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## Duane Mahlen oral history interview by Michael Hirsh, March 18, 2008

Duane Mahlen (Interviewee)

Michael Hirsh (Interviewer)

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[Transcriber's note: The Interviewee's personal information has been removed, at the request of the Interviewer. This omission is indicated with ellipses.]

**Michael Hirsh:** Give me your name and spell it, please?

**Duane Mahlen:** It's Duane, D-u-a-n-e. Last name is Mahlen, M-a-h-l-e-n.

MH: And you're at....

DM: That's it.

MH: And your phone number's....

DM: You got it.

MH: And your birth date is when?

DM: October 1, 1925.

MH: Okay, and what unit were you in?

DM: Headquarters Company Combat Command B, known as CCB.

MH: And how long had you been—and that's the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.

DM: Well, I was probably one of the youngest guys in the division. We, um—I don't know if you've heard about Camp Cooke and this place where we left the States from, but I and many of the—those attending college, which I was not, they were taking special courses in forty-three [1943], forty-four [1944], all Russian or whatever else, and then of course the war heated up, and they all needed the bodies they could get. To make a long story short, the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored was staging at Camp Cooke, which is Vandenberg Air Force Base out here now. Most of the guys were old timers and us younger folks were being—filling holes in the groups so they could ship out, and that would've been the summer of forty four [1944].

MH: Okay.

DM: And I was a high school graduate, barely. I had to rush that up so I could get in, so I was probably a little bit younger than the rest of them. But they let me in with that, and that was all—we were newcomers, and I took basic at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

MH: So did I.

DM: Did you?

MH: Yes. (laughs) A few years later, but yes.

DM: I think a lot of the older fellows had not—you know, didn't come that route. A lot of them joined up, two old cavalry guys, which we have stories about, of course. Patton was a horse cavalry guy. So, yeah, Fort Knox, and I came home on leave and I was told to report to Camp Cooke and had no idea where the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored was. Anyway, a lot of stories to tell, but I didn't have much time, and I never got home after my leave in Los Angeles for some reason, so I didn't get to see the Hollywood Palladium at that point. But I made up for it later on. When I was in Headquarters Company Combat Command B, at the time of the liberation, I was in a light tank crew, and—

MH: What's the designation of a light tank?

DM: It's an M-5, it's a four-person tank; and these other guys, a lot of 'em were in a medium tank, which was a tank that really, you know, eventually won the war for us; albeit that the Germans had bigger tanks and the famous .88 caliber gun, and I guess our fellows were just smarter and had more of them and had to fight harder, so they were out-gunned but not otherwise. At Headquarters Company, we had a tank crew of four. We had the major which was in charge of operations in the Combat Command B, so I was not in the line company per se. I was in—we were out there nearly every day. And, as the war progressed or was wrapping up and we started flying down the autobahn, the major also had a Jeep, and sometimes he'd choose to take the Jeep when there was no particular danger. And so, that was my job. I was supposed to be the gunner, but typically, I was sitting down on the bow gun on the right front where I could also drive and sort of shoot a .30 caliber like you're shooting from the hip, you know?

MH: Mm-hm. So, you're sitting inside the tank?

DM: Yeah, we're all inside the tank, four of us, and it's a very small tank and not designed for combat per se. But really, I suppose, in World War I, and between that, it might've been the biggest tank out there, but it was very small and really designed to support infantry and do reconnaissance. But Harry Saunders, if you talk with him, he would've been in the light tank or an armored car, and so that was the vehicle we were in. Dan had a peashooter gun and had a few machine guns and not intended to take anybody on, really, except infantry and maybe another light tank or people throwing things at us and what have you. So, it was just a smaller coffin, you know.

MH: Right, right, yes. So, you shipped out from Camp Cooke?

DM: Yeah, we all shipped out in, uh, let's see—I'm thinking about September. Maybe Dan has better dates on this. All I know, we shipped out for New York City, and ironically, I was not yet nineteen years old. I'd enlisted just before I was eighteen so I could finish high school in California, which I'm glad I finally did in kind of a hurry-up thing, and most of the people in high school there—some of them were already enlisted and some were going to enlist, and it was kind of a fractured time in high school. But hey, I made it. And I think in February forty-four [1944] I reported to Fort Knox for my basic, and 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division was my first assignment.

