Interview with SAMUEL COHEN

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Interviewer: Sylvia Prozan

Transcriber: Lee A. Bursten

Q What I would like to do is just start briefly with asking you or you telling me just a little bit about yourself, like when you were born and where, where were you when the war broke out, just to give a little background so we go into the story; where you were trained, where you served.

Do you have any questions?

A No.

Q If for any reason you want to stop the interview at any time, just let us know and we will turn off the camera.

A Okay.

Q This is the Holocaust Oral History Project interview of Samuel Cohen taking place in San Francisco, California, on April 26th, 1993. My name is Sylvia Prozan.

Mr. Cohen, when and where were you born?

A I was born May 1st, 1923, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Q Where did you grow up?

A In Philadelphia.

Q And how old were you when the war broke out?

A I was 18. I believe I was 18.

Q Were you drafted into the Service?

A Yes. I was drafted when I was 19. January of 1943.

Q Did you have much of a religious upbringing?

A No, I didn't. I had a very culturally enriching

upbringing, but not in a religious manner.

Q Were you aware of what was going on in Nazi Germany in the 1930s?

A Yes, as much as anyone. I attended a Jewish school every Sunday, from the time I was an elementary student, and current events were taken up as well as cultural background and language. So I was as aware as anyone might be at that time.

Q What were your thoughts when you learned of what happened on December 7th, the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

A I guess I felt, as much as anyone did at that time, that this was a terrible thing and that we should do something about it. I was quite eager to get involved, if I could.

Q Were you drafted or did you enlist?

A I was drafted when I was 19.

Q And where did you take your training?

A I took my basic training in California, Santa Anita Racetrack, Whittier, Los Angeles County. We lived in the horse stalls and ran around the track, that was part of the training.

Q What did your training consist of?

A It was the usual basic training, I guess, that all Army recruits have; obstacle courses, shooting, the usual things they do in basic training.

Q And the year was 1942?

A No, it was 1943. I was drafted January of 1943. That is when I entered the Service.

Q And after your basic training, where did you go?

A After basic training I was placed in the Army Specialized Training Program, which was a college program, and I was at the University of California, Berkeley, for a nine-month period, taking pre-engineering courses sponsored by the Army. That went to March '44, from June '43 to March '44. It was an intensified course, so it was half the usual training time that would be allotted for those courses.

Q And what were you supposed to be doing with this training?

A Well, I was to be evaluated after the training, and then I would be placed wherever the Army felt I should be. After that training there was more training in the desert of California near Lompoc and Santa Maria for battle conditions. And then we were shipped to England in October of 1944 for additional training.

And I had training in aerial photography for a two-month period in England. From that point we were sent to France in December '44, and I was part of the 11th Armored Division at that time.

Q Where in France?

A Oh, I can't remember exactly where. A succession of towns, but I don't recall them at this time.

Q Were you fighting, or was this --

A No, not at that point. It was more training. And after a period of time, we were sent to Belgium and Luxembourg, where the fighting was taking place. It was, I guess, the spring of 1945. And it was the final armored attack that just went quickly through Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and finally Austria was the last place, where we finished the war on May 3rd.

Q At any time were you aware of what was happening to the Jews?

A No. Not at all. Nor did I know of the Japanese internees in the U.S. I had no knowledge at all of any of that, that I can recall. I don't recall any knowledge of it.

Q Where were you when the war ended?

A I was in Austria, near Salzburg. We stayed on one of the resort lakes surrounding Salzburg called the Salzkammergut area, I think five lakes around the area. We stayed on a lake over the summer period until we were shipped home, September or October of '45.

Q When did you first see the camps, the condition of the camps?

A Before I saw the camps, we caught up with a death march from one of the camps, and that was the first exposure to what had happened.

Q Where was this?

A In Austria. The camp was called Mauthausen, and I have some place names on photos that I took in that area, Linz and some other place names. But I have no idea exactly where they were.

Q What do you recall seeing?

A Well, we caught up with the death march, and if you like, I have a letter that I wrote to my brother just six days before the end of the war. Apparently I didn't have time to mail it. I went through my materials at home and found it. It tells exactly what I observed. So if you like, I can read that letter, or portions of it.

Q All right. First, can you just tell us what is in your mind that you recall seeing? Were you walking along --

A Yes. We caught up with the death march, Jews and -- not only Jews but a lot of other categories of prisoners were marched out of the camp when they knew Americans were coming, just to try to eliminate as many prisoners as possible. So of course when we caught up, we tried to help the people that we caught up with, tried to get them fed, talk to them.

Of course, I had a background in the Jewish language, the Yiddish language, so I was able to communicate with those who were Jews, anyway, and with Germans, because the language is somewhat similar.

Q What did you say?

A Well, it was pretty obvious what had taken place,

after just a few minutes of talking to these people, just seeing them, about the conditions of the camp. And just looking at the condition of the prisoners, it was quite obvious. It was pretty horrible. They were civilians, of course.

It was a shock, to say the least. It was quite a thing.

Q Approximately how many people were on this march?

A Probably 1,500 to 2,000 at that time. About several hundred had already died from the exposure to the march.

Q But when you came upon them, would you say there were 1,500 then?

A There were about 1,200, 1,300 at that time.

Q Were there Germans with them?

A Yes, there were, SS troops that were guarding them and marching them. And of course we captured the Germans that were guiding them on this march, and liberated the people in the march.

Q I'm just trying to get as many details as I can from you, because --

A Yes. I didn't even remember the details until I came across this letter, and it described the people I spoke to about their conditions and their history. The one thing that I do remember very clearly, we tried to have one of the people fed. He just couldn't lift a fork. That was quite a shock. We went to a farmhouse, and it was quite a thing. He

couldn't even lift a fork to eat. So of course we took care of him.

But that is one thing I do remember. It's probably the only thing I actually remember of the march itself, until we got to the concentration camp itself.

Q Did the Jewish people know who you were? Did they know you were Americans?

A Oh, yes. They knew. No question about it. They realized it.

Q Did they express happiness?

A Yes, they did.

Q What kinds of things?

A Waving, smiling. There weren't many smiles. I don't recall. But obvious happiness on the part of the prisoners that we liberated.

Q Do you remember what month this was?

A Yes. It was the end of April, 1945.

Q What was the weather like? Warm, rainy?

A I can't remember the weather. It wasn't raining. It was cloudy, I believe, was the weather at the time, at the time I wrote the letter. It was April 27th, so I imagine it was within days of that, a day or two before that.

Q How many Germans or SS troops were guarding them?

A There were about 20 per unit of a couple of hundred prisoners, guarding the separate units of prisoners.

Q And so approximately how many Germans would you have captured?

A Well, I would assume -- there were about seven units, so some 150, 200, I guess, that we captured at that time.

Q And then what happened to the people on the death march? Did they disburse? Were they transported somewhere, that you know of?

