

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

PHILIP G. SOLOMON

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Ellen Rofman

Date: May 28, 1987

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PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewee]

ER - Ellen Rofman [interviewer]

Date: May 28, 1987

*Tape one, side one:*

ER: This is Ellen Rofman, May 28th, 1987, interviewing Phil Solomon. Testing. Phil, 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?

PS: Yeah. I was, my unit was 101st Cavalry, Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized. We landed on the beach in France. We went through France and we entered Germany at, in the Saar region. We first crossed the French-German border in, close to the Saar River, and just west of Saarbrücken was our first...

ER: And when did you arrive?

PS: That was, it must have been, I believe around March the 1st. Either the end of February, oh, you mean in Germany?

ER: Yeah, when...

PS: On German soil?

ER: On German soil.

PS: I think it was either late February or early March.

ER: 1945?

PS: 1945.

ER: Did you know of the existence of the particular camp you would liberate before you arrived there? And if so, please tell me what you knew or had heard of about it.

PS: No, actually we knew nothing, absolutely nothing about. We didn't know that there were such things as concentration camps. We did know of course of the Hitler plans of annihilation, persecution. We knew, I think we were aware of the fact that many Jews and non-Jews were taken from their homes, and I think we were thinking more in terms of being displaced for forced labor, slave labor, becoming displaced persons. But I don't think at any time, you know, I've given--these 42 years since--I've often tried to reminisce and to recall as to whether we actually knew. I would say that, I don't think we knew anything.

ER: You didn't know that they were killing Jews.

PS: No. Oh, we knew that Jews were being taken from their homes. Well, I think we suspected that there was, there were deaths and all. But on the scale of what we saw later, I don't think we had any conception whatsoever.

ER: Okay. Before you arrived at the camp, had you heard anything at all about the mass murder of Jews in Europe? Which is what I just asked you.

PS: No, our first contact, as we, see, as we advanced into Germany from the Saar region, we went directly, we were heading directly east to the Rhine River. Now I

would say that that area from the Saar to the Rhine was completely devoid of everything, even German civilians. I, for the most part, we did see a few, but I think at that part most of them were, civilians were retreating with the German Army, thinking that, you know, any day they were going, they were being told so much propaganda that this was our last advance, that we were outrunning our supply lines, and the best was yet to come for the Germans. But between the Saar and the Rhine we saw nothing, nothing at all. After we crossed the Rhine, and we were heading further east and then southeast, our first indication of the Nazi horrors was when we liberated many forced labor, thousands of mostly Eastern Europeans. I would say Poles, Russians, Czechoslovaks, and they...

ER: Where did you liberate them from, from labor camps?

PS: Yeah, well no, not la-, they just appeared. I guess I, we didn't see any camps or any concentrations such as we later saw of concentration camps. We saw, just suddenly they appeared on the roads. So I imagine that as we were capturing villages and towns, unknown to us these people were just simply being freed because there was no longer...

ER: Or they might have been in hiding.

PS: Or some of them, yeah, I imagine most of them freed themselves when their masters fled.

ER: Took off.

PS: And we saw them on the roads, just walking, walking on the roads.

ER: Okay.

PS: The, oh then the next step was the liberation of prisoner of war camps. But that too gave us no, of course it, in this country I think there was a lot heard about the atrocities or the hardships inflicted upon prisoners, prisoners of war. What we saw was an indication that the Germans had adhered reasonably to the Geneva Convention. They didn't look good. They looked, I mean the prisoners that we liberated certainly didn't look good by any means, but af-, you know some of them had been there three years, two...

ER: What countries were these prisoners from?

PS: They were all, all that we liberated, American, Russian, English, and a few French. But...

ER: Were you aware of any prisoners being Jewish?

PS: No, we didn't, see, we traveled fast. We liberated. We gave them cigarettes. And we radioed back to the rear of what to expect, you know, from troops coming up behind us.

ER: Right.

PS: But I would say that from our liberation of prisoners of war, we still got no, absolutely no, no indication of the horrible, horrible atrocities that were before us.

ER: Can you please give me the name of the camp you liberated and its location?

PS: Yeah. The first...

ER: When you liberated it, if you can tell me that date.

