

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

ARTHUR GOLDSTEIN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: October 9, 1989

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Holocaust Oral History Archive

Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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AG - Arthur Goldstein [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]

Date: October 16, 1989

Tape one, side one:

PS: Phil Solomon, interviewing Mr. Arthur Goldstein, for the Holocaust Oral History Archive of Gratz College. The date is October 16th, 1989. [tape off then on] Arthur, can you please tell me where in Europe and in what unit you were serving before you arrived at the site of the concentration camp?

AG: I was in the 80th Infantry Division. I was attached to the Medical Battalion, 305th Medical Battalion. We landed in Omaha Beach, D plus 60.

PS: That's D-Day plus 60.

AG: 60 days.

PS: And the year is...

AG: 19-...

PS: 1944.

AG: '44. 1944. And from there we got off the beach and the first large battle that we had was the Battle of Argentan. We closed the Falaise gap. And then from there we sailed right through the central portion of France. And we penetrated the Siegfried Line, in two different places. It was the only division that did that, spearheaded the Siegfried Line, and then we crossed the Rhine River. And right through Germany and we were in the Battle of the Bulge in Luxembourg and from there we went into Austria, a little town called Gemeunden [by the lake or sea] Am See [phonetic] . And that's where we finished our offensive.

PS: During your combat experience through France and prior to the time you arrived at the site of the concentration camp, had you heard anything at all about the mass murder of Jews and political prisoners and Poles in Europe?

AG: Yeah, sure, we knew what was going on. It's one of the reasons why I was there.

PS: You knew of the existence, you had heard of the existence of concentration camps?

AG: Yeah, sure, sure.

PS: Prior to your arrival, did you see any evidence of Nazi atro-, when I say arrival, of course, I mean the arrival at the site of your concentration camp experience. Had you seen any evidence at all of Nazi atrocities against humanity? Civilians say in...

AG: Oh.

PS: France and...

AG: Abso-, yeah, plenty of it. One instance, we had a Italian priest and we stumbled upon him. And he was really delighted to see us. He was emaciated. He took his

shirt off, and his back, his back was completely--he was whipped. And it was just, after they whipped him they threw salt on his wounds. And he told us the story of--we tried, we helped him. And he stayed with us for a while until he, he was able to go back to Italy as a matter of fact.

PS: This was prior to your...

AG: Prior to...

PS: To the concentration, yeah...

AG: The concentration camp.

PS: Do you remember...

AG: En route, going through the battles.

PS: Yeah. It was in Germany?

AG: This was in Germany.

PS: Had he been, had he himself been confined to...

AG: He, he was confined and he escaped, and he was brought back, and he was whipped, horse whipped.

PS: So he would be say in the category of a displaced person. He was...

AG: Displaced person, yeah.

PS: Could you see many incidents of slave labor, slave laborers, liberated prisoners, or did you see any prisoners of war who you liberated?

AG: Oh yes.

PS: American...

AG: As a matter of fact, prisoner of w-, American prisoners of war?

PS: Well, any of our...

AG: Yeah, we had some...

PS: Allied...

AG: Oh yeah, sure. We had, we came across quite a few of them every once in a while. They were left, they couldn't travel fast going with the Germans, so they left them alone and we took them over.

PS: These prisoners of war who were liberated, can you describe their physical or mental conditions?

AG: Some were very stable and some were way out. They--it looks like they weren't fed very well. They were worked very hard. And some were litter cases. Some were able to walk.

PS: Did they give you any indication that the Germans were not adhering to the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war?

AG: Not really.

PS: Either in their appearance or...

AG: Yeah.

PS: ...what they said, their stories?

AG: Well, they weren't fed very well. They, as a matter of fact, you know, I think I told you before that Colonel Hallen who was a news reporter, and we came to, he was waylaid by the Germans. His driver of his jeep was killed. He was taken prisoner and when we got him back, his left arm had been blown off. It was wrapped. His wounds were wrapped in toilet paper. They had no bandages. And I'll never forget that, because I helped to pick him up to go to the bathroom, and...

PS: His arm was blown off do you think in combat prior to his capture or...

