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Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project
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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: First of all, can you give me your name and spell it for me?

Carl V. Anderson: It's Carl V. Anderson. C-a-r-l V. A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n.

MH: And you're still at...

MH: Your phone is...

CA: That's right.

MH: And your e-mail address is...

CA: Yes, that's right.

MH: What's your date of birth?

CA: 6-5-1925 [June 5, 1925].

MH: Okay. You were with the 63rd Infantry Division?

CA: Yes, I was.

MH: Which unit?

CA: E Company in the 253 Regiment.

MH: The 253rd. Can you tell me, where were you before you went in the Army? What was going on in your life?

CA: Well, I was just out of high school. In fact, they took me from high school and gave me an all-expense-paid trip to Europe.

MH: Such a deal!

CA: A deal I couldn't turn down.

MH: Okay. When did you go in the Army?

CA: Nineteen forty-three [1943].

MH: You didn't even mention that you probably got an invitation from the president.

CA: I think it was something like June they swore us in. I can't remember the exact date.

MH: When did you go to Europe?

CA: In forty-four [1944]; we left New York about—I believe it was in November, and we landed in Marseilles first of December.

MH: Okay. And that was just before the Battle of the Bulge.

CA: Yeah, it was.

MH: Where'd they send you once you got to Marseilles?

CA: Well, we fought along the Alsace campaign, and then up the Rhine River to Sarreguemines, and that's about the time the Bulge broke out. And when [George S.] Patton turned his tanks around and headed north, he needed infantry protection, so they attached us to his Army going up into the Ardennes. We rode tanks up to the Ardennes and into the Bulge.

MH: You were a rifleman at that point?

CA: Well, yeah, I was in a rifle company. I happened to be in a weapons platoon of a rifle company.

MH: Okay, so you were handling what?

CA: 60mm mortars and light machine guns.

MH: And your rank at the time was what?

CA: I was a sergeant at the time.

MH: What happens to you in the Bulge?

CA: Well, it was cold, and we did a lot of fighting. I can't really go into a lot of detail, because we were moving around too much. Finally, when the Bulge ended, they sent us back to our original division, which was still based around the Sarreguemines area.

MH: They had just sent a regiment up there, then.

CA: Well, I'm not sure it was a full regiment; it was our battalion, I know, which was 2nd Battalion. There may have been other parts of the regiment, but we never did know really how many of us were up there.

MH: Okay. At that point, what did you know, if anything, about concentration camps?

CA: Not a great deal, except what I had learned about between forty-three [1943] and forty-four [1944] when we went up there, from our newspapers and our counseling in the Army. We didn't know, really, a great deal about them at the time.

MH: What was the first time you saw one of these camps, or saw any of the prisoners from those camps?

CA: Well, it was in April of forty-five [1945]. I would say it was towards the end of April, and it was on the western edge of Dachau.

MH: Was it one of the Landsberg camps?

CA: I'm sorry?

MH: Was it one of the Landsberg camps, one of the Dachau sub-camps?

CA: It probably was. There were a lot of prisoners in there. Apparently there was a factory about four to five miles east of there, and they were marched every morning to work and marched back every night to eat whatever they had and lived in a kind of shack.

MH: So, tell me, what was the first thing you actually saw?

CA: Well, we actually saw these people leaning over the fence rails as we approached the camp and waving—those that could; there were a lot who couldn't even get off the ground. And they looked like skeletons, really. It was quite a shocking experience.

MH: You were walking or riding?

CA: We happened to be in trucks at the time, but the trucks stopped, and we gave these people anything we had to eat in our possession. The K rations and these chocolate energy bars and water and whatever we had, we just unloaded everything in our pockets and gave it to them. We had to wait for the medical people to come up and start taking care of them, and people to bring up food for them. We were still fighting at that time.

MH: What's the conversation that goes on between the American soldiers when you first confront that and when you're dealing with it?

CA: I don't really know. It wasn't much talk; it was just the disgust that we had for what we saw. I don't know that there was a lot of conversation really carried on at that time, except, "Here's someone that needs help, give them whatever you've got," and we did that.

MH: Did you go in the camp?

CA: We didn't get far into it, because we were still—had to move on towards Munich. And we were stopped there for a short time and did what we could to help, and then we were moved on and waiting for the rear echelon to catch up and give them more aid that we couldn't give them.

MH: What kind of a day was that, do you recall?

CA: It was an overcast day, almost like we've got here in Waterville today. And it was cool. We had our field jackets on, and it wasn't a warm day.

MH: What were the inmates wearing?

CA: Most of them had on these white and red or white and black striped suits—uniforms, I call them—and that was about all. And they were digging in the ground for roots and trees to eat, and they were eating grass and anything that was edible.

MH: Had they come out of the camp, outside the wire?