PS: Yeah. The first, really, we didn't know it was there in fact. The first camp was Landsberg, just a little distance northwest of the city of Landsberg. In fact, later we found that that was the prison where Hitler himself was confined, was in prison, and where he wrote *Mein Kampf*. The location was on the Lech River about, I think about 40 or 50 miles northwest of Munich.

ER: Okay, and what date? Do you remember the date?

PS: Yeah, April, I have it on record here. April 28th.

ER: 1945.

PS: 1945.

ER: To the best of your memory, can you describe what you saw at the camp and what you felt when you arrived?

PS: Yeah we were, the saddest part was that we were sitting there within about 1,000 yards of the camp and didn't know it was there. Had we known, I think we could have saved many that were slaughtered at the last minute. We were actually in a position to cross a railroad trestle bridge at dawn. And we got there about four o'clock in the morning and the Germans had been shelling the bridge to try to knock it out. And our engineers were trying to repair it. So that at dawn when we were supposed to cross, we couldn't, and about 9:00, about three hours, we had been there since about four, four a.m., April 28th, and it was about 9:00 a.m. that evidently the wind must have changed or something and we suddenly became aware of smoke coming from the woods. We, first we just smelled smoke. Then we, we saw the smoke, which in itself, of course you know is something to investigate. And here all the time we were sitting there, which was about five hours, we were within about 1,000 yards of a horrible massacre that was taking place. The SS, now the German *Wehrmacht* had already retreated across that bridge, leaving a detail of SS and I guess the regular prison guards and staff to kill the remaining prisoners who were still alive. They locked them into the few remaining barracks that were still intact and set the...

ER: Okay, we'll continue.

PS: Now they locked the remaining prisoners who were then alive into all these barracks and set the barracks on fire and that was of course the smoke and the, we immediately quick rushed in. And I think we saved a grand total of 20. There were scattered off, even those who were not burned within the, these barracks buildings, we came upon hundreds and hundreds of bodies that were just scattered, scattered over the entire area, what probably was their play field. Just, at random. I mean not that they had been put there in preparation for burial. Just dumped. Probably by dumpsters. I have a picture in front of me here that only shows a small, it's just a little snapshot. And actually it just shows a very small portion of the, the massive, just, like long, thousand, thousand feet long, like piles of potatoes. A lot of the bodies were nude, partially nude, charred. Some were still, oh, like glowing from the fires. Looking at this photograph, well, you can see they're piled in some places six, seven, eight deep. There you see, hands sticking. It was just grotesque. The positions are, everything about it was just the most grotesque thing that, and this was our

first, we just came upon this so totally unexpectedly that we were just in such a state of shock. The stench, the appearance. And over here in the background are all these which I believe trying to get a clear picture of, in my own mind, I believe that these were all bodies that were hanged, just...

ER: They must have been hung.

PS: Yeah. Where there might have been twenty, thirty or forty, just dead of course, just hanging, swaying in the breeze. It, this was our first contact.

ER: How many prisoners would you estimate that you found alive, beside the, were there any more than 20?

PS: There, now, in one of the reports, I can only recollect a small handful. Our chaplain wrote quite an article on this, and he places the figure at twenty, that were still living. But even...

ER: Were there any that were close to death that maybe you could have saved?

PS: Oh, that, you mean who were still living?

ER: Still alive, yes.

PS: Well, I was just gonna say that I believe that even some of those who we found alive couldn't have survived. Because they were, some of them, really it was hard to distinguish the appearance between the dead and the living. They were, their skulls looked too big for their scalps. Their, everything about them was just so, their bones were protruding from the sack cloth that they were wearing. And one of the most pitiful things and probably contributed to the death of quite a few that were still living was the fact that we could do nothing for them. We had nothing to, nothing to give them, and see we were on a mission. And as cruel as it sounds, our military mission being first, our mission was to seize and hold a causeway on the line of march to Munich. And the whole Army Corps, about six Divisions, about thirty miles in back of us, were depending on our seizing and holding the causeway over the northern end of a lake, Lake Ammersee, which was right between Landsberg and Munich. And, it sounds cruel but certainly priority, and our, we had to adhere to our mission, which was to get there before the Germans could blow it up. Besides, we really had nothing to offer them. We had no food to offer them, no clothes. All we could do was radio back to the nearest units to our rear, which was still I would say about 34. We were doing reconnaissance then for the 101st Airborne, the 12th Armored Division, and they all were like 30, 40 miles in back of us. But I would estimate it would have taken them two, three, or four days to get to that spot. And even after they reached there, they would have been considered, they were front line troops that I doubt if they themselves could have done anything. They would have, saving these people and doing things for them probably would have been dependent on whatever, whatever was being organized. And, this being the first discoveries, I don't imagine that they were prepared at that point really to do too much. Probably very hastily they organized relief, relief organizations to follow up immediately behind the combat troops, to, yeah, to feed and clothe and, but it was a horrible, horrible, horrible sight. And I think one of the, one of the

