

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Virgil Myers**  
**August 13, 2010**  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of a recorded interview with Virgil Myers, conducted by Stephen Mize on August 13, 2010 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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## **VIRGIL MYERS**

### **August 13, 2010**

Question: It's the **United States** Holocaust Memorial Museum in **Washington, D.C.** It is Friday, 13 August 2010, 14:30 hours. We're interviewing Mr. **Virgil Myers**, who served in the 80<sup>th</sup> infantry division, **Patton's** third army, 317<sup>th</sup> regiment. Mr. **Myers**, can you briefly describe your childhood?

Answer: I was – I was brought up on a farm, and I lived on a farm until I was 18 years of age, and then I began to work for **Quaker Oats** company, and to go to junior college at night. And I graduated from the junior college, and then I was married at 20 years of age. And I still worked for **Quaker Oats** company. And I started to work for – I started to go to business college, which **Quaker Oats** paid for. And I graduated two years later, going to school at night, from business college. And I – my wife and I had a daughter a year and a half after we were first married. And so, the war came along. I was working at a job with **Quaker**, which was providing food for the military. And they deferred me one time for a year, then my name came up again, and I s-said well, I'll probably go this time. They said no, you have more important job here. And so they deferred me the second time. I was downtown one day and a lady came by and she stopped me by pulling my arm. She said, are you in the military? And I said, no ma'am, I work for **Quaker Oats** company. She said, well I have two sons and you look as healthy as they are. And I don't understand why that they're in the military and you're not. And that began to

worry me and to bear on my mind. And the next time when my deferment come up, they asked me, and I said no, I don't want it. Which turned out to be a bad decision on my part, I thought many, many times during the war.

Q: So, when – when and where did you enter the army?

A: I entered it Saint **Joseph** – well, actually at **Leavenworth, Kansas**. I was inducted from Saint **Joe, Missouri** and went into the army in **Leavenworth, Kansas**. Was transferred from **Leavenworth** to Camp **Hood, Texas**. And I was one of the first groups that their training period was reduced from 18 weeks to 12 weeks. And we had 12 weeks of basic training, which really amounted to one day of looking at a weapon and being told what it was, the next day you would tear that weapon down, clean it and put it back together many, many times. The next day you would spend a half a day in a schoolroom, showing videos of how that weapon was used in combat. And then the next day you would go on a different weapon. And that's the way it was for the 12 weeks. And you learned to ha – you hadn't night problems that you would use that weapon for a half a day, and then you were on a different type of a weapon. At the end of, really the first week that we were there was just being assigned, getting our billets, getting our clothes, and everything. So when it come right down to it, you only had 10 weeks of basic training, because the last week you were there, they were giving you orders to go home, and then to where you were to go from there. So you – at the time I went through, you really only had 10 weeks of basic training.

Q: And when were those dates in – when – when – when were those inclusive dates?

A: I we – I went in – in – on – on the – the first week in May, and the –

Q: Of year – year?

A: Of 1944, and I came home for 10 days furlough. Then I was sent to Fort **Mead, Maryland** and we got on a ship, the – th-the – the first part of September of 1944.

And from there we went to **Liverpool, England**, which took us 10 days to go across the ocean in a c – big convoy. And then we landed in **Liverpool**, we got off of one boat, walked down the dock, got on another boat, or ship, and went across the channel. And I got off at **Omaha Beach** on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. Went up on the hill at **Omaha Beach**, which at that time was a replacement center. They had two men tents there. And each t – and it rained every hour that we were on **Omaha Beach**, and they would tell – they told us when we were assigned to our tent, there is a bulletin board right down here. You look at that bulletin board at least once every four hours because your name will appear and you will be deployed from here to some unit. We had no idea where we were going to be deployed. On the second afternoon, they – we went to the bulletin board, and my name and elethe – and eleven other names were on the bulletin board, and we were told to load on a truck at 12 o'clock and at 12 o'clock we – 12 of us loaded on, and there was a sergeant on the truck. He says, I will be in charge of you until you reach the deployment area where you'll be assigned. Six hours later we ended up at **Pont A Mousson, France**

on the **Moselle** river. And the 80<sup>th</sup> – and when we got there, we actually unloaded on the west side of the river. And a first sergeant by the name of **Percy Smith** came up, and he was just a small fellow, about five foot six, smoking a big stogie. And he said, I want you fellows to know that you have just been assigned to Company **G**, of 317, the fightingest damned outfit in the **United States** Army. Well, maybe they all told us that, I don't know. But that was our approach when we first reached there. Lined up, he got our names, our serial number, and he said, is there anyone here that has ever fired a 60 millimeter mortar? And **Ken Mauer**(ph), who happened to have taken basic training in **Fort Hood** with me, was in the same group that I was in, which is a miracle for two people to be, but we were replacements. At that time we found out that the 80<sup>th</sup> had taken a lot of casualties, and that they needed replacements. So **Percy** said, you see that bunch of trees about three blocks down there? We said yes. He said, there's a sergeant by the name of **Fadinas**(ph). You report to him, and he's really gonna be glad to see you, because he lost five of his squad yesterday in an artillery barrage. So, that was our re – first experience to being near combat situation. And so we were assigned to the Company **G**, near **Dieulouard, France** on the 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> of September of 1944.

