

is up. Slate four is up.

Can you talk a little bit about how difficult it would have been for an American commander to understand the special problems that Jewish displaced persons faced or American commanders in general? I don't mean just General Eisenhower, who I think had a unique vision, but I mean how difficult it was to understand what those problems of repatriation were.

Each DP camp had a military officer in charge together with a UNRRA team and one or more people sent by the JDC, the Joint Distribution Committee. These officers frequently and their superiors, that is, captains and majors above them, had little knowledge about what had transpired during the years of the war and particularly no knowledge whatsoever as to what had happened to the Jews during the war.

For the most part, very few of them knew anything at all about the treatment accorded Jews by the Nazis. I'm sorry to say that some of them had a little bit of antisemitism, which was to have been expected because members of the American Army were a broad cross-section of the American people. I think that in 1941, the year that war was declared in the United States, in December of that year, there was far more antisemitism in the United States than there is in 1995.

There had been antisemitic preachers and speakers on the radio-- there was no television then, but on the radio-- week in and week out like Father Coughlin, Gerald LK Smith, and others. And I'm sure that their words, spoken week in and week out, had an effect.

So to come back to the subject, there was antisemitism on the part of some if not all of American military officers, and even more, there was little knowledge on their part. In some cases, they were doing a job that they didn't like doing, that they didn't want to do because it wasn't, strictly speaking, a military position something that they had expected when they entered the army so very often, the military men placed in charge of camps provided problems.

Mind you, some of them were good-hearted people, and they tried to do what they thought was best. But they were young men. They were dealing with people who not only had suffered greatly under the Germans during World War II but who, before the war-- many of these survivors had been prominent people in their home cities. They were older, mature people, and yet they were lorded over by perhaps a young lieutenant in his early 20s who thought that he knew what was best for them.

In addition to this, I must say that the orders that emanated from General Eisenhower's headquarters in Frankfurt were not always translated into action in the field, and that was the source of many problems.

Do you think that the Americans accomplished something, though, in the running of the DP camps? Were there some people who ran those who bent rules, and did help, and did accomplish something?

There were many Americans, many military Americans, who are of great help, and that should be underscored. There were many Americans who overlooked military regulations in order to help the survivors. In addition, the divisions that first liberated the camps did everything that they possibly could to help the stricken men, and women, and even some children whom they found in the concentration camps that they had liberated.

I know that American Army medical men and women worked around the clock to help save the lives of the survivors in the concentration camps. Many of them they could not save. They were too far gone, and they died in the hands of their American rescuers. But doctors, surgeons, nurses worked 24 hours a day after their unit had captured a concentration camp in order to help save the Jews whom they could possibly save. And so all praise to them and to the many other American military people who helped save the lives of many Jewish survivors.

May I give you just one interesting example? In Austria, in Salzburg, I called upon the G5, the officer in charge of civilian government in occupied countries, the G5, for Austria, who was General Hume, and he was of extraordinary help in helping the Jewish survivors in the liberated concentration camps of Austria. But there were many like him.

So they actually bent the rules in order to help? They were operating from within a bureaucracy, in a sense, and they weren't dealing with pushing paper around?

No, they were not. And if I go back a little bit, when I was still stationed in Paris, the Jewish underground that had just begun to operate in conquered Europe and in liberated Europe-- one of their leaders came to see me to say that there were about some 600 Jews who were to be moved across the still-fluid borders from Germany into to France and down to Marseilles where they were to be put aboard a so-called "illegal" ship that was to try to run the British blockade to land these people, these survivors in Palestine.

He came to see me because he lacked food for the people who were to be aboard ship for who knows, a week, 10 days, two weeks. It had come to my attention that there were American Army warehouses in Paris full of survivor food kits that had been dispatched to Paris for forwarding through Switzerland to American prisoners of war in Germany.

The war in Europe was now over. These prisoner-of-war packages were no longer needed. American military prisoners of war were sent home at once as soon as they were liberated. These food packages were being stolen regularly, and they were appearing on the French black market.

I went to the American quartermaster general in Paris, asked him if I could remove these prisoner-of-war packages from these several warehouses because a number of Jewish survivors are being moved from one place to another. He didn't ask me for specific answers. He quickly signed the order. He understood what I was asking him for.

Take five.

OK. Why don't you just re-summarize that last point?

I had gotten a request from the Jewish Agency representative in Paris to try to get some food for a shipment of people who were being brought across the still-fluid borders from Germany into France down to Marseilles, where there were to board so-called "illegal" ships to try to run the blockade put up by the British and to get the survivors into Palestine.

I had learned that there were American prisoner-of-war packages in several American military warehouses in Paris, which were no longer needed because our prisoners of war had already been sent back home. I went to the quartermaster general headquarters in Paris.

