United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Robert Zimmer

September 13, 1990

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Robin Hejnar, CSR, RPR, National Court Reporters Association.

ROBERT ZIMMER

September 13, 1990

Question: Could you please tell me your name?

Answer: My name's Robert Zimmer. I now live in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Buffalo, New York, on the 28th of April 1924.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about what Buffalo was like, your childhood was like in Buffalo?

A: Well, I was part of the working class community. My dad was a machinist on the Erie Railroad, and we lived through the Depression, which was sort of harrowing at times, especially one Christmas Eve when my dad came home and said he was laid off, and then that he was out of work about six months, and then he got back to work again; things improved from that point. So I was a Depression child. We didn't know we were poor. We -- I went to public school, walked, oh, eight-tenths of a mile I guess. I was a kindergartner. And then went through high school. Obviously, for my size, I played basketball, but it was a small high school. There were only 44 of us in the graduating class. I married a girl from the graduating class, back then. I've known her since we were in kindergarten I guess, and -- but we didn't date until going to the senior prom together. By that time Pearl Harbor had happened, and everybody was going off to war or working in the war industries. I decided I wanted to go to college, although, I'd been the first one in our family to graduate from high school even. My two older sisters, they

are 10, 14 years older than I am, they left school as sophomores to help support the family. And my folks said that I didn't have to support the family if I went to college, and that was all the help they could give me for going away to school. I went to the state teacher's college at Brockport, New York. I had enlisted in the – enlisted Reserve Corp in July of '42, and was called to active duty then in April of '43. This enough background of growing up in Buffalo or not?

Q: No, that's fine.

A: Okay.

Q: In '42, after enlisting, can you tell us briefly what led up to your activity in Europe?

A: Well, as I said, I'd enlisted in the Reserves, and they had permitted me to start college. Then in April '43 I went on active duty, went through processing at Port Agra, and then

ended up in basic training at Camp McQuaide in the Coast Guard Artillery. I applied for a -- OCS, the Boston candidate school to get a commission. My battery commander recommended that we take our applications back and apply for an army specialized training program, ASTP, which promised us 18 months of college training, and then officers candidate school training. That sounded awfully good to me, and I said okay, and I went to Stanford University for processing, and then to the University of Oregon at Eugene, Oregon, to study engineering. This was the most intense academic work I had ever gone through. Tremendous number of courses that we had to take. We had supervised study every evening. We started at 6:00 o'clock in the morning, and had a schedule back then until 10:00 o'clock at night; and then lights were out at 10:30, so we didn't have much free time. Then in April of '43, this program closed down because of the anticipation of the invasion of Europe, and these troops were really in a holding pattern, we now realized, and we went to fill up the vacancies in the 11th Armored Division, and I became a -- well, I went to the 22nd Tank Battalion Company, AV, for medium tanks, and I was a bowl gunner, or a BOG, and an assistant driver on one of the Sherman tank, medium tank. And they gave us, oh, several review of basic training, taught us how to drive a tank and how to shoot a 75-millimeter gun from the tank, and while we're doing things, basic survival, but we got the division -- well, the division was getting ready to ship overseas then, in August, and we moved from California -- Camp Cooke, California to the East Coast, and I think that was Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and went to board a ship one night, the SS Samaria, and half of the division was on it, about 5,000 men, and they congratulated us, that it was only single loaded. By that they meant that we didn't have to share our bunks with anybody. Because in double loaded you have one bunk for two people, and we were able to sleep for eight hours and the other guy would sleep for eight hours. But we had bunks by ourselves. And I shouldn't say bunk. It was actually -- they were hammocks that were strung across the dining room tables and the back table there. It was a very, very quiet crossing, but we had British food, and the British didn't make any friends among these American troops with the kind of food they gave us and the service we got. We were very unhappy with the Brits on this score. I don't know if any of the other guys told you about it, but we had close to food riots on the ship. We did see -- we were called to the general quarters several times, and we did see some action of death charges being dropped. It was a large convoy, and-- so I presume that they had some alerts that there were u-boats stalking or trying to attack the convoy. We landed in Liverpool, and much to our surprise saw the headlines of the newspaper saying the SS Samaria had been sunk, and we got off the ship, and we were glad the news headline wasn't true. Then they put us on trains and took us to the southern part of England near Warminister where we drew tanks and had to clean up the equipment, because these tanks had been stored, a lot of Cosmoline, it's heavy grease on all parts. It's quite a chore cleaning it up and getting them in working condition. Then we had to check out the tanks, drive them enough to road test them and get a few miles on them so we were

