Transcript: (Earlier Film)

Jim Gentry

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Interviewer: Hello, I'm Jacqueline Hedgecough and today is October 14th, 1990, and I'm speaking with Jimmy Gentry. Could you tell me when you entered the army?

Jim Gentry: Yes, I entered immediately after graduating from high school in 1944.

Interviewer: Did you enlist or were you directed?

Jim Gentry: It was a combination of both. I enlisted, and being color blind—I volunteered first for the Air Force—and being color blind, they refused me, so then I waited till my time came.

Interviewer: What division?

Jim Gentry: I was with the 232nd infantry regiment of the 42nd Rainbow Division.

Interviewer: When did you land in Europe and where?

Jim Gentry: Christmas, we were already in Europe. Actually in 1944 Christmas…of the Bulge, at the tail end of the Battle of Bulge was when we arrived in Europe.

Interviewer: Can you describe the direction your division took, naming relevant cities, battles?

Jim Gentry: Yes. We spent that cold winter in and around Drancy, France, Metz, and in that area, and then when the offensive began in the spring of '45, we went toward Frankfurt, between Frankfurt and Heidelberg, and then directly to the city of Weisberg, and from Weisberg we went toward Schweinfurt, took the city of Schweinfurt, and then we changed our direction and we headed directly south towards Munich. Nuremberg first and then Munich, and that was our general direction.

Interviewer: What was the extent of the warfare that you saw?

Jim Gentry: I'm not sure what you mean by that. I was in the infantry, that's a foot soldier. We walked everywhere we went, we didn't get to ride much, if it all. And so we were actually on the front line. That's the best way to describe it. In many cases we entered the towns and cities and across the hills and the valleys first, so we saw a considerable amount of combat during that short period of time.

Interviewer: What concentration camp did you enter? Can you describe the vicinity in relation to nearby cities?

Jim Gentry: Yes. We entered Dachau which is about thirteen kilometers northeast of the city of Munich, and that's the general area. And I might add that when we, as I say, we were to take the city of Munich. In fact, my division did take the city of Munich. My company, which was E company, was pulled off for some reason not knowing to us, and we took Dachau instead.

Interviewer: What did you know about concentration camps before you entered Dachau? Did you have any briefing at all?

Jim Gentry: No, absolutely nothing. I didn't even know what the word meant, didn't hear, didn't even know it was a concentration camp until later.

Interviewer: Can you describe for me what you saw without any knowledge or preparation or—?

Jim Gentry: Sure. For a long, long time, this part of it has been and still is somewhat a bit emotional for me and for anybody that actually witnessed those things. And quite frankly, I couldn't handle it for a long, long time and sometimes I don't handle it very well even now. But on April the 29th, 1945 is the day that we entered Dachau. It was a cool, damp day, seemed as always, in that part of the world it was cold and damp, although it was spring when we went down a gentle, rather pretty slope, grassy fields on both sides of the road, and that was the first time that we saw the camp itself. Quite high walls, stucco like stone. We didn't know what it was. We perhaps thought it was an army camp. We didn't know exactly what we were getting into, and the thing that I remembered most about reaching the camp was the odor that we had never experienced before. And it was so bad that some of us thought maybe it was gas being used by the Germans in an effort to save the war. And so that's the general idea of what we saw entering the camp. Now, I can tell you that when we actually got to the camp, there was a train, boxcars, and some six rate boxcars were outside the two large gates that entered into the camp. And of course, later, there were cars inside but that's all we could see at the time. When we reached those boxcars, we were going to use that gate which is on the northwest corner of the camp. Some of us go out and went to the left between the boxcars and the gate. And I know I went around the cars to go on the other side. And when I did, I ended up on the side with the doors. And there for the first time I saw the bodies of people that had been machine gunned and they had fallen out into heaps of piles. Some of the bodies were still partially in the boxcars and the reason they didn't fall all the way out is there were other bodies had fallen out and supported them from falling all completely out of the car. That was the first time I saw anything like that. It was something that I didn't understand. I didn't know what it was or who these people were, why they looked so emaciated, why they were killed. They didn't have on army uniforms. They only had prison uniforms. And I had not seen a prison uniform up until that time so I didn't know exactly what I was seeing. And we walked over the bodies to get through the gate and into the compound itself. There we saw the rest of the cars and the continuation of bodies