AG: Well, I don't think he was in combat, but he was...

PS: Oh, he was a...

AG: He was a reporter.

PS: He was there as a...

AG: As a reporter.

PS: As a war correspondent.

AG: As a war correspondent, that's right. And his jeep evidently hit a mine and blew up.

PS: Can you give the name of the camp you liberated, and its location?

AG: I came across Dachau. The other division, they took Buchenwald.

PS: Yeah. You're, the 80th Division was...

AG: The 80th Division...

PS: Dachau.

AG: The 80th Division, some were in Dachau, and they liberated Buchenwald also.

PS: Can you, do you recall the approximate date when you arrived at the site of Dachau?

AG: I know it was a very, very hot day.

PS: It was a...

AG: It was a extremely hot day, so it had to be in July or August.

PS: Well now I think it was April. It was in April.

AG: Was it in April?

PS: Around April 26th, 27th, 1945. [Dachau was liberated April 29, 1945 by the 7th Army.]

AG: Well...

PS: The reason I mention...

AG: I guess the date I...

PS: ...the date...

AG: ...don't remember.

PS: ...is that Buchenwald--almost all the concentration camps within a, the British and American Zones were not liberated until oh, just a week or ten days before the end of the war. The war ended I think May 8th or 9th, and it wasn't until really the last week in April...

AG: O.K.

PS: That most of the prison camps were discovered. Not prison, I meant concentration camps. To the best of your memory, can you describe what you saw at the camp?

AG: Yeah, I have these pictures to show you what I actually saw. And the first, the very first thing that we came across right at the gate were some of the leftover prisoners, inmates, and they were in the process of stoning a German guard. And they beat him to death with sticks and stones. And when we got there, we didn't, we looked and then they started to tell us what he was and who he was. So we let them continue their...

PS: Yeah.

AG: Their enjoyment.

PS: Mr. Goldstein and I right now are looking at the photograph of the guard that he, the incident that he just described. Were there any, when you entered, do you recall...

AG: Bodies all over the place.

PS: Yeah. Do you recall...

AG: Excuse me.

PS: ...if there were any guards, German S.S. or...

AG: No.

PS: ...guards still there...

AG: No.

PS: ...and alive?

AG: They were glad to get away, because they knew that they were, they knew we were coming, so they didn't want to be captured.

PS: Now, Arthur, can you continue to describe in your own words what you saw as to the prisoners who were survivors, who were living and then of course the many bodies that you saw...

AG: Oh...

PS: Again, we're looking at pictures right now that Arthur Goldstein himself took.

AG: I took them.

PS: And they are the most gruesome, gruesome photographs. Can you describe the site that...

AG: They're all, these bodies that are lying here, and they're all dead, they're emaciated. You just look at them and you can see all the bones protruding, the, right, practically right through the skin. And some are dressed, if you want to call it that, and some are naked.

PS: We're looking at the photographs. Most of them are clothed in ragged prison uniforms.

AG: Oh, yeah.

PS: The stripes, striped uniforms.

AG: Over here in another section there are railroad ties, and on these railroad ties are the charred, leftover charred bodies of humans, at one time human beings. And it's, they're a mixture actually. They're not only...

PS: Did it look...

AG: They're not only Jews but...

PS: Yeah.

AG: They're civilians and...

PS: It looked to you as if they had stretched the bodies over these railroad ties and then built fires under them?

AG: Then they had fires and...

PS: Yeah.

AG: ...threw them on, yes.

PS: Yeah, we're looking right now at tarred, charred bodies. You can barely see the form, the human form, the head...

AG: The head, it's a body.

PS: The arms.

AG: And then we saw these mass graves, oh, probably a full city block long, and maybe twenty feet wide. And they're just filled with bodies, and then they threw lye on top of it, and then they made the other prisoners cover them over. We're standing here looking down on some of those.

PS: And there are hundreds and hundreds of bodies you would say that were not as yet...

AG: Oh, [unclear].

PS: ...buried?

AG: None of them, well, they didn't have a chance to...

PS: Just, yeah...