A They were transported to some safe havens, but I have no idea where. It wasn't something that I was directly involved with. But I do know that they tried to take care of them as best they could at that point. I think they sent them to an area which was safe where they could be given assistance, medical attention, food, et cetera.

Q And then after you liberated this death march, then where did you go?

A We continued -- it was, as I said, an armored division, it went very rapidly, with tanks -- to try to finish up the war. So the next couple of days we actually came to the camp where these people had been marched out of. And we saw the camp.

Q Did you know you were headed for the camp? Or were you just --

A I guess so, because it must have been off the beaten track, so to speak. So we must have been guided to the camp

to take care of others who were still at the camp.

Q And what happened when you arrived at the camp?

A Well, we saw the shocking evidence of the killings, the big piles of bodies and what have you, and the gas chambers, and saw all the indications of what had taken place. Tried to take care of the remaining prisoners.

Q In your mind, when you think about the camp, what visual images come to mind?

A Well, the bodies. The bodies and the emaciated living people were the two things that certainly struck me. The bodies particularly. The nature of the piles, like cordwood. It was pretty striking. And also, of course, the emaciated remaining persons.

Q Did you speak to any of them?

A Yes. On the death march I spoke to four of the Jewish prisoners, asking them, you know, what their experience was, and what family they had left, you know, just a variety of things.

Q What did they tell you?

A I think three of the four I spoke to had no family left. One had just lost a brother that very morning, because if these prisoners did not keep up they were just shot on the death march, or if they tried to escape or whatever.

They hadn't eaten for several days. And I just tried to find out as much as I could about what went on. And they told

me. And they were happy. I don't recall how, but it was certainly obvious that they were.

Specific things I have in this letter, that I don't remember at the moment, about the family backgrounds of some of these people. At the camp itself, I don't recall doing much communication with the remaining prisoners. It was a question of taking care of them and helping them.

I don't think there was much time at that point to do anything except keep moving. I think we didn't spend more than a day there at the camp.

Q Were there any Germans left there?

A Oh, I'm sure there must have been. I can't remember. I guess there were, because what happened was when they knew that the Americans were coming, they changed into civilian clothes and tried to get away. And one German surrendered to me, and that was the case with him. He was in civilian clothes and thought he'd better do that for safety.

Q What did he do?

A Just came up, you know, said, I'm a soldier. I didn't have to do anything about it, just take him in. So there certainly were. But of course they had plenty of warning that Americans were coming, and did their best to get away.

Q Do you know what camp the people on the death march were from?

A Yes, they were from this camp that we went to after liberating the march. It was Mauthausen. It was maybe 100 kilometers that they had marched from the camp.

Q Do you know how many people were left in the camp?

A I don't know. Not too many. There weren't too many survivors. Maybe several hundred. Because they tried to take as many as they could out on this march to eliminate them.

I'll now read the letter I sent to my brother:

"Somewhere in Germany, April 27th, 1945. Dear Willie." My brother was in the Pacific region at that time.

"Thanks for your letters of March 8th and April 3rd. I'm glad you finally got my letter. I haven't been keeping track of how often I've been writing. I guess I haven't been writing as much as I've intended to write. It's the same story, moving on an average of once a day, and the drive to finish off the Nazis. I will try to write more often hereafter, I promise.

"I'm glad you've been reading about us in the papers. At least it's kept you informed about our activities, even if I haven't written about them. Of course there remains a lot to be told that the newspapers and radios cannot mention. I'm learning a lot and experiencing a lot of things over here. It's one thing to read about the rottenness of the whole Hitler system, and it's still another thing to see with your own eyes what the new order in Europe has meant -- its victims

and its supporters.

"Most of it can't be realized without personal contact with these people. I will try to tell you the story of one of the Nazi crimes, a mild case, I understand, compared to others. Our convoy was moving through some towns, and from the back of the six by six I was riding, I could see some very shabby characters with hands outstretched begging for food. I just passed it off as more of the slave laborers, thousands of whom we saw on our trips through France and Germany.

"However, during the rest of the day unfolded a horrible story which I know I will never forget: Our convoy pulled off the road shortly after we passed up these half-starved people. I spoke to four of these people, who gave me this story, which was corroborated and enlarged upon during the balance of the day. The four were Jews; one Romanian, one Pole, and two Czechs.

"They were part of a concentration camp about 100 kilometers away which housed 15,000 of all nationalities and types, including PWs of all countries, slave laborers, German criminals and political prisoners, Jews, et cetera. The Jews were singled out, about 2,500 were divided into six or seven companies with 20 SS men guarding a couple of hundred of them, which composed a company.

"The reason for the march was apparently because of the nearness of our troops. As I understand it, the camp had

white flags hanging out for two days until the SS men came and ripped them down and started the evacuation. The Jews, all men, were loaded onto trains with their SS guards, and before the trains could pull out our Air Force bombed the hell out of them.

"The prisoners who took food from the abandoned kits of some of these soldiers after the bombings were shot on the spot. After two days they started out on foot, not having gotten any food for all of about three days. They traveled by night, only through forests. Anyone faltering at all was shot on the spot. The troops guarding them were no ordinary SS men. They were not young frontline men, but older men who had personal hates for the particular types of groups they were guarding.

"For instance, many of the SS men guarding the Jews were Ukrainians, the ones who fought the workers during the revolution in 1917, and the same ones who carried through the terrible pogroms on Jews in Russia prior to the revolution. You probably remember from literature that a lot of these Ukrainians fled to Germany to form units to fight the Soviet Union when their chance came. Well, they had their pet peeves satisfied, and a lot more Jews found their graves as a result of it.

"The Pole and Romanian who spoke to me were terrible looking; thin, haggard. One was only 18. They all told

terrible stories of what was done to the Jews of their respective towns. Only one of the four had a member of his immediate family left, a brother in Argentina.

"The man with his brother in America was a doctor. The Pole who had only a brother left, who was on the march with him, saw his brother shot the very morning I spoke to him, a few hours before we came.

"The column had withstood bombings and assorted fire from our troops during their march; fire, of course, directed at their German captors and unavoidably hitting them. Most of them had marched the full 100 kilometers while others marched a little less due to the fact that their companies were up farther.

"The Jews estimated there were 1,000 left of those who started. After three days they were given some potato peelings. After two more days, more potato peelings. The following day, six potatoes. They had gotten so accustomed to not eating that they could barely finish a half a can of C rations apiece. One couldn't even open a C ration can, for he had no strength left in his fingers.

"All four vowed that had we not come they could not go farther, and would undoubtedly have been shot. As the convoy moved down the road after the stop it became apparent that the Jews were only the first to be sent out, theirs being a death march which would have wiped all of them out eventually had we

not rescued them.

"Although tired and half-starved, they smiled happily, bravoed and waved as our convoy passed them, streaming down the road. It was an international procession such as I will probably never see again. Virtually every nationality of Europe, all colors and races, were represented.