piled outside the cars. And that was our entrance into the camp. After we got into the camp, the first thing that we saw were large buildings, and it was still puzzling as to what kind of a camp would have large buildings like that in them, and so we worked our way from building to building securing each building, and not knowing again where we were or what we were doing. At the south side of the camp and about the center of camp was the main gate. Other soldiers had moved in to the camp through the main gate unknowing to us. And as we worked our way through the buildings, we found that they contained SS troop uniforms, equipment, and all that sort of thing was stored there. And I later found out that the prisoners, some of the prisoners used to work in those buildings. So that was about 10, 11 o'clock in the morning. And by midafternoon we had secured all of those buildings. To my knowledge I don't recall even finding a single German in those buildings. However we had to take each building at a time and work our way through. We got to the center of the camp is where we found the barbed wire remotes. Another wall within the larger wall and there was the compound and as we came to it, there were some other American soldiers milling around that area when we arrived. I don't recall going just to my left and out of the commodore's office. We had found his office, and of course he was not there. We got to the gate and entered into the compound. There for the first time I saw the sea of faces of people that appeared to be dead but yet they were still living. That's the part I have the hardest part.

Interviewer: How old were you at this time?

Jim Gentry: Eighteen, nineteen perhaps then. I went in eighteen. I'm probably nineteen.

Interviewer: So you're about nineteen years old.

Jim Gentry: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: And you stumbled across the situation. You're not really sure why you're there. None of the soldiers know. Were most of the people in your battalion of the same age, all relatively very young men?

Jim Gentry: Yes, I would say, probably. It would range from eighteen to thirty-five, forty-year-old men anyway. Most of us were low twenties, something like that, most of us.

Interviewer: Would you like to show the picture of yourself as a soldier?

Jim Gentry: Yes. Now, this is the way I looked at that age and most people think of me as I look now and I think this is important that they realize that I was just a young person at that time not knowing anything about what I was seeing or anything of that type.

Interviewer: Young. You look very innocent, very happy, stumbled into this place.

Jim Gentry: Right.

Interviewer: Encountered what you just said, a sea of faces.

Jim Gentry: Right. You also can see here that my—this might be a little bit more difficult to see—but this is my platoon and this is the group that entered Dachau and was not with the division when it took Munich. We were in Dachau.

Interviewer 2: Can you point yourself out there?

Jim Gentry: If I can find myself upside down, I believe I'm right here. I'm right under my finger. So you can see the ages of those with me. This happened to be the day the war ended and we are in good shape. We were taking a bath for the first time in many, many months and we think we are real clean. But after looking at it, we were not too clean.

Interviewer: So coming back to this young man, nineteen years old who stumbled into Dachau and encountering the sea of faces, can you tell me a little bit more about what you saw, how you reacted?

Jim Gentry: Well, at that time, as I said, I didn't know what I was seeing. I didn't know who these people were. I didn't know why they were there but I immediately realized that something was not right. These people that were so emaciated so their heads, eye were sunken back into their head. Some of them were not able to stand alone. They were holding on to the fence or some others would hold them up so they could stand. And we opened the gate and went in and this is, as I think back now, it's something that I didn't quite understand. There was no real cheering, yelling and screaming and jubilation for being liberated at that time. I don't think they knew what they were seeing either. I don't think they understood what was happening. In other words, for the first time they were seeing American soldiers. For the first time we were seeing them. And it took a little while for them to really realize that they were being liberated. We would enter the camp some days fall on that. And when we did, they would fall down on their knees and hold you around your leg and kiss your boots, kiss your leg. And just they were all elated then and happy that we had liberated them but it took them about a day to realize what was happening. Some of those that were stronger when we opened the gates, they laughed and went out into the little village of Dachau itself in search for food, and we had to go out and gather them up and finding them back. And then the very next morning which would be the 30th of April, the Red Cross was there. The medical aid was there, food was there, and the trucks came to pick up the bodies and all that sort of thing. And I didn't know how many people were there, but since that time I have read it was about 33,000 in the camp at that time.

