

Clarence Brockman Interview

Headquarters Company, 317th Inf Reg

(MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

00:00:03 Speaker 1

I was doctored in July 42, some little guy with a mustache didn't like us born in this country.

00:00:11 Speaker 1

You know and.

00:00:11 Speaker 1

He fought like crazy. Keep us out.

00:00:18 Speaker 1

We are on our way to Weimar Germany, I said. I'll never go.

00:00:23 Speaker 2

Back, but Clarence Brockman of suburban Pittsburgh is going back at the age of 89 to replace.

00:00:30 Speaker 2

Few people actually.

00:00:31 Speaker 2

Witnessed and a place many people did not survive.

00:00:35 Speaker 1

Even General Patton vomited.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

When he could come them salt.

00:00:43 Speaker 1

He wouldn't leave it.

00:00:44 Speaker 2

It was April 1945. Clarence Brockman was a 25 year old soldier serving in the 80th Infantry Division. American forces were pushing deep into Nazi Germany.

00:00:44 Speaker 1

Correct.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

Start east over towards. Yeah, April the 11th.

00:01:07 Speaker 1

1945 we pulled in the town.

00:01:16 Speaker 1

And the first thing you asked for against civilians over there, where's the booze? And this one told us there's 2 farmers down this road.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

It's about four mile from my remark.

00:01:35 Speaker 1

Should they make the best?

00:01:37 Speaker 1

So we started down that road. There we are. Hello, George.

00:01:43 Speaker 2

Clarence Brockman today lives a quiet life with his wife and family in MacDonald, PA, but in 1945 he was a hardened soldier. By the time he hit Weimar and East Central Germany earlier, Clarence had landed at Utah Beach, fought through France and on into Germany. But nothing, nothing.

00:02:03 Speaker 2

Prepared him for what he was about to.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

See down that country.

00:02:08 Speaker 1

I asked.

00:02:08 Speaker 1

Corporate billman.

00:02:10 Speaker 1

Used in charge by group Triple Man. Just do they have monkeys here?

00:02:17 Speaker 1

Yeah, I don't think so. I said, what's up in the trees?

00:02:23 Speaker 1

Because he looked like monkeys, they saw us 1st and they didn't know who who were, because we had strange uniforms.

00:02:31 Speaker 1

Or strangers thing.

00:02:34 Speaker 1

Melt the trees there and the person for human beings.

00:02:41 Speaker 1

Dressed like monkeys and they went the head on is nothing.

00:02:49 Speaker 1

And one of the guys breakfast could speak Italian.

00:02:55 Speaker 1

And start talking to him. One guys with some Italian Christmas tell us where the camp was down the road about two mile. You smelled like camp before he dropped her. You smell what? Downtown. We wanted that camp, and that's dropped to 6 miles away. And we come in the gate. I said, ooh, leaving us. I don't want to go.

00:03:14 Speaker 1

There, because there's everything imaginable. A typhus, smallpox, anything, anything. Disease of us, you name it. They had it.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

And I wish piles of wattage per.

00:03:31 Speaker 2

For the next two hours, Clarence and his fellow.

00:03:33 Speaker 2

Soldiers wandered through what turned out to be Germany's biggest concentration camp, Buchenwald, from 1937 to 1945, the Nazis imprisoned over 1/4 of a million people there. Political prisoners, POW's, Jews, more than 56,000.

00:03:53 Speaker 2

Were starved or worked to death.

00:03:56 Speaker 1

This is what they exactly look like at the.

00:04:00 Speaker 1

On the day we were.

00:04:01 Speaker 1

There we saw the bodies laying around. They were in carts and laying on the ground.

00:04:09 Speaker 1

Their power up in the Crematory, they had a pit dug and there was throwing the bodies in there.

00:04:17 Speaker 1

Grocery out there.

00:04:19 Speaker 1

We've got the bulldozer made to fit bigger.

00:04:23 Speaker 1

As you get 2500 bars, you go.

00:04:25 Speaker 1

Put them someplace.

00:04:30 Speaker 1

The camp was well.

00:04:31 Speaker 1

Yep.

00:04:32 Speaker 1

It was we was never told anything about concentration camps.

00:04:39 Speaker 1

We didn't know what it was about, how many crematories was there 3/4.

