

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

DR. JULIUS EINGORN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: January 2, 1989

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Holocaust Oral History Archive

Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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JE - Dr. Julius Eingorn [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]

Date: January 2, 1989

Tape one, side one:

PS: I'm interviewing Dr. Julius Eingorn for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College. The date is January 2nd, 1989. Dr. Eingorn, can you please tell me where in Europe and in what unit you were serving before you arrived at the site of a concentration camp?

JE: Well I was with the 89th Infantry Division, excuse me, 79th Infantry Division, 79th Infantry Division, called the Rolling W, 3rd Army. And we had entered Germany some time in January of 1945, in Speicher and we had variously gone to many different places. In fact, the month of March we must have made 18 different overnights in various places. And we were going very fast along the Autobahn and elsewhere with--the whole division was traveling. In fact, at one time, I should say, I was with special troops, the Infantry Forward, Division Forward. And one time we were as much as 200 miles away from Division Rear. So we were going very fast.

PS: Did you say Speicher? The...

JE: Speicher is where we, yeah, it's where we landed.

PS: Was that in northern, up around the Belgian border? Or...

JE: No, that was a, that was more or less I would say its south of that.

PS: Yeah.

JE: South of that, so.

PS: At that time, Dr. Eingorn, did you know of the existence of this particular camp that you would eventually liberate before you arrived there?

JE: No, no, absolutely not. We, I knew that the Jews were put in concentration camps, but I did not know of the existence of, or the name of Ohrdruf [subcamp of Buchenwald].

PS: Yeah.

JE: It meant nothing to me at all.

PS: Before you arrived at Ohrdruf, had you heard anything at all about the mass murder of Jews in Europe?

JE: Yes, I had. I had known that before I even went into the service, which was in 1942.

PS: Did you know of the existence of, the mass murder of the con--the ovens, the gas chambers?

JE: I knew nothing of gas chambers. I'm not even sure I knew about the ovens. I just knew that there was mass killings of the Jews.

PS: Before you arrived at the site of the concentration camp, did you see any evidence of German atrocities against civilians, against prisoners of war?

JE: [pause] Uh, no, no. I had not seen at all. Later I did.

PS: Yeah.

JE: Much later, yes.

PS: But through France or whatever occupied country you advanced through, you saw actually no evidence of atrocities.

JE: Well, if you consider interminable lines of refugees going from one place to another, in fact, if I had an impression to make, I would say that these refugees were streaming from all areas of the country, into France, from France, into Germany. It was an unusual sight to see, thousands of refugees.

PS: And did you have any experience, prior to the concentration camp, of liberating any prisoner of war camps?

JE: No, no.

PS: To the best of your memory, oh, well first, can you give the name of the camp you liberated? And its location?

JE: We liberated the camp of Ohrdruf, and in fact, it may have been the first camp liberated. And it was such a shock to the commanding officers of the United States Army that Eisenhower issued an order that everyone in our division had to go through it. And this was strictly signed by every commander who had to attest that every man in his-under him, had to see this.

PS: Can you describe the general location of Ohrdruf?

JE: Well, this is hard to tell without looking at a map, but it's, it must have been 100 miles west of the Czechoslovakian border, something like that I would imagine, but I cannot say for sure now where, exactly where it was unless I look at a map.

PS: In reference to Buchenwald, I think it was about 60 miles from Buchenwald, I think to the northwest, which would place it, I guess, around the area of the city of Weimar, of Germany.

JE: I can't say for sure.

PS: Do you, can you recall approximately the date that you came upon the concentration camp?

JE: I believe it was early April, 1945.

PS: To the best of your memory, can you please describe what you saw at the camp, and what you felt at the time?

JE: Yes. We had a twelve unit dispensary assigned to special troops of the 79th Infantry Division and all twelve of us, the twelve men, Major Gorky who commanded it, and myself, Captain Eingorn, and we went together. And we saw just piles of bodies, nothing, most of them naked, and practically skeletons. Very, very undernourished. And then we saw the railroad ties where they had just piled up the bodies, with beechwood, and then coated them with beechwood creosote and would be burning them. And it was still

smoking. Some bodies were burned completely, some were not. And there was just a, two or three places like that that had places where the bodies were burned. I don't know if they were burned while they were still alive or not, but it was, just bodies littered all over, including the barracks.