Q: I'm sorry sir, I should have asked straight away, what is your date of birth?

A: July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

Q: Thank you sir. I'm sorry, carry on.

A: No – so, we went down and met **Fadinas**(ph), reported to him. Turned out he was a Russian that had come over as a teenager, to get away from the Germans. And he had gotten his citizenship by volunteering to come into the **United States Army** when he was 18 years old. And at that time he was about 20. And so, he was a very dedicated American soldier, but he hated the Germans with a passion, because his parents and his grandparents both had been eliminated by the **SS** in **Russia**.

Q: What was your first experience, your first personal direct experience with combat?

A: My first personal experience was the next day. We were to take a labor camp on the east side of the **Moselle** river. We had then, after we landed, we went across the river near **Saint Genevieve**. And Company **G** was near **Saint Genevieve, France**, and we were to take over – a Polish labor camp that was supposed to be in some woods, that were just beyond where we were. Well, as we started out, we started through these woods, and the Germans laid in an artillery barrage. And I can remember that **Ken** and I were so naïve, that we were standing there and saying, oh look, that artillery shell hit that tree and knocked the whole top out of it. Because we'd never seen anything like that. And we were – were talking about how the shells were knocking the limbs off of these trees, never thinking about that we could get hit ourselves. Well, after they killed – shot about 12 shells, it seemed that the Germans would traverse to another area, and our lieutenant said, c'mon fellows, let's go.

Well, we got up and we started and we walked about 50 yards. And here was the fellow laying on the ground with the medics, and he had the top of his helmet and his head completely cut off with a piece of shrapnel. And I looked, and it was one of the fellows that rode up on the truck with me. Here's a guy that just got into combat, didn't even have his rifle off his shoulder, and was killed before we even got started. Well, the next time that shells started exploding in trees around us, **Ken** and I were the first ones to stick our heads into the roots of the trees, because we didn't want that to happen to us. And it was a very vivid experience of finding out what happens in combat, in a hurry. But we took that labor camp that day, and freed about 40 Polish labor – laborers out of a camp that were providing labor for an electrical company in the area of **Pont A Mousson**.

Q: Do you recall the name of the camp?

A: No, I don't. I di – at that time I was so dumb, and so naïve, that we didn't know anything. You know, thinking back to those days, compared to the army today, we were so dumb, and so naïve compared to what the soldiers are today, because they've been trained, they're professionals, they know what they're doing, they know what their assignments are. And we didn't even have an assignment before we came up that day before. And we were mortar men, and had had two days experience on a mortar before we came up to that i – to that day.

Q: Do you ver – do you remember the condition of the Polish prisoners, were they well cared for, were they –



A: No, they were – they were, as I remember, wearing very ragged clothes, dirty clothes. And that they were very skinny, and I would say that they were not well taken care of at all.

Q: Did you communicate with any of them?

A: No, no, we didn't. I didn't.

Q: And, you said you were a mortar man?

A: I was a 60 millimeter mortar man. Two days later –

Q: Hang – I'm sorry –

A: Oh, okay.

Q: – I'm sorry to interrupt you, I beg your pardon. Did – did you establish what sort of work were the prisoners engaged in?

A: What kind – you – they were now – it was our understanding that they were working an electrical plant in the area of **Pont A Mousson**, yeah.

Q: Was it – was it a hydro-electric, or was it coal driven, or –

A: Oh, no you're dri – it – it was one – there was no dams or anything around there, so it had to be some kind of a – a – like oil driven, or motor – some kind of motors.

Q: I see.

A: Yeah.

Q: I'm sorry. Carry on, please.

