

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with John Truty
April 4, 2011
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PREFACE

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JOHN TRUTY
April 4, 2011

Question: It's the 4th of April, 2011. It's 14:46 hours. We are interviewing Mr. John Joseph Truty who is a liberator of Buchenwald Camp. I am Steven Mize conducting the interview. Mr. Truty, state your full name and where you were born, please?

Answer: John Joseph Truty, and I was born in Chicago.

Q: Can you spell your last name for me, please?

A: T R U T Y.

Q: Thank you. Can you tell me about your childhood?

A: My childhood was regular. I played baseball, football, tennis, and bowled in free leagues and stuff. I spent quite a bit of time in sports. And I went I graduated from Schurz High School, and I was under the impression that it was hard to get a job and stuff I worked in a sound electric company around the neighborhood, and I got in the army and I was drafted and I was one of the first draftees to go.

Q: When was that? What year?

A: '41.

Q: '41?

A: Yeah, I had eight months in, and they were discharging the people who were 28 years and older already, you know, they figured they didn't need us anymore. So, they got

discharged. They had to come back, you know, because the war broke out right after that. And I went to from Camp Grant I went to, I guess it was Texas Brownwood, Texas and Camp Campbell, Kentucky and Indio, California: I spend a whole year out there. They were preparing us to go to Africa and we got sent to Germany. After that we because we were built at Indio, California, the desert training center, there was nothing there when we got there. After that we went to New York and we departed for Europe and we landed in Marlborough. We were on the Queen Mary. We had 23,000 people on that ship. We slept in shifts, more or less. And it took us a long time, because they were saying that, be careful, you know, after the big boat, you know, Queen Mary

Q: You mean the subs were after the boat?

A: Yeah. I mean, so we landed in Marlborough, England and we stayed there for a while. They had the invasion and I think we went about three weeks, or two weeks after the invasion, because they had to make room for us to land because of the fighting there and stuff. When I got there, you could still see ships, their nose up, I mean. We had to stay on the landing barges for a day or two before we went to shore, you know.

Q: Yes. Let's back up for just a little bit. How did you feel about being drafted?

A: Well, I didn't I didn't feel so good. Because at that time we had soldiers and dogs weren't allowed in the taverns and (inaudible) they didn't allow us there, so, but, like I say, I was one of the first draftees to go. I just I almost had I didn't care about it, because I had eight months in and who wanted, you know, the army? If all of them wants to go and then the war broke out and I had to get go and, you know, and then we didn't

now how long the war was going to last, whether it was going to last a year, two years, five years, ten years or a hundred year war or whatever it is. But, that's the way it was.

Q: What did you train as, sir? What were you an infantryman? an armorman?

A: No, I was a medic. But we had basic training, because, you know, everybody had to take basic training.

Q: How did you feel about being a medic?

A: Well

Q: Did you select it or were you assigned?

A: No, I was assigned as a medic, because they were asking people to drive for (inaudible) and stuff like that. But, I took the medics, because I thought it was safer than being in the gutter or somewhere in there.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So, that's what it was.

Q: Do you feel that your training adequately trained you for combat?

A: Oh, yeah. We had to have combat training and then especially in the desert with the tanks, maneuvers and stuff. We had good training over there in the desert. The heat was 125 out there. We actually, sometimes didn't do anything, but to get used to the weather, you know. But, I had a suntan. I wore shorts all the time and you could see the white here and all black here.

Q: What did you understand of the war and why it was being fought, before going to Europe?

A: Well, I didn't think too much of it. I mean it's war. War is a war. I mean you have to nobody likes war. I mean as far as that goes, war is hell. But we you're in there, you got to do the best you can, because there was a lot of fellows that didn't like it and committed suicide and all that but, thank G d, I held out and I come back in one piece. That's the main thing.

Q: Did you know what was happening to the Jews of Europe before you went over?

A: No, I didn't, no.

Q: Do you speak any foreign languages?

A: I used to read and write Polish, but I forgot, I mean, it's been a long time, 60, 70 years almost.

Q: What did you do when you were in England? Were you still training?

A: Training, yeah. We were waiting for the invasion, you know, because they would send out ships (inaudible) and they were testing out the Germans there, you know, because they had all the coastline all pretty well fortified and we landed in England, they had we had gas masks, because England was all set for if they would get poisoned gas and stuff and in case the Russians the Germans, but they were fighting two fronts, in the back and in the front and Russians, and us, you know, so they had double trouble there, and once we could go got along pretty good.

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Q: What did you think of England and the English?

A: Well, I didn't think too much of them, you know, we made friends and stuff. They're all right, I mean, I suppose you couldn't get used to it, but, they had it a little different, like petrol and gasoline and all that stuff. We had to learn English and French and German and Polish and America, I mean, yeah, so

Q: When did you enter the European theatre? D Day plus what?