MH: So, they sent you by railroad across country.

DM: I think, yeah—no first-class flight.

MH: (laughs) Right. And then you went to where, New York City?

DM: Uh, New York City and one of the camps there. Can't remember the camp right off the top of my head—

MH: Camp Kilmer?

DM: But then we shipped out to England.

MH: Was it Camp Kilmer?

DM: Yes, it was. Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

MH: Okay. And then you boarded ship.

DM: Boarded a British ship—which, as a matter of fact, I wrote about it recently how I came back from my first cruise in Hawaii and compared it to that. But, anyhow, we landed in Liverpool, I think, because southern England was full at the time or we were chased by submarine packs. Of course, they don't tell you that until you get there. But through the North Atlantic, and then we made our way down to the south of England where we set up in what they call "staging," and basically you're waiting for your equipment. There are people there and you're waiting for your equipment, new stuff to come to you. You don't take that with you.

And then in—let's see, September, it would've been October, November—I think in November; you can check those dates—we shipped by a large landing craft to France. The place was secure, of course, by that time, after D-Day, and then we were all there to be part of Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, whose original mission was to, with quite a few divisions, to race for Berlin to hopefully be the ones who get to occupy Berlin; and of course, that became a political decision later on.

Meanwhile, just before Christmas in December, the Germans sort of caught the Americans by surprise a bit. You probably know a little about the Battle of the Bulge already, but that was a—in my mind, maybe need not have happened. Not to criticize anybody, but the German troops were making the last gasp, frankly, and Hitler told them

to get to Antwerp at the port, and most of it was around Bastogne; but there were lots of other places that had lots of nasty things. You know, they ran out of gas, literally, and the skies cleared, and the planes came in and most feel that they'd already lost the war and had a German general calling the shots. He had probably aborted and surrendered even before the Bulge, you know. They could tell that they'd lost the war. Their production facilities had been destroyed and their air force was nil, and they just were asking young guys and old guys and trying to hang on. And the Hitler guy, of course, didn't suffer any excuses, so—

MH: Let me put you on hold for one more second, please.

DM: Okay.

***Pause in recording***

MH: I am sorry.

DM: So. Anyhow, the Bulge came on, and we were not the first ones in there. We all marched about twenty-four hours in the dark. Everybody was racing north to take the pressure off the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, who were surrounded in Bastogne. Of course, Bastogne was a hub for four or five highways, and that's why it was critical. It allowed the troops to move freely and some of the other Army divisions were up there first, and we got there in the dark—blackout march—and at that time, I was not in the tank. I joined them in January. I was doing all sorts of guard duty and what have you.

So, anyway, that finally came to light, and when the Air Force was able to come in and break it up—but I say, and maybe this is not officially, but I think that, really, our defenses were down. We had several brand-new, untried in battle, divisions up there, infantry that were assigned to hang on while everyone else was staging for the next move, I guess. So, they lost a lot of people at that point who were totally—a lot of them had to surrender. They came—were totally overwhelmed with numbers of Germans, and there were a lot of them. They put everything they had out there, and used the SS guys to make sure the other guys keep on moving and so on. But the Schutzstaffel were Hitler's favorite guys, of course.

So, then we went to Luxembourg and the war was still on, then headed just up north of Belgium, and then they headed toward the Rhine, of course, and (inaudible) from that point on is the—you probably read about that in books, but as it were, we got to the east side of Germany. The war was starting to break up, and there were lots of camps up there that we didn't see. But we did pass by a camp called Flossenbürg, near Weiden,

Germany; and that was not our mission to do that, but later, at the end of the war, I learned that Flossenbürg was there and some other group had taken Flossenbürg. By that time, it was a race to end the war down the east side of Germany towards Austria.

MH: Did you know about the concentration camps?

DM: No, no.

MH: So nobody had ever briefed the American soldiers on, you know, what they might be finding.