A: Yeah. So, that – that day was our experience of – of going into – to that. And so then we came back to the area of **Saint Genevieve**, and we then were assigned, our

next objective was to take a village and a road junction at **Sivry**, which was about 10 miles east of the area that we were at that time. Now, you understand that companies of infantrymen, one company will take an area and go forward. There will be two companies that usually will go forward, and one company in reserve. That next day we were in reserve. These other two companies had gone forward from **Dieulouard** east into **France**. And then we were brought up from reserve, and said your objective is to take this little village of **Sivry, s-i-v-r-y, France**. There is a road junction there that the Ge-Germans are using that comes down from the mountains of s – of **Saint – Saint Jane**, and **Saint Mihiel**, and coming down and furnishing supplies to the Germans up around **Metz**. So we want to cut that road off. We went into the little village of **Sivry**, set up our road blocks, never had a fire – shot fired at us. We went into this little village, dug our foxholes, set up our defenses in our – our area. At midnight that night, the Germans started firing from the mountains. Now, these are not peaks, these are big hills. They had set up their artillery and mortars on top of these two big hills that overlooked this valley, and at midnight they started firing on Company **G** because we were the only ones in this village at that time. And there's about 75 houses and a big church in this village. By daybreak there was not one building in that little village that was still standing. We went in that village that day, short of our component of **[indecipherable]** we had 169 men. And they shelled us every time anybody would move outside of a foxhole. They let us dig in, the oth – that afternoon before, and never fired on us. But that

night they started firing on that field, and the village. And by the next morning, all those houses were completely flat. And they kept firing all morning. The afternoon fog moved in, and it began to get dark about 4:30 in the afternoon and we got notice to pull out. Out of the 159, the daily report of Company **G** shows that 40 men walked out, and back up over the hill that night. Now, I don't know that all of them got killed. We know that about 38 of them got captured in that village, but the rest of them were injured, and that was – that was my first day of real combat, and you can become an experienced person of combat in a very short time.

Q: Were you involved in the **Battle of the Bulge** as well?

A: Yes. On – we were near **Saint Avoild, France**, near a little – in a little village called **Gunwaller**(ph), and we had just finished the battle of **Farebersviller** on November the 27<sup>th</sup>, through the 29<sup>th</sup>. And we had come up to **Saint Avoild**, and were in reserve. And we were there and we notice of a m – and about nine o'clock in the morning, there will be trucks here at 12 o'clock to load us up, because we're gonna take a trip up to **Luxembourg**. Well, nobody knew where the heck **Luxembourg** was. We didn't – had never heard of it even. And so we, after – on the way up there, well, we got talking about it and trying to figure out what we were gonna do. We had heard that the Germans had broke through up there, and that we were supposed to go up and support the troops that were up there. Well, it's about 125 miles from **Saint Avoild** up to where we were going. And that evening, or that night, we ended up just east of **Luxembourg** city at **Gonderange**, between **Gonderange** and

**Junglinster**. And the next morning we got notice, Company **G** was to be transferred, and we got in trucks and went up over – they call them mountains, we call them big hills here – they went over the big hill to **Steinsul(ph)**, a village of **Steinsul(ph)**. And from **Steinsul(ph)** we went to the west. He wa – he ended up in **Mersch** where headquarters company, but we were west of **Mersch** on the mountain west and going down the ridge north towards **Ettelbruck**. And we walked all evening, and up to about 10 o'clock at night, and we found a big barn, and it was sn – it was beginning to sleet. And they put us up – we all got into that barn, and laid down and slept til the next morning. But we could hear gunfire during the night, so we knew that we were getting close to the – the front. But it was still about five miles north before we ran into any activity at all, which was just west of **Ettelbruck**. And from there we went to **Niederfeulen**, and we were at **Niederfeulen** and then it began to snow and got cold as hell. Cold as hell. And the next day would have been the 23<sup>rd</sup> – well, we were in **Niederfeulen** a couple a – a couple of days, and then we were supposed to go north of **Niederfeulen** to **Bourscheid** and **Walscheid** and **Kehmen**. And as we went up the ridge, and got just south of **Kehmen**, they opened fire on us, and we didn't realize it, but they had a mountain to the east and north of that area, that they could see the whole area, it – it was like open country to them, and they could see us. And that was where what was called Bloody Ridge, today, yet today to the **Luxembourg** people, because we were tied down there for two days, and took severe – 317 took severe casualties all

that two days, because every time anybody got out of a foxhole, they would get shot at, because they could see them from across the valley from that mountain in the woods where they had their artillery and mortars dug in. And that's what most of it was, was shrapnel from artillery, and it would hit the frozen ground, and it would just skip, and hit people, if you were exposed. And from there – we were there two days. They drew us back, and then we went into **Hiderscheid**(ph), and into – we went into **Hiderscheid**(ph), and replaced – 319 had been in, that was another regiment of the 80<sup>th</sup>, and they – they pulled out and moved farther west, towards **Bastogne**, and we then replaced them at **Hiderscheid**(ph). And we got counterattacked that first night, and then we were able to save that. And then our objective was to go across the – it's the cliff river in that area that goes on down. But from there, we were on the front side of that mountain, near **Tadler** and **Ringel** and all that area, for almost two weeks, right in that area, because they were across the valley firing back at us, and hell, we couldn't move. We – every time we – we would move – plus the fact that supplies, we didn't have supplies, and then on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, we had – our objective was to start from **Ringel** to go down the valley and up over the mountain to **Bourscheid**, and to help to take **Bourscheid**. I was in what was called the weapons platoon, the fourth platoon, and I had 26 men that morning. And Captain **Namkowitz**(ph), who was the company commander said, **Myers**, take your men and – and – and along with **Heizer**(ph) and his machine gun, you fellows walk up the – the fire alley in the forest, because, he said, you can