confident that they weren't going to breakdown when we needed them. And then on about the 16th or 17th of December -- I'm skipping over. We had a few trips to London, and I did get into London in what they called a buzz bomb alley where there was a lot of damage, and I was in London one night, and when some buzz bombs came in, we could hear the explosions and see the flashes, and the anti-aircraft was going off. So having been in London during some of the attacks, we were getting a poor taste of what the war was going to be like. On the 16th or 17th of December we moved to Wayland, England, and boarded an LST. It's a landing ship tank that were under the auspices of the U.S. Navy. And we really envied the navy guys because they had clean beds with sheets, showers, and a good cafeteria, good food, and a greatly enjoyed being guests of the Navy for that short cross of the channel, which was just overnight. We landed in Sibret, and then unloading the tanks, our tank had an accident. We were the number three tank being loaded, and so we're almost the last tank to unload. While the LST had a basketball backboard – so when they didn't -- weren't carrying tanks, the crew could shoot baskets or something. Anyhow, our tank was under it, and the motion of unloading the tanks, the backboard had dropped loose, and it swung down. Well, our gunner reached up to move that so the hatch of the tank wouldn't hit it. Our tank commander was down on the deck directing our driver to get the tank off the LST. Well, just as our gunner, Edmonton -- and most of these guys I refer to them by their last name – had reached out to lift this up. Martiburg [ph] gave Trevy [ph] the signal to move out, and he did, and Edmonton caught his hand between this backboard and the chariot top. And he crushed two or three fingers, and part of his hand. Well, this was a real medical emergency, and nobody's around to help, so we bypass the column, and delivered Edmonton to a hospital by tank. We picked up a motorcycle escort and drove through Sibret, and had -- the motorcycle MP didn't realize the tank could go that fast. We had steel tracks, and this was December, so it was cold weather, and they were cobblestone streets with streetcar tracks on them, and we were skidding and swerving. In fact, we made about two turns where our tank went -- spint 360 degrees around before we changed directions. And, in fact, we almost ran over another motorcycle. The M-view was directing traffic, and he let the -- our escort come through, and he put up his hand for us to stop, and we weren't stopping, and he scrambled to get out of the way, and then we had two motorcycle escorts. Well, we got to this hospital, and I had the distinction of being -- delivering the first patient ever by tank to this hospital. And I actually carried Edmonton. He was a small slight man, older than the rest of us, he was in our mid to late 30's, and we didn't see him until the war was over, and heard that he had lost two fingers and part of the palm of his hand. Then we got back to the company, and loaded up with gas and ammunition, because at this point we didn't know that there was a battle in the Bulge. We were originally scheduled to go to Calais and help -- well, sort of contain about 10,000 Germans that had been bypassed, and this was sort of our introduction to combat. We weren't going to go in and capture them, but we weren't going to let them come out either. They had live