PS: Can you estimate how many survivors were still there, living, alive when you entered the camp of Ohrdruf?

JE: When I entered, there were no survivors. No one was alive. It was my understanding, later on I found out that the SS in order to sort of keep this a secret, they marched all the survivors out of the camp the day before we got there. And as the weaker ones fell by the wayside or the, by the side of the march, they would just kill them and bury them hastily and we were able to follow the trail. That is, our people in our division were able to follow the trail by seeing the, opening up the newly, the new graves. And we thought that was even a worse travesty in a way because at least some of these had a chance to be saved and instead they were being herded away and so as to escape detection and I don't think, they didn't escape detection because they were found anyhow.

PS: So you saw actually no living survivors at all?

JE: No, no, no, I saw no survivors in this camp.

PS: Can you estimate like how many dead that you saw around the camp?

JE: Difficult, but I would say in the hundreds.

PS: And the condition of the bodies or carcasses, did it appear that most of them were simply starved to death?

JE: Unbelievably emaciated, yes. Yes.

PS: And there were many who showed evidence of having been, a recent attempt to destroy the evidence of having the bodies laying around the camps such as, you mentioned about railroad ties, and the attempt to cover it up by burning all of the evidence.

JE: That might be the way that the bodies were in general eliminated, I mean as a, quote, normal, unquote, procedure. But we do know that they were, those that were alive were herded out of the camp and forced to flee the American Army.

PS: Among the, there being no living survivors that you saw, among the dead, did you see any children? Bodies of children?

JE: [pause] I don't believe so. I don't believe so. [pause] Actually, it seemed to me that there were mostly men. I'm not sure I saw any women.

PS: No children, and very few if any women?

JE: Yes.

PS: Do you know if this particular camp Ohrdruf was set up for Jews only or if it was a mixed camp with mixed nationalities?

JE: I can't say for sure, but I would imagine it was, I, I thought at the time it was Jews only.

PS: Can you please describe your personal responsibilities, if any, that you had been assigned in arranging. Of course there were no living to be transferred or cared for.

Were there any responsibilities that you or your men had in connection with burying the bodies or in any way?

JE: No, no. We, I had no direct connection with it at all. We just, we were just ordered to see it, and as far as I know every one of the 20,000 or so troops in our division went to see it.

PS: You say they all went to see it. Now some of your, you were in a battalion that actually was involved in actually entering Ohrdruf initially, then probably there were other regiments, other battalions who were far from Ohrdruf at the time...

JE: Yes.

PS: ...of liberation. So that when you say that they were, all troops in your division...

JE: Our division, our division, yeah.

PS: So some actually were maybe 20, 30, 40 miles from Ohrdruf at the time of liberation of Ohrdruf. Is that correct?

JE: Oh, [unclear] distances.

PS: Yeah.

JE: In fact as we proceeded forward we didn't stop and stay there for any length of time. We didn't, we went forward into Czechoslovakia and I'm sure that following, troops following had to see this, saw too. Because I understand it wasn't just our division. I think Eisenhower's, all the people in that area, all the combat personnel had to go see it, I imagine.

PS: Were there, at the time that you entered Ohrdruf, do you think or did you see, or do you believe, that there were any German guards or SS still within the camp?

JE: We saw a few dead German guards. They were exceptionally well-fed and of course, we knew undoubtedly that this was an SS man; this was not, [unclear] still show the guards in uniform. But they're dead.

PS: Do you think that they were killed by, or, when the SS and guards started to flee, do you think maybe they were the last few remaining and were killed by surviving inmates? Or do you think that your troops upon entering possibly became engaged in fire fight with them?

JE: I can't say for sure.

PS: No, you can't.

JE: I can't say for sure who killed them there.

PS: Well, there was no, I was gonna ask you if there was any verbal communication, in view of the language barrier. But really, the part of, of the Ohrdruf that you saw had no...

JE: No survivors.

PS: No one with whom to...

JE: No one, no one could talk to us.

PS: Just, no one with whom to...

JE: There was no one that appeared to be in charge of the tour as it were. You just walked in there and you just were on your own.

PS: Just the dead.