AG: ...bury these other ones. They shot them, killed them, and then they ran. These were all freshly killed people, unfortunately. They didn't have time to bury them. They left them laying there. We're looking at the, you know, we're looking down at them.

PS: Yeah.

AG: We're looking inside of a little wooden shack, barn, whatever you want to call it, and inside of this that we're looking at is this. Bodies, they were all naked, all thrown in, and they were, some of these buildings were filled up to the ceiling...

PS: Yeah.

AG: ...with these bodies.

PS: And were...

AG: And this is where, the outside of it. That's the inside of it.

PS: We're looking at bodies just piled up, one on top of the other, possibly six, seven, eight or nine...

AG: Deep.

PS: Deep.

AG: Yes, yes they are. Yes, yes. [Telephone rings.]

PS: Yeah. [Tape off then on] As Mr. Goldstein has been describing the horrible, horrible sights that he saw when he entered Dachau, we've been looking at the photographs that he himself took, just unbelievable sights. Arthur, can you estimate, oh, roughly, how many bodies you saw, unburied, just scattered around the camp?

AG: Oh, there probably was maybe two, three hundred.

PS: Yeah. Now, the survivors, when you entered there were, oh, can you estimate how many surviving prisoners were there when you entered?

AG: Yeah, they--there were maybe fifty, sixty, not too many. And they were skin and bones, just...

PS: Yeah.

AG: It's just fortunate we got there, that we saved a few.

PS: Do you know if many of them were saved? Those that were so cl-, near death...

AG: They were young. Those were the young ones. There were no old ones that were living. The younger ones could do the work. The old people that weren't able to work, then they were...

PS: Did you see any children among the survivors or among the bodies that you saw?

AG: Among the bodies? There were many children.

PS: Yeah.

AG: But, survivors? Maybe twelve, fifteen years old.

PS: Yeah.

AG: Fifteen-year-old girls and boys that, were there.

PS: Do you know if Dachau was set up for Jews only, or if it was a mixed camp of various nationalities and religions?

AG: I would say it was a mixed camp. I had no way of knowing whether it was or it wasn't. I assume that there was more than just Jews there.

PS: Of the few children you saw that were still living...

AG: They were Jewish.

PS: Yeah.

AG: Yeah, they were Jewish people.

PS: Were they, do you know if, or if they were with parents? Or...

AG: No, no, there were no parents. There were no connections, family connections at all.

PS: Were you assigned any responsibilities arranging for the care of prisoners?

AG: Well...

PS: The surviving...

AG: Those that we came across and were able to take back we gave them medication and we put them on liquid diets and we tried to bring them around, yeah.

PS: Yes.

AG: Well, they did pretty well.

PS: You were in a medical corps then, and were you aware, there were so many that, where survivors were fed and where the, even medical officers were not aware that there was so little left of their digestive systems that any kind of a food just killed them.

AG: Well, I saw one instance when we put some food out and this was an American soldier. He was a prisoner. And he started to eat, and after about five or six spoonfuls of food, he ate so fast, that he actually, he actually threw up.

PS: Yeah.

AG: And he just upset his whole system, see. At that point, and I had never seen this before, but I didn't realize but then I said, "Hey, he's, this guy was starved, and he's not allowed to eat too much." So then we reversed the situation. We just gave them a little bit of liquids at a time, to bring them around, till they were able to cope with more food.

PS: Can you describe the reactions of the prisoners as you entered the camp?

AG: Oh, they were so happy, they were elated. They...

PS: I guess so.

AG: Sure, they were jumping with joy to see the American soldiers.

PS: With whatever strength they had. Was there very much verbal communication? In other words, could many of, could any of those people speak English or...

AG: Well, they spoke Yiddish.

PS: Yeah.

AG: No, English, no. But Yiddish they were talking and, I understood them.

PS: Yeah, you could experience some verbal communication.

AG: Oh yeah.

PS: In the language of Yiddish at that time.

AG: Yeah, yeah, sure, sure.

PS: Was anything said to you that, oh, concerning their experiences or...