Interviewer: Were you aware of different nationalities, political prisoners? Do you know approximately the number of Jews and non-Jews?

Jim Gentry: No. I don't know the number. I didn't know the Jews were there until I talked with a friend of mine, Charles Theason who lived in Queens in New York. And he told me that some of them were Jews. See, in Franklin, where I was from, we only had about two Jewish families and they were good friends of mine and I just couldn't imagine that anybody would do this sort of thing. And so, what he said, "Some of these are

Jews."But I found out later that those in the boxcars that had been killed were Jews. And there were several nationalities and ethnic groups in the camp that were not Jews. They were just political prisoners or some of them, there were few even Germans in there. But they were Pols and Czechs and Slovs and so on, all in the camp. And a few Jews left, not many of them. They tried to keep the Jews, as I understand it, away from us. They kept moving them ahead of us. As we advanced in the offensive drive to end the war, they would move them ahead trying to exterminate them before we got there. As I understand, those boxcars that I was telling you about, that was the quickest way they could get rid of them, was to kill them in the boxcars by opening the doors and just machine gunning them. Now, the gas chamber and the incinerator were a little outside, actually outside the camp, which would be the northeast corner of the camp. And when we did finally get to it, the bodies were piled in there all the way to the ceiling practically waiting to be burned and so, it was no way…I think what happened, we got there sooner than they thought we're going to get there. And so they just killed those so we couldn't liberate them.

Interviewer: But when you saw all those bodies in the boxcar and all the bodies outside the crematorium, you didn't know they were Jews.

Jim Gentry: No. I didn't know they were Jews at all. There were other bodies strewn throughout the camp. Some of them were laying on the side of the streets. And the most pitiful situation that I saw were some that were in so-called infirmary or hospital which was nothing but wooden slats on a bunk and straw, and there were people there dead laying in the straw. And some were so weak they couldn't raise their head up when you went in. It was a sad sight to see that.

Interviewer: And you had no idea why these people had been so mistreated?

Jim Gentry: No. I had no idea. I was just a happy little boy growing up in Williamson County and went off to war and that's what I've found.

Interviewer: Can you talk more about your reaction? Did you have a physical reaction in terms of—?

Jim Gentry: Well not at that time, I didn't. I had seen death of course. We had no problem with seeing dead German soldiers. We had no problem of that at all. We would have a sick feeling when we saw an American soldier killed, a friend of yours perhaps, someone you'd known and you'd have a real sick feeling. But this was an entirely different feeling because we didn't understand why this would happen. I can understand why a soldier would get killed but I couldn't understand, these people that were not in uniform that were so emaciated, so pitiful. And I just didn't understand that, and it took me a long, long time. If I was the age I am now when I thought I think I would have handled it probably different. It didn't affect me emotionally at that time. I was just a puzzled person and after maturing perhaps and over the years, I read a lot and had gone back and thought about it a lot. I realized what I was seeing. And it becomes a very emotional thing.

Interviewer: Did you know at that time what type of camp it was whether it was a labor camp or a death camp or just totally in the dark?

Jim Gentry: No. I did not know what it was at all and I don't know exactly what all they did other than those…I figured out pretty quickly that the warehouses used labor from the prisoners. And I don't know where else they used them, but they were using them in other places, I'm sure.

Interviewer: What were your instructions regarding the inmates in the camp?

Jim Gentry: Well the first instructions we got, orders we got of course, being in infantry, our job was to take the camp. Now once we took it, we were finished. And we had no direct instructions other than go out and gather those prisoners up that left when we first opened the gates. We stayed there for about three or four or five days perhaps in the camp without any general orders as to what we were to do, and so we just were observers. They brought in the…as I said, doctors. They brought in military police. They brought in other personnel, and we were to go and join our division at Munich. However, the reason they kept us there, we found out a little bit later, was because of the typhus fever, that we couldn't leave because we had been exposed to it. The day that they