DM: I sure wasn't, and I'm not sure anybody was briefed. That's an issue. I've been involved as Dan has, and Petersohn and Saunders and all. They went to Austria in 2005 for a sixtieth reunion, and I was supposed to go, but I wasn't feeling well, so I had to scrub it. And that was a—Petersohn had some great stories to tell about that.<sup>1</sup> And, of course, Saunders has been interviewed for years and years, and I'm not sure how well he's communicating now. And my best buddy, Pete Petersohn in the Chicago area, he's having some problems staying focused, you know, and we still stay in touch. You might want to know that before you (inaudible).

And so, then we raced down the east side there into Austria, and my first—although we were not part of the first people in there. Saunders and a platoon of the 41<sup>st</sup> Cavalry were there, and they were out probing around. They might've heard by that time it was something over there. And basically, they kind of run into the places, you know, and they find them and call the officer and say, "What do we do now?" you know, and so—

MH: So, it's on radio?

DM: Uh.

MH: That they can call?

DM: Yeah, the vehicles have radio; at least, most of them did. And we went in there, and you should talk to the other guys about that, but we went in there within hours, because

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<sup>1</sup> LeRoy "Pete" Petersohn was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is C65-00105.

our major wanted to see what's going on there. And we were not part of the occupying group there or the part that eventually was trying to clean up the camp.

MH: Right. Tell me how far away from the camp you were when you first heard about it?

DM: Oh, goodness.

MH: Just about.

DM: It was along the Danube [River] there, you know, and I don't think—I don't remember hearing about it at all. I think the major probably got a call and wanted to check it out. The war was going to be over; it was virtually over by that time, but not legally. Well, not until May 7 or 8 had they really declared that the war was over there, but we went—not as far as you think. We were headed for Linz, a major city there, and I would say maybe, and I'm not good at remembering statistics, but you know, maybe five miles—five or ten miles.

MH: So, you were just an hour or two hours away.

DM: By tank. I'm just not sure what—we didn't know then until we got in there and saw the mess.

MH: Let's take it a step at a time. You're driving in a tank at this time?

DM: In a light tank.

MH: In the light tank, and you're going up the road toward Mauthausen, and what do you see?

DM: To check it out, frankly. It had already been occupied by our guys. So, we were in there a few hours—and I suppose the major wanted to see what was going on.

MH: But you got out of the tank and walked around as well.

DM: I did, yeah.

MH: So, just take me through it. Tell me—I mean, is there barbed wire around the place? What's it look like?

DM: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's barbed wire and walls and an electrical fence and so forth. I learned more about that kind of a camp after the war when I spent some time at Flossenbürg, guarding it as officers, and then I got to see it close up. But camps and barracks, and we did not march through the main gate like the first guys did. We had to go through the main gate, but we were not the liberators per se.

MH: It's okay.

DM: And you know, you see them and all. It's the most shocking thing I've ever seen in my life, obviously.

MH: But tell me what you're seeing. I mean, are there hundreds of thousands of prisoners?

DM: Well, at least thousands, and hundreds of thousands were killed there. I think when you come in, you see a lot of these prisoners who were, you know, looked like they were dead. A few of them had survived pretty well, and a lot of them were armed at that time. The Germans had left, for obvious reasons. They didn't want to be around and be caught in the act, so they disappeared, and [it was] a little bit scary when you see some of those guys. I'm sure the cavalry guys would say that, that they had to take charge and tell the guys to put their guns down, even though they were the people who're supposed to be liberated. They were a little half-crazed, you know—and very happy to see Americans, obviously.

MH: Did you have physical contact with those?

DM: No, I did not, not physical contact. I'm not sure that I needed to or should have; but I did walk around, and we went to the women's portion over there. The first sight, of course, is the piles of allegedly dead bodies that had not been buried yet.

MH: Why do you say "allegedly"?

DM: Well, there was actually—probably some live people stacked in that pile of the dead, all in different stages of death. And, you know, most of them were dead, in piles there. I always picture this like a stack of cordwood.

MH: That description keeps coming up from many people.

DM: Yeah, yeah, they were thrown that way, and later on, they had to be buried. I wasn't there when they dug the massive holes to bury them, but—and then they let the local citizens of the Mauthausen area help with that, of course. And the mayor got—and I wasn't seeing this—this was after we bailed out—but the mayor had lots of locals over there to look at it. It was their first, allegedly, look at what they've seen, but we'll never really know how much they did know. And they had to dummy-up on, you know, because (inaudible). Austria's a beautiful place, and after the war, I really enjoyed the few months I had there, but it's—we can implicate a lot of people, but we'd never been there ourselves to see what that would be like. So, got to play the game, obviously, so you're one of the victims.