carry your weapons, we don't need you til you get to the top. Well, we didn't know it, but they had an 88 dug in up at the top, and there was 15 to 18 inches of snow on the ground, and it was 18 below zero that morning, and – or that afternoon. As we walked up the hill – now, out of my squad that – that day, of 12 men, I had nine men that had just come up, because they were new replacements, just – and I – I was an old man then, because I'd had from October, November, December, so I had 90 days of experience of – of that. I was 26 years old, and everybody wanted to get into my squad because I was the oldest man there. And they thought that because I was older that I was – I was – maybe could keep them safe. Well, tha-that didn't ha – that wasn't the way it was in combat. You just were lucky wherever you were. But anyway, I had young men, inexperienced, and as the 88 started firing down the firepath at us, they started running. We kept hollering, drop in the snow, drop in the snow. Well, they didn't do it. They ran to get into the trees. And the Germans had wire traps all up the hill, with bouncing **Betty** booby traps that were half gallon bucket size, s-syrup bucket size, that would jump 40 inches in the air and explode, and they were filled with shrapnel. And they were devastating. Well, when we started to run, **Heizer**(ph) and I hit the ground in the center of the firepath, in the snow. They were running, they hit these, and out of the 26 men, 22 of them got – were casualties. And that afternoon, that – after that afternoon, four o'clock they called off the – the advance. About the fi – si – third or fourth shell that that 88 fired, tanks started firing at that 88 and finally knocked it out. But that was – we

only had about four or five shells from that 88, and that was all because they knocked it out. But that evening, there were so many casualties in **G** Company, that that evening, not only in **G** Company, but in the second battalion going up that hill, that when they called it off, they've all had – called for volunteers of 22 men from the company, and two officers to carry the casualties to – back towards **Ringel**, so they could be put in trucks and into ambulances to be taken back to the first aid. And that day, after that day, **gi** – **G** Company had less than 50 men in – in it that day, and we were attached then for three more days to another company, because we were declared inoperative. So, until we could get more replacements up, why, we were attached to another company and that – that was one day that you don't forget.

Q: After – i-it seems to me that in an extraordinarily compressed period of time, you experienced a tremendous amount of combat, and saw a lot of losses and a lot of men killed. At that point, did that experience change the way that you felt about the war, and your role in it?

A: Well, I went to Captain **Namkowitz**(ph), and I said, Captain, I had – by that time I had a squad of six men, myself, and then the other sergeant, Sergeant **Magarlick**(ph) had six men. We had lost so many men I went to Captain **Namkowitz**(ph) and I said, I think that I'm bad luck, and that I hadn't b – outta be a squad leader. He said, **Myers**, he said, it's not your fault. He said, work with me. He said, you've got more experience than anybody else around here now. He said,

don't do this to me. And so that's – that's the only reason I stayed, was because he – he asked me to, and he talked me out of it, because I really felt that I was bad luck.

Q: Did you, as you were advancing, come across any concentration camps?

A: No, not in that area.

Q: When – after you moved into the **Rhineland** and what have you, wh-what was your first experience o-of coming across a camp?

A: The first experience, of course, was – was, for me was not until we got clear to boo – to **Weimar**.

Q: And when was that? Da-Datewise?

A: And that was April the 12<sup>th</sup>, the morning of April – when – when Company **G**, and the 80<sup>th</sup> division came up to **Weimar**, and the 319<sup>th</sup> came to **Weimar** and they sent a message to the mayor of **Weimar**, surrender the city, or we will attack it with tanks and artillery.

Q: Yeah, 319 was armor, was it not?

A: No, 319 was another – was another regiment of the 80<sup>th</sup> division.

Q: Okay, so it was infantry.

