

Lon Redman

00:00:13

>> Interviewer: Is -- hello? Yes. Yes, I can. Okay. Okay. we're on standby, so we'll be starting up here shortly.

>> Redman: Okay.

>> Interviewer: We're all set. Just start out with some basic questions. Okay. All right. You're ready? Okay. Could you please state your name?

>> Redman: Lon K. Redman, R-E-D-M-A-N.

>> Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me your place of birth and date of birth?

>> Redman: Konawa, Oklahoma, 4-10-20.

>> Interviewer: 4-10-20, okay. Tell me about growing up in Oklahoma.

>> Redman: Konawa is a town of 3,000; has been and still is. Born and raised up until I was 12 years old on a farm, a very small farm near Konawa. This was during the Dust Bowl in the Great Depression, and at that time, my family moved -- my immediate family moved from Konawa to Florida; Miami, Florida, to be exact. And things were much, much easier at that time. There was a lot more work to be had in South Florida, lot more to do, better schools, etcetera, etcetera.

>> Interviewer: Okay. How old were you when the war broke out then?

>> Redman: I was 21.

>> Interviewer: Twenty-one. When did you -- did you enlist, or were you drafted?

>> Redman: No.

>> Interviewer: Drafted?

>> Redman: I had the pleasure of being the first group that was drafted in the city of Miami, Florida.

>> Interviewer: And when was this?

>> Redman: This was the 10th of February, 1941.

>> Interviewer: And what unit did you --

>> Redman: I went into an infantry division. It was the 31st Infantry Division, which was the Dixie Division, which was made up of Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama National Guards. I was in there as a private making \$21 a month until -- a little later on, I got to be a corporal, and I got to be making \$54 a month; big money.

>> Interviewer: Well, tell me about your war experiences.

>> Redman: Well, I trained -- I have to tell a little story here. Coming from Konawa, Oklahoma, that's where the 90th Infantry Division was made up from in world war I. The patch that they wear is T-O. That means "Texas-Oklahoma" for world war I. After I was drafted, I finally went to OCS and got commissioned as a lieutenant. Went on through the war. Went to England -- naturally, went through all the training that was available in those days, the desert training and this and that and the other. Went to England. I was in the invasion, and we were the first unit all the way across Germany. Got back home. Went to my little hometown in Oklahoma. Now, this is many years past. I'm in uniform. I go into my local bank, and here is the president of the bank. He came out to greet me, and he says, "I see that you're from the 90th Division." I said, "It's true." I says, "Further, I was with the 357th Regiment C Company." He said, "Well, I got news for you because," he says, "that's the same company that I commanded in world war I."

>> Interviewer: Really?

>> Redman: Yeah. Everything that goes around comes around.

>> Interviewer: That's very true.

>> Redman: And this proves it.

>> Interviewer: Very true. So tell me, you were training in England --

>> Redman: Right.

>> Interviewer: -- with the 90th Infantry Division. Were you involved in D-Day?

>> Redman: Yes. We landed at D-Day.

>> Interviewer: Tell me about your experiences from D-Day on towards the end of the war.

>> Redman: Well, primarily, as you are aware, the infantry lives in the ground, and they're there for keeps. Either you get shot up and get out or you get sick or something else; otherwise, you stay right there. After we landed, we had a terribly, terribly tough time in getting ourselves organized and whatnot and getting everything moving. There's much difference between training exercises and not being shot at than there is from some guy shooting at you from the other side, and we had an awful lot of that. Had a lot of disorganization and so forth, but we got ourselves together and did a tremendous job during the European theater of operation war.

>> Interviewer: well, great. Tell me about towards the end of the war. The 90th was moving into -- towards Czechoslovakia.

>> Redman: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: About what time was this?

>> Redman: This was first part of April of '45.

>> Interviewer: '45.