ammunition, we had live ammunition, we shot, we killed, but we were just going to make sure that they didn't move. That was the original plans that we had. Well, they changed that when the Battle of the Bulge started, and they gave orders to our division to travel from Sibret directly to Bastogne. This was a -- I'd say a force -- it was a force smart. We drove until we ran out of gas, and the truck came by, handed up a gas can, we loaded up and kept going. We drove through Paris -- oh, this must have been about the 24th -- 23rd, 24th. I want to say it was the 24th of December, Christmas Eve. Now the people in Paris knew about the Battle of the Bulge. They knew the German breakthrough, and we were being inundated with propaganda, that the Germans were going to be in Paris by Christmas. Well, the American Armored Division is a pretty impressive show of force to drive through the city, and the people in Paris were out on the sidewalks, there were eight and ten gates, they were trying to climb up on the tanks giving us eggs and flowers and fruit. Everything we wanted, but our orders were not to stop, very specific not to stop. I remember driving up to the Arc of Triumph and making a sharp left turn, and drove on through to Sanson. And all the time it was just hurry, keep going, keep going. It's Sanson they gave us a break to do some maintenance on the tanks, and I shouldn't use that word "break," because we had to work awfully hard. We had to break -- take the track apart, and take the connectors that linked each section of track. These come off as a big one-inch nut on it, and you have to take that apart, take that off, then with a sledgehammer knock the connector off. And then we put on a new connector or an extender. We call them duckbills, which would extend the width of the track about four to five inches. And, again, these have to be put on with a sledgehammer, and then the nuts put back on and tightened up, and it was not easy work; heavy physical work, as well as track -- threading that track up over the drive wheels and sprockets of the tank. They had promised us a turkey dinner for Christmas day, and they delivered it. We got turkey, but that was all we got, turkey and bread; no fixings, but we had turkey. Well, at this point they discovered that our tank, this is tank A3, had a bad transmission and so the rest of the division went on, and we stayed with ordinance while they repaired and eventually they replaced the transmission, and then they decided it was an engine problem; they replaced the engine. So the division went on to Neufchâteau and through Bastogne, and got into action very quickly. Our tank was behind, so we missed the first day – first several days of action. In fact, when we got up to Neufchâteau, they held us there until -- they thought the division was coming off the line, and they didn't, so we were several days there. We didn't know where we were going to, just stayed put. I had some interesting stories as we were traveling by ourselves. I remember, this was now snow and ice, and I remember one little French boy, I would guess must have been seven or eight years old, about that high, came by the side of the road. He looked cold and miserable. We stopped, and put some wool socks on him, and a hat, and gave him some candy bars, and muffled him up as best as we could, but we had to go, but he did look like a very forlorn waif by the side of the road. Then as we were driving beyond here,

now we're in France into Belgium, in that line there, a one-lane road, and it had sort of a crown on it to help drainage, but it was all ice and snow, and it was snowing. This was very tricky driving, because if we kept the tank balanced on the top of the crown, we made good progress. If it was off balance, we'd slide down to one side until we hit the ditch and got some soft dirt, and then the tracks would dig in and bring us up on top of the thing, but usually we'd go up too far and then we'd slide down the other side. So we were going down the road like this, up one side, down the other. This was all right until we noticed that along both sides of the road there were these large trees, and they were, oh, at least that big around. These trees were all notched, and they had little white boxes all wired around them. And we discovered later that these were boxes of TNT, and that was primer cord, and this whole road had been mined like that in case the Germans did break through from Bastogne. They would have blown all these trees, and it would have been like jackstraws across that road, and they would have been denied to the Germans. This concerned me driving down that road. First of all, we didn't -- we could see probably blowing that road while we were there. All we could see is bumping into something and setting the whole thing up. So that was a harrowing experience. Then we caught up with the division, and as I said, we waited, and then we were in the area around Longchamps which is, oh, two or three kilometers from Bastogne, in and around that area, and we -- our company became part of CCR. The 11th Armored Division was divide -- made up of three combat commands. Combat command CCA or CCB or CCR. And there could be any combination of battalions or companies in either one depending on the mission. Well, the mission of Combat Command Ark, CCR, was to support whichever -- A or B -- had the main action; in case of any difficulty, we'd back them up, in case they broke through, then we were to go through the break and exploit it. So we were always moving here and there depending on what the action was. Sometimes we'd move three or four times during a night, maybe -- frequently, more than that, almost like a chess game, to get in position where we expected the German thrust to be. And I remember painting our tanks white, or whitewashing them, so we could hardly see them with all that snow around, and it was very cold. Getting up in the morning, I'd take half three-quarters of an inch of gauze across the inside of the tank. There's no heaters in the tank, and we'd just be sitting there, and as long as one man was on the radio, the rest of us could sleep, so we'd take turns doing that, but it was cold. And sometimes we'd be in position. I remember one -- this little valley where the forward slope of the valley, and on the other side of the knoll was our German column. This morning at dawn, bright and clear, blue sky, it was beautiful, and our friends in the 19th ?Akal? Air Command came over with their P-47s, and attacked this German column. Now, the column was out of sight, it was on the other side of this hill, but we could see the people dive down, we could see the machine guns going, we could see them drop bombs, and it actually disappeared around the crest of the hill. And after, oh, a half hour or so we got orders to move, that we were no longer