MH: What was your reaction, hearing that, you know, the locals said, “We had no idea this was going on”?

DM: I heard that after the war.

MH: Right.

DM: I didn't—there weren't—we were there so early that that stuff hadn't happened yet. They were just occupying it, so we went around and saw what we could see and got a look at the women through the fence, those that were still standing, and the troops. And the men were very jovial, you know, at different stages of—even the starved-looking ones were there, and we didn't touch them. I don't think anybody did unless they had to.

MH: Did any of them speak English?

DM: I suspect they did. I heard all sorts of languages there. Our tank commander was a Kraut himself, and the driver was Polish. I don't think at that point they made, you know, contact with them. It was very early in the thing, and things were disorderly yet. But there were times when Sergeant Cherry, who could speak Polish, when they were on their

way down that way, when they were surrendering by the thousands, and both Carl Quint and Stan Cherry could—they could communicate in German or Polish, and that was very helpful to our major, you know. But they—I think Stan Cherry came back—both these fellows are deceased now. Came back, was called in as one of the senior people to work on the, you know, cleaning up the mess. Colonel Siebel was put in charge of—Major Siebel, actually—put in charge of cleaning the place up, and they were there for several weeks, so they can really tell you stories. But my tank driver was part of that contingent. We were in Linz by that time, when the war was over, and Linz was the nearest large town on the Danube. We camped out there for a while, I guess. I'm not real good on dates where some people can tell you they are, but I've never been [that] type of a person.

MH: When you were inside the camp, was there a significant difference between the men's side and the women's side?

DM: Well, all the women were kept together; they were behind a fence, you know, and had been until we came along. And I think they were a little bit subdued. I'm sure they'd been through an awful lot of stuff, and they were essentially standing, looking at us, very emaciated. And I didn't make any contact with any of those people, but you see it, you know. It's all around you, and—

MH: Were they asking for food?

DM: I don't recall them asking me. Some people tried to give them stuff, which turned out to be a mistake. They weren't prepared to eat rations and stuff like that. I don't recall that I did that, personally, but some of the folks did, I guess, and then those that came in and stayed there were—you know, everybody wanted to be helpful. They wanted to share what they had with them, and they said later on that some of that probably hastened the death of some of those people, because their stomachs were not prepared to take on real food, even though it was GI rations. But back then, they were pretty well gone anyhow. We never thought badly of ourselves for doing that, because Americans are always, you know—

MH: Right. What were the conversations between you and your buddies like? What'd you talk about at the time, or even the day after or that night?

DM: You know, I don't remember the conversations. I'm sure that we used all sort of expletives and everybody's mad at the Germans and Austrians for allowing it. I just don't remember any particular conversations, although I'm sure we had them; that's not my forte. But we were all deeply stunned, obviously, and surprised. A lot of the Americans were in the—if they knew that camp was there, it sure didn't get down to us. But I think

—actually, it was discovered. I mean, they came upon it. Somebody probably told the cavalry guys, “Well, you take that; go up there and scout it out,” and that’s what the cavalry guys do. They’re the guys who search out spots and kind of clear—they don’t really clear the ground, they’re just our—they do the—they’re the point guys, if you will. And so, it was. They were the guys that saw it first, but we saw it in about the same shape they did; but we didn’t stick around for more than two or three hours at the most; then our major had to report to his colonel and go do something else. I know I’ve been personally involved, although I didn’t get back to Europe. I had a couple of occasions I could’ve gone, but I wasn’t up to it physically. But I’ve been involved in the Holocaust thing, even in California here, and I’m a kind of student of it in my own way.

MH: Hello?

DM: I mention Flossenbürg coming down there, and we were not—you know, maybe within miles but it wasn’t our place to go.

MH: Right.