"We saw many horrible scenes, too; a trench with about eight dead, and a Jew with a distressed face kneeling beside it, palm outstretched to the victims in a gesture showing us what they, the Germans, had done to his comrades. At another point the SS troopers shot a group of Jews who ran from them out of the woods to meet some of our forward elements, and I could see them strewn out on the field before the woods.

"According to the prisoners, numbered thousands lie buried along the roadside. It shocked everyone who saw these scenes into a realization of what Nazism has meant to the people of Europe. We passed a few PW cages that held a few hundred of those 'elite' SS men.

"The thing that struck me was that there was no show of remorse or sorrow or sadness on their faces. Instead there was a haughty, satisfied, smug look on each of their faces, with plenty of ego left in them. In one group we stopped along the road, the SS-ers were sassy and noisy as hell and speaking their piece. There were three prisoners with "KL" on their jackets, meaning "concentration camp," just as the rest

of the prisoners.

"However, we noticed that they were being socked, none too lightly, by other prisoners passing by. We grabbed them and found out they were some of the ordinary German criminals who killed many of their fellow prisoners, and as a British fellow told us, were at times worse than the SS men.

"The happiest thing for me that day was to see a column of captured Jerries being marched down the road by a sizable group of former Russian prisoners, who seized the guns and ammunition from their guards when our troops came along and turned the tables. The faces of these Russians were really lit up, grinning from ear to ear, and all of us were shouting with glee to see such a sight.

"One of our fellows told one of the Russians not to let any of their Jerries get away, and he replied with a very assuring "don't worry." It must have been a welcome sight to see the towns they previously had been marched through smoking and burning as they walked back through them, free men, bound for rear areas where they will be taken care of and sent home.

"I'm writing this with a Waterman 100-Year pen which I recently got from a friend in New York. I'm so unaccustomed to writing with a good pen, I'm having trouble getting used to it. I know you are anxious to get some souvenirs. I tried sending you a German officer's dress bayonet, but it was

returned because it was on the restricted list for men overseas. However, the first chance I get I will send you some things I think you will like.

"I'm finishing this letter a day later. Yesterday was a red letter day for me. I captured a heinie. The word "captured" is put in quotation marks, for the man gave himself up and all I had to do was march him down to the PW cage. However, it makes me feel good. He was a patient in one of the hospitals here in town, and just before we took the town, the officers told the soldier patients to don civilian clothes and go home.

"This is just one of the many tricks the Nazis played, but not too many of them work. He donned civilian clothes but was smart enough to give himself up before being captured. I better end this now lest we move again. Best regards, Sam."

Q You mentioned the smug look on the faces of the Germans. Was this as they were being captured?

A Yes. They were actually already captured. It didn't matter to them that they had been captured. They were in custody, just as though they hadn't been. It didn't make any difference to them, apparently.

Q And just to clarify, the Germans, when you were in sight of the Germans, as some of the people ran to you, the Germans shot them?

A No, this was prior to our being on the scene.

That's when the prisoners got some glimpse of us on the road. They were actually in the forest, the prisoners and the Germans, to avoid their being liberated. And when they ran out of the forest, on seeing some forward elements of our group, then they were shot. I was in a group beyond the forward elements. So I don't know firsthand how that took place.

Q What did the camp smell like?

A I can't remember that specific point. I guess the shock of seeing things was more than enough. It blotted out anything else. I don't know. I just can't remember that.

Q What did you ever send your brother as a souvenir?

A I can't remember what, but I saved a lot of stuff. I've got three boxes. That's where I found this letter. Nazi flags and Nazi propaganda, materials that our units put out to the Germans to give up. I enjoyed writing for the newspaper, the Army newspaper, so clippings of news items I put in there.

Q Was that Stars and Stripes that you --

A Well, it was just a local unit bulletin type of thing. I don't think it was Stars and Stripes. I had some clippings from Stars and Stripes of our unit, telling about what we were doing, that kind of thing.

Q Yours was an armored unit, you said.

A Yes. Tanks and artillery.

Q Where were you riding in it?

A Probably behind the tanks. I was in a headquarters battery. It was a communications unit, which strung the communications wire for the artillery to zero in on their shooting. And I operated the switchboard to put calls through between the forward unit and the headquarters unit.

That was the result of my nine months at training at Berkeley. It was a very simple job, taking only a couple of hours to train me. But they were very smart, because I wasn't very mechanically inclined. It was good that they did that instead of trying to give me something more sophisticated.

Q What would you say to the one in five people who believe that the Holocaust never existed?

A Well, obviously it's hogwash. I didn't make it up. I've got the pictures that I took of the bodies and some of the prisoners who survived. I didn't just make these up. They were poor quality, because we had to develop them ourselves, not professionally.

Q Where were they developed? Germany?

A Yes, by our unit, where they had facilities for developing photos. I can't really remember how, but the quality isn't too good on most of them.

Q Have you spoken of this often in the past?

A Hardly ever. As a matter of fact, we don't keep good track of pictures and organization of pictures. We

seldom have any albums of even our own family. And I was actually convinced my wife had thrown out the photos that I had taken, because she just didn't want to look at them. But I found them in just the last few weeks when I took a look, and I saw that she hadn't.

But it was quite fascinating to -- not fascinating. It was a terrible memory. I always, of course, remembered it. But this brought back more. And so I'm really glad to have been put in touch -- well, I put myself in touch with this program.

Q We're very grateful that you have come.

Tell us about this picture, please.

A This was the day we came to the camp and went through the camp. You see what had been done there, the gas chambers and what have you. This was several days after the liberation of the death march that we came across it, and probably were there before the end of the war.

This banner apparently was put up by a group of prisoners who were Spanish. It was a greeting. The large type says, "The Anti-Fascist Spanish Salute the Raiding Forces."

Q Tell us about this picture, please.

A This is one of the shocks we had when we came to the camp and saw these piles of bodies. It's indescribable, how we felt. It was horror. I guess it was a rainy day. I see the water marks on the photo.

Q Do you know how long the bodies had been there?

A No. I'm sure the experts knew, but we had no idea. It was just enough to see it, for us. I guess the killings were sped up when they knew the Americans were coming. There was obviously no chance to bury them. It had been several weeks.

Q What about this picture?

A More of the same as the previous. Piles and piles of dead bodies. We had, of course, in the past month seen dead bodies, but just one, two, here and there. This was something completely different. Just completely not expected, just couldn't fathom this at all. It was just unbelievable. I still can't understand it. It's a very horrible sight. That's what prompted me to take the pictures, of course.

Q Did the others react the same as you?

A Oh, yes. Everyone. No question about it. There was horror in everyone's feelings.

That's more of the same. There is no difference among these pictures. Just documenting what we saw, is all. It was an indication of how I felt, the fact that I even took these pictures.

This obviously was a trench to bury the dead.

Q Where was this taken?

A Right by the camp. I think you can see a tower there, a watch tower, gun tower. I may be wrong. It looks

like one. And obviously the fact that it hadn't been completed is testimony to the interruption of what they were doing there by our coming to the camp, by their knowledge that we were coming, getting away from there. But this is one of many that we saw, trenches.