took us away from the camp, permitted us to leave and join our outfit again, they took us out into a big field about a mile away from the camp and took all of our clothes off, shaved all hair off our bodies and sprayed us with a new insecticide at that time called DDT. That was the first time I ever heard of DDT. We were nearly frozen out there and then they sprayed it with this stuff, cold. Then they burned all of our clothes and gave us some more clothes and then we were permitted to go away. So we had no real instructions why we were there other than just assist if we were needed and we were not needed. They had so much staff taking the people away. We did have to load some bodies into the truck. Mr. Gant, who lives up at McMinnville, came there with a fleet of trucks—and he just happened to be there, I found this out later after the war also—and his job was to take the bodies away. So we assisted some in that but they usually furnished the people to load the truck themselves.

Interviewer: So the only—

Jim Gentry: I can tell you a little bit about what we did then and the relationship with them.

Interviewer: We're talking about exchanges between yourself and the inmates at the camp. How did the inmates that you had to gather up that had left, how did they react to—?

Jim Gentry: That was amusing because we had just liberated them, and then we go out and round them up and bring them back and they thought, "Oh, boy, they will put us back in there again. We're not really gaining anything."And with the problem of language there, we had to let them know that we were not trying to harm them. We're going to help them and give them food and some way we got across to them. Those who spoke German…we knew a little bit German especially about the food. We can talk about food and we would tell them about the food that we were going to give them and that encouraged them. But it was amusing at the time to see them trying to resist in a way because they were puzzled. They thought, "Well, you're going to put us back in."And we did get them back in the camp. Now, while we were there, not having any specific duties to perform, we would go into the compound nearly

every day and with the prisoners. And we'll have to figure out what was going on to see what was going on. And sometimes we would find a person that could speak English and then they would begin to tell us where they were from, why they were there, and many of them were political prisoners. They were thrown in for no particular reason other than they just didn't belong to the Nazi party or they were some trumped up deal that they had, were an enemy of the state or something to that effect, and so we did go in. We went in and helped feed sometimes. We would go in and they would feed them. It was there we couldn't understand them at first. We only give them soup and mainly potatoes because they couldn't take very much food and then they gradually built them up. The doctors, the nurses took over, and we just more or less watched what would happen in there for three or four days before we had to leave.

Interviewer: Was anyone able to communicate any experiences of what life had been like in the camps?

Jim Gentry: No, we didn't really get into very much of that. They would try to give or show their appreciation sometimes and I recall one man gave me a hat. And of course, we wore steel helmets there. But I took off my steel helmet. I was in the process of putting this hat on and another prisoner ran over and grabbed my arm and told me not to put it on. And what he was telling me was that the typhus fever, that the fleas might be in that hat, and which I appreciated. I would have put it on if he had not done that. So that's about the only time I think I had in a situation like that.

Interviewer: So it wasn't until how many years after the war that you actually knew what those prisoners had suffered.

Jim Gentry: Right. And since that time, and I still do, I read as much as I can and try to find out what happened prior to it before we got there. I know what happened the day we got there, but I didn't understand what had happened before and so I tried still even today to find out more and more about what happened.

Interviewer: It's only this impression that obviously these people have been mistreated.

Jim Gentry: Right.

Interviewer: Did you see any concentration camp personnel, all the Germans had left?

Jim Gentry: No, they had not left. Most of them had. Some of them were still there and what they did in an effort to escape, they put on some prison uniforms themselves but we had no problem finding them because they were fleshy. They did not look like the others and the prisoners themselves would run them down for us. And they would find them, and usually by the time we got to them, they had beaten them to death. They would be dead by the time we got to them.

Interviewer: So you saw that—

Jim Gentry: With stones, with sticks, with boards, anything they had. And then of course, when we got there, they had the encouragement that we were there and they can do whatever they wanted to and so they killed them. I didn't see a single German come out.

Interviewer: Did you saw several killed?

Jim Gentry: Yes.

Interviewer: By mobs.

Jim Gentry: Mm-hmm, they were dead.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that? What was your reaction?

Jim Gentry: This sounds terrible to say this in one sense and on the other hand it doesn't. I was glad after I saw what had happened to them. I understood why they did it. I know that doesn't sound just right, but I understood why they killed those Germans.

