

Edith "Justy" Spellman-Soule

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Answer: Yeah, there were...I don't want to get into that Hardin.

Question: Is okay if I ask that question, though, cause it is, it's interesting because everybody deals with war differently. It's funny, I had somebody that was looking at one of the tapes we did and it was funny because the guy, it was on the other tape I did and he says I don't believe that guy because of the way he acted. I said, you know, everybody deals with a situation differently and this guy, he laughed about everything but that was just his way of.. I asked him about friends he lost and he kind of talked about so and so and then he'd chuckle because he would go off and tell a funny story about them. But he'd have to come back and you'd kind of have to figure out that, yeah, he did lose so and so cause he never said. Yeah, good old Smitty died or whatever... he'd always say yeah well, there was one that I and then he'd tell me a funny story. So with your group there some that were close enough to the front that you lost some of them?

Answer: Yes, but I don't think the enemy did it. I think it was stray bullets, stray bombs that got dropped weren't the enemy or I say the enemy when the Germans were trying to escape our planes and you can't maneuver when you have heavy bombs in these light planes. And they had to drop them somewhere and some of our people were probably were in the wrong spot at the right time. But I've erased all that Hardin from my mind; I just really don't want to bring it back.

Question: Was there, did you want to do nursing after the war?

Answer: No, I didn't. I, after I was discharged, Bill and I were married. He set up his office. We didn't have any money other than we each got pay for three months I think after, Officer's pay for three months. Now I had saved all my allotment, I had it put back in the bank. That went to buy an x-ray machine and some other equipment. He had sent most of his home to his Mother which she needed but he had some. And when I got back to a small town called Gridley, Sp.?? California, it's on my discharge, down in the Sacramento Valley, and we were both in California, why, you know they made no cars during the war which you could buy (Inaudible). But there was one new Ford that I think the dealer had promised everybody and he was really in a spot, I was only the one who came home to this small town, so he let me have it. I paid him... it was \$800. It was brand new... it was a black Ford, V-8. Boy I thought it was a limousine. We'd ridden in the back of GI trucks like this all the time.. And we had that and we set up, he set up his office. I did the bookkeeping at night. A little after nine months after we were married I had my first son who's now a doctor himself. But anyway, beside the point, and so and the first two or three years were, we had this one car that he used, made all kinds of house calls and he was a general practitioner for ten years. And as I said I did the bookwork, worked at night and it doesn't look too good for the doctor's wife to be in there. It looks like you're just kind of grabbing the money, not that there was much to grab in those days but now I did fill in a time or two if the nurse that he had got sick. But no, I really did not work there. I had the new baby and a year later I had another, a little girl, that's my two children. And he did a lot of surgery, because in small towns you're the surgeon and he was and he was very good. But there were more doctors than him there; there were, but the others hadn't been... you get a lot of experience doing surgery in, where he was and I did a lot of volunteer Red Cross work, I worked most all the blood drawings that would be in the vicinity. I became, as my daughter became a little older, I became very active in the Girl Scouts and I was President of the Council. And my husband and I were in charge of the Girl Scout Camp which we helped finance and that was all volunteer

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work. And I really never, I guess by myself, I have never made a dime since working out. But I felt I worked..

Question: So the two of you it sounds like when the war was done that was put away and..

Answer: That's right, exactly, and we have a very good life.

Question: Have you ever faced, and I'm making an assumption first of all that the nurses had a camaraderie-ship between the nurses. Am I assuming right?

Answer: No, we didn't.

Question: Oh.

Answer: And that, I had excellent camaraderie-ship between the nurses I trained with, and we still do. Because it's fun, we had a lot of fun in nurses training. They were a super group of girls. We all got our Bachelor of Science out at Mills College before we ever, when we graduated from nurses training so we were very close. Most of the nurses that were in our unit I think they didn't want to go it over again and neither did I. Now I know that might sound strange to you. We were very close; we lived in a tent together but when it ended, it ended. And at least that's the way I felt. As I say, we did Christmas cards for a few years. We never discussed it and it wasn't something you live with. There was nothing funny or fun about it. It was cold and muddy; it was.. I'm glad I did it. I'm proud of it but I wouldn't, I would never want my daughter to have to go through it. And I never want my son to have to go to war but I have grandsons that age. He has two boys in college, oh, I just, almost rather see them, I don't know what I'd rather see... I don't want them to go.

Question: Have you shared much of this with your children and your grandchildren?