Another scene in the trenches of dead bodies. It's interesting that they seem to have their clothes on in this case. Our guess is the reason for that was the hurry on the part of the Germans to do away with as many people as possible before the Americans came, so they didn't bother having the clothes taken off. But that's only a guess. I have no idea why that is.

These are prisoners who survived within the camp. As we were going through the camp we saw them, and even though I'm sure they were happy to be liberated, you get a kind of feeling of wonder, distress, confusion perhaps at what was going on after their experience.

Q Where was this picture taken?

A At Mauthausen, the concentration camp, as we went through the camp.

Q Is this in the barracks?

A It's the housing unit, whatever. I don't know whether you call it a barracks or what you call it, but this is where they slept, many on a bunk. So I guess sleeping barracks.

Q Not one smile.

A No. Not a single smile. Maybe there wasn't enough strength or understanding, even, of what was happening after their experience.

Q Do you recall speaking to anyone after you took the picture or as you were taking the pictures?

A No. You can see the curiosity in people's faces that I was taking a picture, perhaps wondering why I was even taking the picture. They just didn't know what was going on. They weren't fully aware that they were being liberated or what liberation meant or who we were or what was going to happen to them afterwards.

Q These people didn't know you were Americans?

A I have no idea. The looks on their faces indicate they just had no idea what was taking place. They had seen many soldiers, I'm sure, but recognizing us as liberators perhaps didn't dawn on them at that point.

This was also in the camp at Mauthausen. Here too these prisoners apparently don't know what to think after their experience, who we were, what we were doing, what was going to happen to them. I'm sure this was the same day we actually came to the camp, because I don't think we stayed there more than a day before moving on. I'm sure it was just another shock to these people as to what was happening.

Q Was this taken in the same place as the other

picture?

A Different room.

Q Do you know what the room was used for? Was it just a room?

A It looks like it's just a room. Almost like the storage room. There was no attempt to provide good facilities, for sure. But I don't specifically remember this specific room or -- but it seems like a very dark room, so it was part of the subjection of people. It wasn't meant to be anything other than that.

Q Nobody seems to be talking to anybody else.

A No. There is just wonderment there at who we are, what we're doing.

Q Before you left the camp, did the Red Cross or somebody come in to take care of these people?

A Not Red Cross. Just, I guess, certain Army units, perhaps, which were trained for taking care of civilians. We didn't do anything specifically ourselves. We were part of the march to get through the war, the armored unit. This was something we came across in carrying out our main function, and undoubtedly other units came to specifically take care of them.

Q They weren't left alone?

A No, I doubt that. No way they would be left alone.

Q It looks as if there is almost no emotion; not

happiness; there doesn't appear to be sadness. Just --

A Dazed, resigned. Whatever comes, comes.

Those are some of the liberated prisoners. Apparently we took care of them, got them clothes, put them on their way somewhere, to a safe haven. By this time the war was just about finished. This was probably May 2nd or so. May 3rd was the official close of the war.

These are Russian prisoners who were liberated at the Mauthausen camp, apparently we got clothes for them, shoes, and put them on their way to a safe haven. The place, Mauthausen was near a place called (Kaum [Traun?]), apparently, Austria, the place that would be nearest to the camp. Even here you don't see smiles or anything. Just pleased, I guess, to be out of the camp.

These are some SS men and other Germans who were guarding the prisoners on the death march, and we captured them along the line of the march. They are surrendering to our troops.

Some of the people who surrendered were actual criminals who were prisoners of the camp and who were given free rein to kill Jews at the camp or carry out criminal activities at the camp, as long as it's okay with the SS men and guards at the camp. You can see one of the Americans with a rifle guarding the group, and a little jeep over there in the far corner.

Q Was any talking going on during this surrender?

A No. No. Just a quiet surrender. After they were

in their PW cages, as I indicated, they acted very cocky. The SS men did, in any case. There has to be a distinction between the SS men and the ordinary guards. The SS men just were absolutely without any feeling of remorse or sorrow whatever.

This is some of the guards guarding the prisoners on the death march. And this particular place is near Cham, Germany. The camp was actually right near the border of Germany and Austria.

Q But the hands are on top of the head.

A Yes, that's what we asked they do to surrender, to make sure that they don't have free rein to grab a gun or anything of that sort.

Q When did you return back to the United States?

A January 1946.

Q Did you talk much about your war experiences?

A I can't remember if I did, but I kind of doubt it. Everyone was pretty well aware of what had gone on with the war. I'm sure I did talk about it, but I don't recall anything specific. But I did -- what I did do, however, was to take advantage of the GI bill, went to Temple University, obtained a bachelors degree in journalism, and went on for a masters degree in remedial reading, went on for postgraduate work in speech and hearing, and wound up with a career in speech and hearing, and taught and headed up a speech and

hearing agency for 35 years before retiring seven years ago.

But I continued my interest in international affairs from the time I came back. I was a volunteer in many organizations. In 1970 I visited the World's Fair with our two daughters in Japan, and became quite interested in the culture, and through contact with a school in Japan, developed a program of bringing students here and sending students to Japan for study, also of having groups come this way and taking groups to Japan.

I've taken 13 groups to Japan to date, including orchestras, choirs, general public, teachers and others. I'll be taking a group over in June again to Japan for a cultural exchange program. I developed an exchange program to develop good understanding between citizens of our two countries.

I know this has no special relationship to my previous experience, except my feeling that we had to do something to develop understanding and avoid situations like we had with the war and the concentration camps. And I've been very pleased to be involved with this program, even though it's basically a voluntary thing on my part, but a very satisfying one.

So one of the things I'm particularly proud of is my relationship with the Japanese American Citizens League, now that I've learned about the liberation by a Japanese-American army unit, of Dachau. Particularly interesting is the fact

that I've become so associated with Japanese people and relationships over the years. As a matter of fact, my interest took me to the development of a chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League in 1976 in Livermore, and I became its charter president, the first time a Caucasian had been charter president of a local chapter since the national organization's founding.

And still at this time I'm a director of the local Diablo Valley chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. I've held a number of offices in that organization. But as I say, I'm not sure of why the relationship developed. I'm very pleased to have this relationship, to be doing something as a citizen for world peace, which I'm convinced we have to do as individuals. It's a small organization that we have, but one that does a job.

Q What is the name of the organization?

A It's the Japanese American Cultural Exchange Program. I work out of my home doing this work, and it's in Pleasant Hill, California.

Q Do you recall showing the pictures to anyone?

A I'm sure I showed them to my family when I first came back, and then put them away. I doubt that I've looked at these pictures in 40 years. So I'm frankly grateful that I've had a chance to revive my memory a little bit and to do more thinking about what has happened. Not that I forgot the

experience itself. It's indelible. But still, to bring it to the fore, I'm happy to have done that.