AG: Well, in a manner of speaking, yeah. They said they were slaves, they were working hard. They showed us their hands. They did all the menial labor work.

PS: Being in a medical unit, were you prepared with medical supplies when you entered, that is over and above the medical supplies that you normally would have on hand for battle injuries and battle casualties.

AG: Yeah, we were supplied with many different medicines, you know, for colds, pain, morphine...

PS: Were you prepared for...

AG: We were, we...

PS: ...the scope of the medical requirements of what you hit, what you realized at Dachau?

AG: Well, we couldn't treat diseases, if that's...

PS: Yeah.

AG: ...what you're referring to.

PS: Or the extreme...

AG: Some of the extremes, no, no. Strictly emergencies.

PS: Do you know if when you discovered the horrors of Dachau, do you know if other medical units were rushed in to cope with the situation with more extensive medical supplies?

AG: No, not really because what we did was we evacuated them to the base hospitals.

PS: Oh, oh. I was going to...

AG: Yeah.

PS: I was going to ask, yeah.

AG: No, in those days they evacuated the base hospital. We didn't leave them there.

PS: Yeah.

AG: We took them with us.

PS: But you were equipped for emergency...

AG: And then what we couldn't do...

PS: But before...

AG: ...we sent them back further, sure.

PS: Yeah. Did the experience of seeing the prisoners, and all the sights you saw at Dachau have any effect on your feeling about being part of the war and fighting Germany?

AG: Well, I knew what I was there for, and I was very I was glad I was able to do something to help some of these people. And I'm looking at a picture of the ovens.

PS: Yeah.

AG: And inside...

PS: Right here.

AG: And this is inside the oven. This is where they, the slabs. They put the people and they put them in ovens and burned them.

PS: Yeah.

AG: And they...

PS: Then they...

AG: There was a room, there was just a room full of these ovens, a room full. And I had a picture, and I don't see it here. I gave it to someone, of the inside of the gas chamber. And I was in this gas chamber. I went in just to see what it was like. And all the clothes, they'd tell the people there they're gonna take a shower, you know, and that's what

the prisoners told us. They were going to go for showers, and then they, as the American soldiers arrived, they didn't have enough time to send these other people to the showers, so they shot them and then ran. And that's why these bodies are out there, or else they would be thrown into...

PS: Yeah.

AG: Into the...

PS: So right...

AG: They would have been gassed.

PS: Right up until the last minute.

AG: The last moment, oh yeah.

PS: Until the last moment they still, you would say that they, the Germans were still not satisfied, that, well, it's almost over. These poor devils that are still living, to let them live.

AG: It meant nothing. It meant nothing to...

PS: So, from what your...

AG: To the S.S. it meant nothing, no.

PS: Yeah. So, from what you saw and experienced at Dachau, you would say that right up until the last moment, before they fled in the face of the advancing American troops, you would say that right up until that last moment they were still...

AG: They were still killing...

PS: Killing...

AG: Killing the inmates...

PS: Killing, killing.

AG: Of the camps, yes, yeah.

PS: In your wildest imagination, when you saw Dachau, could you have in your wildest imagination dreamed that this could, it was actually not, only a small part...

AG: Inhumane...

PS: Of the many...

AG: Very.

PS: Millions. Did you realize that what you saw...

AG: Didn't think people could...

PS: Dachau...

AG: ...do anything like this.

PS: Could be multiplied by so many other even bigger death camps than Dachau?

AG: No, it was hard to im-, it's very hard to imagine that a human being would do something like this to another human being.

PS: Yeah. At that time when you saw Dachau, you certainly knew that this could not have been the only one. But at the same time did you really think that there could have

been so many and that it would have added up to six million Jews and another six million others, totaling like twelve million people slaughtered?

AG: No, I really didn't realize that it was, I knew it was many millions but how many millions...

PS: Yeah. I don't think...

AG: I didn't know.

PS: ...anyone could have...

AG: I didn't know, really.

PS: In your own mind, can you explain to, even have you tried to explain to yourself the German decisions that led to the setting up of concentration camps, and the cruelty that developed within inhumane things that were done? Can you explain to yourself [unclear].

