

>> Allen: ...out in the woods.

>> Interviewer: It didn't last long, though, did it, the woods?

>> Allen: No.

>> Interviewer: Yeah.

>> Allen: And they're still building too.

>> Interviewer: Okay, thank you. Okay, they're ready to begin.

>> Allen: Ready? [coughs] Excuse me.

>> Interviewer: I just start any time? Okay, okay. Please tell us your name and where and when you were born.

>> Allen: Henry S. Allen Sr., born Allens-Bakers Crossroads, which is in Horry County. Date of birth is 3 September 1924. Went to Valley Forge Elementary School, Alexander Graham Junior High School, high school dropout.

>> Interviewer: All in Horry County?

>> Allen: No, I moved to -- after my father's death, I moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where I went to junior high school, which is Alexander Graham Junior High, and dropped out of high school and went to work in a shipyard in Wilmington, North Carolina. At a later date, I completed high school.

>> Interviewer: How did you come to be in the United States Army?

>> Allen: working on a defense job, I could have been deferred from service, working on ships for the Defense Department. But so many classmates and friends was in the service, and some was returning wounded, and some did not make it back who made the supreme sacrifice, so I felt like that I should go ahead and enter the service. I was entered through the draft system.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Where were you sent for your training, and what type of training did you get?

>> Allen: Originally, I was sent to Fort Bragg, which is in North Carolina. Then from Fort Bragg to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. I took basic training at Camp Shelby, basic, advanced, and individual training, and was assigned to a reconnaissance unit, which is a small unit, and, after several months training, was sent to Europe. And after arriving in Europe, we were assigned to Third Army and for the travel across France, Germany, and Austria.

>> Interviewer: What year were you originally shipped over to Europe?

>> Allen: We originally arrived in Europe on January 22, 1945.

>> Interviewer: What was your job when you first went over there?

>> Allen: My job assignment to the unit, primary duties was a mortared gunner, jeep driver. A mortar crew was the primary duty, but the assignment included other jobs, of course, secondary, and secondary being -- in a reconnaissance unit, you had primary duties like all jobs, but being assigned to the command, we drew missions of patrols, which is night patrols. And being the eyes and ears of the task force commander, we drew assignments of wherever we was needed in the area that we was in in the theater.

>> Interviewer: And where were you during this time? Where in Europe were you sent?

>> Allen: We -- [coughs] excuse me. The first assignment was -- the assembly area was Camp Lucky Strike, which is near Le Havre, France. After leaving Le Havre, we traveled up into Mainz [pronouncing "mins"], or "mines" I guess it would be, crossed the river at Mainz, and then crossed Germany, which the first area that I recall was near Frankfurt, going across, and all the way across Germany to Austria. We crossed the German-Austria border and traveled across Austria, and the final destination being Linz, Austria. And the last shots that I heard fired was at Horsching field, Linz-Traun area, and VE Day was May 7, 1945. So that's when the war ended in Europe, of course.

>> Interviewer: As you were working your way across France and into Austria, how much did you yourself know about what the Germans were doing, as far as the Holocaust is concerned?

>> Allen: Traveling across Germany, April 1945, I was on assignment to go to a POW camp, to liberate a POW camp. After that, on January the -- correction, on April 12, 1945, I went to a labor camp. My organization went to a labor camp, which is known as Ohrdruf death camp, and I saw a lot of atrocities which had happened at Ohrdruf. I saw a lot of bodies there that was left by the Germans, I saw where our own people was making the temporary interment there, and I saw many bodies stacked there, still pending interment.

I remember this quite well because the President of the United States had died. We'd just received word through BBC, which is British Broadcasting Corporation, that our President had passed away on that same day, so I remember it quite well, being at Ohrdruf.

>> Interviewer: Did you know that you were going into a POW camp to liberate it, did you know what you were going to find there, or was it all a shock to you?

