now, until I saw a piece in our paper, in our local paper, saying that the high school students — one instructor talked to his students, and was trying to teach them history and that night at home he got calls from the parents of some of these kids telling him he was just making up these things. And that sort of hit me, that they were not made up things, they were real, people should know about them. We do not hate the German people, they were somewhat similar to us GIs, I think, we were told what to do, and that happened. We did what we were told; they did what they were told.

“But we do get evil people in power sometimes and we have to watch that we don't get evil people in power. We have to watch our voting rights. We don't form militias and do all these type of things, we do it to the Constitution that we've got.”

What was the announcement General Eisenhower made?

“General Eisenhower asked that he’d like all the GIs in the vicinity of these camps to go into the camps and see what they had been fighting for. I didn’t want to see any more. I didn’t go back to see it. I mean, I saw enough, after I realized what I’d seen.”

You didn’t talk about it with your family when you got back? Do you want to talk about it?

“No. [*Pauses. Struggles to speak.*] No.

“It wasn’t something you brought up at dinner to talk about. We didn’t talk about the war much. We lost men in places that were harder to talk about than this because when you lose people in your squad and so forth —

“I had a teacher in high school who used to talk about World War I; we used to call him Old World War I. I didn’t want to be called Old World War II, so we didn’t spend time talking about this.

“But the generations do need to know that if the government gets out of hand and the people don’t take any interest in the government, these things can happen. It’s happening in Bosnia now, I’m sure, things just like this. People have no control over them.”

Any moment that stands out with Dee Eberhart; you were together the whole time?

“We went fishing with hand grenades, I remember those. All the time. Then he cooked them and he had the eyes up looking at me, and I’d never seen —being from Idaho, we took the heads off, but he didn’t, being from Washington.”

Anything you’d like to add?

“We appreciate your trying to disseminate this information, especially to the young people, to be able to watch that it doesn’t ever happen again.”