AG: Well, they were going back in history like cannibals, I guess. Cannibals wouldn't do anything worse than what these people were doing. When you asked me about numbers, there's a sign written here, and it says, "This area is retained as a shrine that 238,000 individuals who were cremated in Dachau."

PS: Yeah.

AG: So there's 238,000, and this sign here proves it.

PS: Yeah.

AG: Who put the sign up, I don't know. I really don't.

PS: The sign is in English.

AG: It's written in English.

PS: Yeah. Did your experience have any effect at all on your faith in your religion?

AG: Oh, I was very, very happy that I was able to do something. There were only three Jewish boys in, in our outfit. But the fact remained that we had nine Jewish officers, all doctors, and one beautiful thing happened. A half hour before we landed in France, and were on these landing barges--a true story--our Captain, his name was Captain Whittaker, a graduate of Temple University, he was a doctor, and he stood up and he said, "Boys," and he was from North Carolina. He said, "Boys," he says, "I'm takin' my bars off of my shoulder, and I don't want nobody to call me Captain, because the Germans are known to kill officers." So he stood there and he took his off. He took them off. After that happened, Lieutenant Paul Karliner [phonetic], who was from Baltimore, a Jewish man, and he was a brilliant, brilliant doctor, had a fantastic practice that he left before he went in the service. And he stood up and said, "Fellows," he says, "I want you to call me Lieutenant, and I'm proud of my bars, and I'm proud that I'm Jewish, and we're here to do a job against the Germans. And that's what I'm here for. Now if you want to call me by my first name you can. If you want to call me Lieutenant, call me Lieutenant, because if I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die with a purpose."

PS: Yeah, yeah.

AG: This man was a smart man. I think he took this other fella back a couple of steps.

PS: Yeah, he should...

AG: And he...

PS: He should have been taken back.

AG: He really felt a little guilt complex. And we were happy. I mean I was happy to be there, being able to do something, and knowing that we did something like this was a--I was glad I was there, that's all.

PS: Arthur, before we started the interview you showed me, I think there were four volumes, or five volumes of your regimental history of the 80th Division through combat.

AG: The 80th Division.

PS: And France.

AG: Yeah.

PS: Well, I guess Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany and Austria. [tape off then on]

AG: ...bought these.

PS: Do you know, we leafed through these volumes of your regimental history. Do you know if there's contained within those books any record of concentration camps in...

AG: Yes.

PS: Your, the 80th Division having been involved in the liberation...

AG: Yes, yes.

PS: ...of Dachau?

AG: Your, if you read through this you'll see that the...

PS: That is part of your regimental history.

AG: That's right. Absolutely. It's in here. And [phone; tape off then on]...

PS: But Arthur, do you recall when you first heard of the gassing of Jews?

AG: Well, I don't remember when I first heard of it. I did hear of it and then I saw when I was in Dachau, I saw the gas chambers.

PS: Yeah.

AG: And it was, again the, some of the prisoners who were able there, took us around and showed us some of these atrocities, and where they were taken care. They even showed us places where they had dogs, and they would play, the Germans would play games with the people. They'd throw the people in a enclosed yard and they would have dogs in there, and the dogs would rip them apart, then they'd stand there and they'd la-, this is what they some of the guards did with these. Some of the prisoners...

PS: Just unbelievable...

AG: ...told us...

PS: ...cruelty.

AG: ...what went on there. And this was like a lookout there. So, that they're doing and then they were co-, the gas chamber, I saw them. I was right in there.

PS: Yeah. Do you recall how long you were at Dachau before your division and your unit moved on?

AG: Just about a day and a half, two days.

PS: Did any of the prisoners that you liberated ever contact you, or was there ever any kind of contact at all after the war?

AG: This Dr. Karliner [phonetic], I know for a fact, brought two or three of them, got them, and sent for them when he got home. He sent for them and brought them over to this country. He did that.

PS: How long did you remain in Europe, Arthur, after the war?