A: It was infantry. And they came up and all of us, each regiment had an armored unit attached to it, like the 307. Three – 307 tank battalion was attached to the second battalion of 317. But three wee – actually, 317 as we came – we had been in **Erfurt** for three days fighting. And then we started and came to **Weimar**, and it's only 10 miles to **Weimar** from **Erfurt**. And when we got to **Erfurt**, why 319 was



ahead of us, and 317 was in reserve. They call it reserve, we were held – we were all like a mile back of them, so that if they got in trouble, why we could be deployed up to help them. But we stopped and we sat there for – for quite a – for about three or four hours. And finally, why they gave the message to the mayor to surrender the city, and he and a lady on a bicycle came out with a white flag, and they surrendered the city. So, 319 went around the city, 317, with the second battalion, came into **Weimar** and we were the only ones that was in **Weimar** from the 80<sup>th</sup> division actually, because 319 skirted it and went around, and 318 followed them. 317 was left in reserve so that we could – our – ou-our assignment was to do police work and keep control of the city. And that's what we did. 317, the three – the second battalion walked right down the main street from the west, into **Weimar**. As we walked down the street, we were on both sides of the street, about five, 10 yards apart, each one of us, as we got downtown, the civilians that were on the street as we walked by, would turn their back to us and face the walls of the stores, and wouldn't look at us. Wouldn't look at us at all. But the kids, the kids would run out and say, have you got any **gumy(ph), gumy(ph), gumy(ph) chocolate**. And so they were just like kids back home. And when we got downtown, to **Weimar**, we went down to the plaza that is right in the center of town by the city hall, and company **G**, Captain **Namkowitz(ph)** set his headquarters up in a building right down on the – on the square. So he signed all the different ones. I had to s-set up on a street with my mortars, near the railroad station, so that I could see down the railroad tracks, in

case that a train come, or something like that. So, we were there. We kept seeing these people who were in striped suits. Not many, but we would see them once in awhile, walk by. Finally Captain **Namkowitz**(ph) told **Percy Smith**, who was the first sergeant of **G** Company, he said, **Percy**, he says, you take down **Smith** the **Jeep** driver in a **Jeep** and get **Myers**, and you guys go see if you can find out where the hell these guys are coming from. He said, wa – where are they coming from? He said, we'd see – they must be a – a prison, or a jail around here that they're getting out of. So, we started, and we asked four different civilians, where are these prisoners? **Nix**(ph), **nixt**(ph), we don't know, we don't know. They didn't know where they were coming from. Well, we went down to the railroad st – track, or down by the station and saw two boys that were about 10 - 12 years old. **Percy** could speak a little bit of German, and **Percy** got out of the **Jeep** and he went over to these boys, he said, where are these prisoners coming from? And they said, oh, way out on the hill, way up on a hill, way out in the country. So, we started to drive out in that direction. We drove for about four miles, and we thi – and we got to talking, we said, you know, those damn kids, they – they've given us bad direction, there can't be anything out here, and we still didn't see it. But we were on a country, a dirt road that had been traveled a lot. So, **Don** said, well, we'll just follow this up around the hill. So we went up around the hill, and then right at the top of this hill, here was a 10 foot wire fence. Guys were just leaning against it, just looking. We drove up to the gate, and we didn't know what it was. We saw all these

buildings. Now, at the wi – at that time, we didn't realize that we were at the back gate of **Buchenwald**, which was down by where the museum is now. But there was a fence all around that area on the west side of the camp, and we came up on the west side of the camp. And **Percy** got out and he asked the guy, he said, what is this place, anyway? And the guy says, **ein minute, ein minute**. He goes into a barracks and comes out with a little fellow that was five foot six. Skinny? God, he didn't weigh 70 pounds, he didn't weigh 60 pounds. He said, my name is so and so, and I am from **Lithuania**. He said, I've been in this camp for four years. He could speak English, very good English. He said, I been in this camp for four years, and he said, this is **Buchenwald** work camp. **Percy** said, work camp, what the hell is a work camp? He said, well, we furnish – he said, they come here and this is a big camp. He said, there's other little camps all around, at the industries and out in the farms, that furnish labor from here. And he said – **Percy** said, well, who's in charge here? He said, well, the **SSers** were until last night, and they heard that you were headed this way, and, he said, they ran. He said, there was about 3,000 of them here. We said, 3,000? And he said yes, he said, there was approximately 3,000 here before you came here. He said, how many people are in this camp, anyway? Well, we could see – now, where we came in, there were low one, just one story buildings that looked like they had been put up in a hurry. They had just – I don't know whether it was straw board, or what, but it wasn't – it – it was – looked like temporary buildings. And so he said, this camp here, is – is the west part – he said,