DM: So, after the war, us young fellows were not old enough to have enough points to go home yet, so from V-E Day on until it was December or the spring of 1946 that most of us young guys had enough points to go home. So, we did all sorts of different kinds of jobs, and one of mine was an assignment at Flossenbürg camp that I mentioned. I’d never heard of it. At that point, in the winter of forty-five [1945] for me, we were guarding SS officers who were allegedly awaiting trials or how they were going to be charged, and I don’t know how it turned out, but I suspect a lot of them walked. And some of them are—if they’d been implicated directly, they were executed. And all this I read after the war, so I read a lot of stuff on this stuff.

In fact, I had a conversation with a fellow yesterday from the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and he was calling for a donation. And I happened to mention that I saw this firsthand and I was involved in a lot of the stuff here. When we had a reunion in D.C.—I don’t know when; about three years ago, I guess—we were honored at the Holocaust Museum. But out here, and in aught-five [2005] when I did not go to Austria, I was invited to go up to the Simon Wiesenthal Museum here, which is the West Coast operation.

MH: Right.

DM: And they were having a parade because of the sixtieth observance, and I was honored there with a woman who had actually been at the camp who I never knew. You know, you don't know [*sic*] those people there. So they had a real photo op, for one thing, and so we were—I was honored personally up there, under grand marshal of the little parade. I allegedly rode in Jack Nicholson's convertible, which didn't really impress me. But it was—I've kept in touch with them a bit, and so I was there about three days. And then one of the fellows we liberated was—he had written a lot of books, and he was down at the Dallas-Fort Worth part of the Holocaust thing there, and so he had a book review, and we were available for questioning and so forth. I was obviously treated pretty grandly. Interesting part about it, I was the only guy wearing his World War II Eisenhower uniform.

MH: You can still fit into it?

DM: Well, it was tough. (laughs) It was tough. I'd already moved the buttons over. I never gain much weight. I'm at about 160 now that I've been ill. But I buttoned it up and I appeared in everything I had. I didn't have any of the wool pants that I had over there, but I had some pants I wore afterwards that looked good enough. And I probably looked more like a lieutenant than a corporal, but then that was okay. And that was the—I tell the story that I got through the day but all I did was exhale, you know, but it was a very moving day. They also had fellows there that had helped catch Hermann Göring. So that was another outfit entirely, but we were all honored, and it was very emotional. I think I got a three-second shot on television.

MH: Come back to Flossenbürg for a minute. How long were you there?

DM: Got there in December, just before Christmas in what, aught-five [2005]? I'd been in England. They were trying to keep everybody busy down in Austria there so the guys'd behave themselves, and they kind of got tired.

We settled in Kirchdorf. Our unit was in Kirchdorf, Austria, which is down the road a piece from Linz. And, you know, we were doing lots of what they call make-work, and in a snow area, and they came up with the deal that anybody who had enough bucks in their Kirchdorf tour book, they could—my buddy and I were guarding tanks and coal piles, like everybody was, that nobody wanted to steal, and so we said, “Yeah, we're available to go to Garmisch-Partenkirchen and learn how to ski.” Their thought was that when we learned the basics of skiing, certainly everybody would want to learn to ski in Austria, because much to nobody's surprise, that was not their mission at that time.

So, I'd been there, and then I'd been to England, had a chance to go to a couple of schools, one in (inaudible) and one in (inaudible), England. Sure, the college prep thing, and I had no indication I was ever go to college. We were still trying to get up to the poverty level at home. I'd come back from there, and then I reported to Flossenbürg, and I remember my English host there; my brother had been there years earlier, and [she] was like a mother to us. And she had an early Christmas for me, because I wasn't going to be there.

We spent Christmas in Flossenbürg guardhouse, and I think it was the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored contingent with my outfit, because the old guys had already left for home, were already there, see? And that was—we were guarding SS officers there, and they were a very cooperative crowd, allegedly, as long as it suited them. And so when I heard about Flossenbürg, what had really happened there after the war and this fellow in Los Angeles that had been locked up there. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who you may or may not have heard of, was a German Lutheran theologian that chose to be part of the attempts to assassinate Hitler, and of course, he was a marked man. And later on, before we got there—before I got there—they had hanged him. Not much of a trial, but he was a marked man, so they made a special case out of him. I'm not sure if he was incinerated there or not. Flossenbürg did not have—as far as I know, they had an incinerator, but I think most of the guys were hanged or shot there, as far as I could see. No mass killing any other way, and I don't recall any gas chambers there.