Q. What I would like to do is just start briefly with asking you or you telling me just a little bit about yourself, like when you were born and where, where were you when the war broke out, just to give a little background so we go into the story; where you were trained, where you served.

Do you have any questions?

A. No.

Q. If for any reason you want to stop the interview at any time, just let us know and we will turn off the camera.

A. Okay.

Q. This is the Holocaust Oral History Project interview of Samuel Cohen taking place in San Francisco, California, on April 26th, 1993. My name is Sylvia Prozan.

Mr. Cohen, when and where were you born?

A. I was born May 1st, 1923, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. In Philadelphia.

Q. And how old were you when the war broke out?

A. I was 18. I believe I was 18.

Q. Were you drafted into the Service?

A. Yes. I was drafted when I was 19. January of 1943.

Q. Did you have much of a religious upbringing?

A. No, I didn't. I had a very culturally enriching upbringing, but not in a religious manner.

Q. Were you aware of what was going on in Nazi Germany in the 1930s?

A. Yes, as much as anyone. I attended a Jewish school every Sunday, from the time I was an elementary student, and current events were taken up as well as cultural background and language. So I was as aware as anyone might be at that time.

Q. What were your thoughts when you learned of what happened on December 7th, the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

A. I guess I felt, as much as anyone did at that time, that this was a terrible thing and that we should do something about it. I was quite eager to get involved, if I could.

Q. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

A. I was drafted when I was 19, I guess.

Q. And where did you take your training?

A. I took my basic training in California, San (San Anida) Racetrack, Whittier, Los Angeles County. We lived in the horse stalls that ran around the track, that was part of the training.

Q. What did your training consist of?

A. It was the usual basic training, I guess, that all

Army recruits have; obstacle courses, shooting, the usual things they do in basic training.

Q. And the year was 1942?

A. No, it was 1943. I was drafted January of 1943. That is when I entered the Service.

Q. And after your basic training, where did you go?

A. After basic training I was placed in the Army Specialized Training Program, which was a college program, and I was at the University of California, Berkeley, for a nine-month period, taking pre-engineering courses sponsored by the Army. That went to March '44, from June '44 to March '44. It was an intensified course, so it was double, but the usual training time would be for those courses.

Q. And what were you supposed to be doing with this training?

A. Well, I was to be evaluated after the training, and then I would be placed wherever the Army felt I should be. After that training there was more training in the desert of California and near Lompoc or Santa Maria for battle conditions. And then we were shipped to England in October of 1944 for additional training.

And I had training in aerial photography for a two-month period in England. From that point we were sent to France in December '44, and I was part of the 11th Army Division at that time.

Q. Where in France?

A. Oh, I can't remember exactly where. A succession of towns, but I don't recall them at this time.

Q. Were you fighting, or was this --

A. No, not at that point. It was more training. And after a period of time, we were sent to Belgium and Luxembourg, where the fighting was taking place. It was, I guess, the spring of 1945. And it was the final armored attack that just went quickly through Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and finally Austria was the last place, where we finished the war on May 3rd.

Q. At any time were you aware of what was happening to the Jews?

A. No. Not at all. Nor to the Japanese internees. I had no knowledge at all of any of that, that I can recall. I don't recall any knowledge of it.

Q. Where were you when the war ended?

A. I was in Austria, near Salzburg. We stayed on one of the resort lakes surrounding Salzburg called Salzkammergut area, I think five lakes around the area. We stayed on a lake over the summer period until we were shipped home, September or October of '45.

Q. When did you first see the camps, the condition of the camps?

A. Before I saw the camps, we caught up with a death

march from one of the camps, and that was the first exposure to what had happened.

Q. Where was this?

A. In Austria. The camp was called Mauthausen, and I have some place names on photos that I took in that area, Linz and some other place names. But I have no idea exactly where they were.

Q. What do you recall seeing?

A. Well, we caught up with the death march, and if you like, I have a letter that I wrote to my brother just six days before the end of the war. Apparently I didn't have time to mail it. I went through my materials at home and found it. It tells exactly what I observed. So if you like, I can read that letter, or portions of it.

Q. All right. First, can you just tell us what is in your mind that you recall seeing? Were you walking along --

A. Yes. We caught up with the death march, Jews and -- not only Jews but a lot of other categories of prisoners were marched out of the camp when they knew Americans were coming, just to try to eliminate as many traditional prisoners as possible. So of course when we caught up, we tried to help the people that we caught up with, tried to get them fed, talk to them.

Of course, I had a background in the Jewish language, the Yiddish language, so I was able to communicate with

those who were Jews, anyway, and with Germans, because the language is somewhat similar.

Q. What did you say?

A. Well, it was pretty obvious what had taken place, after just a few minutes of talking to these people, just seeing them, about the conditions of the camp. And just looking at the condition of the prisoners, it was quite obvious. It was pretty horrible. They were civilians, of course.

It was a shock, to say the least. It was quite a thing.

Q. Approximately how many people were on this march?

A. Probably 1,500 to 2,000 at that time. About several hundred had already died from the exposure to the march.

Q. But when you came upon them, would you say there were 1,500 then?

A. There were about 1,200, 1,300 at that time.

Q. Were there Germans with them?

A. Yes, there were, SS troops that were guarding them and marching them. And of course we captured the Germans that were guiding them on this march, and liberated the people in the march.

Q. I'm just trying to get as many details as I can from you, because --

A. Yes. I didn't even remember the details until I came across this letter, and it described the people I spoke to about their conditions and their history. The one thing that I do remember very clearly, we tried to have one of the people fed. He just couldn't lift a fork. That was quite a shock. We went to a farmhouse, and it was quite a thing. He couldn't even lift a fork to eat. So of course we took care of him.

But that is one thing I do remember. It's probably the only thing I actually remember of the march itself, until we got to the concentration camp itself.

Q. Did the Jewish people know who you were? Did they know you were Americans?

A. Oh, yes. They knew. No question about it. They realized it.

Q. Did they express happiness?

A. Yes, they did.

Q. What kinds of things?

A. Waving, smiling. There weren't many smiles. I don't recall. But obvious happiness on the part of the prisoners that we liberated.

Q. Do you remember what month this was?

A. Yes. It was the end of April, 1945.

Q. What was the weather like? Warm, rainy?

A. I can't remember the weather. It wasn't raining.

It was cloudy, I believe, was the weather at the time, at the time I wrote the letter. It was April 27th, so I imagine it was within days of that, a day or two before that.

Q. How many Germans or SS troops were guarding them?

A. There were about 20 per unit of a couple of hundred prisoners, guarding the separate units of prisoners.

Q. And so approximately how many Germans would you have captured?

A. Well, I would assume -- there were about seven units, so some 150, 200, I guess, that we captured at that time.

Q. And then what happened to the people on the death march? Did they disburse? Were they transported somewhere, that you know of?

A. They were transported to some safe havens, but I have no idea where. It wasn't something that I was directly involved with. But I do know that they tried to take care of them as best they could at that point. I think they sent them to an area which was safe where they could be given assistance, medical, food, et cetera.