Answer: My grandchildren are becoming very interested now. My own two children... I don't think it was except.. Would you believe that Sunday, my daughter and my one granddaughter and her, and my daughter's husband came out Sunday, helped us. Hardin got the big footlocker out and I went through and got all this stuff out and my daughter was so interested in all of it and it's, she's, how old's Marsha, 53... and she's in her early fifties, the first time she'd ever seen any of it. And my granddaughter was fascinated... Grandma, you've got to do something about this and show it, let people know. And my daughter looked at me and said, Mom how come I hadn't seen this before? And I said I didn't think you were interested. Well that a stupid thing to say I know. And she said, well how come Daddy never showed me. He's got a lot of his stuff in here too. And I said, I guess this is something we just didn't want to talk about. But yet I've kept it all and it's all in pretty good shape too. Gotta get some new moth crystals before I put our uniforms back. Now the grandchildren are getting interested. Well of course see they're learning about this in school and they're learning the right way. They're not learning that it never happened like they're teaching these kids in Germany and this bugs me.

Question: Plus for them to be able to talk to Grandma who was really there makes it..

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Answer: Yes.

Question: It creates a reality too.

Answer: My grandchildren were more interested than my two children.

Question: You know I think it's interesting. I've talked to a lot of veterans that have faced the same thing and I think that part of it is, it skips a generation but there also was an age..

Answer: That's right.

Question: Because like you said, you came back, you wanted to move on with other things..

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: And then growing up, that's just Mom. That's just Dad.

Answer: Yeah, sure.

Question: Because they don't have an appreciation for history yet at that time. Now I think as they get old and understand the world affairs all of a sudden it's like..

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Mom was at the Battle of the Bulge so..

Answer: That's right.

Question: Do you have a couple question. This is one of your pictures and I wonder if you could just tell me a little bit about the gentleman in the, I assume it's at the camp..

Answer: Oh yeah. This is the one; this is my favorite patient, oh, out of Buchenwald Concentration Camp, we saved him... 1945. Yes, he's the one I saved, well I didn't save him, I shouldn't say that. But I was kind of assigned to him and he was one of the better ones, physically, I'm talking about because they used him for such hard labor that they had to feed him a little or he would have been no good to them. And he had had, he talked perfect English of course as well as German. He I assume was Jewish, I don't know. Now there, that's everybody associates completely the concentration camps with the Jewish people... that's not exactly true. Sure, they predominate, they were predominate but there were quite a few Germans there who disagreed intensely with Hitler. They were also there. And they weren't necessarily Jewish. He actually could swallow food... we didn't have to try injecting somewhere. He talked very, very little cause he was just kind of like zombie and it was hard for him, he kept saying are you really here? Have they gone? And the first time we were asking if he wanted some food he said, Will it kill me? You know, he was so stunned and yet he was so pleased that we were there. I don't know his name. I never did know it. I don't think he knew it to tell you the truth. Now they all, every one of them have tattoos on them someplace with a number, not a name, they're not, the Germans didn't think they were worth a name. But yeah, he was my

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prize patient. In fact that's what I put on here... yeah, my Prize Patient out of Buchenwald. He was one of the better ones.

Question: One of the gentlemen that we interviewed..

Answer: Look at the look on his face..

Question: Did you take the picture or did somebody else?

Answer: No, I didn't but Bill Spellman took it so, the one I was working on. I shouldn't say that, that sounds awful.

Question: That's why those nurses didn't talk to you afterwards, it wasn't anything else, it's cause you got the one unmarried one. One of the gentlemen we talked to was at one of the camps and he said that for three years he never heard his name.

Answer: Is that, he was an inmate?

Question: Just a number. He was a Jewish man in Auschwitz I think it was. And one of them, I think it was Zweig said that he wasn't even a number because they just counted off but he didn't have a number. He was lucky he didn't tattooed because he didn't sent over but you just counted off and there was supposed to be like twenty people in this room and twenty in this and if there weren't twenty in there.

Answer: Oh boy..

Question: You weren't always No. 1 but there'd better be twenty and if there wasn't, they'd go find one somewhere else. You were just one of twenty or two of twenty or three of twenty... you didn't even have a number... no name or no number. And is this is Nordhausen, Do you remember this picture?

Answer: Oh sure. That was taken in the tail of the buzz bomb of the V-2's.

Question: Is that at Nordhausen?

Answer: That was in, seen in the tail of the V-2 buzz bomb... it just says Germany after the war ended. Now this, the factory was underground. That's why these V-2's actually were never used because the war ended. Now the V-1's were the ones that, they did more than actual damage, they just killed people psychologically because they'd come over and they'd, oh I was deathly afraid of them. When we, before we went, when we were at the, assembled at the demarcation area in England to get the boat to go over to France soon after D-Day, they would come over and we would, a whole bunch of us were in one huge big room and we probably waited there two weeks. See they never knew when D-Day would be... it depended on the weather. And you remember then all at once it broke and they sent them over. So then we knew we would be going soon. Okay, and we would hear the V-1's come and we thought boy if it hits, we're dead but it never did. And after the war, the war had ended when we went here and, but there's another one of Bill Spellman sitting in one and it tells where it was. I saw it.

