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interview 2/14/95 Richard Seibel

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

[Something missing] the Germans or the Russians. And they

ran across this concentration camp, Mauthausen, and they

radioed in and said: We have come across something--we

don't know what it is. It is like a big jail and there's

people running all over. And I said: All right, you come

back. So patrol returned to our headquarters. I reinforced

the patrol, you must remember the war was still on, and I

went back and I made a thorough inspection the best I could

of Mauthausen, not knowing anything about a concentration

camp. And made the inspection and I returned to our

headquarters and I reported to our commanding general, Ge,

Dager, and told him what it was. Along with that. there was

two Americans in the camp, and one in particular, Lt. Jack

Taylor, who was a member of the OSS, he told me what

Mauthausen was. Then I told Gen. Dager what it was, and I

went to get some lunch. And the telephone rang. It was

Gen. Dager wanted to talk me. And he said: Dick, he said,

I want you to return to Mauthausen and take supreme command

of the camp. He said: You got a lousy job to do and he

said, you cannot accept any orders from anybody, and he

said, I have enough confidence in you to know that you will

do what is right,and therefore you will take command and

stay there and run it. And that's how it all about and

that's how I wound up in Mauthausen with the capture and the

occupation of the camp.

Sandy: OK, now go back to when you first came in before you

reported that---how people reacted to you.

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COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, actually and truly, it was unbelievable. I had never

seen anything like this before in my life. I knew nothing

of a concentration camp. We had heard of them, but that was

the extent of it, and to see all of these bodies piled up

and these starving sick people in the camp, I just couldn't

imagine it. We we didn't know what, actually and truly, we

didn't know what to do. And then, as I said, I returned,

but my initial shock when we found about 700 bodies lying

around and just piled up like wood, if you will. I couldn't

believe it, I just couldn't believe it. The -man's

inhumanity to man actually existed between men and women and

the starving, sick, dead people in that camp--unbelievable.

I, I, I stop and think about and I I don't know how I ever

managed to stay through it. It was, in my opinion, it was

that awful.

Sandy: When you first came back, what did the people in the

camp do to you?

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

They, they were so happy that we were there. Of course, we

felt that we had done a tremendous thing by capturing the

place and turning it to the Americans to solve a problem, if

you will. But it it, I can't describe to you exactly--we

were there and it was the second day. One of my people came

into the headquarters and said: You better come quick into

the main compound. He said: there's trouble. So I went

out, and there are four people on the pavement with their

throats cut. Which I had never seen before in my life. And

the political unrest in the camp, I couldn't believe it

because we were shocked actually and truly, that those

people would be fighting among themselves, and I think it

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was primarily in control of the camp. I just couldn't

believe it. Because, ah, here they are liberated people,

and fighting among themselves. I don't know what they were

fighting about, of course, it's it's a political, let's put

it that way, and so, then from that time on, we become very

strict. And we, we segregated camp, 18,000 people. We

segregated the camp by nationality, and got all of the

various nations nations living together rather than.... The

Poles hated the Russians, and so they were locked up

separately. And the other nations, like the Yugoslavians ah

anybody who was who was there, I learned this from from the

ah ah Yugoslavians. People who were the followers of King ?

, King Peter and Mahailowisz, they were not accepted by the

people who followed Tito. And therefore, there was great

unrest among those people. And it was all political, and we

were, we were really shocked. We thought, we here we are,

the great white father has liberated these people from a

concentration camp and here they are fighting among

themselves. So we took some very severe action and put a

stop to it--real quick.

Sandy: What about the initial reaction of the people when

you first came in?

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Mixed emotions, really and truly. Some people, I know,

would come up they want to touch me. Other people ah, were

not particularly concerned. But after we were there a

little while that all changed. And they they recognized us

as their saviors, if you will.

Sandy: What about--wasn't there one prisoner who had taken

over an office. Tell me about that.

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COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, that's sort of one of the highlights. Ah. We came

back. When we came back to occupy the camp and take it

over, we went into the headquarters and first of all I must

tell you, I speak only English and not too good at that, and

here are all these different nationalities, and for me to

correspond with them, no way. So there was a prisoner

there, and he still lives in London. His name is Premislav

Dobios, and correspond him, and it fat, I'll be seeing him

in Austria in May. He volunteered to be my interpreter, He

spoke 6 languages. And so, he was with me, and this fellow

who was sitting behind the desk, and, I don't know, 3-4

other people behind him. I said by an interpreter, I said:

What's he doing there? And he asked me. WEll, he was a

Russian major who was prisoner in the camp, and they had

taken over command of the camp. I said: Is that so? I

said will you please inform him that this is in the American

zone, and we are responsible for it and therefore we are in

command of the camp. He wouldn't budge, he wouldn't move.

I said: Please tell him again that we are responsible for

this camp and that I am personally in command. He wouldn't

move. So, I reached down and pulled out my 45 pistol and I

cocked it and I shoved it right across the desk in his face.