>> Allen: Let me clarify, now. First was a POW camp, which we did not know -- because down in the ranks, this assignment was -- within 10, 15 minutes, we drew this assignment. The reason I remember it quite so well, we had come out of the hills and was refueling our armored vehicles, and the platoon commander received a message, "Proceed to coordinates XX." And at that coordinate, we received the mission that an armored task force was gonna spearhead in to a POW camp. We did not know -- I didn't know what a POW camp -- "where is that?" Because a lot of information was not received down to the squad level. You drew the assignment.

And so we proceeded, the armored task force, to the POW camp. And at this POW camp -- the name I cannot tell you of the stalag at this time. But on arrival there at approximately sunset, we secured the POW camp, trying to prevent the POWs from leaving the camp because so many of them were suffering from malnutrition. Those that had been there a time was like a skeleton, like death warmed over, which they was not supposed to be fed hard food because they was waiting for the medical personnel to catch up at the front line.

So our mission that night was to keep it secured, to keep any Germans -- and the reason they sent this task force in, the Germans had a habit, when Americans was moving up, to evacuate the prisoners to the rear. So that night, we secured the camp, and of course the next morning, we moved out to another assignment, so really I don't know what happened, except I know this, that the POWs, the candies and foods and anything that we had on our trucks, which we was not supposed to give to 'em because of their physical condition, and, you know, they sort of helped themselves, and we didn't say no.

Also, other things that I remember, such as we was not supposed to let 'em go into town that night. Of course, some way or another, they got our wire cutters and cut wires, and those that was able to go in went in scouting for the SS and people who had committed these atrocities and all at the prison camp. I never did get my wire cutters back. But a lot of 'em made it back and did single out -- the guards had put on civilian clothing and was trying to get out with the civilians to get lost where they wouldn't be identified. But some of these POWs was able to identify and brought 'em back, and they were placed in proper arrest, and I don't know what happened to 'em after that, of course.

That was my experience at the POW camp, but let me clarify now, the death camp was Ohrdruf, and this is where you saw the atrocities that had been committed. I have some photographs, which I hope to show at the end of this interview, which may clarify a lot, because a photograph can most certainly clear more than I explain in person.

>> Interviewer: What type of prisoner did you see when you arrived in camp? Were they old, young? Was it a men's or women's camp? Were there any children?

>> Allen: Ohrdruf, you're talking about?

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Allen: I don't recall the age. What I saw, it was mixed age, different people. They were suffering from malnutrition, and their dress and sanitation condition was so bad. First of all, let me clarify something. I saw in Ohrdruf barracks after barracks of people who were suffering from malnutrition. The sanitation condition was awful. They had lost weight until they were just skeletons. A lot of these people was being used as

labor forces there, and so it was different ages. But that was a long time ago, so I don't remember.

There was so many different nationalities, you name it, at these camps that was there in a lot of cases. Of course, you would think in Austria, for example, there would be Austrians, but it was not. I saw Hungarians. I saw Poles. I saw Czechs, British, Jewish, you name it. I guess from most all walks of life, they were there.

As you know, in the concentration camp -- if we may, let's go on to Mauthausen, and at Mauthausen --

>> Interviewer: Now, this is another concentration camp that you then went to?

>> Allen: That is absolutely correct. This is a concentration camp. First of all, we talked about a POW camp. Then we talked about a labor camp. Now let's talk about the concentration camp.

The concentration camp that I saw was located near Linz, Austria, just across the Enns River at the tiny village, at that time, of Mauthausen. The camp, the concentration camp, Mauthausen concentration camp was located half a mile, a mile uphill. And in this concentration camp, I saw wagons loaded with bodies, what we would call like loading cordwood. They were stacked like cordwood up, you know, like so. Also, saw 'em in trenches and various places for interment. They should have been interred earlier, but the Germans had not because they vacated when they knew the Americans were coming. They didn't bury a lot of dead, and a lot of the -- probable was waiting to go to the crematory.