CA: No, they didn't come out—well, a few of them did come outside the wire, but a great many of them weren't really able to negotiate around the wire or walk around too much.

MH: How long, in terms of time, did you spend there?

CA: Oh, I would say we were there maybe two or three hours.

MH: Was this a place where there were also bodies stacked up as well?

CA: We didn't get into that, no.

MH: Okay. What about the smell?

CA: I told my wife later that the people in Germany and around that area said they didn't know what was going on. I said the smell alone should have told you something was really bad going on. It was bad.

MH: And you could smell it away from the camp as well.

CA: Oh, yes, yeah, yeah. We moved on after a couple hours towards—more towards Munich, because they were afraid Hitler's troops were coming down into the mountains behind Munich, and we needed to stop them.

MH: How did you feel as you left the place?

CA: Well, we were mad. We were just disgusted and mad that somebody would do that to people like this.

MH: How does that play out in terms of what comes next in the war? You fight harder?

CA: Well, we moved towards Munich, and they held our division up and put a mountain division through us so that if these people got into the mountains, they had a unit trained for us. And we held up—well, we were there until the war's end, which was a few days later.

MH: Did you ever go back to any of the camps?

CA: Oh, yeah, yeah. My wife and I visited there, oh, about 1979, and we retraced all the places where we had been, and we went to Dachau and went through the entire area. They have a museum there, and you can go into the barracks where these people were. The furnaces were there. We spent most of a day going through that camp.

MH: Did you go through or go by the place where you had initially seen the prisoners near Landsberg?

CA: We probably did, although I can't really recall. It's a number of years, and places had changed. But we spent a couple of days in that area.

MH: How do you think seeing that thing, that sort of thing, during the war affected your life later on?

CA: Well, it's hard to say. You don't forget it. And you go into how people could do that to other people. I tell my grandchildren the stories about it, so that they know. And it just grinds me no end, these people who deny the Holocaust ever existed. And when we have our reunions, which we had a couple of weeks ago, our division reunion—I guess you were there—we talk about it among ourselves. And we make sure our kids know what really happened.

MH: Do you remember the first time you told your kids about this sort of thing?

CA: I guess my son was probably, oh, nine or ten years old when we discussed it or he heard us discussing it together, and he wanted to know—he got curious as to what happened. That was about—I believe he was around ten years old.

MH: Which would've been when, in the mid-fifties [1950s]?

CA: Let's see, he was born in—yeah, it would've been towards the end of the 1950s. Yeah. Then, of course, my grandkids—my grandson, he was always interested and wanted to know what happened. Of course, with him, Grandpa fought and won the whole war. (laughs)

MH: Of course. Did you figure out a good way to tell young kids about such a horrible thing?

CA: No, not really. The subject would come up once in a while, and of course I had pictures and things here, memorabilia, and they would see it and they'd ask about it—my dog tags and pieces of shrapnel and pictures we took during the war, and so forth.

MH: So, it essentially is using that stuff as a teachable moment: they ask, and you can go a little more into detail.

CA: Yeah. Yeah, when they would see it, they'd say, "Well, what does this mean?" and they'd look at the decorations and want to know what they were. "Why did you get them and how did you get them?" and that sort of thing.

MH: What decorations do you have?

CA: Well, I have the Combat Infantry badge, of course, and the Presidential Unit Citation, and the Bronze Star with Cluster, and I guess that's about the main ones.

MH: Were you wounded?

CA: No, I wasn't. Somehow, I got through without it. Came close, but they missed.

MH: That's a good thing. Do you have a photo of yourself from World War II?

CA: Yeah, I do.

MH: Would it be possible to send it to me, and I'll scan it and send it back to you?

CA: Yeah, well, I can send it. I've got one—I've got a couple of them here that I could probably send to you.

MH: Okay, I'll e-mail you my mailing address and that sort of thing.

CA: Okay. Fine.

MH: Do you have a current picture of yourself?

CA: I'm sorry?

MH: Do you have a current picture of yourself?

CA: Well, yeah; it's within recent months, anyway.

MH: Relatively current. If you could send that—I'll send you an e-mail.

CA: That would be fine.

MH: Okay. I would appreciate that very much, and I'll scan them and get them right back to you.

CA: Okay. Now, in the ad book, there was a picture of us before and after, and I don't know whether you might've had the book from our reunion or not.

MH: No, I didn't, 'cause I wasn't there; I just had actually been in touch with one of the—I believe it was the minister—Vince Stratton.

CA: Oh, yeah, because I talked to him later.

MH: I asked him to see try and—see if there were any people who had been at the camps.

CA: He said someone might call us and ask about it.

MH: Okay, well, I'll put this in the mail to you. If anything else comes up or you think of anything else you saw at the camp, please feel free to either call or email me.

CA: Okay. I will do.

MH: Thank you very much for your time, sir. I appreciate it. Bye-bye.

End of interview