needed there. Air Force had taken care of the threat, so we moved to another position, but that was a lot of the kinds of activity we were doing.

Q: Do you remember any underground resistance as you were going from action to action?

A: No, we didn't run into underground. We were very sympathetic to the Belgiums. I remember we would come across some of the Belgium homes that had been overrun by the Germans, and I remember one little cottage we came into, and there was an elderly woman, I'd say an old woman, maybe in her 80's. She was still laying in bed. She had a bullet hole in her head, and we had no need for it. Of course, there were all sorts of dead animals around, but when it was cold, that didn't bother us. When it thawed that became a problem. We were into the Bulge and had heard about the massacre of Normandy, and that was in the northern section of Bulge, and the 11th was not involved in that, but that went through that the whole American army I think. The Germans were not nice, and we weren't going to take any prisoners either.

Q: How many people were killed?

A: Oh, the massacre of Normandy, about 160 I think. These were American solders that had been captured by the Germans and they were machine gunned. So the 11th decided not to take any prisoners for a while. And, in fact, General Patton had come down to division headquarters, which is quite a way downs by the chain of command, to give direct orders to our division and commander that we were to take prisoners, and -- but we established our reputation then, and, so, we didn't wear patches, so -- we didn't want to be captured by the Germans; they didn't like us.

Q: Patches?

A: Shoulder patches showing that we were members of the 11th Armored Division, a triangular patch that's red, yellow and blue with the 11th on it. And so we fought through the Bulge, and that was a big battle. I understand that there were about 80,000 American casualties, and a 100,000 German casualties in about six weeks. So it was a lot of very serious fighting, and small action is big action, and so on. We helped in the pinching off of the Bulge, drawing up with the First Army, part of the 41st Calvary, and Major Greene, or General Greene now, led that group to do that, and that was at Houffalize. And then from that point on we started pushing the Germans back, and we moved in to Luxemburg to bridge the sick-pick line, and we finally broke through at Prüm or Prüm, I guess it is. And at the time sat at the Prüm River. And from that point then we made a dash to the line getting near Coblenz, took a breather there – a breather, a couple of days -- and then they started moving us upstream of the line, so I guess we'd be moving east, and closed off the Saar-Moselle Triangle. That took a large amount of prisoners. I remember that kind of action, because at night we could see German search lights on the Rhine forming

a huge "v". So the German troops -- because they were disorganized. There were individuals of small units, you know, with nowhere to go to get across. Of course, we were killing them off, and taking them prisoners, and sending them back making sure they didn't get across. We got to the line, and we crossed at --near Worms on a pontoon bridge, and much to our surprise there was the Navy in their Navy uniforms with their white sailor caps manning the pontoon rig, which was with smoke pots all around so we couldn't -- but nobody could see it, but driving a tank across that was -- across the Rhine on a pontoon bridge was sort of disconcerting shall we say? Everybody had their hatches open. We're standing with their heads out in case that bridge went down, that we'd have somewhat of a chance to get on the tank. We crossed there. And we started driving through Central Europe, heading toward -- well, it was actually East Germany now, and captured an arms plant -- a Walther arms plant at -- in Zella-Mehlis, and we're into Czechoslovakia, and we were the first American troops to cross the Czech border, but we were pulled back and told that the Russians were supposed to have our case in Prague in Czechoslovakia. So we went south along the Czech/German border into Austria, and through Linz.