real terrible, terrible realities of it all, we were standing there looking at those bodies in horror. And when I think that some of our boys who were just 18, 19, or 20, looking at that, they didn't know that within a few hours they themselves would be killed, and were literally, blown to pieces by German anti-tank guns.

ER: All right. Can we just get back to the camp for a minute. Did you know if this particular camp was set up for Jews only, or was it a mixed camp?

PS: No, now, we had very little verbal contact. However, the chaplain that I've mentioned had with him an interpreter. And in fact he wrote in his articles that they were about half Jews, about half non-Jews, and that they were called, they were told that when they were gathered in and interned there, they were told that they were, this was being done to them because they were enemies of the State. Fifty percent Jews, fifty percent non-Jews, from Germany, from Poland, Russia, Holland, Italy.

ER: Were there any children there?

PS: We didn't see any, we didn't see any children, no. There might have been. See, now at the barracks buildings, they were hopeless as far as, yeah trying to do anything to save. There might have been children, in fact under these piles that we see here of bodies there might have been some children.

ER: But you're not really sure.

PS: No.

ER: Okay you mentioned that that was not your primary, your primary assignment was not to liberate the camp. It was to...

PS: Right.

ER: Then you, well, you came to the camp and then you radioed back and they took responsibility for taking care of the prisoners.

PS: Yeah. We had to continue on our way to try to achieve the mission on which a whole army, you know...

ER: How long did you stay at the camp?

PS: Well we, I don't think we were there more than 20 minutes, 30 minutes.

ER: Oh, that's all?

PS: In fact we, yeah. Well, even that. Actually, our mission failed partially because of that. We had, we fought our way then to this causeway. And just as we approached it, we were within about a mile or two. See our mission was to seize and hold that causeway, so all the armored divisions and everything in back of us could use it. Otherwise, if the Germans destroyed it before we seized it, it would mean a long detour around this lake, Ammersee, Lake Ammer. And as we...

ER: Do you know how to spell that?

PS: Yeah. A, double M, E-R-S, double E.

ER: Okay.

PS: Ammersee. It's about twenty to thirty miles northwest of Munich.

ER: Okay.

PS: But just as we approached they, it blew, so we failed in the mission.

ER: When you entered the camp, what was the reaction of the prisoners?

PS: They were, I think they were very timid at first, because I first their feel-, in fact, I spoke, by coincidence I met two about two years ago, who actually were liberated, one of the, two of the twenty that were liberated. And they were telling me that as we approached, they thought, see, the SS had just left. And when they heard our tanks, see, our tanks could be heard you know from long, long distances. And when they heard our tanks approaching, they thought we were just more German troops coming up. So when we approached and got in, I think they were, where they thought they were liberated when the SS left, when we approached they thought, well, you know, here, here we go again. But then when they realized we were Americans, of course they, they emotionally, they appeared naturally overjoyed. There was very, there was no verbal communication. None of us could speak German and none of them, either they couldn't or they didn't speak. But of course they appeared, oh, in a daze, but through it all of course they realized that this was the, you know, that they were at that point free.

ER: And there were no Germans left in the camp?

PS: No. None at all.

ER: No? Okay. You mentioned that you were not prepared with food and medical supplies. Do you know how long it took for them to get...

PS: I have no idea other than, I know that the troops in back of us, see the way we traveled, we left I think more enemy in back of us than in front of us. And I know that sometimes it took, the main, what was considered the front line to, it would take sometimes one, two, three, four days. I think in this case, I think I read or heard later that it took them about three days to work up to that point. Then, as I say, I doubt if they were equipped any more than we were to help them. And I would say that some of them had to die, had to have passed away between the time we liberated them and before they got the help that they needed.