In Mauthausen, I saw the crematory. Also, I saw the gas chambers. Let me clarify the gas chamber. They had modified and rigged showers, stalls, after a shower stall. I assumed, going

in there, they thought they was going for a shower when actually it was the gas. And this was the gas chambers that they used. I saw a lot of that there. Also, there was so much there. It's just hard to believe that people could be like that, to treat people the way they did and starve 'em for days and weeks and all, and looking like these people looked, again, it looked like they were dead, really, just skeleton and bones and eyes sunk back like a dead person.

>> Interviewer: So you saw the barracks where the prisoners were kept, you saw the crematoria itself where the bodies were burned after they had been gassed in the gas chambers, and you saw the gas chambers.

>> Allen: Yes.

>> Interviewer: The people that were there, tell us how they reacted when you arrived, the ones that were still left alive.

>> Allen: Let me clarify. First of all, I was not the first unit to arrive there. The concentration camp had been secured when my people arrived there. The mission that we went on was to see, I guess -- our commanders wanted to make sure that -- I remember my commander anyway, Captain Nelson, wanted to make sure that all his people in the unit saw the atrocities that had been committed. So the people that was there that was alive, that was well enough to communicate, was so happy with joy. But there again, you must remember, in most cases, those that was there was still suffering from malnutrition and was not able to communicate a great deal.

It's so hard to communicate because, first of all, we had to use concern about many things; first of all, the sorrow and your own feelings to those people. But there again, the military government was moving in medical personnel, was moving in personnel to assist these people, and so, therefore, I did not

have close contact with 'em at that time. If you wish, I can continue on parts that, if you wish, that -- what I saw afterwards at the temporary hospital, if you wish --

>> Interviewer: Sure.

>> Allen: -- if you'd like. Excuse me. [coughs] Later on -- this was VE Day, which was May 7th and 8th, that I'd like to refer to. As you know, VE Day meant Victory in Europe, and immediately after that, we met the Russians, and our mission was, the unit we was with, was to link up with the Russians, and we linked up with the Russian 7th parachute airborne division. And so after the formal meeting with the commander general of the division -- which is Stanley Reinhart from Ashville, North Carolina, who was the commander general of the unit -- and a Russian general, who the Russians blacked out his name -- I do not recall, but for some reason, they decided to black out, and his name was never known, to my knowledge.

After the socials was over and General Patton came up and met the Russians, had the ceremony, and so forth, my unit drew the mission of securing Hörsching airfield, which is an airfield in Austria near the town of Traun, 10 miles out of Linz on the wels highway, or near the wels highway. This airfield had many, many barracks for an airfield, and immediately, the American government started moving in POWs and DPs, displaced persons, from various camps. It was a concentration camp, Mauthausen, and three POW camps in the immediate vicinity. Plus, there was other subcamps from Mauthausen, which I don't recall the details because I wasn't there. But there was thousands of people being brought in as time permitted, the worst cases first. They brought, normally, the worst ones in first.

And these barracks at this airfield -- which we, the American government, and the British had bombed -- we converted them to temporary hospitals immediately. And these people was brought in

by stretcher there and was treated by the medical personnel, which they brought in immediately from the rear, and the ones that was able to fly was sent to the rear. And I stayed there for four months afterwards, and I saw thousands go through there, and when I left there, there was still thousands at this airfield waiting for evacuation, which you must keep in mind that a lot of 'em was not able to fly. A lot of 'em didn't make it. A lot of 'em was dead on arrival there from malnutrition and the treatment that they had gone through, the experience they had gone through.

So we had hundreds of thousands of people, I guess, or more, in that immediate area from these prison camps and the concentration camp, and the displaced persons was trying to get home, and in this four months that I was assigned there, I saw this happen. And I was happy to get out, away from there, but it was quite an experience. Now, I was not in the medical. My unit was assigned to secure the field, to patrol the field, to try to keep law and order, and to keep the planes in and out. Because these people were so sick and all and so happy to be free, that the Americans had freed 'em, they was wanting to meet with you anywhere they could stop you, get in your vehicle, and socialize with you, the ones that was able to walk and communicate. So, therefore, we had a problem of keeping the airfield clear, off the runways, for their own safety and ours too. So it was quite an experience. It was nice to share once, but I would not want to share it again. I was happy to move on to the rear.