Q. And then after you liberated this death march, then where did you go?

A. We continued -- it was, as I said, an armored

division, it went very rapidly, with tanks -- to try to finish up the war. So the next couple of days we actually came to the camp where these people had been marched out of. And we saw the camp.

Q. Did you know you were headed for the camp? Or were you just --

A. I guess so, because it must have been off the beaten track, so to speak. So we must have been guided to the camp to take care of others who were still at the camp.

Q. And what happened when you arrived at the camp?

A. Well, we saw the shocking evidence of the killings, the big piles of bodies and what have you, and the gas chambers, and saw all the indications of what had taken place. Tried to take care of the remaining prisoners.

Q. In your mind, when you think about the camp, what visual images come to mind?

A. Well, the bodies. The bodies and the emaciated living people were the two things that certainly struck me. The bodies particularly. The nature of the piles, like cordwood. It was pretty striking. And also, of course, the emaciated remaining persons.

Q. Did you speak to any of them?

A. Yes. On the death march I spoke to four of the Jewish prisoners, asking them, you know, what their experience was, and what family they had left, you know,

just a variety of things.

Q. What did they tell you?

A. I think three of the four I spoke to had no family left. One had just lost a brother that very morning, because if these prisoners did not keep up they were just shot on the death march, or if they tried to escape or whatever.

They hadn't eaten for several days. And I just tried to find out as much as I could about what went on. And they told me. And they were happy. I don't recall how, but it was certainly obvious that they were.

Specific things I have in this letter, that I don't remember at the moment, about the family backgrounds of some of these people. At the camp itself, I don't recall doing much communication with the remaining prisoners. It was a question of taking care of them and helping them.

I don't think there was much time at that point to do anything except keep moving. I think we didn't spend more than a day there at the camp.

Q. Were there any Germans left there?

A. Oh, I'm sure there must have been. I can't remember. I guess there were, because what happened was when they knew that the Americans were coming, they changed into civilian clothes and tried to get away. And one German surrendered to me, and that was the case with him. He was

in civilian clothes and thought he'd better do that for safety.

Q. What did he do?

A. Just came up, you know, said, I'm a soldier. I didn't have to do anything about it, just take him in. So there certainly were. But of course they had plenty of warning that Americans were coming, and did their best to get away.

Q. Do you know what camp the people on the death march were from?

A. Yes, they were from this camp that we went to after liberating the march. It was Mauthausen. It was maybe 100 kilometers that they had marched from the camp.

Q. Do you know how many people were left in the camp?

A. I don't know. Not too many. There weren't too many survivors. Maybe several hundred. Because they tried to take as many as they could out on this march to eliminate them.

"Somewhere in Germany, April 27th, 1945. Dear Willy." My brother was in the Pacific region at that time.

"Thanks for your letters of March 8th and April 3rd. I'm glad you finally got my letter. I haven't been keeping track of how often I've been writing. I guess I haven't been writing as much as I've intended to write. It's the

same story, moving on an average of once a day, and the drive to finish off the Nazis. I will try to write more often hereafter, I promise.

"I'm glad you've been reading about us in the papers. At least it's kept you informed about our activities, even if I haven't written about them. Of course there remains a lot to be told that the newspapers, radios cannot mention. I'm learning a lot and experiencing a lot of things over here. It's one thing to read about the rottenness of the whole Hitler system, and it's still another thing to see with your own eyes what the new order in Europe has meant its victims and its supporters.

"Most of the camp realized this after personal contact with these people. I will try to tell you the story of one of the Nazi crimes, a mild case, I understand, compared to others. Our convoy was moving through some towns, and from the back of the six by six I was riding, I could see some very shabby characters with hands outstretched begging for food. I just passed it off as more of the slave laborers, thousands of whom we saw on our trips through France and Germany.

"However, as the rest of the day unfolded, a horrible story which I know I will never forget: Our convoy pulled off the road shortly after we passed up these half-starved people. I spoke to four of these people, who gave me this

story, which was corroborated and enlarged upon during the balance of the day. The four were Jews; one Romanian, one Pole, and two Czechs.

"They were part of a concentration camp about 100 kilometers away which housed 15,000 of all nationalities and types, including PWs of all countries, slave laborers, German criminals and political prisoners, Jews, et cetera. The Jews were singled out, about 2,500 were divided into six or seven companies with 20 SS men guarding a couple of hundred of them, which composed a company.

"The reason for the march was apparently because of the nearness of our troops. As I understand it, the camp had white flags hanging out for two days until the SS men came and ripped them down and started the evacuation. The Jews, all men, were loaded off the trains with their SS guards, and before the trains could pull out our Air Force bombed the hell out of them.

"The prisoners who took food from the abandoned kits of some of these soldiers after the bombings were shot on the spot. After two days they started out on foot, not having gotten any food for all of about three days. They traveled by night, only through forests. Anyone faltering at all was shot on the spot. The troops guarding them were no ordinary SS men. They were not young frontline men, but older men who had personal hates for the particular types of groups

they were guarding.

"For instance, many of the SS men guarding the Jews were Ukrainians, the ones who fought the workers during the revolution in 1917, and the same ones who carried through the terrible pogroms on Jews in Russia prior to the revolution. You probably remember from literature that a lot of these Ukrainians fled to Germany to form units to fight the Soviet Union when their chance came. Well, they had their pet peeve satisfied, and a lot more Jews found their graves as a result of it.

"The Pole and Romanian who spoke to me were terrible looking; thin, haggard. One was only 18. They all told terrible stories of what was done to the Jews of their respective towns. Only one of the four had a member of his immediate family left, a brother in Argentina.

"The man with his brother in America was a doctor. The Pole who had only a brother left, who was on the march with him, saw his brother shot the very morning I spoke to him, a few hours before we came.

"The column had withstood bombings and assorted fire from our troops during their march; fire, of course, directed at their German captors and unavoidably hitting them. Most of them had marched the full 100 kilometers while others marched a little less due to the fact that their companies were up farther.

"The Jews estimated there were 1,000 left of those who started. After three days they were given some potato peelings. After two more days, more potato peelings. The following day, six potatoes. They had gotten so accustomed to not eating that they could barely finish a half a can of C rations apiece. One couldn't even open a C ration can, for he had no strength left in his fingers.

"All four vowed that had we not come they could not go farther, and would undoubtedly have been shot. As the convoy moved down the road after the stop it became apparent that the Jews were only the first to be sent out, theirs being a death march which would have wiped all of them out eventually had we not rescued them.

"Although tired and half-starved, they smiled happily, bravoed and waved as our convoy passed them, streaming down the road. It was an international procession such as I will probably never see again. Virtually every nationality of Europe, all colors and races, were represented.

"We saw many horrible scenes, too; a trench with about eight dead, and a Jew with a distressed face kneeling beside it, palm outstretched to the victims in a gesture showing us what they, the Germans, had done to his comrades. At another point the SS troopers shot a group of Jews who ran from them out of the woods to meet some of our forward elements.