I said: Now you tell that s.o.b. to get out of here or I'm

going to shoot him. Boy, they took off just like that and

that was one of the highlights of our occupation. But they

wouldn't budge, they wouldn't move at all until I used some

force and that they understood.

Roll 2

Sandy: Tell me how bitter the enmities were and how much

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they wanted to bring their perpetrators to justice.

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, that was one thing that we had to all of the people

down because under the stress and strain that they had been

and all of a sudden they are free people,and it was very

difficult for them to accept that fact. And they had

certain rivalries, I'll say, in the camp, and we had to stop

that because so many people would be hurt. And ah, the the

feelings, we we were so surprised that they thought, we

thought, that they would just bow down and scrape, you know,

because here we had saved their lives and such. And so, we

were trying to be good guys. if you will, and then we had to

stop being good guys and be quite severe, if that's the

proper word, to get them to understand that it was still a

concentration camp and we were going to run it to the very

best of our ability and take care of them and we expected

cooperation from all of the people in the camp. And That's

that that was our feeling and how we got them in line to be

normal beings again.

Sandy: Tell me about how the Jews requested not be put with

their countries.

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

All right. Ah, of course, I came from a very small town in

Ohio. Population at that time was somewhere in the

neighborhood of 9000 people, and we had two Jewish families.

They weren't Jewish , as far as were concerned, they were

members of the community and didn't recognize them as Jews.

So my education in that respect was nil. One day, one of

the boys came in and said: There is a prisoner out here who

wants to see you. And I said: All right, bring him in. And

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he came in and I said: What do you want? And he said: I am

a Jew. And he said: I want to know why all the Jews in the

camp are not together. I said: That a good question. I

said: What's your nationality? He said: I'm a Hungarian.

He spoke excellent English. I said of all the hell you

people have been through before, being, ah, wearing the Star

of David on your on your clothing and being treated as Jews

and to severe punishment and severe actions, ah, that

doesn't happen anymore. I said: You may be a Jew, but to

me you are a Hungarian. I said: Judaism is your religion.

He said: Yes. He said: I know, but I think all the Jews

should be together. I said: Not according to my book. I

said: You are a Hungarian, therefore, you will live with

the Hungarians. And so finally, he accepted it. And this

is kind of odd. When he got ready to leave, he thanked me,

and he said: Sir. He said: Could you give me a couple of

Hershey bars. And from that time on, the Jewish zionist

organization from Switzerland, the chief of the zionist

organization plus other members of the organization came to

Mauthausen and really put the stem on me to put the Jews all

together. And I wouldn't do it. I said: Absolutely not.

I sid: I do not recognize these as Jews. I said: I

recognize them as a nationality, and that's the way it is

gonna be, and nobody is gonna change. And so they accepted

it, but not willingly, I'll put it that way. So from that

time on, we didn't have any problem, but I would not put

Jews together because they had been living under horrible

conditions isolated as Jews, and I wasn't gonna stand for

that, cause I didn't believe in it.

Sandy: When you tried to bring order in that first month or

so that you were there, what were your primary goals and

problems?

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COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, I would say, that the big problem we had was the

sickness that we had among the prisoners, primarily typhus

and Tuberculosis. I had doctors with me who kept me very

well posted and we deloused every prisoner in the camp with

DDT powder, and those people, and we called in two clearing

hospitals, big hospitals, army hospitals, and anybody who

was ill they were confined to a hospital. And so we

hospitalized while we were there, we hospitalized 1000s of

people and got them back on their feet and got and with

proper medical treatment and such, got them to where they

were normal beings again. We had abut 1300 people die while

we were there because they were beyond help. And we were

giving them the very best medical attention that we could.

Everybody was in the huge clearing hospital tents, and they

were all on cots. So that we tried to give them the best.

Then the other thing that was so important was food. And

upon the advice of my doctor friends, told me what I could

and couldn't do. so we started out giving them the same type

of food they had been receiving, very watered potato soup.

I mean it was just colored water, that's all. And so we did

that for, I don't know, for or three days, and then we

thinned it up a bit and made it a little thicker and then we

had found a warehouse in Linz, Austria of dehydrated

vegetables. And so we brought those in, so then we started

adding some vegetables to the potato soup and that was

lovely. They all liked it very much. And as it progressed,

they went on solid food--boiled potatoes and vegetables,

these dehydrated vegetable, but not in soup. And meat,

horse meat. See, in the German army, a mechanized division

has got umpteen horses and so in in the combat action,

you're driving all these horses ahead plus the ones that

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were there in Austria on the farms. So we butchered horses

and we fed them meat, potatoes and vegetables. And

coffee,of course. And bread. Now bread, that was something

that presented a bit of a problem. We found a bakery and we

got some people who were prisoners in the camp to do the

baking. We didn't have any yeast, all we had was oats, and

mixed oats mixed with water turned into bread--I think maybe

I'm responsible for for the oatbread in the United States

today. But, ah, we baked thousands and thousands of loaves

and we had to put because when they are first baked and they

come out, they are just nothing but squishy water. if you

will. So we put them in the warehouse to dry out. And after

they got dry enough that we could slice, every prisoner got

one slice of bread. and then after a little while, they got

two slices. And brad, eh, eh, prior to our occupation,

bread was the most the precious article of food that they

had in the camp or ever had or ever will. And so then it

got to where we could give them a quarter loaf of bread.