>> Redman: And we were ordered -- we were up in the north portion of what turned out to be West Germany at a place called Weiden. We were ordered to go south into a redoubt area south of Czechoslovakia where the Germans had been ordered, so they said, or so the intelligence people said. They had been ordered into a redoubt and a reorganization area south of Czechoslovakia, and they were gonna counterattack us as we moved on in toward Berlin. It never came about, but that was the reason we were moving into Czechoslovakia and south of it, and that's where we ran into the Holocaust, the murder camps.

>> Interviewer: well, tell me about Flossenbürg from the beginning, please.

>> Redman: We, we got information of Flossenbürg through our normal channels. We knew about where the location was. We moved up to it with sufficient force to take it, and we found, upon our arrival, that they

had very little as far as guards. There was no really organized resistance, so we moved into it, and in a very short time, we had cleaned it out of all German guards, the dogs, SS, and so on, so it was a fairly simple, easy operation.

>> Interviewer: well, tell me about what did you see, things you saw when you first went into the camps.

>> Redman: well, just a little bit of background. Nature had bestowed this beautiful stadium affair on the ground over the years. It had -- this stadium affair had been formed with the layout of the landscape a horseshoe type. The upper back end of it was the village of Flossenbürg, and from the village of Flossenbürg, you could look out the back and see the activity in the camp because it was down on the next level.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Redman: But very obvious and very clear to those people living there, and this plays a part in the thing. On the next level, they actually had the camp. They had the barracks. They had the work places and so forth. And on the third level, we found out later, they had the ovens. So what it amounted to, they had -- and you visualize this ground sloping off away from the hill -- away from the village. They had rigged a gravity-fed or gravity-pulled railroad car, small, little car -- you probably have seen it -- and these little cars in most all of these camps. This one ran by gravity from up on the main camp, down through a tunnel, all the way into the ovens. And the little car would come rolling down there on its own, and a guy was standing there with a tong, and he, in turn, would turn this body around -- it was on a swivel -- the body around and then slide it right into the oven and do the cremation and then make his records and so on. And we discovered that later on as we were moving in to this thing, and it was very, as you can imagine, very, very repulsive, many, many bodies laying around, a few that were still alive that we naturally tried to help.

So we decided, after we got the place cleaned up and got our people notified to get the follow-up up forward to handle these people -- naturally, the front-line troops didn't waste a great lot of time on things in the back. We had units that handled those. But we decided that the thing to do here was to bring all the citizens out of their

homes and get them up into this camp and have them parade around and look at it. We did that. There wasn't a one of 'em that admitted that he knew the camp was there. There wasn't a one of 'em that admitted that he'd ever seen anything. And that went on for years, and as a matter of fact, I have some friends that go back to Germany quite frequently, and they've made a couple of trips back to Flossenbürg, and the people still don't admit it. And they were close enough to all of this activity that you could see it with the naked eye. You didn't need field glasses or anything. All you had to do was look. And this, by the way, was sort of typical with the Germans for a good, long time.

At the end of '45, I came back to the States. Stayed here a short time. Went back to Germany into the Occupation. During the years -- I stayed there four years. During those years, no one, even though we were bringing these troops back in from the east and what have you, not one of them would ever admit that he ever fought on the Western Front. All of them fought on the Eastern Front. And that went on for years, and finally, many years later, they started to admit this. And we said, "well, we want to see you guys. We want to meet up with you. We want to know what you look like." And sure enough, they did. They turned out and they said, "Okay, we were there. We were the guys that were shooting you up."

But back to the camps. They refused to acknowledge it completely, and they still refuse to, even today.

>> Interviewer: When you were in the camps, you said there was a lot of dead bodies and a few survivors around.

>> Redman: Right.

>> Interviewer: Did you have any contact with any of the inmates of the camp when you arrived?

>> Redman: Well, we talked to them, yes, yes. But those camps, those death camps, were -- I'm sure you've not been around large groups of dead people that have been laying around for some time. The stench is unbelievable, unbelievable. And --

>> Interviewer: How were they killed?

>> Redman: The thing that we tried to do in the short amount of time that we have there was to help get these people loaded -- or get them into a position so that they could be helped.