MH: Did any of the SS officers talk to you about things that had happened during the war?

DM: Well, not about what had happened. They were, you know, kissing up to us, right?

MH: Right.

DM: And they were all, you know, captains or majors at least. And so they were very bright guys, and a lot of them spoke good English. A few of them got to come out and clean up our shacks, occasionally, under guard. But they were prisoners. Kind of a—so, they wanted to be nice to us so we'd maybe kiss up to them, but that didn't happen.

A few things: It was built in kind of a big sandpit, and when the fog rolled in every night and when that rolled in and we were (inaudible) with our flood lamps and machine guns, and it was kind of difficult to—allegedly, some of the guys got out, and I don't know how they did it, because it was electrical wire and everything else, but they were back in the morning for roll call. I'm just guessing that some of them might've been stationed around there and made contact with people in town, you know, in Flossenbürg. And I got

out of there and it was time to go home, ship out in the spring. On an American ship, this time, I recall. Getting into Pearl Harbor—getting into New York Harbor, which we hadn't gone to—we'd shipped out of there, but kind of a surprise when the tugboats came out to greet us, you know, and playing all this crazy forties [1940s] music we hadn't heard about. Talk about funky songs today, but they also had those songs back then. It was pretty nice to be home.

MH: Right. And then how would you say your experience confronting in the Holocaust in the war affected you later on?

DM: Oh, tremendously. I did not have any illness. I think Pete Petersohn's thought we were suffer a bit at the time, but he was in there fixing bodies, you know. He was honored greatly at the camp there, but I think as soon as you start reading about it, when you're there, you don't really know what's going on. You see it, and I read more about the Holocaust since the war was over, and I read everything I can get and verify things, and I'm still shocked at what I did see. My grandson gave me a large book this year by someone with pictures on it.

I've got literature all over the place, and the latest thing I came up with was an article somebody gave me on the slaughters in the Ukraine area where the Latvians and Lithuanians and all those guys were, you know—they were overrun, and they chose occasionally to get along with the Germans. I think over the century, they had to get along with a lot of people. And so, they actually slaughtered their own people, thousands of them, and that was a real surprise to me, because I'd heard nothing about that part of the thing. And being a Norwegian by heritage, I heard an awful lot about the resistance of the Norwegians up there when the Germans occupied them, although they were—you know, could not prepared to meet that onslaught. They surrendered if one of them got killed; but Norway was not a military power, and they left the world alone and we left them alone. But I've read about that and some of the resistance that happened there, very quiet.

And just the other night, on *NOVA*, I ran into a show on the heavy water thing where the Germans were trying to make a bomb. And that's an interesting story where they were making this so-called heavy water, something needed to, I guess, activate other things, and they were talking about how the Germans were trying to dump some of these cans of stuff into the deepest lake, which they did, and backing up from there, I just remember that I read about the article where the German resistance trained in England sabotaged that place, and that was a fascinating story to read. So, I've read everything that's out there, which is—in fact, I think everybody would say the same thing. You knew more about what's happened there than you do when you're there. I could say the same things about little towns in Germany and stuff like that, you know, you come upon them, and I'd never traveled in Europe, so I'd say it was validated after the war.

MH: When did you get married?

DM: I got married—oh goodness, I shouldn't forget that my wife died nine years ago. But August 4, 19—terrible. Nineteen fifty-one.

MH: So, did—at what point, if ever, did you tell your wife about the things you had seen?

DM: Oh, you know, at that point, we didn't talk a lot about it, because stuff hadn't been written yet, and there really hadn't been much stuff coming out yet. Today, of course, it's been an onslaught, and I told her about it. You know, but I don't remember her reaction. We were courting, and I was going to a local city college on the GI Bill, which was a godsend for me, and I was the first Mahlen to ever go to college anywhere. I'm a South Dakota native. But as time went on, right after the war, you're not really into that. You're going to school, working. I think everybody might tell you the same thing in the end. The guys hadn't written their books yet, and there was no TV shows about it, because the discovery, really—the significance of the discovery is later on where most of us validated what we'd seen. So, I've been a spokesman for—talked to a few classes in school when my grandson went to school here. Like I say, a couple days ago I talked to the guy in the—

MH: The museum?