"And I could see them strewn out on the field before the woods. According to the prisoners, a number of thousands lied buried along the roadside. It shocked everyone who saw these scenes into a realization of what Nazism has meant to the people of Europe. We passed a few PW cages that held a few hundred of those elite SS men.

"The thing that struck me was that there was no show of remorse or sorrow or sadness on their faces. Instead there was a haughty, satisfied, smug look on each of their faces, with plenty of ego left in them. In one group we stopped along the road, SS-ers were sassy and noisy as hell, and spoke their piece. There were three prisoners with "KL" on their jackets, meaning "concentration camp," just as the rest of the prisoners.

"However, we noticed that they were being socked, none too lightly, by other prisoners passing by. We grabbed them and found out they were some of the ordinary German criminals who killed many of their fellow prisoners, and as a British fellow told us, were at times worse than the SS men.

"The happiest thing for me that day was to see a column of captured Gerrys being marched down the road by a sizable group of former Russian prisoners, who seized the guns and ammunition from their guards when our troops came along and turned the tables. The faces of these Russians were really

lit up, grinning from ear to ear, and all of us were shouting with glee to see such a sight.

"One of our fellows told one of the Russians, watch out that that any of their Gerrys don't get away, and he reported with the assurance, don't worry. It must have been a welcome sight to see the towns they previously had been marched through smoking and burning as they walked back through them, free men, bound for areas where they will be taken care of and sent home.

"I'm writing this with a Waterman 100-Year pen which I recently got from a friend in New York. I'm so unaccustomed to writing with a good pen, I'm having trouble getting used to it. I know you are anxious to get some souvenirs. I tried sending you a German officer's dress bayonet, but it was returned because it was on the restricted list for men overseas. However, the first chance I get I will send you some things I think you will like.

"I'm finishing this letter a day later. Yesterday was a red letter day for me. I captured a heinie. The word "captured" is put in quotation marks, for the man gave himself up and all I had to do was march him down to the PW cage. However, it makes me feel good. He was a patient in one of the hospitals here in town, and just before we took the town, the officers told the soldier patients to don civilian clothes and go home.

"This is just one of the many tricks the Nazis played, but not too many of them work. He donned civilian clothes but was smart enough to give himself up before being captured. I better end this now lest we move again. Best regards, Sam."

Q. You mentioned the smug look on the faces of the Germans. Was this as they were being captured?

A. Yes. They were actually already captured. It didn't matter to them that they had been captured. They were in custody, just as though they hadn't been. It didn't make any difference to them, apparently.

Q. And just to clarify, the Germans, when you were in sight of the Germans, as some of the people ran to you, the Germans shot them?

A. No, this was prior to our being on the scene. That's when the prisoners got some glimpse of us on the road. They were actually in the forest, the prisoners and the Germans, to avoid their being liberated. And when they ran out of the forest, on seeing some forward elements of our group, then they were shot. I was in a group beyond the forward elements. So I don't know firsthand how that took place.

Q. What did the camp smell like?

A. I can't remember that specific point. I guess the shock of seeing things was more than enough. It blotted out

anything else. I don't know. I just can't remember that.

Q. What did you ever send your brother as a souvenir?

A. I can't remember what, but I saved a lot of stuff. I've got three boxes. That's where I found this letter. Nazi flags and Nazi propaganda, materials that our units put out to the Germans to give up. I enjoyed writing for the newspaper, the Army newspaper, so clippings of news items I put in there.

Q. Was that Stars and Stripes that you --

A. Well, it was just a local unit bulletin type of thing. I don't think it was Stars and Stripes. I had some clippings from Stars and Stripes of our unit, telling about what we were doing, that kind of thing.

Q. Yours was an armored unit, you said.

A. Yes. Tanks and artillery.

Q. Where were you riding in it?

A. Probably behind the tanks. I was in a headquarters battery. It was a communications unit, which strung the communications wire for the artillery to zero in on their shooting. And I operated the switchboard to put calls through between the forward unit and the headquarters unit.

That was the result of my nine months at training at Berkeley. It was a very simple job, a couple of hours. But

they were very smart, because I wasn't very mechanically inclined. It was good that they did that instead of trying to give me something more sophisticated.

Q. What would you say to the one in five people who believe that the Holocaust never existed?

A. Well, obviously it's hogwash. I didn't make it up. I've got the pictures that I took of the bodies and some of the prisoners who survived. I didn't just make these up. They were poor quality, because we had to develop them ourselves, not professionally.

Q. Where were they developed? Germany?

A. Yes, by our unit, where they had facilities for developing photos. I can't really remember how, but the quality isn't too good on most of them.

Q. Have you spoken of this often in the past?

A. Hardly ever. As a matter of fact, we don't keep good track of pictures and organization of pictures. We seldom have any albums of even our own family. And I was actually convinced by my wife to let her throw out these photos that I had taken, because she just didn't want to look at them. But I found them just the last few weeks when I took a look, and I saw that she hadn't.

But it was quite fascinating to -- not fascinating. It was a terrible memory. I always, of course, remembered it. But this brought back more. And so I'm really glad to have

been put in touch -- well, I put myself in touch with this program.

Q. We're very grateful that you have come.

Tell us about this picture, please.

A. This was the day we came to the camp and went through the camp. You see what had been done there, the gas chambers and what have you. This was several days after the liberation of the death march that we came across it, and probably were there before the end of the war.

This banner apparently was put up by a group of prisoners who were Spanish. It was a greeting. The large type says, "The Anti-Fascist Spanish Salute the Raiding Forces."

Q. Tell us about this picture, please.

A. This is one of the shocks we had when we came to the camp and saw these piles of bodies. It's indescribable, how we felt. It was horror. I guess it was a rainy day. I see the water marks on the photo.

Q. Do you know how long the bodies had been there?

A. No. I'm sure the experts knew, but we had no idea. It was just enough to see it, for us. I guess the killings were sped up when they knew the Americans were coming. There was obviously no chance to bury them. It had been several weeks.

Q. What about this picture?

A. More of the same as the previous. Piles and piles of dead bodies. We had, of course, in the past month seen dead bodies, but just one, two, here and there. This was something completely different. Just completely not expected, just couldn't fathom this at all. It was just unbelievable. I still can't understand it. It's a very horrible site. That's what prompted me to take the pictures, of course.

Q. Did the others react the same as you?

A. Oh, yes. Everyone. No question about it. There was horror in everyone's feelings.

That's more of the same. There is no difference among these pictures. Just documenting what we saw, is all. It was an indication of how I felt, the fact that I even took these pictures.

This obviously was a trench to bury the dead.

Q. Where was this taken?

A. Right by the camp. I think you can see a tower there, a watch tower, gun tower. I may be wrong. It looks like one. And obviously the fact that it hadn't been completed is testimony to the interruption of what they were doing there by our coming to the camp, by their knowledge that we were coming, getting away from there. But this is one of many that we saw, trenches.