I told him that a group of Jews-- they were survivors, I explained-- had to be moved from one place to another, that they required food for the journey, that there were these warehouses of American military war packages in our warehouses in Paris, packages that would no longer be needed, that were already being stolen, that were already appearing on the French black market.

I asked him would he not grant permission for all of those military prisoner-of-war packages to be removed from the warehouses for this purpose, of feeding hundreds of Jews on this journey. He did not ask me any questions about where they were coming from or where they were going. He understood that he had better not ask the questions. He didn't want information that might bother him.

So he bent the rules and quickly signed the order, and for the next several days, the trucks hired by the Jewish Agency representative in Paris were busy transporting the prisoner-of-war packages out of the American military warehouses to be used for the purpose I indicated at the outset.

And were there lots of instances of bending the rules?

There were a number of instances. I know that other Jewish chaplains of the American Army who had been asked to help in the same project I just mentioned got medical supplies and even ammunition, and these were all obtained from American military officers who gave them voluntarily, knowing the purpose for which these supplies were to be used.

OK. Now let's talk about the problem for the survivors of finding families? What were some of the ways they went about looking--

One of the first desires on the part of liberated survivors was to try to find members of their families. In some cases, they had left families behind in their native cities and towns. They went back, some of them, to look for a members of their families. In most cases, they returned without having found any.

In one particular case, that of Dr. Solomon Greenberg, who was head of the St. Ottilien DP camp, which was really a hospital. He had left his little son with a Christian neighbor in Vilna, in Lithuania, and he went back. He found the child and brought the child back with him to St. Ottilien.

Then these survivors wanted to get in touch with members of their families who lived in the United States, and I tried to be of help to them. In France, the survivors came to see me at Army headquarters, French Jewish survivors, and I sent their letters to the addresses of families in America that they still had. When I received the letters back, I gave them to the French Jews. Remember, there was still no regular email for civilians.

In Germany, one of the first things that was done by the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews of Bavaria-- these were Jewish leaders who had been liberated from the concentration camps and who were living, at first, in DP camps. They had been leaders of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. They knew what leadership entailed.

They quickly created a committee in Munich, and one of the first things that committee did was to try to get a roster of the names of all of the survivors in the American zone of Germany. And they tried to forward mail from these people to their relatives in America through American Jewish chaplains.

Many of them brought letters to me in Frankfurt to forward to their relatives in the United States, and soon my daily mail included many letters from people in the United States writing to their surviving family members in the DP camps, which I forwarded to the UNRRA team or the GDC people working in the camps to be distributed to the proper people. And indeed that was one of the first things that liberated survivors wanted to accomplish, to get in touch with families.

What about in Europe? What kinds of things did they do there? Did they put lists everywhere? Did you see any of that? Did you see any reunions that were--

I didn't see lists. There weren't lists posted in the DP camps. But within each DP camp, there was a committee elected by the survivors, and this committee would gather the names of all of the people in the camp. They would forward the list to the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich, and that committee would then try to get in touch with relatives in other countries.

And also within Germany, and also within--

Oh, yes, within Germany itself, of course. That was one of the first things they did was to look at the list and see if they could find wives, husbands, brothers, sisters who had survived the war in other concentration camps in Germany or Austria.

Tell me about the visit of Ben-Gurion and what it meant not just to you but also the people in the camps.

Ben-Gurion had sent a request from Paris, where he was visiting, to General Eisenhower and to General Montgomery asking for permission to enter the American zone and the British zone, respectively. And I was called by someone in General Eisenhower's office, and I was asked if I knew who this man was who wanted to visit.

I told the person, yes, I knew who he was, that he was the head of the Jews of Palestine, roughly, a rough description. I was asked whether I thought it was advisable to permit him to enter the American zone of Germany. I answered, it would be most advisable because his very arrival would lift the morale of the survivors in the DP camps. So permission was sent to him.

Can we just--

Go to camera roll six. Slate six is up.

OK. Now we're continuing with--

It so happened that I was to proceed to Paris for a day to receive the Croix de Guerre from General De Gaulle, and when I arrived in Paris, I called the office of the Jewish Agency and learned that Ben-Gurion was in Paris the Claridge Hotel and he would very much like to see me. After the Croix de Guerre ceremonies, I went to the hotel, met Ben-Gurion, and he asked me generally about the conditions of the survivors.

And then I told him I would meet him that very night on the railroad platform for the American military train that ran between Paris and Frankfurt. I got there early at the railroad station, and I saw the American captain in charge of the train. He gave me a ticket for the train, my quarters on the train. My accommodation was to be half of a bedroom. I was to share it with another American Army major.