JE: Just the piles of the dead and later on I had occasion to visit a, nearby, and if my memory serves me correctly about three or four days later, a camp which had 150 Hungarian Jewish girls.¹ And the name, I don't remember the name or the exact locale, but at this time I was able to talk to these Jewish girls in Yiddish. And I got the story from many, many of them and exactly what had happened to them. And to this camp we brought some food, ourselves. We personally delivered food and whatever we could give them. We were actually a combat unit. We didn't have big stores of food, but whatever we, that we could spare we brought over to them. And mostly they wanted support, mostly they wanted to see fellow Jews. And they wanted to see the Americans. And they, I guess, probably starved for the sight of an eligible man. That was a--we were able to speak to them in Yiddish.

PS: Dr. Eingorn, after leaving the concentration camp of Ohrdruf, was it, would you say a week or two weeks before you stumbled on this camp with the Hungarian women?

JE: I would say, I said four days before, but maybe as much as a week.

PS: Okay.

JE: I don't really know for sure.

PS: Was that camp, do you have any idea of whether it was set up as a labor, and the fact that they were all Jewish women from Hungary, do you think that they were being held there on their way to one of the extermination camps or were they there, do you think, as part of a displaced persons labor, possibly labor camp?

JE: I would, I know that they were a labor camp. They were, they worked hard, and whether they were women supplied to the Nazi soldiers I don't, I can't say for sure. But they were all young women. They all told the same story about their mothers and their sisters being interviewed originally and if the mothers were generally over 40 or such they were sent to the, moved to the left and if they were to remain and moved to the right or I may have it vice versa. And quite often the children, young children, eight, nine, were--if the mother did not seem, if the children wanted to remain with the mother, they were both exterminated. I mean it was as simple as that. I mean if you decided to go with the mother well they were both exterminated. But they kept these young Jewish girls there and they worked them. And I do know too that getting a cold there was like a death sentence. They all told me the same story in many ways that if you didn't appear in good health for the roll call in the morning, and you were in your bunk, then you were immediately exterminated.

¹This occurred the end of May 1945, and the camp was near either Weida or Werdau, according to Dr. Eingorn, Dec. 28, 1999, in a phone conversation.

PS: And the, probably, as with other concentration camps and labor camps, there was no attempt to give any of the sick inmates any kind of medication or, no medical treatment. They were just left to...

JE: If you were too sick to work you were exterminated.

PS: Yeah.

JE: You couldn't stay in your bunk for the day.

PS: Approximately how many women were there at this site?

JE: About 150...

PS: About 150.

JE: Women. 150 women, yeah.

PS: Can you describe the physical, the general physical condition as compared to the bodies, the starved bodies that you had seen in Ohrdruf? Were these, did they appear to give the evidence of having been better treated, better fed, or did they look like the victims of the general atrocities?

JE: I would say that the ones that we saw were, appeared to be in a better health and they told us that the food rations were terrible and they had so little food. The same thing with the cabbage, cabbage soup and the bread is what they mostly had. But I would also say that those who were weaker were immediately killed. I mean if you could not work, could not report for duty even one day, you were killed. So we saw the ones that, we saw the actual survivors of the group. I don't know exactly how many started out in that camp, but we actually saw the survivors. They had no time to doctor anyone. I mean, if you had a bad cold and you could not--in fact, the story was told to me many times that they would, if someone was real sick and could not get out of bed that morning, that someone else would take a chance and call "Present" for them when their name was called. And if it was found out that was instant death. If you were answering for someone else, it was the death penalty. So a lot of people took chances to save those who could not report for work.

PS: Getting back just for a moment to Ohrdruf how long were you there at the site of the Ohrdruf concentration camp?

JE: I would say the greater, one morning, one morning. Yeah, one morning.

PS: And there being no survivors, of course, there was nothing to be done but clean up and start...

JE: Other troops...

PS: [unclear]

JE: Either in our division or in succeeding troops who took care of that, you know.

PS: Yeah.

JE: We just kept going, kept on going.

PS: And probably Ohrdruf being, I believe, the first concentration camp to be liberated by the Americans, of course if there's no survivors and all the dead it's, using the

term "liberation" is, yeah, a frustrating word to use when there was really nobody living, no one left alive there to liberate.