Interviewer: So you empathized with their condition right away.

Jim Gentry: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Did you have any contacts with the people who lived in the vicinity of the camp to find out what their attitude toward the war is?

Jim Gentry: Yes. The first German word that we learned in the infantry was, as I said, was food. How to ask for food and that sort of thing, but we only tried to put together sentence. We figured out, "Haben Sie Dachau gesehen?""Have you seen Dachau?"I remember going in the village and asking those people, had they seen Dachau?"And they denied knowing what was going on there. They said they knew it was a camp but they didn't know what was going on inside the camp, which is hard for me to believe because Dachau is only, there's a street when we were there. There was a street and across the street were houses and I couldn't understand why they did not know more about what was going on, and the odor. How could they stand to even live there? Now, that may not have been there all the time but it was there the day that we arrived. Someone had painted on the gate and I don't know who did it. I don't know if it was done before we got there or after we got there. "This is the camp. You enter by the gate and leave by the chimney."Now, someone may have painted that on later. I feel we like they did. I don't think the Germans would allow that to be on there. So that's about the only contact we had with those people. I wished I could tell you more but when you're in the infantry, you keep going. You don't stop. And we were lucky to get to stay there three or four or five days. I don't remember how many it was, but those few days was sort of a rest for us

because we had a barrack outside where the Germans had been sleeping and we slept there and we ate our K rations and that sort of thing there. We didn't have any real duty. And then as soon as we were ready, we had to go back with our outfit.

Interviewer: Coming back to these villagers, did you maintain your feelings of being puzzled or were you at any point angry with the villagers?

Jim Gentry: No, we were angry with them by then. We knew that they were not telling the full truth. They may have been telling partial truth in my way of thinking, but I feel like they knew something about it more than just a prison. They said it was a prison all right, but they thought it was criminals being placed in there, according to them. So yes, we were pretty well angry with them. We didn't believe them. Now, I can understand how people in some parts of Germany would see families, Jewish families being taken away, or anybody for that matter, and not know where they were going, but to think, the problem is they didn't care enough to try to find out where they were going. So I can understand and believe when they say, "We didn't know they were going to concentration camp."I can understand that part of it. But they never took the time to try to find out where they're going or why they were going. I don't understand that.

Interviewer: Have you had any contact with the Armed Forces of any other allied country?

Jim Gentry: Yes. Not there, we didn't. We fought beside the French army and also with the British some. So up to that time, we had just those brief contacts with seeing one another, but that's about all. Afterwards we were in close contact with those forces.

Interviewer: Did you have contact with other forces that had liberated camps?

Jim Gentry: No, we didn't.

Interviewer: It was just your unit.

Jim Gentry: Um-hmm.

Interviewer: And your unit went to Munich after leaving camp?

Jim Gentry: The time we left there—of course, as I said it was only thirteen kilometers, just short distance to Munich—the city had already fallen to the division, and we just went straight through Munich. I think maybe one day there and then went on to the Austrian border where the war ended a short time after that. About ten days after, the war was over.

Interviewer: Can you describe your experience from liberating this concentration camp in the long term? Did you have nightmares about it later on?

Jim Gentry: Well, not exactly. I really didn't have any nightmares about it, but all my life I've been able to handle certain situation pretty well I think. But as I reminisce sometimes back to this situation, I don't have problems with it if I'm alone but when I'm speaking like with your or in front of a group, I do have emotional problems with it when I do that. And I might say this, that I didn't talk about it for a long, long, long time. And Mr. Irvin Limor here in Nashville came to me one day, and he simply said he just wanted to see me and shake my hand. And when Mr. Limor came, I was at school and we met each other not…he'd never seen me before and I'd never seen him before, and we both cried. I guess we knew the same things. So that's where I have my problem with it. I don't have nightmares. I don't have a problem with that. It's just when I talk with other people and my mind, my thoughts gets ahead of my language, speech.

Interviewer: Yes, you mentioned earlier that at nineteen your reaction to it is different now.

Jim Gentry: True.

Interviewer: Do you want to elaborate on that one?