00:04:45 Speaker 1

Times is good one.

00:04:48 Speaker 1

And the bodies were half crooked in there.

00:04:50 Speaker 1

And that's what the barracks look like. The people they still didn't know what was going on, even after three days, still didn't recognize the freedom. But we notified the.

00:05:03 Speaker 1

Our CIC officer, Captain Brent. She's.

00:05:07 Speaker 1

Got a big problem though, sure.

00:05:12 Speaker 1

Rather, where we will start to.

00:05:17 Speaker 1

And then they brought up food and everything.

00:05:20 Speaker 2

Else but Clarence arrived and moved. Involved on the morning of April 11th, 1945, the Nazis had abandoned the camp three days before taking many of the prisoners on a forced death March. Clarence was one of the first Americans to walk through Buchenwald.

00:05:37 Speaker 2

This film footage.

00:05:38 Speaker 2

Was shot by the US Army in the days just following the camps. Liberal.

00:05:43 Speaker 1

We saw the camp inside and.

00:05:46 Speaker 1

Out.

00:05:49 Speaker 1

And then the people say.

00:05:52 Speaker 1

They didn't know what was going on.

00:05:54 Speaker 1

Didn't know the campus here. Aurora, come down to take the civilians out of the town. Take them up that camp and take them.

00:06:02 Speaker 1

Through the camp.

00:06:05 Speaker 1

Then they broke down not on their.

00:06:08 Speaker 2

Those images are forever burned into Clarence's memory. He returned home, married, moved to MacDonald, had a family and retired after working for 35 years at consolidated coal. So Clarence has visited Germany several times.

00:06:13 Speaker 1

Georgia, Georgia, Georgia, Georgia.

00:06:20 Speaker 1

Hey, George. OK.

00:06:23

There we are.

00:06:24 Speaker 2

He never thought he'd see Buchenwald again.

00:06:27 Speaker 1

Not sure. Never go.

00:06:28 Speaker 2

Back but 65 years after first seeing that terrible place, he did go back an international committee that maintains the camp invited Clarence and other U.S. soldiers from the 80th Division. Only six of the liberators were able to make the trip. Clarence travelled with his daughter Barbara to commemorate the liberation.

00:06:49 Speaker 2

And to meet with one.

00:06:50 Speaker 2

100 people he helped set free.

00:06:53 Speaker 1

It's a little bit worried about going over.

00:06:57 Speaker 1

Our record there at that time.

00:07:00 Speaker 1

What time?

00:07:03 Speaker 1

When you get a plate of good food put down in front of you and a nice tall glass of beer which you're not allowed to have, can't change your mind a little bit.

00:07:16 Speaker 2

Clarence didn't arrive empty handed. He brought a book about Pittsburgh, signed by Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, a proclamation for the mayor of Weimar and something else.

00:07:27 Speaker 1

With that flag flown on top of the capital.

00:07:30 Speaker 1

And we took that over presents to the supervisor of the group over there to look at the camp now and what was back then 45.

00:07:41 Speaker 1

That's two different.

00:07:42 Speaker 1

Stories. It's all well manicured. They burn all.

00:07:46 Speaker 1

The buildings down.

00:07:47 Speaker 2

On young Hashoah Holocaust Remembrance Day.

00:07:51 Speaker 2

The liberators and the survivors came together at a solemn ceremony.

00:07:58 Speaker 1

I come in the gate with off the bus. He grab me and hug me and kiss me and everything else is, Oh my gosh, you didn't.

00:08:08 Speaker 1

They will.

00:08:09 Speaker 1

The sentence and biggest celebration of Hong Kong stay with hand over there.

00:08:14 Speaker 2

What's left of the camp is still maintained. The main gates and restored barracks that house a museum in canteen. But book of all today is vastly different than the hellish place Clarence and his buddies happened upon that April.

00:08:29 Speaker 2

Morning.

00:08:30 Speaker 1

When I walk in the camp, I expected to see little birds and what else still there. But they might look and saw how they manicure everything else.

00:08:44 Speaker 1

We were there before.

00:08:48 Speaker 1

In short.

00:08:49 Speaker 1

It's something you don't want to remember, but you can't forget.

00:09:11 Speaker 2

Tonight's program contains graphic scenes of the.