Ah, and our stock of bread kept building and building, so

finally, I said: OK. Give everybody half a loaf of bread.

One day one of the prisoners came in and said: Colonel, We

don't want anymore bread. We've got enough. [laughs] Which

was quite rare because bread, I say, you could get your head

bashed in or your throat cut for a half a piece of bread.

And they used to store in in their bunks and sleep on it.

If they hadn't eaten it.

Roll 3

Sandy: Did you bring in German civilians to help you with

the running of the camp?

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

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No. We didn't bring any civilians in, but we did bring in

about 400 German Wehrmacht soldiers. We had, see, the SS,

when they left, they disrupted everything. And they were

gonna burn the place down, but the prisoners said: Please

don't. And they didn't do it. But they had disrupted all

of the water supplies, the sewage, the electricity,

everything, there wasn't anything in the camp. And so we

found out that there was a prisoner of war camp where they

had a lot of prisoners who were capable of doing special

things. And so we got 400 German POW and brought them in to

do all of the things that were necessary, which helped us

tremendously. And they were they were conducted as soldiers

and they were not treated as prisoners, and we got along

very well. And they brought life back into the camp.

Sandy: How do you think they felt?

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, I remember the captain who was in put in command of

this detachment. His name was von Bruhl and he was an

Austrian. Ah, he couldn't believe it. They they were

combat soldiers and they they they really and truly didn't

believe that their own people and other people were being

treated like that. It was an experience for them the same

as for us.

Sandy: Tell me again about the sensory things like the

smell and the sound and the women's barracks.

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Well, I'll tell you. To explain or describe the condition of

the women in that barracks --words fail me. After we

occupied the camp in force, when I brought more people in,

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we burned all of those building because they were so full of

vermin it was--oh you couldn't believe it. It is beyond

imagination. The women ah, living under these horrible

horrible conditions, they were all gotten out of there, they

were all cleaned up, they were all deloused, and we just

burned the buildings down. Got rid of them, they were no

good. It's a--I don't know, to see these women, why they

were treated as they were and under the horrible conditions

that they were living, I don't know, I I have no answer for

that except the brutality. And again, man's inhumanity to

man. That's the only way I can describe it.

NEXT TWO PAGES OF COL. SEIBEL ARE VOICE OVER ONLY!!

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Sound roll 2. VOICE OVER ONLY

Sandy: Tell me about the kommandant of Mauthausen.

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Oh, Franz Ziereis was a colonel in the SS and he was in

command of of Mauthausen and two small camps down the road

called Gusen. In fact, Mauthausen was a control camp for 23

camps. And Ziereis was the boss man. And, of course, when

we captured the place, he was gone, and we were looking for

SS. And you know how you could find SS? They all had a

tatoo. Their blood type was tattooed here. And if they'd

got rid of their uniform and you didn't weren't sure, all

you had to do is tear open his sleeve and if there was a

tattoo there or a scar, they were former SS. And so Ziereis

left the camp. And we got word that he was down in the

village, living with his mistress. So we sent a patrol down

to get him. And they went up to this house--they had been

told where it was--and he started to run away, and he was

shot three times. He was shot once in the middle of the

back, once in the side of his arm, and the other side of his

body. And they brought him back,and I was told they brought

him into the camp. They said: Do you want to see him? I

said: I sure do. And so he was being interrogated and it

lasted for quite a little while. And he was being kept

alive on blood plasma and cigarettes. And in the

interrogation, he denied that he had ever hurt anyone. Or

caused anyone to be hurt, he was an innocent man. He did no

harm at all. So we got through questioning him, and, of

course, it is all being done by an interpreter,and then

relayed to me. And finally, he got tired and finished, no

more questions. And we didn't know--they said to me: What

shall we do with him? Oh, I said: We are all through with

the interrogation. Ah. By the way, aren't we out of blood

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Sound roll 2. VOICE OVER ONLY

plasma? And the fellow who was giving it to him, he said:

Yes, we are. And that was Colonel Ziereis, former

Kommandant of Mauthausen concentration camp.

COL RICHARD SEIBEL:

Ziereis used to put on a special show when Himmler would

visit Mauthausen. Ziereis would put on a special show for

him by special executions and such. Ziereis and his son,

ah, used to practice on prisoners, target practice, getting

ready for the hunting season. That is how brutal they were,

and not much consideration for a human being.

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