Another scene in the trenches of dead bodies. It's

interesting that they seem to have their clothes on in this case. Our guess is the reason for that was the hurry on the part of the Germans to do away with as many people as possible before the Americans came, so they didn't bother having the clothes taken off. But that's only a guess. I have no idea why that is.

These are prisoners who survived within the camp. As we were going through the camp we saw them, and even though I'm sure they were happy to be liberated, you get a kind of feeling of wonder, distress, confusion perhaps at what was going on after their experience.

Q. Where was this picture taken?

A. At Mauthausen, the concentration camp, as we went through the camp.

Q. Is this in the barracks?

A. It's the housing unit, whatever. I don't know whether you call it a barracks or what you call it, but this is where they slept, many on a bunk. So I guess sleeping barracks.

Q. Not one smile.

A. No. Not a single smile. Maybe there wasn't enough strength or understanding, even, of what was happening after their experience.

Q. Do you recall speaking to anyone after you took the picture or as you were taking the pictures?

A. No. You can see the curiosity in people's faces that I was taking a picture, perhaps wondering why I was even taking the picture. They just didn't know what was going on. They weren't fully aware that they were being liberated or what liberation meant or who we were or what was going to happen to them afterwards.

Q. These people didn't know you were Americans?

A. I have no idea. The looks on their faces indicate they just had no idea what was taking place. They had seen many soldiers, I'm sure, but recognizing us as liberators perhaps didn't dawn on them at that point.

This was also in the camp at Mauthausen. Here too these prisoners apparently don't know what to think after their experience, who we were, what we were doing, what was going to happen to them. I'm sure this was the same day we actually came to the camp, because I don't think we stayed there more than a day before moving on. I'm sure it was just another shock to these people as to what was happening.

Q. Was this taken in the same place as the other picture?

A. Different room.

Q. Do you know what the room was used for? Was it just a room?

A. It looks like it's just a room. Almost like the storage room. There was no attempt to provide good

facilities, for sure. But I don't specifically remember this specific room or -- but it seems like a very dark room, so it was part of the subjection of people. It wasn't meant to be anything other than that.

Q. Nobody seems to be talking to anybody else.

A. No. There is just wonderment there at who we are, what we're doing.

Q. Before you left the camp, did the Red Cross or somebody come in to take care of these people?

A. Not Red Cross. Just the certain, I guess, Army units, perhaps, which were trained for taking care of civilians. We didn't do anything specifically ourselves. We were part of the march to get through the war, the armored unit. This was something we came across in carrying out our main function, and undoubtedly other units came to specifically take care of them.

Q. They weren't left alone?

A. No, I doubt that. No way they would be left alone.

Q. It looks as if there is no almost no emotion; not happiness; there doesn't appear to be sadness. Just --

A. Dazed, resigned. Whatever comes, comes.

Those are some of the liberated prisoners. Apparently we took care of them, got them clothes, put them on their way somewhere, to a safe haven. By this time the war was

just about finished. This was probably May 2nd or so. May 3rd was the official close of the war.

These are Russian prisoners who were liberated at the Mauthausen camp, apparently we got clothes for them, shoes, and put them on their way to a safe haven. The place, Mauthausen was near a place called (Kaum [Traun?]), apparently, Austria, the place that would be nearest to the camp. Even here you don't see smiles or anything. Just pleased, I guess, to be out of the camp.

These are some SS men and other Germans who were guarding the prisoners on the death march, and we captured them along the line of the march. They are surrendering to our troops.

Some of the people who surrendered were actual criminals who were prisoners of the camp and who were given free rein to kill Jews at the camp or carry out criminal activities at the camp, as long as it's okay with the SS men and guards at the camp. You can see one of the Americans with a rifle guarding the group, and a little jeep over there in the far corner.

Q. Was any talking going on during this surrender?

A. No. No. Just a quiet surrender. After they were in their PW cages, as I indicated, they acted very cocky. The SS men did it, in any case. There has to be a distinction between the SS men and the ordinary guards. The

SS men just were absolutely without any feeling of remorse or sorrow whatever.

This is some of the guards guarding the prisoners on the death march. And this particular place is near Cham, Germany. The camp was actually right near the border of Germany and Austria.

Q. But the hands are on top of the head.

A. Yes, that's what we asked they do to surrender, to make sure that they don't have free rein to grab a gun or anything of that sort.

Q. When did you return back to the United States?

A. January 1946.

Q. Did you talk much about your war experiences?

A. I can't remember if I did, but I kind of doubt it. Everyone was pretty well aware of what had gone on with the war. I'm sure I did talk about it, but I don't recall anything specific. But I did -- what I did do, however, was to take advantage of the GI bill, went to Temple University, obtained a bachelors degree in journalism, and went on for a masters degree in remedial reading, went on for postgraduate work in speech and hearing, and wound up with a career in speech and hearing, taught or headed up the Speech and Hearing Agency for 35 years before retiring seven years ago.

But I continued my interest in international affairs

from the time I came back. I was a volunteer in many organizations. In 1970 I visited the World's Fair with our two daughters in Japan, and became quite interested in the culture, and through some home states and contact with a school in Japan, developed a program of bringing students here and sending students to Japan for study, also of having groups come this way and taking groups to Japan.

I've taken 13 groups to Japan to date, including orchestras, choirs, general public, teachers and others. I'll be taking a group over in June again to Japan for a cultural exchange program. I developed an exchange program to develop good understanding between citizens of our two countries.

I know this has no special relationship to my previous experience, except my feeling that we had to do something to develop understanding and avoid situations like we had with the war and the concentration camps. And I've been very pleased to be involved with this program, even though it's basically a voluntary thing on my part, but a very satisfying one.

So one of the things I'm particularly proud of is my relationship with the Japanese American Citizens League, now that I've learned about the liberation by the Japanese American unit of Dachau. Particularly interesting is the fact that I've become so associated with Japanese people and

relationships over the years. As a matter of fact, my interest took me to the development of a chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League in 1976 in Livermore, and I became its charter president, the first time a Caucasian had been charter president of the organization since its founding.

And still at this time I'm the director of the local Napa Valley chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. I've held a number of offices in that organization. But as I say, I'm not sure of the relationship. I'm very pleased to have this relationship, to be doing something as a citizen for world peace, which I'm convinced we have to do as individuals. It's a small organization that we have, but one that does a job.

Q. What is the name of the organization?

A. It's the Japanese American Cultural Exchange Programs. I work out of my home doing this work, and it's in Pleasant Hill, California.

Q. Do you recall showing the pictures to anyone?

A. I'm sure I showed it to my family when I first came back, and then put them away. I doubt that I've looked at these pictures in 40 years. So I'm frankly grateful that I've had a chance to revive my memory a little bit and to do more thinking about what has happened. Not that I forgot the experience itself. It's indelible. But still, to bring

it to the fore, I'm happy to have done that.