JE: Well, there were those that were liberated, who were marched out before our troops got in there. And some, as I say, fell by the wayside and were buried.

PS: There were...

JE: But we finally got, we finally found some, you know. But not to my personal knowledge, but I do know that as stories were told that they did find...

PS: Yeah.

JE: ...some others, but not many.

PS: Well when they were marched out of Ohrdruf, they were probably marched out with the German guards...

JE: Yes.

PS: And probably being just, trying to transport them to another death camp.

JE: Yeah.

PS: Your experience in this camp with Hungarian Jewish women, how long were you there, Doctor, do you recall?

JE: I was there for a day.

PS: One day.

JE: Yeah.

PS: Were you, you've mentioned that, even though you stumbled on the, on this site, had no knowledge of it being there, you didn't approach it knowing it was there with the, for the purpose of saving, but you mentioned that you were prepared to some extent to feed them, you had some food to offer.

JE: Whatever food was, sure.

PS: Did your unit have...

JE: Medical supplies.

PS: Medical supplies?

JE: Medical supplies, sure. We were a dispensary, and so we had some medical supplies, yes.

PS: Yeah. So, every attempt possible was made to give these women the medical, all pow--all within your power to do for them what you could medically.

JE: Of course, but we were there, like I say, just for one day. And we were not troops that were stationed there.

PS: Yeah.

JE: We just kept going along.

PS: Well, but then to your knowledge, there were troops coming up behind you...

JE: Oh yeah, so...

PS: That probably were better prepared with food, medical supplies, medical officers...

JE: I'm sure, yeah.

PS: And you say you were only there for the one...

JE: I would say just one day.

PS: Just one day.

JE: Yeah.

PS: Here again, the fact that children were separated, so there again at this site, you saw no children.

JE: No. The girls must have been anywhere from, I'm gonna guess here, from 18 to 30.

PS: And they evidently had been taken out of lines, selected, for whatever purpose this camp was being used for. Did your experience of seeing all the horrible, horrible deaths at Ohrdruf and these women, Hungarian Jewish women, did it have any effect on your feeling about being a part of the war and fighting Germany?

JE: Well, I had always felt that as a Jew it was my duty in a way, as much as anyone's, to see Hitler destroyed. And so it only vindicated my feelings there. [unclear] Because I felt that he, no matter what preceded it, with everything else, he really had to be destroyed.

PS: Do you recall the reaction of other men in your unit? Did you talk with them afterwards about what you and they had experienced?

JE: Yes, we did. We certainly did. And we had a, our commander of our little dispensary, [unclear] dispensary, the Major Gorky, who was a first generation German, and we had some interesting discussions about it. And, more than interesting. And we had a few Italians, and as well as a few other Jews on our, in our dispensary. So we, and we were very intimate and, because we were always quartered together, and so we did, the Jews themselves, I felt that I knew that these things had existed, because I had read about the left and the right and those who, those who went to their death and those that were permitted to stay alive. I had known about that. I felt I had known about that. But the other Jews, who didn't know anything about it, they were surprised, completely surprised by this.

PS: After experiencing what you did experience, at the two sites--Ohrdruf and this camp for women--it probably had a lingering effect on your thinking as you look back, as you reminisce?

JE: Oh, sure. And I've often wondered, "Could it happen in the United States?" And I've come to the conclusion it could happen anywhere.

PS: When you saw, and this is going back for one moment to the concentration camp of Ohrdruf, when you first saw Ohrdruf, the horrors, the bodies, the carcasses, the attempts to conceal, were you aware at that time that this was only one of many, many concentration camps?

JE: I knew there were other concentration camps.

PS: Did you have in your wildest imagination any thought that this could be on the scale--you saw possibly say a thousand, two or three thousand bodies. Did you in your

wildest imagination ever think that it could be six million Jews, twelve million overall who were massacred?

JE: Never.

PS: Annihilated in the concentration camps?

JE: I never conceived of those numbers.

PS: In your own mind, can you explain the German decisions that led to the setting up of the concentration camps?