A: How many days what?

Q: How many days after D Day did you land in France?

A: D Day was what day was D Day?

Q: June.

A: Four? I think it was two weeks.

Q: Okay. Do you recall your first exposure to combat?

A: Recall the first exposure?

Q: The first time you saw combat?

A: No. We seen shells coming over from while we were still in England, but they had let me see 88's and stuff in the bunkers and they couldn't find them at first, you know, they shootin', put 'em back in. But they got it later on when they after invasion. They found out that the (inaudible) people right in front of you, you know what I mean, but cause we were (inaudible) division. We had to take care of all divisions. Some go and

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some come. You have to be well prepared for that. Our general got the stars from every time Patton got promoted, he got Walker got stars and stuff and so

Q: Did you ever meet General Walker?

A: Walker? Oh, yeah he was right there, our general. I never met Patton.

Q: Did you like General Walker? Did you respect him?

A: Oh, yes, he was a good general. But Patton was kind of rough. I mean, he was I was kind of scared of him. Every time I knew he was coming I'd stay away from headquarters there.

Q: Sure.

A: So, I didn't want to get a slap in the face (laughing). No, but that's his job. So, I mean, he had to do it, him with his 45's. But cause some generals they Patton wanted a credit, Eisenhower wanted a credit, MacArthur wanted a credit, Bradley wanted a credit, and Churchill wanted I mean, they all wanted to outdo one another, but, I guess they got along, so

Q: When you got to Europe, when you got to France, do you remember the first battle you were engaged in?

A: No, I don't remember. There was shooting going on there and stuff.

Q: Do you remember crossing the Rhine?

A: Yeah.

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Q: Okay. What can you tell me about that?

A: Well, they build them platoons and we crossed.

Q: Did you engage the Germans there? Did you engage the enemy during the crossing the Rhine?

A: We didn't, the people in front of us did. I mean, there were tanks and infantry. There were troops in front of us. We took care of the troops that, you know, invaded them.

Cause we had our own little G1, G2, G3, G4, we had to care of officers and enlisted men, to give them shots and whatever they needed. But, we didn't go right up to the front because we had Patton had his men up there. All he wanted was tanks, tanks, tanks, the hell with the infantry. You see tanks all along the road there, and that was it.

Q: Did when you were actually in Europe

A: Yeah?

Q: did you and after having served in combat did your attitudes about the war change at all?

A: Well, sure it changed. I mean, it's glad it was over. I mean, we be they sent I had 92 points, I mean, it was enough to get a cross, but they sent the people, the soldiers in front of me, that were rookies and stuff, and they just come after me and stuff, they didn't have enough points, they send them back to USA to train them to go back to not train them, but to revitalize them to go back to Pacific, you know. So, we had I was like they asked me first if I wanted an army occupation and I didn't want that, I wanted

to get home, the heck with that. So, they left me there anyway. And there is no revelling, no retreat, no nothing. But we went horseback riding and then we could play golf, and nobody to, you know, bother you or stuff. But then later on, we got through in Japan, they dropped the atomic bomb there, so

Q: As you were moving through Europe and advancing with the Third Army, do you recall coming across any concentration camps?

A: Oh, I didn't come across but there were a lot of them there. They told us. They had us scattered all around.

Q: Did you see any of them?

A: Well, Buchenwald. That's the only one that I really seen there, you know.

Q: Tell me about experiencing Buchenwald. When did you arrive there? What did you see? What did you think was going on?

A: Well, I rode with the captain. He was a medical officer, he got discharged (inaudible) colonel later on, but, I had to with go with him, and he and I went in a jeep, and seen the camp. And we seen how the soldiers they had a flagpole they tried to get out, because they knew we were coming and the Germans shot them and left. They were right by the flagpole there and stuff. But so and then the only way we could see them is they wouldn't allow us to feed them or anything like that, they were fed intravenously, the ones that were ready to die anyway, I mean, but we got in cause we had medical I had a van and, you know, I was with the captain, so, he was a medical

officer. So, they let us in and we went in the camp there, and it stunk and the tears and the urine and all that stuff. I couldn't stand it. I went through one barracks there, that they had there, and the trains were just lined there and they were peeing and stuff and it was just I couldn't stand it, so, I just left after that.

Q: Did you speak to any of the prisoners?

A: No, I didn't speak to them.

Q: Did you provide any medical assistance to any of the prisoners?