Jim Gentry: When you're nineteen years old and young, you don't really realize the value of life like you do as you grow older. You don't understand the situation as well. And we were trained to fight. We were trained to kill, to defend ourselves and do what we were supposed to do, and as I said, go in there, and not know who these people were, not know what was going on, it just didn't affect me that much at that time. Although I had a feeling for them, a sadness and a compassion for those people, and I still, as I said, I really didn't know who they were. So it didn't bother me that, because I knew in the next hour I might be killed myself. And so you don't stop and think about those things when you were in the war. And so I knew we had to get the war over with and we got it over, and when it was over I was so relieved. And then there was the possibility of going to Japan, and we were training to go to Japan and fight again. So I really sort of pushed that in the back of my mind, but it's there and it will never leave. Although here we are in 1990, it seems like it was only yesterday. I can still smell the odors. I could see the faces and all that sort of thing. It's no problem. It's there imprinted in my mind.

Interviewer: Can you describe those faces?

Jim Gentry: They were chalky. Their hair was usually shaved. If they had any it was a little fuzz-like hair at all. Their eyes were just back in their head, their ribs are all protruding. They reminded me of maybe a dog that hadn't been fed in a month or two months and were starving to death. As I said I can just see their faces. I don't recall any of those people ever really smiling or laughing, although as I said they were liberated. I think again that our greatest desire is to survive, and I think they were trying to survive. And here we are soldiers, we were trying to survive too. And both of us just stumbled into one another I guess. And they didn't understand what we were doing exactly in the beginning. And I certainly didn't understand why they were there.

Interviewer: Now, you said earlier that after the war you began reading about this. And that's when you really found out why these people where there and exactly what had happened. How soon after the war did you begin this reading?

Jim Gentry: Well I think the most interesting thing there that happened to me after the war is when we went into the camp and we were there for a few days, I wrote a letter to my mother describing what I had seen. And when I got home, I begin to feel like that this really didn't happen, that I had dreamed this. I knew it had happened but this is something that was supposed to happen to someone that lives in New York or California or Texas or somebody else. I didn't understand why I was there. And so I got puzzled and I said, "Well, maybe I did dream this."And so I go to my mother and I asked for the letter and she scared me at first because she said, "I don't have the letter."And I thought, "Oh, God. Here I go."But she says, "Your sister-in-law has it."And so I got the letter and read my letter to assure myself that I didn't dream this, that this was a real happening, and that happened shortly after I got back home. And I tried to talk about what I had seen to people. And that time, those people really didn't want to hear it, and I can understand. They had already been through a war. They had already heard about death and death and death. But they didn't want to hear anymore. And so, some of them, I got the feeling, began to give me the fear rather, that, "This is a war story. We don't want to hear it."And so I didn't talk about it anymore. Then, as I went along, it began to get emotional and I quit talking about it altogether. I didn't like to talk about it and refused to talk about it. And finally, Mr. Limor was the one that pulled me out of it by saying that I need to tell people about it. "Don't keep it to yourself because when you die, it will go with you and let other people know what you saw."That made me also think of my mother that told me stories when she was just a young girl. And had she not done that, I wouldn't know what her life was like. And so, that made me think, "Hey, I owe this."And so I did start talking although it was painful to do.

Interviewer: Did your reading about the history of concentration camps, of what happened to the Jews and other political prisoners, did that coincide? That happened shortly after you met with Mr. Limor?

Jim Gentry: Um-hmm.

Interviewer: And so that's when you start really to do the reading.

Jim Gentry: I read before that but that made me read even more.

Interviewer: So you sporadically—

Jim Gentry: I would really have liked to just let it pass it off, forget about it. But then, I got the curiosity of what happened before I got there. I wanted to find out more about that.

Interviewer: What year was this when you met with Mr. Limor?

Jim Gentry: About ten years ago. I guess about 1980, '81 or two or three or something along…I went a long time without talking about it. And in fact, the way that Mr. Limor found out about me being there was a student I had in school earlier had heard me speak about it back when I first got in this teaching. And then I quit talking about it and I thought everybody forgot about it, but he had not and he told someone and they in turn told Mr. Limor and that's how they got in touch with me. And there are others, I'm sure, around, that have not been touched that have those advances.