the main gate is over there. Well, we didn't know that there was a name – main gate. And later on, we found out that other people from 317 had come in on the front side of the gate. But he said, there was some guys here yesterday in a motorized vehicle, kind of like a tank, but he said, they didn't even come in. They just were here for a short time, and he said, they left. And we said, well, what did you have to – what are you eating? And he said, well, he said, the **SSers** had some potato peelings that they had peeled yesterday and threw in the dump, and he said, we got them and washed them, and then, he said, we went over there and got green grass and brought over and put in with that, and he said, that's all we've had to eat today. So, we went inside the camp, just to the first row of buildings, and in front of the barracks, they had people laying out, and **Percy** says, what happened to them? Oh, they just died. They just died. And about that time, here come six guys pulling a two wheel cart up from around the corner, down below. And they were picking these dead guys up and putting them on this two wheel cart. And I don't know what they were doing with them when they got them, you know. But **Percy** said, well, I don't remember was **Percy**, me or **Don** said, what do they do with them? Well, he says, they have a cremator – had – they have an oven up there. An oven? Yeah, he said, they burn them. He said, they burn the bodies. Well, come find out they had two crematories there with four ovens in each building, and they worked them 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And – so **Percy** said, how many people are here? He said, well, we think there is about 26,000 here now. And **Percy** said, who's in

charge? Well, we have a committee that's in charge, but, he said, really nobody's in charge. He said, a bunch of them took off after the **SSers**. He said, they broke into the armament, and they are after the **SSers** now. And he said, we've got ninety – now I'm – I – I might be wrong, but he said – I think that he said, we have 19 of them locked up on the other side in a building. And so **Percy** and I and **Don** went back to town and Captain **Namkowitz**(ph), we told him what we'd found. He said, well, I'm going to call division and tell them what's there. So they said, well, we'll have some trucks with some food and blankets and medicine up there tomorrow. So, I was assigned with my five man – six man, I was assigned from the 13<sup>th</sup>, the 14<sup>th</sup> and up until about noon on the 15<sup>th</sup> to go around and pick up these guys that were in – straggling in town, and to take them back out to camp for – so that they could get medicine. And some of the fellows didn't want to go back out to camp. But we told them that they were gonna be food out there, the best we could. Tried to tell them, but we had one fellow that was at the edge of town, and he came out of a house eating a potato that must have weighed a pound. And he was just eating that thing just like it was a candy bar. He walked out to – almost to where our je – truck was – **Jeep**, and he fell over. Well, we picked him up, put him in the **Jeep** and took him back out to the camp, and Dr. **Bob** out there, he was our battalion medic, he was out there and by that time they had set up some medics also that had got there. And he said, this poor guy, he didn't weigh 60 pounds. He said, this poor guy was e – we told him what happened, and he said, well, probably the starch in the potato was just

too much for his system and he just can't handle it, he just couldn't handle it. So, on the 15<sup>th</sup>, then, I was r – they – I was relieved by – now, I – I think it was people – fellows from a cavalry that replaced us, but by that time then, our headquarter, our company headquarters had moved, and we went to **Gina**(ph). **Gina**(ph) was east of there, and so we went to **Gina**(ph) from – from there.

Q: When you said you su – you supplied them with blankets and medicine and – and food and what have you, what sort of food did you provide? Were they **K** rations, was it [indecipherable] what was it?

A: It da – da – I ha – I'd – I honestly don't know, because I didn't go into the camp to see, but I would assume, I would assume that it was probably **K** ra – **K** rations or something like that, the f – on that first truck.

Q: Sure. And how long – how long of a di – did you spend actually inside the camp itself?

A: I would say th – probably th – 30 minutes maybe. Maybe 30 minutes that we took and saw what was happening and everything. The guys never – they just looked by us when we were in there. Now, some of them, four or five trailed along with us, as we were walking in there. But other than that, they were so sick. And I didn't realize it until this year, when we were in **Weimar** and was talking to fellows that were in the camp, that the backside of **Buchenwald** was called the death camp. That when they had people that were so sick and so **emancipated** that they thought they were gonna die, they would bring them back to that part of the camp and – and

put them there. They asked me in the evening if I would tell about finding the camp and what I had seen and such as this. One fellow, afterwards he said, he was in the cr – in the group, and he held his hand up, and I said, yes, sir? He said, what you have just said, I can verify every word, because, he said, I was a 16 year old Jewish boy that had typhus fever, that they had put me into the death camp. I said, what do you mean death camp? He said, that's what that part of the camp was called. If they expected you to die in the next four or five days. And he said, I was destined to be eliminated in four or five days, but you guys came along, and saved my life. And I said no, the **SSers** were gone. We didn't save you, we – we just happened to come up there. He said no, they knew that you were coming and they left. So, he said, I want to come up and shake your hand. And he did, and he started crying, and so did I. And so, he said, my name is – my name is **Klein**. He said, I have been an American citizen for over 45 years and I'm a r – a – a Jewish rabbi in **California**. I have his picture with his wife and his son, that had been invited to come back to **Weimar** as one of the former prisoners. And he said, I just want to thank you, because you saved my life. And I said, no, we didn't. But, I said – he said, well, as far as I'm concerned, you did, because the next day I was in a hospital in **Gina**(ph), and two days after that, I was in **England**, and he said, then I was sent to the **United States** to completely recover, and that's where I've stayed.