A: Not we. But they took care of them, I mean, they emptied the soldiers they try to get, you know, them out of the way first, because they were dead, but the ones that were still in there, they took them I don't know where they took them, the hospitals or something, and tried to rejuvenate them, you know, because they were all skin and bones, I don't think they'd live anyway, but you try it and stuff, they were so glad to see to us. Because they had a table like this, they had lampshades made out of skin, you know, they took the skin and made lampshades out of them or anything they could use. And, of course, they had hair, I seen it, they stripped them with they got shoes and stuff up there, and that was it.

Q: Did any of the prisoners try to speak to you, or say anything to you?

A: No. They just wanted to something to eat, you know, and stuff. They couldn't speak, I mean, they're laying there like four or five of them in a little space. It was terrible.

Q: How long were you inside the camp itself?

A: In the concentration camp?

Q: Yes.

A: Not too long. I couldn't stand it. It stink and smudge and stuff. I don't know how they could survive.

Q: Did you see any enemy inside the camp, living or dead?

A: No. But later on, I did see enemy soldiers after they surrendered. They put their guns in a big pile and they'd hand these prisoners to the Frenchmen, you know, and the French took over and especially SSS guys. They hated the Frenchmen hated SS they were supposed to be the elite of the army there. So, they take them and march them in the forests and you could hear boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, they got aim with them.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Some of them that like I say, mostly SS guys that they didn't, they hated and stuff but

Q: Now, was that the French unit that was marching with 20 corps?

A: Yeah. I don't know how they got attached to them, I mean, but they let them have the French the German prisoners, so

Q: Did you see the crematoria at Buchenwald?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did? Can you describe what you saw going in to that area?

A: Well, seeing these bodies right there, packed like 2 by 4s, you could see they're all skin and bones. And in the back the crematoria, there was all ashes that they emptied out. Because they had two like two small freight cars and they put them in and they take them out. I didn't see that seen them doing it, but I seen the ovens there, you know. I tried to take a picture, but it didn't come out. It blurred and stuff, all black. But you could still make out a little bit that it was the freight cars, them little freighters.

Q: After seeing Buchenwald, after seeing the concentration camp, did it change your attitudes about the war and why you were fighting it?

A: Yeah. Then I realized that we had to do it, I mean, after all, otherwise it will kill everybody. Especially the Polish people, because there's a lot of Jews in Poland there and stuff, and they first took the Jews and then probably the next, Polish and I still got cousins and aunts and living there.

Q: Living in Poland?

A: Yeah. In fact, I went to see them in 1982 with my sister, because my wife didn't want to go, so I took my sister there and we spent two or three weeks there.

Q: After you left the camp, did you meet any of the surrounding population who lived around the camp.

A: Not really, no. There wasn't too many left there. It's just a woman that was women and kids maybe, that's all, but the guys were in the army and stuff and there's healthy

guys and stuff. But, I didn't meet any of the older folks, because there was none left, I mean, they were starving too.

Q: How long were in the area around Buchenwald?

A: I don't know. Maybe a couple of days, and we went on.

Q: You pushed into Austria after this?

A: Yeah. We wound up in Austria with the Russians there.

Q: Do you remember did you meet up with the Russians?

A: No. I didn't talk to them, but the guys in front of us did, you know, we stopped there and we come back.

Q: How did you learn about V E Day?

A: How did I learn? Well, it was in the papers and stuff. We were glad it was over. But, I know there is another war going on with Japan. We weren't through yet, but, that was a piece of cake, I mean, as far as after they put the atomic bomb and stuff.

Q: How long were you in Europe after V E Day? How long did you stay after?

A: Oh, I stayed until the war was over in Japan, and then they shipped me back. They must have sent some Army of Occupation or something, earlier on, to take care of that. So, like I say, we had it made it was a piece a cake. We were playing golf we couldn't play golf because we didn't have no golf balls. But, I wanted to come home regardless, I mean, they could give me a million buck, of course, I wasn't too long

overseas a year and a half overseas but in the army four and a half years. So, but it's still a long time, I mean, it's the best years of my life.

Q: Why so? Why do you call them the best years of your life?

A: Well, I went in when I was 22, 23 years old. And by the time I spent four years, or almost five years and by the time you can get out and adjusted to civilian life and I got in business and so

Q: What rank were you on discharge?

A: What rank? T/4, surgical technician.

Q: And, did you come back to Chicago immediately after the war? Is that where you came?

A: Not we went to some kind of a camp there in and then they gave me 300 bucks I guess big deal for traveling expenses. So, I saved, I mean, because we were in the army, it was \$21 a month. By the time you get your cleaning done and stuff, we had to wear civilian clothes and get that cleaned and, of course, we got rations (inaudible) all that free, you know. But, still in all, you go out and have a couple of beers or something and of course, beer was cheap, but you didn't I was always broke. Getting the crap game, and, you know, waiting another month. Yeah, it was rough.