ER: Did the experience of seeing the prisoners have any effect on your feeling about being part of the war and fighting Germany?

PS: Well, I think all, I think everyone, when they saw that, you know, the stark reality of what we were involved in, there were many, of course I, I personally wanted to fight. I mean, I knew what I was fighting for. But I think there were many, there were many. Don't forget a lot of them were kids who were 18, 19 when they, you know, came into this, from, you know, many parts of the country, the midwest and that. And, you know, the southwest, wherever, where it really, I don't think they truly realized the impact of what Germany, what the Axis powers would do to this world if they had conquered. And then too I realized how, how close victory came when the British evacuated Dunkirk. If Hitler had done just a few things then, actually they would have ruled the world. We wouldn't have had a chance to get into it. So there was, I think there was some of us that talked about this, and we realized what we were fighting for. But, that might have been, oh, it was, let's



say it was a majority. Most of them were good, you know, Americans who were anxious. But I think there were some who didn't know what they were fighting for. But I think after that, they not only realized what they were fighting for, but I think that they truly realized what we were fighting against. I think we were fighting against, you know, the most horrible regime of cruelty, annihilation, everything it stood for.

ER: You mentioned that you only really remained in the camp for about 20 minutes. But did that experience linger after you left? And has it had any influence on your thinking as you look back?

PS: The thinking, it might sound hard to, like, you know, a hard thinking, but, see we ourselves, like the survivors that we left there, I think actually we almost like envied them. They were liberated. They had survived. Where we, at the next turn of the road might be blown to pieces. We were in the middle of something that, I don't think we could really afford to truly relate, truly relate to any of this. Oh, it affected us. There's no question. But like...

ER: But were you aware that this was just one camp out of...

PS: Yeah, see...

ER: Hundreds? I mean did that even enter your minds?

PS: Yeah, well, oh certainly. See that, the final figure was say 12 million. Well we saw, oh hundreds, maybe four, five, six hundred. But, and we knew that this can't be the only one. But I mean, even then I don't think in any way we connected that with the what the final figure was going to be, of 12 million. Oh, it did affect us, surely. And, but we couldn't afford to let anything affect us too much, because like that night, if we had one or two hours to try to get a little bit of sleep, we couldn't afford to let this keep us awake. You know, we, it wasn't until, with me personally, really, the true impact didn't come for maybe a year or two after the war, that I was back home and in civilian life that all of these things started to really assume their proper perspective.

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

PS: Well in my own mind I can't imagine anything that could enter the mind of any human being that would in any way perpetrate crimes such as this. I mean, it's just absolutely beyond animals. I mean beasts would never, could never possibly plan and carry out. As far as what, what was behind it all, it's just the sick minds of probably very few people who caught on, they considered these people--well I think as far as the Jews were concerned, that started probably as the, the old story of the whipping boy. Whenever there's any problem within any country, but then I think it multiplied, just the desire for their pure Aryan race. Just a total sickness, I guess, that brought it all about.

ER: After you left the camp, was there any official or unofficial meeting of your unit to discuss what you had experienced at the camp? And do you know if there was a regimental history that included this experience?

PS: No, there was no, the only discussions would have been just between individuals, serving next to each other. No discus-, no formal discussions. In fact no group discussions. Really we couldn't. I mean we were, at that time, in fact the war department records give us credit for 102 days, consecutive days of contact with the enemy. And that meant 24 hours a day, day and night. And we had, no meetings. What was the second one?

ER: Just if you had an official meeting to discuss what had, you know, you had experienced.

PS: No. Just, each with his own thoughts, or with your buddy. Just individual discussions.

ER: Later on did you hear of any other servicemen who were involved in liberation of camps?

PS: I heard just of one. In my, after the war, a number of years later in fact, I just came in contact with one, and in conversation learned that he too was involved in experiences like this. Oh, undoubtedly I have seen and spoken to others without, you know, the subject coming up.

ER: Did you have any idea of the number of camps or the number of prisoners in captivity?

PS: Absolutely not. We never dreamed that it, even after we saw a few, we thought maybe we had seen the only few. No, we still didn't dream that it was on such a tremendous scale.

ER: When did you hear of the gassings of the Jews?

PS: I don't think we heard of that until after the war when, you know, it was, we read it in books and read it in papers. I don't think we heard or realized that part of it at all.