>> Interviewer: The people who were killed, how were they killed? Do you know?

>> Redman: Most of them appeared to have starved to death or worked to death or what have you. In other words, they were not shot.

>> Interviewer: Before you discovered Flossenbürg, did you or any of your unit have any idea this kind of stuff was going on in Germany, that these camps existed --

>> Redman: No.

>> Interviewer: -- that any of this was happening?

>> Redman: No.

>> Interviewer: None at all?

>> Redman: I say no; I, I, I didn't. And one of the things that we were aware of in the United States, to back up just a bit, would realize that everything was -- about the Germans was bad, bad, as was the Japanese. So our focus was really on those two, and we never really got -- I don't remember having seen in the press or what I had that pertained to me that indicated to me that there was something going on as we found out later there was, and the Holocaust and the people being sent back to Germany and all of this stuff. But to answer your question, no, I didn't, and as far as I know, the other people I was associated with didn't either.

>> Interviewer: What was your reactions then when you and your comrades discovered this just out of the blue, seemingly?

>> Redman: It's a very, very bitter pill, very bitter.

>> Interviewer: You were telling me about how you discovered all these very detailed records of all the inmates who were brought into the camp and who were killed. What other aspects of the camp can you tell me about?

>> Redman: Well, they, as I said, they would roll these down the hill, and it was a gravity thing, and then there was a group of prisoners up at the top -- this thing was on a small cable, and the thing that they -- and this cart, now, that I'm talking about is about this wide. You could lay one body on it. That's how big it was. They would crank that thing back up into its starting position. A couple of them up there would load a body, and back it would go again. And as I say, their record-keeping was meticulous. The Germans are known for this, and they were no different there. They recorded the person. They recorded his -- they took his hair if they wanted it. They knocked his gold teeth out and anything else that he might have that was of any interest to them. But they did -- it was no great problem. In other words, you didn't have to be a spy or a sleuth or anything to find out how many people had gone through there because it was right there, right in front of you, and all you had to do was pick it up because they were very, very keen on keeping good records.

>> Interviewer: How long were you there?

>> Redman: At Flossenbürg?

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Redman: I would say two days, probably; no more than that.

>> Interviewer: And where did you -- where did your unit go from there?

>> Redman: We went right on south to Cham, which is just east of Munich, and we took a little time off while we were there to go over and look at Dachau because Dachau had just been liberated, and it, again, was a bigger version of Flossenbürg. So all of our troops that wanted to could over and have a look at it, and most of them did. And --

>> Interviewer: How did the -- I'm sorry. Go ahead.

>> Redman: Then from Cham, we received a change in orders. In other words, we were going south and east. We received a change in orders to switch back and go back north to Prague, which is where we headed and where the war ended, matter of fact, during that period.

>> Interviewer: How did your experience at Flossenbürg -- did it, did it change the way you looked at the war or the way you fought the war, your attitude towards the attitude towards the enemy? How did it impact you?

>> Redman: I think there's been a lot more impact since then than there was at the time because actually, in the infantry, and I speak to that, you've really got nothing, nothing in your mind except protecting your hide and trying to get through this mess. So you don't really have too much time to get fixed on anything else, you know. You know that you're gonna be there till the end of the thing, so you've got to do everything possible to take care of yourself. So I would say that the effect on me personally was much greater after, after the whistle was blown, the shooting had stopped. It was much more so after that than it was exactly at that moment that I saw these people.

>> Interviewer: And what was that impact, do you think? How did it affect you? You say it was greater.

>> Redman: It was difficult, but again, it was not as unusual as you might think because on several occasions during the war, we had our own people shot up, and my division lost 3800 killed, 18,000 wounded. So we saw this really at close hand, and I've seen stacks of our guys. So it wasn't as, you know -- it wasn't something that I'd not seen before, and as I say, I don't think it affected me nearly as much at that particular moment as it did later on.

>> Interviewer: So your unit was around Prague when the war ended?

>> Redman: Mm-hmm. South Prague, yeah.