Interviewer: Now, when you speak to groups, do you have a particular message, a focus in what you have to say to these people?

Jim Gentry: Yes, I think so. When I do talk to groups I tried to let them know first what I saw, and that I didn't really understand how one group of people to do that to another group of people. Then at the same time, my real point is that this happened and it can happen again. It may not happen to the Jews again, but it can happen to any group of people. And if I can get that message across, it might lift their prejudices and what they think would overrule a good judgment. That's what I try to do, to let

them know that it can happen again. It could have happened here in the United States to the blacks back in the 30's. It could have happened to them. It could have happened to the place you say, "Well, I don't care what happens to them. I know they have taken them away but I'm not going to bother to find out where they're going."It could have happened and it can happen in the future.

Interviewer: Did you ever have students challenge you in terms of what you think say to them?

Jim Gentry: No, not really. I've heard of people saying that, "Well, this really didn't happen,"that it's a hoax and all that sort of thing. I can't say what happened before I got there, but it was not a hoax what I saw.

Interviewer: So you react pretty strongly to those who say it's a hoax.

Jim Gentry: Yes. They're talking to the wrong person when they bring that up.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to say in summation of what you've learned and how this experience has affected your outlook on life on general?

Jim Gentry: I think it teaches me to…I hope that everybody should know this, to appreciate everybody and respect everybody. It doesn't make a difference what ethnic group they are, what color they are. You must appreciate and respect people. Then in turn, they will appreciate you and respect you, then we can get along a lot better. We got problems even today that we don't understand, and they don't understand us. And we've got to, somehow, some way, learn to respect one another. So I think what I got out of the whole thing mainly is that I respect the Jewish people whom I did not know before. As I said, there are only two families. I like them. I had no idea that this was happening. I didn't understand how other people felt about it or how they thought. I respect the Jews. I respect the French or whatever. It doesn't make a difference to me. And so I think that's the main thing I got out of it.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Jim Gentry: You're welcome. I can't think of anything else right now…If I had to, I'd fight them again but I respect them as a person.

Interviewer: And you think that this experience with liberating the camp has—?

Jim Gentry: Had a great deal to do with it. It had a great deal to do with it. And of course as you grew older, you mature and hopefully get wiser and understand what's going on around you.

Interviewer: Is there any other incident that comes to mind, maybe an anecdote that you could tell. Something that happened after the war that triggered your memory of what you had seen?

Jim Gentry: No, you didn't have to trigger. You don't have to trigger the memory. It's there. Anybody that was there, you can't get rid of it. I wished I could.

Interviewer: So it's always with you.

Jim Gentry: It's always there and always will be there. As I said, I'm looking at you right now but I can close my eyes and I can see the faces right now. I can see the gate, the wire gate. I can see the iron that said, "Arbiet machen Sie Frei,"on the gate. I can see the little guard house on one side, the guard house on the other side and I wouldn't forget it. And it makes such an impression on you. Some other things I've forgotten. My wife and I went back to Europe a few years ago and we travelled the same places that I had walked, but when we got to Dachau, I skipped it. I didn't want to see it again. And she said, "Don't you want to see it?"And I said, "No."And I don't think she did either. I already know

what it was like and I don't need to be reminded anymore. So we skipped around Dachau.

Interviewer: Do you think you could say that you can still see the faces? Can you still smell that odor?

Jim Gentry: Um-hmm. I know what it smells like.

Interviewer: Can you describe it a little bit the way you described the people there?

Jim Gentry: No, I can't describe. Some of the people, some of the soldiers threw up when they smelled it. They didn't know what it was but they just throw up. It made them sick to their stomach.

Interviewer: Do you remember throwing up?

Jim Gentry: No, I did not. I remembered being sick in my stomach though.

Interviewer: Do you remember crying or any other physical reaction?

Jim Gentry: No, I did not at that time. As I said, we were there for a purpose, to take that camp away from whoever had it. Then we saw all these people and it just didn't sink in at that time what—