

Oh, dear. Is that me? It is. Something's happening here.

Need a car?

No, I'm fine. Can you tell me about the radio patrol that came to you when you first-- what they said to you before you came to Mauthausen?

Well, we sent the patrol out in an effort to maintain contact with the enemy, the Germans, or the Russians. And they ran across this concentration camp, Mauthausen. And they radioed in and said we've come across something we don't know what it is. It's like a big jail and there's people running all over. And I said, all right, you come back.

And so patrol returned to our headquarters. I reinforced the patrol. You must remember the war is still on. And I went back. And I made a thorough inspection, the best I could, of Mauthausen, not knowing anything about a concentration camp. And I made the inspection. And I returned to our headquarters. And I reported to our commanding general, General Daiger and told him what it was.

Along with that, there was two Americans in the camp. And one in particular, Lieutenant Jack Taylor, who is a member of the OSS. He told me what Mauthausen was. And then I told General Daiger what it was. And I went to get some lunch.

And the telephone rang. It was General Daiger. He wanted to talk to me. And he said, Dick. He said, I want you to return to Mauthausen and take supreme command of the camp. He said, you've got a lousy job to do. And he said you cannot accept any orders from anybody. And he said I have enough confidence in you to know that you will do what is right. And therefore, you will take command and stay there and run it. And that's how it all came about. And that's how I wound up in Mauthausen with the capture and the occupation of the camp.

OK, now let's go back to when you first came in, before you reported back. And tell me what happened when you came in? What you saw, how the people reacted to you.

Well, actually and truly, it was unbelievable. I had never seen anything like this before in my life. I knew nothing of a concentration camp. We had heard of them, but that was the extent of it. And to see all of these bodies piled up and these starving, sick people in the camp, I just couldn't imagine it.

We didn't know what-- actually and truly, we didn't know what to do. And then, as I said, I returned. But my initial shock when we found about 700 bodies lying around and just piled up like wood, if you will, I couldn't-- I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it. That man's inhumanity to man actually existed between men and women and the starving, sick, dead people in that camp. Unbelievable. I stop and think about it, and I don't know how I ever managed to stay through it. In my opinion, it was that horrible.

When you first came back, what did the people in the camp say to you?

They were so happy that we were there. Of course, we felt that we had done a tremendous thing by capturing the place and turning it over to the Americans to solve the problem, if you will. But I can't describe to you exactly. We were there and it was the second day. One of my people came into the headquarters and said, you better come quick, out into the main compound. He said there's trouble. And so I went out. And there are four people on the pavement with their throats cut, which I had never seen before in my life.

And the political unrest in the camp, I couldn't believe it. Because we were shocked, actually and truly, that those people would be fighting among themselves. And I think it was primarily in control of the camp. I just couldn't believe it. Because here they are, liberated people, and fighting among themselves. I don't know what they were fighting about. And of course, it's political. Let's put it that way. This was political.

And so from that time on, we become very strict. And we segregated that camp, 18,000 people. We segregated the camp

by nationality and got all of the various nations living together rather than-- the Poles hated the Russians. And so they were locked up separately. And the other nations, like the Yugoslavians. Anybody who was there-- and I learned this from the Yugoslavians. People in there who are the followers of King Peter and Mikhailovich, they were not accepted by the people who followed Tito. And therefore, there was great unrest among those people.

And it was all political. And we were really shocked. We thought, here we are, the great white father had liberated these people from a concentration camp, and here they are fighting among themselves. And so we took some very severe action and put a stop to it real quick.

What about the initial reaction of the people when you first came in with-- did they speak to you? Did they cry? Did they laugh? Did they--

Mixed emotions, really and truly. Some people I know would come up to me, wanted to touch me. Other people were are not particularly concerned. But after we were there a little while, that all changed. And they recognized us as their saviors, if you will.

What about-- wasn't there one prisoner who had taken over an office? Tell me about that.

Well, that's sort of one of the highlights. We came back-- [LAUGHS] when we came back to occupy the camp, take it over, we went in to the headquarters. And first of all, I must tell you, I speak only English and not too good at that. And here's all these different nationalities. And for me to correspond with them, no way.