>> Interviewer: Did any of the people you met during these few months tell you about their experiences in the concentration camps?

>> Allen: Yes, I talked with a few, and I've seen the markings, of course, on several, the tattoos. And of course Mauthausen had a tattoo shop also, where they tattooed numbers and so forth. Also, they had a tooth shop. I don't know whether you've heard

it called that, but this is where the patients were taken in, the prisoners were taken in, and I guess checked their teeth; if they had gold, extracted their teeth before they went in the crematory. So I saw that also. That's what they called it, or what we called it, the tooth shop, where they extracted the teeth. And I saw...oh, so many personal items there that was removed from them, I guess, before they went in. Going into the shower, had thousands and thousands of articles of clothing and things that had been taken from the prisoners before they was put to death, of course.

Oh, I'd like to tell you another story, if you'd like. I mentioned to you -- and this is -- I feel it ties to Holocaust for this reason. Six months prior to -- I am told, and I saw the house. As I recall, it was a barrack-type building, and the command decided that they would assist the prisoners, men, and so they decided to set up a house of ill repute. But they had brought in these prostitutes from the local villages or someplace -- I guess the local villages -- and charged 20 marks for this service, 5 dollars going to the prostitute -- correction, 5 marks going to the prostitute, 15 marks going to the command group of the concentration camp. So, therefore, they wasn't doing it for the prisoners. They was doing it to make money for themselves. So I thought I'd add that little part. I still remember that part.

>> Interviewer: How did you feel after you had these experiences of going through the concentration camps, the death camps? Can you remember your feelings at the time about what you were seeing?

>> Allen: Yes. It's a feeling that you wish to get rid of, that you could divorce it entirely, especially back younger days. It's something that you want to forget, the parts -- you have feeling -- as a human being, I think we all have feelings for our fellow man, fellow person, and it was...a lot of sympathy

for those people, and it was hard to concentrate on your everyday job, because, first of all, I had to put myself -- it could be me in that condition. It could have been my brother, my mother, my father, my sister. It could have been my family. But it so happened, I was American, being an American with the land of the free, so -- I'm referring to the displaced persons, of course. I saw in this location a thousand prisoners, many prisoners coming through, which was American, British, French, Dutch, you know, all different countries.

But, yeah, it's still there. You never shake it entirely. For many, many years, I refused to be interviewed. I just wanted to come home, get readjusted to life, to... Excuse me. Let me have a drink. Let me have a drink. Get a little thirsty.

I had the pleasure of marrying a beautiful young lady from North Carolina, and I'd like to tell you that story. This is not a Holocaust, but it's -- I, working on a fence job, my wife -- back in those days, young women, just like today, they answered the call of duty, and the call of duty was to work the fence jobs. She was assigned to a shipyard in Wilmington, North Carolina, as a tack welder for shipwrights. This is steel, and she just tacked the weld. So I was the linesman assigned to her group, to this group of welders, and my job was to keep the lines repaired to make sure that they had a line for the torque to work with. So I remember quite well when she pushed that shield up and I looked and, uh, so... After a few weeks of seeing each other -- I saw her at the beach and the lake and so forth -- we became good friends, and I married this young lady. So I was wanting to get home, forget everything, start a family, and move on with our lives.

>> Interviewer: How old were you during the months that you went through this experience in Europe?

>> Allen: I was 20. I went over -- I was 20 when I went in the service and came back, 21.

>> Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to tell today, what you -- out of your experiences, what you feel is the most important thing that stayed with you or anything we can learn from this, or anything else you would like to add?