Q: What is this timeframe?

A: Timeframe, March/April of '45. We were moving very fast. One time we -- the Germans let us go through, and then they cut off our supplies, so we had to -- I think that was in Kombach. Don't quote me on that name, but we were cut off there, and we had to send our trucks with our light tanks back to fight the way through the Germans in order to get supplies and bring supplies up so we could keep moving. And we've heard that they'd give us maps expecting us to cover the 20 miles in two or three days, and we'd do that in a half a day, and we have to wait for maps so we can go on. Of course, the Germans were very disorganized at this point, and when they did resist, it was sort of a last ditch stand, but we were moving very fast, and the Armored Division just -- with CCA and CCB, they just use a pincers movement, and cut them off, and we'd just keep going.

Q: At this point the war was turning back clearly __?

A: Yes, a little. Again, in the front line, we didn't know what was happening elsewhere. We were – We didn't have radios or news broadcasts, we did get newspapers. Every day was another day at combat. We're just pressing on. A lot of my impressions are, you know, hindsight. The day-to-day activities were just to keep that tank going, and drive until we hit resistance, and then we deploy to fight. So I remember one time in Briod, it was the first -- only time we had to dismount from our tanks and fight on foot. This was -- This is scary for a tanker. A tanker feels very comfortable with that steel around them. But there was a hospital there with British pilots there, and we couldn't get to it because bridges had been blown up, and we had to go across the bridges in the water, and then deploy to take them down. The Germans who were guarding the Brits were very happy to

surrender, so they -- there was no resistance. But at the time they told us to dismount, we didn't know what we were going to run into, and you never do, but we were able to cap -- to relieve the -- liberate these British flyers, and turn the German prisoners we had over to them, and they took care of it, and --

Q: What happened as your division approached Mauthausen, or how many __+?

A: We captured Linz, and we were the first troops into Austria. We captured Linz, and actually had heavier fighting at Linz then we had since the Battle of the Bulge. The others had been rather sporadic. So we took a lot of casualties going into Linz. To give you a little bit of a feel of this, I remember going into Linz. There was a railroad that was in a cut that was down, oh, I'd say, four feet below the road. The road was next to it, and then there's a mountainside going up. Only room for one tank. Two tanks couldn't pass each other on this road. Coming up the mountain road, around a bend, where a group of about, oh, 15 to 20 kids on bicycles. They were the Hitler young. They were in military uniform, and strapped to each bicycle was a Panzerfaust, an anti-tank weapon. It looked like a football at the end of a hockey stick. They were coming, and we were going down, and we weren't going to let them get close, so -- and a kid on a bicycle is -- and I say a kid, these were 12, 13, 14 years old. And we had to open up with machines guns. It wasn't pretty. Some of them tried to climb the mountain side, they couldn't do that, and they couldn't drop down to the railroad cut, we'd just drove right through it. That was going into Linz. After Linz we kept going, and finally met the Russians. Now, this beyond Mauthausen. At this point we had a company, 22nd Tactic, part of CCA, Combat Command Day, and we were one of the lead companies. So we had bypassed Mauthausen. Other units of the 11th found Mauthausen. We started getting rumors from our guys, the cooks and bakers who were going back for supplies, that they had found a concentration camp. And some of the rumors we heard were that there were bodies stuffed down wells, that there were bodies stacked as cord wood all over the place. They even said that they had found some lampshades made out of human skin that had tattoos on them. This came at the time when we got to Russia. Now, the deal with the Russians were that there would be a ten mile buffer zone from the Russians and the American Army, and they were between the Germans that were trying to surrender, and they were desperately trying to surrender to the Americans rather than the Russians. And at this point a large number of the 12th SS Panzer Group surrendered to our lines. We were to -- they were supposed to surrender to the Russians but didn't. We finally took them under control, and our control was just an open field, and we mark it off with telephone wire, just strung telephone wire about two or three strands of it on pipes or posts stuck in the ground. There was a stream flowing through the field. I don't know how many thousand troops and Germans were in there. We had set up our tanks at about a hundred foot intervals, and we just rounded the machine gun between the tanks. And we weren't going to let any Germans get out. We weren't very careful about them. If we saw any