ER: You never came across any more camps in your travels? That was...

PS: Yeah, no, we came across a few more. In fact, one or two days later, when we were on our next mission, and approaching Munich, of course see at that time these places didn't have names. We saw, we were passing I think within a mile or so of what we certainly could see was a concentration camp. And again, we couldn't even go in. We sent a patrol in to make sure that there were no Germans left, to make sure that there were no prisoners on, like in burning buildings, or, really to make sure that there were none that were on the verge of death. I later, when I looked at the map--see these places had no names at that time--later when I looked on a map I saw the town right there that I know was right in our advance, was Dachau. So that, I know had to be Dachau.

ER: Right.

PS: But there again, only a small patrol of I think maybe 30 men from our outfit went in, and when it, made a quick survey and determined that there were none there whom they could save. I don't know if there, well there were probably survivors.

ER: There were survivors.

PS: Yeah. Then again, see all we could do...

ER: Were you the first unit to reach Dachau?

PS: Oh yeah, we were 30, 40 miles ahead of any other units. So there again all we could do was, again, I say, I, this, I think was Dachau. Looking on a map, that was the town that appeared to be right in our advance. There again, all we could do, unfortunately, was radio back to the rear, to the troops coming up behind us.

ER: Now, did any of the prisoners that you liberated ever contact you or your unit?

PS: No, I, none did. In fact, I don't think they even knew who we were, what unit we were. And as I say, of those 20, I doubt if very many of those 20 survived. I, two years ago, just accidentally, met two who were actually two of the survivors that day.

ER: Would you please describe that experience?

PS: Yeah, one of them was, my wife and I were out on the West Coast, and we were sitting, it was a hall. We were sitting next to two couples who were speaking quite a obvious German accent. And my wife started to speak to the one, to the woman next to her and learned that she was, that all four of them were survivors of concentration camps. And when she mentioned that, my wife said to her that, she pointed to me, she said, "My husband was involved in the liberation of a few." So she leaned over to me and said to me, "Which camps were you, were you in?" So the first one I said was, I said, "Well the first we entered was Landsberg." Well, when I said, "Landsberg," it was like a shock. I mean she almost, like hit the ceiling. She just jumped. And she jumped out of her chair, came over to me, and she became totally hysterical.

*Tape one, side two:*

ER: Wait, I'll tell you when.

PS: All right.

ER: Okay. All right. So, she jumped out of her chair.

PS: Yeah, she grabbed me by my shoulders, and she was yelling, "I've found my liberator!" She was just totally hysterical. She was screaming, "I've found my liberator!" I, she was crying and screaming, "I've found my liberator!" And she was hugging me and shaking my shoulders. By that time, there must have been like 500 people in this hall, and her husband quick jumped up, grabbed her, led her back to her seat. And that was the end of that incident, until, oh, about an hour, well, she kept leaning over to me and touching me. It was just pitiful. Then about an hour-and-a-half later we got up to leave, and we were walking out. My wife was on my left side, and she caught up to us, and she grabbed me by my right arm, and she just looked up at me. She was a short five feet. I was a tall six feet. She was just clutching my arm, just pulling on me, and looking up at me, and sort of whimpering. I looked down at her and she was just clinging to me, and looking up at me and whimpering. And. You know, it was, looking down at her, the way she was holding on to me, and whimpering, and the expression on her face, to me it was obvious that she was actually reliving, you know, the moments of liberation. You know, it was, even, that I was affected even more when a little later, oh well, this went on for, she just grabbed and wouldn't let go, and for about, well probably it was just a few minutes when her husband again came over and calmed her down, pacified her. And I saw her a few times after that, during the next few days. And then, what hit me real bad later when I judged her age, see, this was two years ago, which would have been forty years after the liberation of this death camp, and when I realized that, when I saw her I would judge that her age was in the late 50s. She could have been 58, 59. Then, when I realized that that was 40 years prior, that she was a girl of probably 18, 19 years old at the time, and that most of the prisoners we found had been interned like for three years, four years, five years, which meant that this girl, who was 18, 19 at liberation, could have been like 13, 14, 15 years old. Then, you know, other things started to catch up to me, the fact that the survivors, what did they, what did they survive really? Here, a girl who was interned at say 13, 14, or 15, liberated at 18, 19 or 20. And even then, what really was her liberation? You could see from her reaction how terribly scarred she was, what she was carrying, and also, the thinking that most of the survivors, as scarred as they were personally, lost entire families. Thinking of her, with all of her horrible, unspeakable experiences, she still in addition probably came out of it without a mother, father, sisters, brothers. See, it was in later years that all these things. Through the course of our combat, I really don't think that we had time to, to really, we couldn't afford to sympathize too much. I think we were...