>> Interviewer: What happened the rest of your military service, then, after that?

>> Redman: Well, more war stories here.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Redman: We moved from our -- I was right outside of Susice. We moved back into Germany, and my unit moved up to Weiden, which is north. That's where we came from. And my particular battalion and my company moved on up to the north end of what became West Germany to a little place called Hof, H-O-F, and that's where we established our,

our point for supervising and bringing the Germans back and what have you. And as you know, part of Czechoslovakia was the Sudetenland, and immediately after the whistle blew and the war was over, the Russians came in and took over Czechoslovakia and booted out all the Germans. So we had this great influx coming in to us that we had to be particular with and see that they got off and things like that.

Then I stayed on there until the end of -- or the middle of December of '45. went back to the United States. My division was broken up. It's a reserve division, by the way. It was broken up. I came on back to the States and was reassigned to a new unit, and shortly after I got to the new unit, they were looking for some officers to go back to Germany, and I said, "I'll go," and I did. I went back over, and one other note in the connection to the Holocaust, after I got back on the second tour in 1946, I was assigned to command a prison that would be comparable here to a state prison. This prison was not for the Jewish Holocaust people. It was for the likes of the Russians, the Polish, Lithuanians, Latvians, and so forth, and those were the prisoners I had in this prison. And another group that I had at the same time was 5,000 Jews who, most of them, had been in the camps, one place or another, and they were in -- we had them in camps, feeding them, clothing them, so on and so forth, getting them out and getting them moved to where they were going, and this went on all the way through 1947.

>> Interviewer: If I could back you up a little bit, you talked about Dachau briefly, and you said that you were in the area of it.

>> Redman: Yeah.

>> Interviewer: Did you actually go and see Dachau?

>> Redman: Yes. Yes.

>> Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit about that, what you saw there?

>> Redman: It was just a big, big version of Flossenbürg. Loads of people, loads of people that had been laying there for long periods of time, and it, it can make you sick very quickly; terrible, really terrible. How, how anyone could do this, I have no idea. But they had railroad cars loaded with the bodies, and they had them stacked up

around in the camp itself, a stack here and a stack there. And that's what it was.

>> Interviewer: How long -- when you got to Dachau, how long had it been liberated by the time you got there?

>> Redman: I think about three days, and they were busy running -- getting everything cleaned up. I mean, they were busy getting cleaned up.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to add for this interview?

>> Redman: Well, nothing other than, I had one very memorable incident that I'll pass on.

>> Interviewer: Sure.

>> Redman: Whether you know or not or have read or heard or whatnot of the Malmedy Massacre in the Battle of the Bulge?

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Redman: Have you heard that? They had a bunch of Germans that put on American uniforms and came into the lines, and they murdered a bunch of people. After the war, I'm commanding this prison for displaced people, Russians and so on. They took and captured -- they recaptured, or they captured all of these guys, the Germans, that had made these attacks on our people, and they convicted them to hang. And who do you think they called to hang these people? Me. And I had -- I believe it was 21. They said, "We will send you the Army hangman." The Army had -- at that time, they had a master sergeant who had much experience in this. They said, "He'll be down to give you a hand and carry out this mission, and we will be sending you these prisoners very soon, so make preparations immediately." And the sergeant did show up. We went to work on the gallows, had them completed, and I called the headquarters and said, "Okay, the gallows are ready. Send the people on." And I didn't know what to do. I wasn't, I wasn't looking forward to this. And lo and behold, they said, "Well, we've got good news for you." They said, "You're not gonna have to hang 'em because the courts, the review courts, have found out that they were mistreated and so forth during their interrogations. Therefore, all

their sentences have been thrown out, and they're free people." And they're still running around Germany today. Every now and then, I pick up a paper and read about Colonel So-and-So who was tried for the massacre doing this, that, or the other. But it was very exciting.

>> Interviewer: How long -- could you tell me a little bit more about these DP camps you were in charge of?