Q: When you came home to the United States, who was the first family member you saw?

A: First member?

Q: First family member that you saw when you returned to the United States?

A: Well, I'll tell you truth, we didn't have a car. My dad didn't have a car, he was a foreigner. He couldn't speak English, he was a citizen. But I don't know how he got his citizenship. But, I stopped I took a train, and I stopped in the tavern I used to go to, because it was like a block and a half away, instead of going straight home, I stopped in the tavern, had some couple of beers, and they were all glad to see me there, seen some friends, and before you knew it, half a crowd and then I went home. They were glad to see me, and my mother had two stars in the windows, you know, she was so proud of me. But, that was it.

Q: What was it like for you seeing your family again, your mother and your family?

A: It was great. I mean, I was overjoyed, cause like I say, I didn't know how long I was going to be in the service, in the army, because, you know, you are a long ways from home and, of course, we went back on a boat, on a small boat, but we didn't come back on a Queen Mary like because, I don't know why. Well, anyway I was sure glad to get home.

Q: What did you do after the war?

A: After the war I got a job. I didn't work too long, about a year and a half, and then I got into business. My buddy's father had a restaurant. He was in partnership with a guy in Chicago close to the Loop, and they had an argument there, so he said you buy me out or I buy you out. So, he didn't have too much money, so he asked me if I would like to get

into business, and I didn't have any money, my dad didn't have any money, so my dad had to borrow money, he trusted me. I don't know why my partner in the restaurant business, he kind of figured I was you know, I could save a buck, I wasn't too so, he said, you'll get that back in no time. I took his word for it, and I told my dad, I says, if you can borrow some money, and my dad had some good friends and he borrowed 6,000 bucks, I think it was, and he I got in partnership with him. It worked out in no time. I paid my dad out first, and then I was sitting pretty. I bought a car, and I had a pretty good life after that, I mean, hey, while the sun was shining, because, you know, they had to go to Wisconsin to buy to slaughter. You have to get some everything was rationed not yet but, before that. And so they used to go get meat there and stuff, and I was in the restaurant business for 27 years. So, it was a cafeteria style though. But, it's not like what it is now. Now you need a cashier or a manager or a this or that or anything for you. We did have about 12, 13 employees, but we were opened up from 5:30 in the morning until 2, 3:00 the next morning, you know. But, then they start dwindling down, the neighborhood started changing. Eventually we only had breakfast and dinners, because we used to get the crowds after bowling and stuff. They didn't they cut that out, I mean, they were afraid to deliver, the neighborhood was changing, shooting and stuff. I got up here. So, I had to give it gave it up.

Q: Did you talk to any friends or family about your experiences in the war?

A: Well, I told them I didn't want to scare them. Because, my brother, he was in the navy, and he says don't tell them mom and dad that he's going back after they took care

of his ship. He was anxious to get back there to kill them Japs and stuff. So, I didn't tell my mother and dad because my dad died when he was young, 65. And, I was my mother lived to be 100 one month short of being 100. So, she was a widower for a long time, but she was in a nursing home. And don't I mean, after she'd be better off dead than living the way she lived in a wheelchair all the time. We had a nursing home close to home in Chicago, and my sister always used to go see her every day, feeding her, and fixing her hair and stuff like that. But, that was it, I mean.

Q: Did you have the opportunity to see the exhibition upstairs in the museum?

A: First time, today, I went.

Q: What did you think?

A: Nice, gorgeous, amazing. They should show if the people seen it real, you see it yourself, it's different than telling people, you know. But, now they see you can see the pictures and stuff, that's really wonderful.

Q: Do you think it accurately did it accurately portray your experience?

A: Yeah, it was pretty close to it, I mean. You see it in the movies and stuff too in the papers and stuff, but you can't beat this, it was wonderful, really.

Q: We're recording this for prosperity, what would you most like future generations to know about what you experienced in the war?

A: To know what?

Q: What would you most like future generations to learn from your experience in the war?

A: Well, if you want freedom, you got to fight for it, I mean. That's why Obama and stuff, and maybe these younger generations would straighten them out. And I think we all hate war, as far as that goes. War is hell for everyone, you know, but that's you know, we were there. But, it's the best thing to do is try to stay out of it. And (inaudible) is sticking her nose here and there, and we're fighting for everybody else, and there will always be war. As long as there are two people living, you and I, we're you want what you got, plus what I got, and I want what you want. That's the name of the game, I mean, that's it.

Q: Okay. Well, thank you, sir, and thank you for your service to our nation.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay. Thank very much, indeed. It is 15:22 hours.

Conclusion of Interview