movement, a machine gun would go off. We didn't care if it sprayed through the camp. Some of our guys saw some Germans trying to swim in the stream, and, again, we machine gunned them, and let fly a whole round of ammunition just to make sure. We didn't have facilities to feed them, so periodically, like every other day or so, we'd shoot a horse and drag it into the camp, and it was up to them to butcher it and how to distribute the meat however they want. That was about the only food we could give them. This was going on while Mauthausen was being cleaned up and made, quote, Suitable for human habitation. In other words, other members -- parts of our Division were at Mauthausen taking care of the sick, burying the dead, and because -- there's talk – finding the camp, it was a surprise to the Division. We weren't prepared for it. We didn't know they existed. We had no idea of the extent of it. We didn't have food, we didn't have medics to help the people. Some of the people died just running to our tanks and half tracks. Emotionally, they were drained, but physically they were kind of a skeleton. The food we had wasn't appropriate for a person who was -- had been on a starvation diet. And they started eating food too fast, and this didn't agree with their stomachs, and so they would get even sticker, and many of them died. It was a very sad thing, but we didn't know, because the medics could have been backing us up, but we were so far ahead -- actually, the 11th, when the war was over, we were the furthest east of any American troop. We were way east of Berlin. Most people don't realize that the Third Army had gotten that far east. And our lines were awfully far extended. And it was a difficult thing for them to bring the resources up to take care of these people, and, fortunately, we were able to save off many of them.

Q: When your division first went in -- I realize you weren't there, so -- but other members were, what happened to the SS who were the head of the camps? Do you know whatever happened to the upper echelon the day in Europe under your supervision --

A: What I've heard was that when the tanks got close to the camp, the Germans ran, they left, and I don't know if they were captured or if they were able to hide themselves or what. The -- I'm sure the reaction of the guys was that, if there was no resistance, we had to do something with these sick and dying people. You know, thousands of people that are dying, some dying as you're looking at them. It was something that nobody was prepared for. And I'm sure that we weren't -- the guys weren't concerned about the guards that had run away. But I know in other -- let's see. What was the name of that town? Well, we hit a small city that had a lot of forced labor, slave labor, mainly French and Dutch people. When we liberated that, the French and the Dutch took care of their guards very quickly, and not very humanly; they just beat them up, and beat them to death. And I imagine if there were any survivors over at the camp, were in physical condition, they got their hands on the guards at Mauthausen. They were treated the same way.

Q: Do you if there were men and women who were at the camp?

A: There were men and women and children. I've been back to the camp -- I went back there about five years ago. The camp was made up mainly of East Europeans, many Poles, Latvians, Estonians, Bulgarian, there were even a few Americans, 2- or 300 Americans in that camp. There were predominantly Jewish, but there were other people there too. They were, I guess, masons and catholics and the thing.

Q: __?