AG: I was there until, heh, I had 81 points, and I left the, left my outfit, because I had more points. I don't know why. I accumulated points for different things. But that's, you got out on a point system. I left my outfit around September, 1946 I guess it was, I forget.

PS: That would have been 1945.

AG: '45, yeah.

PS: That is the September following the end of the war.

AG: Yeah.

PS: Yeah, that would have been...

AG: Right, 194-...

PS: The war ended in May, '45, so you were there June, July...

AG: September.

PS: About four months.

AG: I left the outfit in September, and I was supposed to--me, and, there was about seven of us--and we got attached to some artillery outfit somewhere in Germany. And I think they, I think the government forgot about us.

PS: Mmm hmm. After...

AG: I got into Camp Lucky Strike.

PS: Huh, I was there.

AG: And every...

PS: Near Le Havre.

AG: Near Le Havre. Every day I was able to take a jeep, and we'd go into Paris. We used to go to Paris almost every other day. [chuckles] Yeah, really. And then we traveled around, saw little things, and toured, and we left December 1 is when I boarded to come home, from Marseilles. And I was on the water for 21 days. We were out on the ocean on [unclear] ship. There was 550 fellows. And lucky I didn't get sea sick. A lot of them did. I landed in, we're coming home, we went into Norfolk News, Norfolk, Virginia.

PS: Norfolk.

AG: And I was there for about, it was the 21st, 22nd. We were over there till, I think we stayed there Christmas. And then we came to Indian Town Gap, and I was discharged around the 29th, 30th of December. I was home for the, just before New Year's Eve.

PS: Arthur, after--this is backing up a little bit--but after you and your unit left Dachau, and there was still another week or two of fighting before the Germans surrendered, during that period of time, did you see any other examples of atrocities? Did you see survivors of concentration camps wandering, walking around...

AG: There were plenty of displaced persons all over the place. I came across a barn someplace in the middle of the woods or forest. We heard a lot of noise. And this was after our Dachau episode. And we opened the, and this thing was locked from the outside so these people couldn't get out. And when we opened this gate, we opened the door, there must have been about six, five, six hundred women, all women, came out of there like wild animals. They were kept in here. They were used by the German soldiers. They were also prisoners and again...

PS: Yeah.

AG: There again there were all kinds of denominations.

PS: Yeah.

AG: All kinds of denominations.

PS: All women and...

AG: All women.

PS: All for the purpose...

AG: There was about between five and six hundred women there.

Tape one, side two:

PS: This is Phil Solomon continuing to interview Mr. Arthur Goldstein. Arthur, we've gone over just about the questions that I had intended asking you. Is there anything you would like to add to your testimony? Anything that we haven't covered in the questions and answers? Your feelings? Your thoughts since the war? How much you might have been thinking since you arrived back in this country? Your thoughts, your remembrances, what you recall?

AG: Some of these instances go through my mind many, many times, and over the years, I've had these pictures in the drug store with me. And this area being basically, though not as much now, but it was before, primarily a German area...

PS: Yeah.

AG: And when I occasionally would bring these pictures out and show these people, they were horrified. Some of them said, "Oh, it couldn't be." And I said, "Hey, I *took* these pictures, so I know it *did* happen. And we hope it never happens again." But some of them are hard to convince. They, I don't know how you can make pictures up like this with dead bodies around. [chuckles] But they...have a one track mind and, fortunately, those people are in a minority. Because most of the people said that they knew what was going on and...

PS: They did know.

AG: And they had an idea.

PS: And they don't deny it.

AG: And they do not deny it. Very few do, but thank goodness it's a minority. And that's...

PS: That's about...

AG: That's about it.

PS: Yeah, Arthur...

AG: That's...

PS: On behalf of Gratz College and the Holocaust Oral History Archive I want to thank you very, very much for your most important testimony, which will become a permanent part of our Archive, and thank you again.

AG: Well, you're more than welcome, and if it was any input to the situation or this subject, I'm glad I could help.

PS: Well, you're...

AG: I got these pictures here which you are welcome to take with you, but they are the only ones I have left, and I would like to have them back.

PS: Yeah.

AG: So, with that, thank you very much.

PS: And thank you.