Question: The Hartz Mountains it says.

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Answer: And he's sitting in the V-2 in the tail and on the back I wrote where it was. I remember reading it today when I was going through these... What's it say?

Question: That one says Germany. Oh, here's another one, let's see what that one says.

Answer: The fin tail of the V-2 buzz bomb in the Hartz Mountains at Salane labor. Okay, the labor was under, in an underground factory. That's this. Now this isn't... yeah, oh no, that's still me. How'd I get all these? Well, he's in one too I know. And that's where they made the V-1's and then later the V-2's and if they, now the V-2's could be aimed... that's the difference between the V-1's and the V-2's. And if, in other words they could aim them for London; they could aim them for Paris. Now I don't know the range but the V-1's had a terrific range and they made those in the underground factory and some way got the technology to make the V-2's and they never flew one. At least that's what we were told. And this was after, oh we got around after the war and looked at quite a few things.

Question: Who, do you know where this picture is..?

Answer: Yes, okay, now this was somewhere in, let me see, somewhere in France. We're having lunch on the, and we were on the march. We had to walk on this one and it was about ten miles.

Question: And that's a group of nurses?

Answer: That's a group of nurses and we stopped for lunch in this forest... that's me right there.

Question: You're on the far right hand side?

Answer: Uh huh. And we all wore this type of a turban cause I don't think we'd been able to wash our hair for probably three weeks. And we didn't comb it either. We just tied it up. And I can still remember this gal's from Mississippi and about every other day she'd say to me, I suppose you think you won the war. And I'd say, what war Julie? Well there's only one real important war and that was the Civil War. She was, I liked her a lot. And I remember this gal, she was Jewish and she'd tell... (Inaudible) day. They were a tired a bunch. Look at that.

Question: It's interesting cause when you look at it..

Answer: The name's coming back.

Question: And you are a tougher looking crowd. I mean..

Answer: Yeah.

Question: It's not this dainty nurse in..

Answer: No, no.

Question: I mean sometimes the way that nurses have been portrayed in World War II and the movies are little white uniforms..

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Answer: Oh glory now, no we were out in the woods..

Question: There's one of these ladies I think is smoking a cigarette here so..

Answer: Am I?

Question: No, no, you don't, well you might have yours hidden but the lady in the center looks like she had a cigarette in her..

Answer: She does, she does, she certainly does. Well, you know they put cigarettes in our rations all the time, yeah. There'd be, the rations were dropped by helicopter. We never knew when we were gonna eat, whenever the rations came down we'd pick them up and I thought they were pretty good. When you get hungry enough, anything's good and there'd always be two cigarettes in the rations and some matches and some Reeds, that's the brand candy that's like lifesavers and they were wonderful. To this day if I could find some I'd buy them in a minute. I loved them.

Question: Now this is not as joyful of a picture. I assume, is that one of the furnaces?

Answer: This is the chute that the ashes are coming down from the furnaces.

Question: Okay.

Answer: Yes, that is one of the nurses. I don't know who it is. See I, where the bodies were burned and the ashes removed, I've written on the back of most of these and that's what that chute is and they were still ashes to go down there. And that's the furnace. That's an inside picture. Well this goes to the outside into a, oh, some kind of a big cart on..

Question: So they could haul it away?

Answer: Great big wheels, yeah, and they're hauled away.

Question: And this one here sitting at the table?

Answer: Oh that's Bill sitting at, up at the Eagle's Nest in the Bavarian Alps and that is Hitler's spot. I said I wouldn't sit in his spot... I'd spit on it.

Question: I was gonna say it must have been kind of eerie and maybe not the time in retrospect looking back and..

Answer: Oh all the, there were a group, I didn't go up there. There were a group, this was after the war, of course, so there were a group of doctors that took a jeep and went up there and they all took turns taking a picture of each other sitting in Hitler's seat.

Question: War tour or something. That's where there is a surreal aspect of war, that there's all this tragedy but yet..

Answer: That's right.

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Question: There's still the tourist.

Answer: That's right, at the Eagle's Nest.

Question: Do you know, this, it looks like it has a Red Cross on it, the truck, do you know what that is, is that the?

Answer: Sure, that's our unit, the 102nd evacuation unit in the ETO. ETO stands for European Theater of Operations. But I don't know where. This is what we rode in when we went on long moves and they all had a Red Cross somewhere on them so that we wouldn't get bombed. They're not very comfortable... believe me.