>> Redman: I had -- in 1947, at that time, I had this prison which was under the control of the U.S. Military Government, which ran all the political activities. As a matter of fact, they ran West Germany, so on and so on. They had decreed that no German could touch a displaced person. If he murdered someone or he committed a crime or whatnot, they called on our people to go pick him up and put him into this Military Government prison, which is -- one of them -- there were two of them over there. I had one of them.

At about -- now, this was early '46, and about early '47, the Military Government came out and passed a rule and said, "Okay, we're taking off our regulation that the Germans cannot control the DPs, and we're giving it back to them," which is what they did, which put my place out of business because they took practically everyone that was in it, sent them back to Latvia, Lithuania, and Soviet Union and so forth. And that was the end of that phase of the thing. They were sent to wherever they wanted to go, supposedly. Then the other big camp operation that I had was, after I left the prison, I was assigned as a post commander down near Stuttgart, a little place called Göppingen, and in that area, in my area of operations, I had a town or a city called Ulm, U-L-M. And that's where we had 5,000 Baltic nationals, and we had 5,000 Jews, and we had UNRRA. That was the United Nations Relief association or whatever. They were actually running the thing, and I was overseeing the thing on the upper level, watching UNRRA to see that they got sufficient supplies and that the security on the place was adequate and that nobody was being harassed and all of this stuff. And we were moving those people as quickly as we could to where they wanted to go. But it did take a good, long time, and it was in 1947 before we got it cleared out completely.

>> Interviewer: Were these people at this camp -- you say they were Jews and Baltics. Were they camp survivors, or --

>> Redman: No, the Jews -- now, the Jews and the -- we had, we had them completely separated from the Latvians, Lithuanians, and the other Baltics, but they were all on their own there, and as I say, the bulk of them had been involved in some phase of the Holocaust; in other words, they had been in jail. They had been in these camps. Now, this prison that I mentioned earlier, the Military Government prison, had no Jews in it because we had taken all those out and sent them over to these centrally located camps where they got good -- well, they got food, they got adequate food, they got clothing and so on and were well taken care of, as well as we could.

>> Interviewer: What happened to them after they left the camp? Do you know?

>> Redman: They went, they went -- some went to Australia, and some went to the United States. Some went to Israel and wherever. Wherever they wanted to go, that was the chore of getting it done.

>> Interviewer: And you say that took up until '47?

>> Redman: Yeah, mm-hmm, yeah, yeah.

>> Interviewer: Okay, well, great. Well, what happened to you there after '47, after the camps were cleared out and everybody sent home?

>> Redman: Well, I got back to the United States in '49 after that tour. I had a really terrific, terrific tour. Learned a lot and so forth. I got back home, and the Army was being thrown away, as they're doing right now, exactly: Out. Get out. We don't need you anymore. Throw the equipment away. Anyway, I go along with a little of that, but not as much as they do.

Anyway, the same thing was happening when I got back, and the offices -- the OSS, which was the forerunner of the CIA, was going out of business at that time, and they were switching over to CIA. So I took an assignment with the CIA over to the Far East, and I worked over there for some years. I came back home and worked a little longer, and then I retired.

>> Interviewer: You retired to South Carolina? Is that how you arrived here?

>> Redman: Yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm.

>> Interviewer: Well, great.

>> Redman: Yeah. And to prove to you that what goes around comes around, when I was drafted in Miami, Florida, in '41, I was driving a truck for a guy that had just started his trucking business in 1941.

>> Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

>> Redman: And now, here it is 1992, and he's the same guy I'm working for today.

>> Interviewer: Well, that's terrific. Well, I'd like to thank you very much --

>> Redman: Okay.

>> Interviewer: -- on behalf of myself and the Holocaust Council.

>> Redman: My pleasure, and I hope this thing does a lot of good.

>> Interviewer: Okay.

>> Redman: Because we've got a lot of people that are non-believers.

>> Interviewer: Okay, well, thank you.

>> Redman: Thank you.

>> Interviewer: Try to get yourself unhooked.

00:32:30