Q: As you pressed on, did you come across any of the subcamps, or any other concentration camps as you **[indecipherable]**

A: Now, they told us that there were subcamps all around, that they furnished labor out of there. Now, part of our 319 came by a camp called **Orndorf**(ph), which was to the west of there. And this year we went back to **Orndorf**(ph) and course all it is there is the same way at – at **Buchenwald**, is just where the buildings were, and a monument that they have there in a couple places. But at that time, it was a hellhole, because they didn't treat them as nice as they treated them even in **Buchenwald**, which it was horrible.

Q: Having seen what you saw in the camps, in **Buchenwald**, did it alter your view of th – of the war, and your role in it?

A: Well, it made me realize why that we were fighting. That – that solidified why we were over there.

Q: And did it alter the way that you dealt or interacted with the German populace?

A: Not really, not really. Because I didn't – w-we were in the infantry in the line companies, and we weren't in headquarters and such as that. So, w-we only got buildings that had been assigned to us. We weren't in the job of taking buildings, or taking – making our own assignments. But I would say that this time, at the banquet, the prime minister of [indecipherable] looked at we five guys that were there, and he sa – when he started talking, he said, I want to thank you for freeing the German people from the tyranny of the Nazi political regime, because he said, we were prisoners and didn't realize it as well as these people here at **Buchenwald**



were. And I thought that was quite a statement. And – but it proves what can happen to politicians when they get too much power.

Q: When you first came across **Buchenwald**, did you have any idea what you were looking at? Di – wa – wou – had you heard stories, had you heard reports about concentration camps, or was – did it completely take you by surprise?

A: Well, this took us by surprise, because we had heard of concentration camps, but we didn't really know what they were. We hadn't seen any – I hadn't seen any pictures of any, and I didn't know that they were as big as what **Buchenwald** was, damn, that covered 400 acres. And the – the buildings that were there, there were three story buildings, there were two story buildings, and then there were a lot of these pre – kind of prefab buildings around the west side, the edge there, where we came up. And that, I couldn't – I'd – I was amazed, really, because I'd – I didn't realize that – that the labor camp, what the heck they were doing with that many people for a labor camp, you know?

Q: Sure. Did you stay on after the war, with the – with the unit in **Germany**?

A: In **Germany**, I stayed. I – I – I didn't come home until the 16<sup>th</sup> of January of 1946. After the war, or at the end of the – after the war was over, **Percy Smith** got to come home because he had enough points, and I took over as first sergeant of **G** Company, and I was acting gi – first sergeant for almost five months. And so, from – we were at **Shpital**(ph) on the Russian line, and we were – we furnished guard duty fo – at **[indecipherable]** **Goering** and **Hitler** and all had the paintings and all

of the beautiful things, artwork that was done, but I never got to go inside until 25 years after that, the wife and I went back and I got to go inside of the **Neuschwateine**(ph) castle there. And that was first time. I was on guard duty outside for almost a month, but I didn't get inside. But I did then, but –

Q: Do you remember receiving your orders home?

A: Well, yes, because I gave them to myself. At the – we were – we were in **Bavaria** up until November, then we went to **Czechoslovakia** when they had an election of – in **Czechoslovakia**. Then we came back to **Schongau**, and at **Schongau** we were there probably – I said November, it was October when we went to – to czechosl – or to – yeah, **Czechoslovakia**. And then we came back **Schongau** for a month, then we went to **Aufschaffensburg**(ph), **Germany**, which at that time was a deployment point. And our job was that they would send in **G.I.s** from all over **Europe** into **Aufschaffensburg**(ph) and each morning I would get orders – well, when they would come in, I would get their orders, that they would – the name, and how many points they had, and their number. And then I would get each morning, an order, today you have to ship out so many people to f – to go home, but they have to have so many points. So I would go through the rosters, and pick out the – the rest of the guys were doing nothing, actually, ther – that were there. But we knew that we were gonna get to come home pretty soon, so then I got orders that the 80<sup>th</sup> division was to move home on about the 29<sup>th</sup> of December, I

think it was. So, we were replaced by another outfit that took over our job, and we then went to **LaHavre** and got on a boat and came home.

Q: What was that like, what was coming home like?