A: Yeah. So there were all sorts of people in there. We could see the grave sites, mass grave in the film that some of the guys in the division took. We used our bulldozers to dig out the grave, but the Germans in the local community -- I guess this was Austria, I should say Austria, it's in Norwood really -- denied knowing anything about this camp. That is hard to believe because of the stench that was coming from the camp. You could smell it for miles away. And the sight, you might imagine, but the smell no one can imagine. Well, we got the local people to help bury, and so we made them place each body in the trench as gently as they could. We filled the trench, and then had them put dirt over them with shovels, but once there was covering of dirt, then we used a bulldozer to put more dirt over them, and then put another layer of bodies in. The danger from disease was so great we had to get these bodies -- there's thousands of them – into the ground, and we had to get them buried.

Q: How close was the closest town to the concentration camp? You said you could smell this for miles?

A: Mauthausen overlooks the Danube River, and the town of Mauthausen. I would guess the distance from the town to the camp was maybe three kilometers. Not very far. That's why it stretches the imagination that they wouldn't know what was happening there, because the shift of the wind, they'd know it.

Q: What was the town peoples' response when your division had come in and then realized that the camp was being liberated? Did they have a response to the people who had been in the camps?

A: I don't know. Remember, we had bypassed it. The people lived in a small farming village, and everybody there denied being Nazi, denied knowing anything about the camps. This village was pretty remote from Mauthausen. We were about 20 or 30 miles from them by that time. And they didn't have good communication, just a -- had to take a dirt road to get into the village, in fact. So -- and that's -- Afterwards, they started taking tours of the guys through the camp, and then shortly after that, in July, the Division was disbanded, and we were preparing to go to Japan to fight over there.

Q: So members of the Division were brought in. When people grew up as prisoners in the camp, still in the camp? Where were they --

A: Yes. This was in the period when they were trying to, not only bring up our medical staff and supplies, but just even while the burial details were in progress so that the guys in the Division could see what's happening. And this sort of reinforces what we've been fighting for, although, we didn't know it. From Battle of the Bulge on, we were fighting most of the troops of a -- Panzer groups. Now the Panzer group was made up of several pounds or division, so it was a large -- almost a corps type thing. But we -- The people in these small towns, they said they didn't know anything about it. I suspect they were telling the truth, but the people close to Mauthausen had to know what was going on.

Q: What happened to the people that -- your part of the division regarding the Panzer groups?

A: When Mauthausen was cleared of the survivors, and the dead had been buried, our prisoners were transported back to Mauthausen, and they were incarcerated in those barracks until they were later exchanged probably to the Russians, because they were supposed to be turned over to the Russians anyway, and I suspect the Russians kept them for X number of years at forced labor. I don't have -- that's a rumor I had.

Q: So thousands of people in the Panzer group that you had to guard?

A: Yep.

Q: And then they were moved to the concentration camps?

A: Uh-hm.

Q: How did your detail wind up from that part of the war, at Mauthausen?

A: See, the war was over shortly after that. And, in fact, the day we got the word that the war was over, there was a lot of celebration, you know? And we got word about 10:00 o'clock in the morning. And there was a lot of celebrating. And then about 11:00 o'clock at night we get an urgent message to mount our tanks and move out, that 52 German Tiger Tanks were going to break through to a readout area in their purchase garden, somewhere in that area. And, so, we had to move from this little town we were in to head the tanks off. And the German Tiger Tank is a huge tank, and greatly outguns, and there's much more armor than American Sherman Tank; they had 88-millimeter cannon, and we had a 76-millimeter. And kind of against Tiger, is not what we really like to do, but we had to drive through the mountains to head these guys off, but we had drunken drivers taking us there, and it was a blackout drive, so it was rather hazardous to your health just to ride the tanks. But we got to where we were supposed to be, and the Germans didn't show up. It was a trick or a rumor, that there were no Tiger Tanks