>> Allen: Well, yes, I'd like to say something for the school, or to the children of today. I would encourage the children to stay in school, to get a good education, and to get involved in politics, not necessarily as a politician but behind the scenes. In all walks of life, I feel that this is the most important, that we assess people to get in political offices to make sure we have the best men and women in political offices, to support them, be a politician or be a support group to support this, making sure that they get the best education, where that we can help prevent ever having a dictator as Hitler and Tojo and others, that they can never have the power to bring death and causing people to make the supreme sacrifice.

You know, from what I study and understand of history of world war II, we had 55 million people who lost their lives through Holocaust and/or direct -- some way in world war II. Fifty-five million is a lot of people. Of course, the Jewish, as we know, lost over 5 million, the Russians millions and millions, and others that we could talk about. But if my memory serves me correctly, 55 million people lost which should have not been lost, and I feel that if our young people, which we have the best system in the world, I feel, we could help prevent this ever happening again. I think myself that the German people back in the '30s was hoodwinked because of the financial condition of Germany, and I feel that this is how Hitler got a stronghold, that people was looking for a leader, looking for support for their economy, and I'll always believe that this is how he came to power, is because people looked the other way because they

was hungry and hoping that we would have a leader to get 'em out of the financial condition they was in.

Excuse me. I'm sorry. Anything else?

>> Interviewer: Unless you'd like to add something.

>> Allen: No, I --

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Allen: I may have missed something. When it's all over with, I may remember. I don't -- I think I've talked enough, unless you have a question. Can you think of anything?

>> Interviewer: Did you -- before you actually were sent into the concentration camps, did you or any of the other soldiers know about concentration camps? Was that knowledge that you all had, or was this a surprise when you entered that? Had you heard of the concentration camps before?

>> Allen: Yes, I had heard of concentration camps prior to going in the service from the newsreels and so forth, that there was concentration camps, but I did not have any eyewitness facts because, as you know, news media, we didn't have the news media we have today. So, therefore, I had only hearsay. But, yes, I was aware of it. We had talked about concentration camps even down in training. In training, this was brought to our attention that, in Germany and throughout Europe, there was many, many concentration camps. Also, we was instructed to make sure that we was very careful going in, when we went in -- even down in training -- if we should go in, that we had people from all walks of life and all different countries, that we had to be very careful diplomatically of how we conducted ourselves. Yes, we knew about the concentration camps, but not in depth.

>> Interviewer: So going into it, that was still a shock to you, what you actually saw.

>> Allen: Oh, yes, yeah. You can be trained and told and told and told, and you never know until you actually experience it, till you get in there, the shock of what you see.

>> Interviewer: While you were in Germany, did you have any contact with villagers and German citizens to know whether they knew what was going on at the concentration camps?

>> Allen: You know, I'm glad you asked that question. I forgot to mention that earlier. I did talk with a lot of people in Austria and in Munich. I talked with people in Munich. I was assigned near Munich at Wasserburg when I went back to Germany after four months up in Austria. And, you know, I can't believe this, that people lived near the village, near the concentration camp of Mauthausen, or near Dachau, they swear to you that they knew nothing about it. And they'll swear to you -- or the ones I talked to swore -- you know, immediately, my response, "I don't understand how you could miss it, living so close. I can't believe you." I believe they lied. I think a lot of 'em knew about it, in my opinion.

>> Interviewer: Was there a smell in the air?

>> Allen: Yes.

>> Interviewer: We hear that you could tell just from the smell.

>> Allen: In the immediate area, yeah, you could smell the odor. First of all, what you'd have to do, the American military have to go in immediately and decontaminate it as much as you can. And since you asked this, every village we went into to occupy, immediately we used a spray for bugs and to -- DDT then in a powder form. We had to spray the village, and, yeah, we -- yeah,

there was an odor, yes. Yeah, you never forget the burnt -- the smell, the odor. You know, for a long, long time, it'd feel like you still had it in your nostrils too. It's here, not here, but it's there.

>> Interviewer: Okay, thank you.

>> Allen: Thank you.

>> Interviewer: A hard story to tell.

>> Allen: Yes.

>> Interviewer: Even after all these years.

00:35:03