So there was a prisoner there and he still lives in London. His name is Premislav Dobius and I correspond with him. And in fact, I'll be seeing him in Austria in May. He volunteered to be my interpreter. He spoke six languages. And so he was with me.

And this fellow that was sitting behind the desk, and, I don't know, three or four other people behind him. I said via an interpreter, I said, what's he doing there? And he asked him. Well, he was a Russian major who is a prisoner in the camp. And that they had taken over command of the camp.

So I said, is that so? I said, will you please inform him that this is in the American zone and we are responsible for it. And therefore, we are in command of the camp. And he wouldn't budge. He wouldn't move. I said, please tell him again that we are responsible for this camp and that I am personally in command. Wouldn't move.

So I reached down and pulled out my 45 pistol. And I cocked it. And I shoved it right across the desk in his face. I said, now you tell that S of a B to get out of here or I'm going to shoot him. Boy, they took off just like that. And that was one of the highlights of our occupation. But they wouldn't budge. They wouldn't move at all till I used some force. And that they understood.

Did you know who the-- we're just about out. We have to put another roll of--

All right.

Two.

Tell me how they wanted to establish-- tell me how bitter the inmates were and how much they wanted to bring their perpetrators to justice.

Well, that was one thing that we had to calm all of the people down because. Under the stress and strain that they had been, and all of a sudden they're free people. And it was very difficult for them to accept that fact. And they had certain rivalries, I'll say, in the camp. And we had to stop that because so many people would be hurt. And the feelings-- we were so surprised that-- we thought that they would just bow down and scrape, you know, because here we had saved their lives and such.

And so we were trying to be "good guys," if you will. And then we had to stop being good guys and become quite severe, if that's the proper word, to get them to understand that it was still a concentration camp. And we were going to run it to the very best of our ability and take care of them. And we expected cooperation from all of the people in the camp. That was our feeling and how we got them in line to be normal beings again.

Tell me about how the Jews requested not to be put with their countries. Tell me about that request.

All right. Of course, I came from a very small town in Ohio. The population at that time was somewhere in the neighborhood of 9,000 people. And we had two Jewish families. They weren't Jewish as far as we were concerned. They were members of a community, and didn't recognize them as Jews. So my education in that respect was nil.

One day, one of the boys came in and said there's a prisoner out here that wants to see you. And I said, all right, bring him in. And he came in. And I said, what do you want? And he said, I'm a Jew. And he said, I want to know why all the Jews in the camp are not together? I said, that's a good question. I said, what's your nationality? He said, I'm a Hungarian. He spoke excellent English.

I said, of all the hell that you people had been through before, wearing the Star of David on your clothing and being treated as Jews and to severe punishment and severe actions, that doesn't happen anymore. I said, you may be a Jew, but to me you are Hungarian. I said, Judaism is your religion.

He said, yes. He said, I know. But I think all the Jews should be together. I said, not according to my book. I said, you are Hungarian. Therefore, you will live with the Hungarians. And so finally, he accepted it. And this is kind of odd. When he got ready to leave, he thanked me. And he said, sir. He said, could you give me a couple of Hershey bars? [LAUGHS]

And from that time on, the Jewish Zionist Organization from Switzerland, the chief of the Zionist organization plus other members of the organization, came to Mauthausen and really put the steam on me to put the Jews all together. And I wouldn't do it. I said absolutely not. I said, I do not recognize these people as Jews. I said, I recognize them as their nationality. And that's the way it's going to be and nobody is going to change it. And so they accepted it but not willingly, I'll put it that way.

So from that time on, we didn't have any problem. But I would not put the Jews together because they had been living under horrible conditions, isolated as Jews. And I wasn't going to stand for that, because I didn't believe in it.

When you tried to bring order in that first month or so that you were there, what were your primary goals and problems?

Well, I would say that the big problem that we had was the sickness among the prisoners, primarily typhus and tuberculosis. I had doctors with me who kept me very well posted. And we deloused every prisoner in the camp with DDT powder. And those people, we called in to clearing hospitals-- big hospitals, army hospitals --and anybody who was ill, they were confined to a hospital. And so we hospitalized-- while we were there, we hospitalized thousands of people. And got them back on their feet and got and with the proper medical treatment and such got them to where they were normal beings again.