ER: Well you were also very young.

PS: Yeah, and also that we were sympathizing with ourselves. We were in a hell of a spot. But, you know, the impact in later years was much worse on me, far, far worse than at the time. As bad as it was, it might be hard to understand that within five or ten minutes after we viewed those bodies, and the smoke, and the people hanging, within five or ten minutes, we were so diverted by, fifteen minutes later we were crossing the first wave over a railroad trestle bridge. On our, that had been partially destroyed. So, you know, really, you, you couldn't dwell too much on it. You couldn't afford. You'd go crazy. I did see people, men in my outfit who were, I always considered to be the roughest and toughest, who were literally carried away, who just broke, from, I guess, what we were experienced personally to, you know in our missions and seeing sights like this. I saw, a few, not many, but I personally saw three or four who I would consider the roughest and toughest men in our outfit. By men I don't mean mature men. You know, I still, when we're talking about boys--the average age of 18 to probably 25 or 26--but, who would laugh when shells came in. Suddenly, they just broke completely, and were carried; where they, had there been straight jackets there, they, you know, they should have been really put in straight jackets. They had to be held down, and led off, and evacuated. So there, there was a toll on us. It was the combination of these sights that we were seeing in the concentration camps, and our own, of course our own experiences.

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

PS: Only, we, see what I'm relating, when we got south of Munich, it was the first week in May. The war ended officially May 9th, and we were one of the first combat units in the European theater to get redeployment orders to the Pacific. We were there maybe a month or only, really only waiting for ship transport to the Pacific.

ER: So here after you finished with one experience, then you had to go to the Pacific.

PS: Yeah. But that, really, we've been talking about concentration camps, and what we saw of survivors. I think what we saw after, the final week of the war, I think what we saw was really as bad as the horrible sights within the camps, and that was seeing survivors wandering through the woods. When we got south of Munich, we were entering the heart of southern Bavaria. And already the Austrian Alps were in the distance. We were heading for Austria. And, once beyond Munich, traveling through the woods in our armored vehicles, we suddenly started to see these pitiful, pitiful figures, just darting in, trying to hide. They could have fit, trying to hide behind trees, and believe me, it didn't take, it could have taken a seedling, a, you know a twig...

ER: A weed, yeah.

PS: To hide them. The reason being again, they didn't know where, see, we were, see, as we were pushing down through Bavaria, there was a complete SS division directly ahead of us. And we were in contact with them. They were retreating, and see, these poor survivors didn't know, see, we, after all, just about another mile or less ahead of

us, was an SS division. So they weren't sure at first whether we were part of the SS division...

ER: Right.

PS: So they were, until they were sure that we were American troops, or that we weren't SS or *Wehrmacht*, then they started timidly to come out from the woods. And we were moving, and we couldn't stop. They were, some of them looked worse than the dead that we saw. You could see their bones protruding. What they were wearing, these threadbare prison uniforms, threadbare, no shoes, and although we speak of this as being early May in southern Bavaria, it was cold. It, the mornings, in fact, I have some pictures in my book here that quite a few of the mornings there was like two, three inches of snow on our armored vehicles. And these poor, it was just pitiful, survivors. We shouldn't even call them survivors. They were hungry. They were starved. They were going through the woods. And I guess at that time--I don't know, there were so few villages in that area. And I imagine they would not have ventured into the villages for fear of SS being in there or, I guess they didn't even know what kind of a reception they would get from German civilians. So they, we, as I say, we couldn't even stop. A couple of times when some of the boys finished like a can of C-rations and threw it, they, they scrambled, and there was nothing, you know, they were tin, little tin cans.

ER: Right.