JE: I don't want to be an apologist for the Germans. They, it started out with *Kristallnacht* where they found a, what they called a legal excuse to take away property from the Jews and to change the laws regarding Jews, as if they were non-persons. And then it gradually proceeded, especially as they started losing the war, it gradually proceeded to use the Jew as the, as a big scapegoat, as a measure of their success in doing what they promised to do. And probably the only area in where they really were successful in their promise was the annihilation of so many Jews. And, it has to be a certain warped mentality that starts to figure out the most efficient way to carry out such a heinous undertaking. I mean, to find the best gas, to find the quickest way to do it, and the best scientific German brains worked on this. The medical men worked on this, to try and find out the best way and kill someone, the least problems, the most amount of personal belongings, as if it was a reformation project of some kind.

PS: You know, bringing that up, I think many people in going over the same subject, realizing that Germany at that time was probably one of the most advanced societies in the world, in the field of science and all the arts, medicine, every branch of science and the educational system, and yet this was the society that was responsible for breeding probably one of, well not probably, but by far the worst massacre for all these, where medical, where prominent doctors performed brain surgery, you know experimental surgery; nurses were involved in experimental ways to do away with people. It sort of ties in with the fact that this, the type of society it was and you mentioned their efficiency. Do you see any connection there between that very highly-educated society, especially in the fields of science, do you think there's any relativity here between that and the methods of extermination?

JE: Well, they had enormous numbers of people that they intended to kill, and they did it in a, sometimes very crudely, as you can see in Ohrdruf where they just used beechwood creosote and railroad ties as a furnace, and the gas chambers where they had the best kind of, the fastest gas that they used, and on a mass basis. Their science, like any other part of the German development or civilization, was corrupted. It was, the government was run by criminals, and the criminals rose to the top, and those people who protested were killed and those people who accepted or refused to believe, or chose not to believe, were advanced, and so it was a, the stupidity of the people. People who were, greed, doctors wanted to advance to the higher positions and they committed this and even theologians looked the other way and committed it, let alone the ordinary person. So I think

the government was being taken over by criminals, the criminal element, and those, and a lot of people, for whatever reason, nationalism, greed, inertia, accepted it, and permitted this to happen.

PS: How...

JE: I might mention one thing in this connection. You asked me about German medicine and things like that. Well, like I told you, Major Gorky was a first generation German from the Los Angeles area. We, later on we went to a German hospital, which took care of, as I understood, Poles and Russians. And we spoke to this physician who was a colonel. And I remember him sitting at the desk, and being very proper and saluting us. And he had realized the war was over, and he had a long, long list of admissions, and a beautifully tended grave yard out back. And we asked him, "How many," that Major Gorky asked him, he says, "How many admissions have you had in the year or so since you've been here?" And he says, "Well, he's had 1500 admissions." And he says, "Well, how many are out in the grave?" And he says, "About 1100." And he said that, "How many were alive?" He says, "About 200 were alive." And he said, "How many were ever discharged from this hospital?" And he says, "Well," he says, "maybe 200 were discharged." Now, we're talking about 1100 graves, 200 still living, and 200 that were discharged.

PS: From that 1500.

JE: And, Gorky, who was the physician, exploded. He says, "You mean to tell me that this is German medicine?" He says, "What kind of a hospital is this that out of 1500 has only been able to discharge 200 people?" He says, "This is just a death camp!" He says, "You call yourself a doctor?" He really, really laid it hard on him. The man didn't say too much. But he had very great records. He had every plot marked out, every admission marked out, everything was there. But I understand it was for Poles and Russians, prisoners.

PS: And where was this?

JE: This was in that same general area.

PS: Oh, of Germany.

JE: Yeah. Of Germany, yeah. About a couple days after the Hungarian camp.

PS: How long did you remain in Europe after the end of the war?

JE: The war ended May the 8th, May the 9th, and I left Europe March of the following year. March of 1946.

PS: So you were there about ten months, in Germany about ten months after. During that period following the German surrender and the liberation of all the concentration camps, of all the displaced persons camps, did you see the return of survivors or, and the distribution of the displaced persons? Do you have any comments on...

JE: Well, the only thing is that we started to now to see refugees, German refugees.

Tape one, side two:

PS: The interview with Dr. Julius Eingorn, for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College, continues.

JE: As I was saying, now the tide of refugees swung in a third direction. We were now starting to see German refugees. People had started to come in from the Prussian, well this was the Prussian area, and the Austrian area, and they were coming back into Germany to escape the Russians. And we were seeing a complete reversal of the tide of refugees.