coming through. But that was really the last incident of the war, as far as I remember, other than going on guard duty in Star and Read, and eventually up to Nuremburg to supervise the destruction of German ammunition by German POWs. And then I was able to go home, and didn't really-- end of December of '45, and was actually discharged from the Army in January of '46. And coming home, we were on victory ship, the Norway Victory, and it was a small boat, today's standards, and we had a tremendous gale in the north Atlantic. Instead of taking seven days to go from Sibret to the Norfolk, it took us eleven. And I was seasick ten-and-a-half of those 11 days. It literally -- the waves were 60 to a hundred feet high. I mean, you'd look up, and the ship was down here, and all you saw was water way up there. But we did get to Norfolk safely, and then we were discharged, and I used the GI bill to pick up a civilian life, and it was a typical young man in a hurry. I used the GI bill to get three degrees, and I -- including a master's and a doctorate, a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1950. So -- and then I went into community college work, and became the founding president of three community colleges in the country. So I had a whole professional career. But then 1976 -- oh, I had -- when I got my Ph.D. in '50, Korea was breaking out, and in '52 it looked like Korea was going to become World War III, and I could see myself going back into service as a tank crewman, PFC type. And so with a hot Ph.D. in my pocket, I went to various services to see if I could get a direct commission. I went to the Army, and they said, We'd make you a second lieutenant in the quartermaster corps. I went to the Navy, and they said, we have no use for Ph.D.s. Went to the Army -- or the Air Force rather, and they said, We'd make you a first lieutenant as a human resources research specialist. I figured, with a title like that, it would take me -- well, it took me about 20 seconds to accept the Reserve commission with the Air Force, and I stayed active in the Air Force Reserves. And in '76 went back in active duty with the Air Force at the Pentagon. I was a full colonel at this point, and became the director of post-secretary education for the Secretary of Defense, and helped with the establishment -- or rather with the degree granting authority that the community college of the Air Force had. So I was still in the community college work.

Q: We're running out of time. Going back to Mauthausen, were you able to take a tour through at the time --

A: No.

Q: -- after part of your division -- liberating the camp, and cleaned part of it, you said other parts of your troop has passed through. Had you gone through --

A: I wasn't part of that group. I had gone back, as I said, five years ago. That would have been '85, maybe '86. Most of my reactions are from the film that Ray Bush had taken.

Q: Can tell me a little bit about how that came about?

A: Well, Ray was with the '56 engineers, and he had a small eight-millimeter camerA: And we were all told not to have that, cameras or keep diaries or take pictures of anything, but that didn't stop most of us. And he was taking pictures of combat from England right in through the Bulge on to Mauthausen. And he would send those home. Some of them were x-rayed, unfortunately, but he put them all together in this -- two reels of film, and he showed them to us at the division reunion. And the offhand, if I wanted a copy of it, he'd be glad to do it, and I took him up on it. I had a copy made, or he had copy made, I paid for it, but whatever, and it was fortunate I did, because his copy was destroyed when a fire went through his home. So mine was the only surviving copy, and that's why I thought, rather than take a chance on it, because it is rather historic evidence that the Holocaust Museum should be -- would be the place to deposit it.

Q: And the film was taken as --

A: It took as day-to-day activities would provide. And I know one section of the film, there was a section of the 22nd Tank Battalion moving, and I think he got my picture, but I was all buttoned up inside the tank. He got a picture of my tank anyhow.

Q: And it showed the prisoners that survived as well?

A: Yes. It was showing them in the barracks in various stages of emaciation. It showed them unloading the dead in wagons, showed them placing them in the mass graves, showed them covering the graves, and even took a view from the concentration camp over to the countryside where you could see the Danube River.

Q: And in your experiences of the war, was this something that was totally unexpected?

A: Yes. We were fighting the Nazis. We were soldiers fighting soldiers. We didn't – nothing prepared us for this. Nobody told us that there were concentration camps. I don't think anybody knew. We didn't expect anything when we overran Mauthausen. It just sort of reinforced the -- our feeling that we were fighting a just war, that whatever happened, it was right that we should be in the war, that we were the good guys, white hats, even though there are times during combat when we weren't nice guys, but combat is like that, you fight to survive.

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

A: Thank you for inviting me.

Conclusion of Interview