

## **RG-50.759.0016**

### **Summary**

Francis Boss was a 24-year-old T-5 enlisted soldier, assigned to the Machinegun Platoon of Headquarters Company, 21st Armored Infantry Battalion, 11th Armored Division, when his unit was ordered into the Mauthausen Concentration Camp after its liberation by the 41st Cavalry. The Camp had been guarded by dedicated SS troops who had either withdrawn or were captured; one dead SS guard was lying next to the camp's warehouse where also the bodies of prisoners were strewn about. There were prisoners walking around in the yard, all in very bad shape, looking like walking skeletons. Francis had a brief time to see the camp, guided by an inmate. The camp had been built up with stone from a nearby quarry, where Jewish prisoners had cut the stones, carried them on their backs to the camp and where they built a 15' -20' exterior wall and laid steps within the camp for about a two-mile stretch; all proved very solid and sturdy. Within the camp the prisoners were political, Jews, Russians and Poles, all dressed in striped uniforms. If distinctions had been stamped on their skin, those were hardly legible, in view of the weight loss involved by each detainee. At liberation, the weather had turned warmer, springtime was in the air and Francis did not notice if each prisoner had at least one blanket. The Engineers were busy burying the dead with their equipment in a soccer field outside the camp perimeter. The unit pulled guard duty at the wooden entrance gate to keep the inmates within the camp, for their own protection; when in town, they would look for solid food which they could not tolerate; but in the camp they were fed soup and liquid food which was healthy for them.

Francis was swiftly transferred to the satellite Gusen concentration camp, not too far from Mauthausen, for a couple of weeks until that camp was dissolved. He was housed outside of the camp in private housing. Thereafter he returned to Mauthausen for another month and a half of duty.

The 11th Armored Division had stayed active for only about three years, but its veterans remained quite active afterwards. Francis had participated in a return to Mauthausen twice, ten years and five years before his 1994 interview. Particularly the widows of deceased veterans remained as a very active social group. The last half of the one-hour interview focused on Francis Battle of the Bulge experience, a number of his war stories and his general thoughts about the war and its after effects.