PS: Quite a few times we stopped to regroup or maybe where the head of the column was running into fire, we would stop. And then, when they were sure of who we were, they would come in to the perimeter of, you know, our assembly point, and it just, see they're things that really--they're the things that are just so deep in the memory today, that we couldn't do, the worst of it is the frustration. For a while I personally felt so guilty that there was just nothing. See, we ourselves were, we really didn't have enough to eat ourselves. We were so far ahead, we had no food supply, no regular food supply, where, say the regular divisions, the regular combat troops--the infantry, artillery and so forth--had all the mess facilities, mess trucks, mess tents. We really had nothing. Each man had maybe a few cans of C-rations or a few cans of K-rations. And we ourselves at this point really didn't look much better than the, than these concentration camp survivors. And at times we didn't even have a can of C-rations or K-rations. We were completely, we had completely outrun our supply lines, and depended mostly on occasional air drops, when our own supply trucks couldn't get to us. So, I think--I'm not completely sure, but I believe--we were under orders not to give any of our...

ER: Food.

PS: Food, because again, hard as it sounds, we had a mission to defeat the enemy. Our mission could have been too to try to save these people, but you have to realize that number one above all was to defeat this cruel--see even then, the Germans were being fed the propaganda that this absolutely was the last push that the American and the other Allied troops would be capable of making, that we had completely outrun everything. And

they were trying to convince the people that there in the Austrian Alps, that they had so much strength that they were gonna push out and destroy, so that there still was something. In fact we, there was at that point even the fear that they had established a very strong redoubt in the heart of the Austrian Alps. We didn't know, but there was intelligence that led to the belief that it could be. So we, I'm sure we were under orders then not to give anything away. We had so little to give. We had no, they, they were freezing, they were starving. Their appearance, bones protruding. And you know one of the, another horrible reality that hit me later, that we could not save because we had to kill. Now isn't that, I mean, we're human beings. We're, yeah all of the boys in our outfit were kids who never knew what it was to be cruel to anybody, and here, we couldn't save because we had to go kill. I mean the, that little twist in the last number of years just seemed to get to me. What kind of people? And yet we were doing, naturally we had a cause, I don't mean, you know, as far as these boys, our boys were concerned, certainly it was no reflection on them. They had to do this.

ER: Do you think that had you not seen the victims of the camps you would have had these same feelings, of just being a soldier fighting, you know, on the front?

PS: Oh yeah, absolutely. Because not only fighting on the front, but, what we didn't see, after all there were very few troops that actually saw the true, the horrors that, I mean, out of the millions who were involved in warfare, there were probably just a few thousand who actually saw it first hand, what had been done, what was being done. But I think that all of this, whether we saw it or not, I feel that if I had not seen it myself, I would still feel the same as I do today, because what I didn't see I read about, I saw pictures of, I saw the Yad Vashem. And you know, it, I think that this, it makes it more real in my mind. And I think about it much more often because especially in later years, very often now my mind goes back to that. I'd say that it didn't, it didn't make me feel any stronger in my hatred for what was done. I think what it did if anything was make me think about it much more often.

ER: Did it affect your Judaism in any way? Your belief in your religion?

PS: Oh yes, I think definitely. The fact that, just the fact that Judaism again survived and we lost six million but the fact that we survived and that nobody caved in. I don't know of any one of the Jewish religion who said, "Hey, we better give this up, we might be next." I think if anything, my own feeling, my own faith is stronger than ever, because haven't we gone through this all through history and survived? This, certainly, there was no, never anything comparable to this, but I think, you know, to answer the question, no, my faith is stronger than ever because of this.

ER: Is there anything else you'd like to add to your testimony?

PS: Well, one thing I would like to add, when the war ended, we were deep in Austria and see all during the months that we were in combat, we could not write anything home because of censorship. Nothing whatsoever. So when the war ended, about two days later, I wrote a long letter home, and I didn't--see we already knew that we were gonna be