DM: The Holocaust thing, and instead of telling him I'm gonna send him any money, I said, "I may or may not, but I know all about the thing and could talk to you for hours if you wanted to." I think anybody would tell you that much of this was validated after they got out of the Army, and when my company landed in Kirchdorf an der Krems in Austria—like I said—we holed up there for a few months and we were playing softball and drinking some beer, of course, and doing typical military make-do work to keep the guys occupied. Not too far from Berchtesgaden was where Hitler hung out and I assume planned to rule the world from one of his headquarters, but that was abated.

So, I got to know the local Austrians better there. They were—(clears throat) At that time, I had no idea how they'd been implicated, you know, and it wasn't until some of these anniversaries came up in Austria that really they were called to task for that. And they'd been unwilling to talk about it, so they were implicated, because Hitler was born not too far from that area up there, and he was a Bavarian. And so, you got to know the people, but we were relaxing, we were unwinding. The old guys went home. And there was a railroad trailhead there a lot of the—I could tell you that the Hungarians—

everybody was fleeing the Russians—wanted to come, you know, west instead of east, and I think some agreement was struck by their brass along the way that at some point or made a deal with the Russians, I guess. I wasn't involved in that, obviously, at my level. But just kind of drew a line, I guess. (inaudible) sent quite a few of these German prisoners over, gave them to Russia as part of the deal.

But the locals were nice. We took over somebody's house there and the man and the woman who were—kind of ran a cement works there and they had a headquarters, but we took that up for several months. His wife there, the mother, she reminded me so much of my maternal grandmother. We never beat anybody up, just a matter of saying, "We need this house for our guys" and we took it over, and that's how it was when we were able to stay inside. And of course they all said, "*Nicht, nicht Nazi.*"

MH: *Nicht Nazi*, yeah. I keep hearing that from people.

DM: In that same house we stayed at, I pointed out pictures of the SS sons of hers, but they denied it. Maybe at that point, that's a logical reaction; but I think the Austrians finally, when they had the sixtieth anniversary and so forth, that they finally had to come to terms with it. Some of our guys on the East Coast talked to some of the diplomats there, and they—that aught-five [2005] thing, we were ready to go on our own, and all of a sudden the Austrian government paid for six people and put them up in style over there, and their spouses. Like I said, I couldn't go and so I just gave Pete my—I pointed to him and said, "Somebody really ought to go there." He can tell you some stories if you can get it out of him.

MH: When you say Pete, you mean LeRoy?

DM: LeRoy, yeah, yeah.

MH: Okay. Back in this country, did you ever run into people who said it didn't happen?

DM: Not personally, but I've sure read a lot about that, and I've sort of taken the advance on that; you know, it did happen and I'll stand up to anybody today. I think there's less denial now that if they read this stuff and put the Holocaust and a lot of the specials that have been done on war. But I don't recall any denial per se because I wasn't in that crowd, but I would stand up to them in a minute. There's no better witness than having been there and seen it as I did, and I don't want it to happen. And the Jewish people have been persecuted for generations. Some time I would personally like to know what specifically the Germans were mad about. I guess they'd lost a war—World War I—and

never got over that, I guess—but you know, they must've been blaming somebody for their life, and they were better businesspeople, you know? Owned the banks and stuff like that, and I say so what, you know? But it must've been tough for the Germans to accept that, those people being there, and so they were gonna get rid of them. You know, so many stories about the plans they had for doing that.

As it turned out, I got to see some of it, and quite a few guys surrendered. Toward the end of the war there, they were surrendering in wholesale, the Germans, on the way down the east side of Germany, and we were overwhelmed by prisoners. When they raise their arms, Americans have to accept that. You don't—you'd like to shoot them, but we didn't do that. Maybe some guys did (inaudible), but I have no idea. The guys in the line company who—well, it's either you or me. I didn't run into that situation personally, although I shot at a few of them, but that was not my role, per se. Anyway—

MH: Okay.

DM: I've got to get ready to leave for—get my hearing checked. I—

MH: Okay.