A: Well, we got into one hell of a storm by the **Azores**. And the captain of the boat said, I've been a captain of – in the navy for 31 years, and have never seen waves in the English channel like this. The boat would go up and come down and hunks of enamel or paint would pop off of the side of the boat, like that. Guys in their bunks – they had bunks five high, you know, wrapped with rope and the ropes would actually break and the guys would fall, and everybody was seasick, my God, everybody was seasick. And he said, I've never seen waves like this in my 31 years. And I thought, my God, I was in combat 210 days and I'm going to go drown going home. That's what I thought, I really did, but boy. But after five days it – it began to smooth out. We came into **New York** and set outside of **New York** harbor for four hours in the dark and we couldn't figure out why. Well, they waited until daybreak to take us by the Statue of lemer – of Liberty. And man, everybody – everybody was crying and f – happy and hollering and everything. And hello statue, and they all laughed, and it was – it was a very happy time. It was just wonderful. And then they unloaded us at **New York**, took us over to Camp **Kilmer** and from Camp **Kilmer** they took us into a big assembly hall, the first thing. When we got off of the train, we marched into there. When we got in there, on the stage was a big American flag, and they had a – a big fan in back of that flag, and it was just a

flopping, and they were playing the national anthem. And I can still do – I can still think about that. That – that was a very emotional, it even is yet today, I'm sorry.

Q: What was seeing your family like, again?

A: Well, my wife met me in **Saint Louis**. I was deployed to **Saint Louis**, and – to get discharged, and was supposed to meet her at a certain hotel. I got there, she wasn't there. They – for after, I'd said to the clerk, and I went back about three different times, and I said, she has to be here, because this is where we were to meet. And they said, well, wait just a minute. So they went over and they looked through the thing, and they said, oh, we didn't have a room here. We had to put her up into a – a hotel in the east – the west part of town. And so I took a taxi and went ... and it was – it was a joy, because I hadn't seen her for two years. I hadn't really had anything except just a letter, because you don't – you didn't have computers or cell phones, or anything like that today. I can't believe how the guys talk home every day, you know? And it was – it was – we were married 70 years and I lost her last year. But I have lot of wonderful, wonderful, wonderful memories.

Q: Sir, this interview is for posterity. What would you most like future generations to know about your experiences? What would you most like them to learn?

A: Never to let their damn politicians get enough power that they think that they are the boss, instead of the people. And that worries me right now, because there isn't anyone listening to anyone in **Washington**. And this has to change. I talked to a lot of high school's history classes in **Florida**, I'm – I happen to live in **Florida**. About

– I never talked very much about my experiences until about 15 years ago, and my granddaughter said, Grandpa, will you come to our history class – and tell us about World War II? I said, what can I tell you? She said, well – I said, why don't you have your history teacher write me down some things that she would like for me to cover? So she did. And so from that, I talked to her class and told them – and then I opened it up and – for questions, and let them ask me questions about it. And from that I started. And the year before my wife got sick, and I had to kind of quit this for awhile, I talked to 46 different schools in one year, about World War II, and the Battle of the Bulge, and this, and I bring it up to them, that if your parents aren't voting, then you keep on them, and make sure that they vote for someone, and to study their – what they stand for before you let them go. And don't let them say, well, I don't have time. Because they do have time, and it's their duty to you to see that this country stays like it has been down through the centuries, up until this time. Because this is the only country in the world like us, and we don't want it to be changed. And so, I've – I feel – and I've been doing this now for almost 15 years, and I'll probably get back into it again.

Q: I hope you do.

A: Yeah.

Q: Any closing words, sir?

A: No. We thank you, and I think what you have done here in this building is something that, it – it – it has been needed, and the people need – more people need

to see what happened, so that they won't let it happen here in this country, because it can happen. It can happen. You know, the German people, the only reason it happened in **Germany** was because **Hitler** was such a **charismic** speaker that he convinced people that he knew more than what they did, and that he was – his group of people were smarter than what they were. And that he had the answers to bring **Germany** back from 40 percent unemployment to what it was back before World War I. They fell for it. And the Senate rescinded their authority and let him have a one man decision on all questions, problems and answers to what he thinks that ger – is best for **Germany**. The first thing he did, so the people tell me, was after he got this authority, was to eliminate everyone that disagreed with him, by building up hate within the people for a specific problem that **Hitler** wanted to get rid of. That was religion, God, and his enemies. And he was successful in getting the Senate to relinquish their power and to give it to him. But in the new constitution of **Germany**, they no longer have that authority to relinquish that power to one person. It must stay in a vote in **Germany**. So I was told in **Weimar** this time, because I ask them.

Q: Thank you Mr. **Myers**. Thank you for your interview.

A: Okay.

Q: It's 15:37 hours.

### **Conclusion of Interview**