PS: These were Germans who were refugees from camps in Poland? Like prisoners of war more so...

JE: No, no. These were German civilians who were now starting to travel. This might not be what you want but it's the overall...

PS: No, no, this is...

JE: This was, these were German civilians who were, who had been occupying Austria and maybe some in Poland who had maybe settled there, and there's a Prussian area near Poland, and Czechoslovakia, who were now streaming back into heartland Germany. And it was complete reversal.

PS: Oh, I...

JE: We were also getting towards the end of the war, which, and, in April, May, we were getting whole divisions of Germans surrendering to us. We were roughly a small number of people, but we at sometimes would have in one day we'd get four or five thousand prisoners would come in, *en masse*, with their commanding officers and every thing else, and just be herded into some school yard or something. And temporarily. There was no way that we could take care of all this many prisoners.

PS: In those ten months that you remained in Germany after the end of the war, did you see many Jewish refugees, refugee survivors of concentration camps? Did you see many of them returning to their home regions?

JE: No. We were getting the story from Germans, say a German wife of, who had been married to a Jew who had been sent to a concentration camp, or, some who were hidden, was hidden by this German spouse, and because some marriages were still kept intact and the Jewish partner was hidden by the German spouse. And we kept hearing stories of that. Of course a lot of the stories were also self-serving, meaning we, you know, you walk into, you go into a German town and where three days before they had been spitting at British prisoners of war, when we came in there they were all anti-Nazis. So...

PS: Yeah.

JE: You know, you know the stories...

PS: Everything...

JE: The stories were not always to be believed...

PS: Everything suddenly changed.

JE: Yeah.

PS: Dr. Eingorn, I have reached the end of the questions that I had in mind to ask you during this interview. Do you have anything at all that you would like to add to your testimony, anything that we haven't covered so far?

JE: Well, I was telling you about the--I didn't tell you anything about the British prisoners of war that we liberated, but we had, a number of them would come in and they would say to us, you know, we gave them what we had, and sometimes they were like, from the K-rations we had the concentrated fruit bars, or the chocolate and we'd give them what we had. And they would come into our dispensary the next day with all kind of stomach ailments, diarrhea, because the food was much too rich for them. And, a few of them we were talking to and we were, since we were both English-speaking, we'd say, "Why are you doing what you're doing?" They would go through the town, they would kick people off the sidewalk, and make them walk in the gutter. So they said, "That's what they did to us." They said, "We'd go to work in a labor camp of some kind, go to labor, and the kids would spit on us, make us walk in the gutter." He says, "Now two days later since you've come, since you Yanks have come," he says, "why, everybody's anti-Nazi. No one knows anything. No one knows anything what happened down the road." Incidentally, all these people around Ohrdruf that we interviewed, I know that knew nothing. And they all claimed, disclaimed knowledge of what was happening. Or if they saw fires or anything like that, they averted their eyes. They said they didn't know what was burning. And, a complete sense of non-guilt. I might also say that in the month of March, and in April, we had occasion to sleep at maybe 20, 25 different types of German houses, farm houses, and city, urban houses, and I can tell you that there wasn't one where there wasn't a picture of Christ in the bedroom, as well as a dozen pair of leather shoes which they had gotten from other countries. And, so I could never understand this kind of belief in God, and the action that they were carrying out. But they were, generally they had a picture of Christ, and quite often the same picture in their bedrooms. And as I was telling you before, I don't know whether you taped it or not, I really feel it can happen here, if we're not vigilant, and we don't stand up for certain ideals, and permit lying to go on, I think it could happen any, in any country in the world, especially in a civilized country.

PS: Which is really one of the reasons that we are gathering this testimony from many hundreds of survivors and now we're of course gathering testimony from liberators. Some day, we hope it won't have to be used, but some day this may be called upon to prove the credibility of what did happen there in Germany and occupied, countries occupied by the Germans. Dr. Eingorn, this tape of your testimony will become a permanent part of the Holocaust Oral History Archives of Gratz College, and on behalf of Gratz College I want to thank you very, very much for your very valuable, and certainly your most important testimony. Thank you very much.

JE: You're welcome.