When Ben-Gurion came, I was standing on the platform waiting for him. I asked him to wait, and I went to the captain of the train and asked him where was this gentleman to be seated. He asked me for his name. I gave it to him. He said, well, he was to sit in the coach. I told the captain that this gentleman was a distinguished visitor who is coming to General Eisenhower's headquarters, and it was not proper for him to sit up all night in a coach.

The captain asked me what I thought he should do. I said, I think you should tell the major sharing that bedroom with me that, unfortunately, distinguished guests of General Eisenhower had arrived to take the train for Frankfurt and that the major would have to leave the bedroom and take a seat in the coach. That's what happened.

And so Ben-Gurion go on and I occupied the bedroom on the train, and we talked until about 2:00. As the train was riding, well, Ben-Gurion plied me with questions about the displaced persons.

We arrived in the morning at Frankfurt. I took him to headquarters I introduced him to general Walter Bedell Smith, chief of staff. General Eisenhower was away on one of his many field trips, and then I took him to his first concentration-- to his first displaced persons camp, his first DP camp. The camp was called Zeilsheim near HÄ¶chst, not too long a ride from Frankfurt.

I'd requisitioned a reconnaissance car. We arrived at Zeilsheim, drove into the camp. I told the driver to wait. I stepped out of the car, and a number of the people living in the DP camp came up to me. They knew who I was. I'd been there often before.

We chatted a while, and suddenly one of them went over to the car, and looked inside, and saw this man sitting in the back seat. He couldn't believe his eyes. He looked, and then he screamed, Ben-Gurion. And the others came running to look, and they too began screaming at this familiar face. To them, it was unbelievable that this man who was the head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the head of the government of the Jews, the substitute for a government was there in Zeilsheim, in their DP camp.

And other Jews came running, and I was afraid that a riot might ensue. So I quickly called them together, and I said to them, I want you to show Mr. Ben-Gurion the discipline of which you are capable. He is going to speak to all the people in the camp at the assembly hall. Now, you people run around the camp. Tell the people to get together in the assembly hall, and they will hear Mr. David Ben-Gurion speak.

They did that. I drove with Mr. Ben-Gurion to the assembly hall, and we waited there for the people to come. Very soon, they pack the entire hall, and those who didn't get in stood outside the open windows and doors, straining to listen to what would happen. And when the place was as jammed as it could possibly get, I escorted Mr. Ben-Gurion out on the stage, and as soon as he appeared, the people rose to their feet. And they began to sing "Hatikva," "The Hope," the national anthem of the Jews living in what was then Palestine.

And as they sang, they broke down into tears, and Mr. Ben-Gurion did, and I did. And eventually, when they could get back to it, they finished singing, and for the first time, for the first time, these people who had gone through years of hell knew that they were free.

Most of them had cherished the hope all through the years of their suffering that maybe someday they could get to Palestine, and here Palestine had come to them in the form of the leader of the Jews of Palestine, David Ben-Gurion. And throughout his talk, there were sobbing. There were tears, and at the conclusion, there were cheers. It was a scene that I shall never forget, and I'm sure that no one who was there will ever forget it. And when I met Mr. Ben-Gurion in the following years in Israel, he and I would often speak about that historic event and the assembly hall of the Zeilsheim DP camp.

I then took Mr. Ben-Gurion back to American Army headquarters, and he very much wanted to visit the DP camps. That was his reason for coming. And general Walter Bedell Smith speaking for General Eisenhower asked Mr. Ben-Gurion if he would visit the DP camps and bring back a report to General Eisenhower together with recommendations.

That night, Mr. Ben-Gurion and I met with the committee of the Jewish leaders of the Zeilsheim camp that we had visited earlier in the day. Mr. Ben-Gurion fired questions at them, trying to test their mettle to see what they were made of, what did they really want.

And I remember he asked them a question that I knew was not a real question, but he wanted to see how they would react. He asked them, if the Jewish Agency were to give orders for all the Jews of the DP camps in Germany to walk out of their camps and to keep walking until they crossed the borders to Italy and to France and to go to the southern coast of Italy and France and board ships for Palestine, would you go, would you follow those orders despite the danger involved? You might be shot at. You might be beaten. Would you go?

And they gave the answer that he had hoped for. They said, yes, we would go. We would follow your orders. And so he got the answer he had hoped for.

Unfortunately, I could not accompany Mr. Ben-Gurion on his trip to all the other DP camps because at that very same time a civilian advisor to General Eisenhower, whose coming he had suggested as a possibility in his first cable back to Secretary of War Stimson-- that gentleman was to arrive that same night, and I was, of course, to meet him and to bring him to General Eisenhower. That gentleman was Judge Simon H. Rifkind.