redeployed to the Pacific. So I didn't want to make it too gruesome. The family had enough to worry about. And I wanted to give an overall picture of the horrors of warfare without relating any personal experiences because I feared if I did, we had already been told that we not only were being redeployed to the Pacific, but also that we were going to be primary invasion troops of the Japanese mainland. We were that kind of a cavalry, mechanized cavalry and reconnaissance, although of course, thank God, it never came to pass. But knowing that that faced me and faced my family, well I just wanted to--all the things that had built up, to just tell them in a general, actually I never wa-, even was able to write that we were in combat, for which I was grateful. They were worried enough as it was. But this letter I wrote, I gave the horrors, the general horrors of warfare without giving any personal experiences, and what kids just taken out of the streets had to be subjected to, that was in every way totally inhuman, where day and night no sleep and constant contact with the enemy. Then I brought into the, what we have seen in the concentration camps. Then, in fact this letter was saved and I've read it a few times. The whole point of that letter was that with all that we went through, at least I personally had the satisfaction of knowing that it was so horrible that possibly 100,000,000 people had died because of the war, which was perpetrated by a few maniacs. Not only, the world was aware of the fact that 100,000,000 people were killed, but it was on such a large scale that just about everybody in this world either witnessed it or was fully aware of the horrors. And then my point was that as bad as it was, I had the satisfaction of knowing that if I ever had sons, they never, my sons or my sons' sons or their children, would absolutely never have to go through what I went through, because it just could never be. There had been wars in the past, but nothing on the scale of this, and because of the scale of this, that absolutely nothing, there could never be another war, for generations upon generations. And the fact of what was later referred to as the Holocaust, that that was so terrible. But here again, nothing like that could ever happen. Now, oh then, in later years, the term, the phrase became quite common of, "Never Again! Never Again!" Now unfortunately my faith as a result of what I saw in that phrase, "Never Again!" I, inside my own mind, it translates to, "Ever Again!" Because with what I predicted in that letter, almost from the day that World War II ended, there has been genocide from, on every continent on this earth. In Africa, from the northern, from Libya on the shores of the Mediterranean, all, Uganda--where they killed millions of their own people, the entire continent of Africa, the Middle East. Right at this moment in 1987 the genocide that's going on in, say in Afghanistan. And I think probably the worst of all, on a per capita basis, probably much, much worse than the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the genocide in the Southeast Asia--Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, where again, they consume their own people, by the millions. South America, the Argentine, and Chile. And my total thinking there is that this is going on and going on, something that I thought would have to end. And my feeling is that as long, relating all this to the phrase, "Never Again!" my feeling is that as long as genocide is permitted to exist on, in, against any people, anywhere on this earth, it can happen again to any other people anywhere else on this earth. That



really is what the frustrations that, when I think of what I saw and then relate to what I had hoped for, what I hoped would come out of this--that 12 million that died here at least, you know, there was a cause, and all the, probably 100,000,000 that died overall, that there was a cause. That, you know, there again, it's all just a matter of a lot of frustration.

ER: Okay, I want to thank you very much. This was a very important testimony. [pause] We are going to add something to this testimony.

PS: Between, when we entered Germany, I had mentioned previously that the first, I think the first indication we saw of the cruelty of the Nazi regime was the liberation of the displaced persons who were taken into Germany for forced labor. Our next indication came when we liberated, oh, a number of prisoner of war camps. At that point I had mentioned that we still had no, absolutely no knowledge of what lay ahead in the way of the concentration camps, the death camps. Before we hit the first of the concentration camps, we, the forewarning of what was to come was when we came upon some empty, not empty, some boxcars, railroad cars, two or three I believe there were, on a siding. Now, that in itself was very unusual, because any rolling stop, whether automobiles or trains, if they couldn't be moved, they were blown up. So, the fact that we saw there in that one spot two or three or four railroad cars intact immediately aroused our suspicion. We went over to the cars, and oh, I guess before we were within 100 feet of them, we knew what we were going to find because the odor. It wasn't an odor, it was a stench, a stench, a horrible stench. We, the cars were all sealed, steel bars blocking so the doors couldn't be pushed open from the inside. When we opened the cars, they were filled with the dead bodies of concentration camp. Evidently they had been in concentration camps that had been overrun, and we hadn't--maybe back in the woods or back in the hills, and I imagine the Germans were trying to evacuate them to concentration camps deeper down into Bavaria, which they I guess hoped would be a turning point of the war before our troops reached that part of Bavaria. But, I imagine they reached that point and then for some reason or other, either we overtook the Germans or for some reason or other they couldn't roll these cars any more. And they simply left them all locked up. I don't know how many days they were there. Every body within those cars was a dead body, and from all indications they had been there for quite a few days or more. Not a single live soul among them. That was our first indicator of what we were going to see, and of course what we saw in later days was that and far worse.

ER: Thank you.