DM: I heard you pretty well, but—if you talk to LeRoy, just be aware of that and maybe catch him in the morning. He really—He was really out of there, because some little baby near death when he got there, and they nursed her along and she survived, and lo and behold, the thing came up in aught-five [2005]. They had brought this woman, who's now a doctor in Northern California, and put together—and brought her and Pete together, and that's the photo op of the century.<sup>2</sup> I mean, it was just exactly what—Pete wasn't even—didn't know he was supposed to go, and so when I couldn't go, I talked to (inaudible), “Boy, you've got to get him over there somehow.” But I had heard what he had done and—but he was overwhelmed by that. I mean, it turned out to be the highlight of the appearances, you know.

MH: Where was that?

DM: That was in Mauthausen—

MH: No, I mean—

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<sup>2</sup> This woman, Hana Berger Moran, was also interviewed for the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. The DOI for her interview is C65-00090.

DM: In aught-five [2005].

MH: In aught-five [2005] in Mauthausen?

DM: Yeah. By that time, they were having—they have an annual thing there now.

MH: Right, but I thought you said that this woman was a doctor and she was in Northern California.

DM: Yeah, but they brought her over.

MH: Oh, they brought her over.

DM: We knew nothing about that.

MH: Okay.

DM: He didn't see her until he got there. Pete saw an awful lot of stuff and he might get emotional about it, so just keep in mind that he may not be able to talk about all of it.

MH: Okay. I appreciate that.

DM: But I'd like to see a draft or something sometime when you do this.

MH: Okay.

DM: I'd like to know what you're—what you're doing with this.

MH: I will—do you have e-mail?

DM: Yeah, I do. I got a computer for Christmas. I didn't want it, but I screw it up. It's....

MH: Okay.

DM: And I'll try to reach you but I—it's one of those things I didn't need and didn't want, but you know—it's sort of like getting a car you don't know how to drive yet.

MH: Yeah, well. You—

DM: (inaudible) Do you have a phone number and address I could reach you if I needed to?

MH: Um, sure. But you know what I'll do? I'll just—I can e-mail it all to you.

MD: Would you?

MH: Yeah. No problem.

DM: And you're in Florida and—

MH: I'm in Florida. I'll send you an e-mail—

DM: Are you Jewish?

MH: Yes.

DM: And you have some stories to tell too?

MH: No. I'm only sixty-five. I mean, I've got Vietnam stories, but they don't count.

DM: Oh, well, I tell ya—

MH: (laughs)

DM: When they had those last thing out here—well, Ken Burns' book<sup>3</sup>—

MH: Yeah.

DM: I've always told my people that we've had our day in court. We've had our—I run the California chapter out here with our national division association for a year, and I'm very tight with the people. I haven't been able to go to the reunions for about three years, but it's—we've been—Ken Burns did a good job of describing the other wars. And I tell my guys—look, you know, the Japanese, the Eastern war, I never wanted to go to that one. The Japanese were different—were a different enemy and they didn't play by their own rules.

MH: Right.

DM: There was some civility, of course, with the Anglo soldiers in Europe, but you know, if you had to kill them, you did it. But I tell our guys, we got so much publicity in the European war. I think it was the best—and the Bulge, of course. The death rate there was such that it's been a really big topic and we've been—we were always asked about it. But I said when I saw that Japanese war stuff, "I don't want no part of Hiroshima," 'cause those guys were—

MH: Right.

DM: But you know about McCain, of course. He spent five years in that thing, and that's  
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MH: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your time.

DM: Thank you, and I probably forgot some stuff and I try not to.

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<sup>3</sup> *The War: An Intimate History, 1941-1945* by Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, published in 2007 by A.A. Knopf.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Senator and 2008 presidential candidate John McCain, who was a POW in Vietnam.

MH: Well, if you happen to remember anything and you want to send me an email, just send it.

DM: I don't exaggerate anything, 'cause I was not a lineman, but I had all these experiences just because I had been there. Like the thing at the Holocaust thing out here, I just didn't expect that, and so it was—like I said, I will chat to anybody about that, and we're just up to confirm what I've heard since. I believe every word of it, and it's probably worse than I even saw it.

MH: Okay. Thank you very much, sir.

DM: (inaudible).

MH: I appreciate it.

DM: Bye-bye.

MH: Bye-bye.

***End of interview***