We had about 1,300 people die while we were there because they were beyond help. And we were giving them the very best medical attention that we could. Everybody was in the huge clearing hospital tents. And they were all on cots so that we tried to give them the best.

And the other thing that was so important was food. And upon the advice of my doctor friends told me what I could and couldn't do. And so we started out giving them the same type of food that they had been receiving-- very watered potato soup. I mean, it was just colored water, that's all. And so we did that for, I don't know, two or three days. And then we thickened it up a bit, and made it a little thicker.

And then we had found a warehouse in Linz, Austria of dehydrated vegetables. And so we brought those in. So then we started adding some vegetables to the potatoes soup. And that was lovely. They all liked it very much. And then as it

progressed, they went on solid food, boiled potatoes and vegetables. These dehydrated vegetables, but not in soup. And meat, horse meat.

See, in the German army, a mechanized division has got umpteen horses. And so in the combat action, you're driving all these horses ahead plus the ones that were there in Austria and on the farm. So we'd butcher horses. And we fed them meat, potatoes, and vegetables, and coffee, of course, and bread.

Now, bread, that was something that presented a bit of a problem. We found a bakery and we got some people who were prisoners in the camp to do the baking. We didn't have any yeast. All we had was oats. And oats mixed with water turned into bread. I think maybe I'm responsible for the oat bread in the United States today. [LAUGHS]

But we baked thousands and thousands of loaves. And we had to put-- because when they're first baked and they come out, they're just nothing but squishy water, if you will. And so we put them in a warehouse to dry out. And after they got dry enough that we could slice them, every prisoner got one slice of bread. And then after a little while they got two slices.

And bread-- prior to our occupation, bread was the most precious article of food that they had in the camp or ever had or ever will. And so then it got to where we could give them a quarter loaf of bread. And our stock of bread kept building and building. So finally I said, OK, give everybody a half a loaf of bread.

And one day one of the prisoners came in and said, Colonel, we don't want any more bread. We got enough. [LAUGHS] Which was quite rare because bread-- as I say, you could get your head bashed in or your throat cut for a half a piece of bread. And they used to store it in their bunks and sleep on it if they hadn't eaten it.

OK, we're just about out--

Colonel Seibel, Camera 3 mark 3.

Did you bring in German civilians to help you with the running of the camp?

No, we didn't bring any civilians in. But we did bring in about 400 German wehrmacht soldiers. We had-- the SS, when they left, they disrupted everything. And they were going to burn the place down. But the prisoners said please don't, and they didn't do it. But they had disrupted all of the water supply, the sewage, the electricity-- everything. There wasn't anything in the camp.

And so we found out that there was a prisoner of war camp where there had a lot of prisoners who were capable of doing special things. And so we got 400 German PWs and brought them in to do all of the things that were necessary, which helped us tremendously. And they were conducted as soldiers. And they were not treated as prisoners. And we got along very well. And they brought life back into the camp.

How do you think they felt seeing the camp?

Well, I remember the captain who was put in command of this detachment. His name is Von Broll and he was an Austrian. They couldn't believe it. They were combat soldiers. And they really and truly didn't believe that their own peoples and other peoples were being treated like that. It was an experience for them the same as for us.

Tell me again about the sensory things like the smells and the sounds, and the women's barrack.

Well, I'll tell you, to explain or describe the condition of the women in that barracks, words fail me. After we occupied the camp in force, when I brought more people in, we burned all of those buildings. Because they were so full of vermin, it was-- oh, you couldn't believe it. It's beyond imagination.

The women living under these horrible, horrible conditions, they were all gotten out of there. They were all cleaned up. They were all deloused. And we just burnt the buildings down, got rid of them. They were no good. It's-- I don't know.

To see these women and why they were treated as they were and under the horrible conditions that they were living, I don't know. I have no answer for that, except the brutality and, again, man's inhumanity to man. That's the only way I can describe it.

Are we almost done?

We need to just record 30 seconds of the sound of the room. So just be very quiet for about 30 seconds.

All right.