Question: I was gonna say it doesn't look, you know, it looks like a cattle truck. I mean that's a... Let me just look through these real quick...I assume...Just this one last picture...I assume this is why for so many years you put it out of your mind...

Answer: Isn't that awful? Oh God, look at that...Just bodies.... The pit of bodies in Buchenwald...God...Here, I'll give it back to you.

Question: It's interesting cause and these were taken by your former husband, is that right?

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: It's interesting because it looks like he has a medical mind.

Answer: Uh huh.

Question: He was documenting, you know, so that, to understand.

Answer: There were far more than one furnace see in this place. There might have been half a dozen in a row of furnace where they could burn the bodies and of course they burned more bodies toward the end to get rid of it, they didn't, you know, for evidence. But they never had time to cover the pits. There were thousands of them, those pits were very deep, but..

Question: You described, and somebody else that we talked to described the stench. Are there things today that will, you may smell something sometimes that spark a memory, a flashback or is that so far repressed that...?

Answer: Well, that's pretty far back. I can't, of course now you pick up the paper and you read some pretty weird things, but those are kind of few and far between, and they don't involve huge groups of people. I mean it would be like one or two or three like some man that recently, supposedly murdered his wife and three of his own children. See, that's almost unbelievable. Well, that would be more on a par with it. But I hadn't thought of Buchenwald in years until I was, about six years ago, was very ill and I was in the hospital and they took me for an MRI. And suddenly every bit of it came back. I just thought I was gonna die before I got out of that MRI from living that again. And but, maybe it did me good too because our priest, our Episcopal Priest, was there in the hospital room when they brought me back. And I knew I was, he knew I was very badly shaken up. In fact I was crying and Hardin said he was there too but I didn't see him. He was on the other side and

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this priest was talking, just sort of held my hand and he was a very nice man, and he meant a lot to me. And I got over it and now I can talk to you. It doesn't bother me.

Question: What do you think triggered it?

Answer: I don't know. I just don't know.

Question: Do you think that there's a message that should be left for your great grandchildren, or great, great grandchildren that you..?

Answer: Well I hope so. And don't let people go to war again. It's, sometimes I think these young men think it's kind of glamorous. Well, it isn't. They learn better too. I don't know how you feel about this war they're talking about now any day but I know what I think. It's not worth it.

Question: Do you think... I think for a lot of people, myself included, it gets very confusing because if we were to face another Hitler, do you think that...

Answer: Well, we'd have to do something. Yeah, we'd have to do something. But we can't do it alone. We had a lot of support in the last war but I don't know I just, I guess I think now more about the age of my young grandsons. I have four of them. Hardin has, well I call some of his mine too.

Question: It makes a difference when there's a face and name to go with it.

Answer: Isn't it...oh man, yes. He's got two of his own that are just the right age, Andy and Ian and I call Forest mine. No, Forest is mine. He's really yours but I claim him. He claims me; he calls me Grandma. And then I have, I have four grandsons of my own and Forest makes five. So between us we have seven boys and I have one daughter.

Question: It's like our family. We were four boys.

Answer: Yeah. So..

Question: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate you..

Answer: Well I hope I helped.

Question: I have one question. How soon after Buchenwald was liberated did you get there?

Answer: The Bronze Star?

Question: No, how soon after Americans arrived at Buchenwald did your medical unit get to Buchenwald?

Answer: Oh, we were the first medical unit in Buchenwald.

Question: But now the first Americans to contact Buchenwald before you got there... how many days before that did they run into Buchenwald?

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Answer: Well, the SS, when we got there the SS, some of them were still running down that road and we just of course let them run. We were not armed. We were there to help. We were not there to kill or to arrest. But our, some of our MP's stopped them and what they did with them I don't know. I mean, I'm not... did I answer your question or did I understand it.

Question: There's a controversy about the first, who is the first American unit to get there, there's a four-man (Inaudible) that claim that they'd reached the wire and then there's a black tanker unit that says they're the ones that broke the wire.

Answer: Oh, that.. Oh, I see what you're talking about. Yes, now they were an armed unit of course. You know, I don't know really but it couldn't have been very long because I know we were the first medical unit to go in and it would have to have been very soon after any of the other units were in there to liberate it but I can't tell you the exact time. I don't know that we were ever told that.

Question: I think I read it was just, it was a day later that the medical unit was there. Because as one, supposed the combat unit had reached the wire; then they had to leave.

Answer: Yeah, they left because there had been no medical unit in before we got there, none. That I do know. Because the inmates that were still alive and left there were really did not know who we were or what... they didn't know but what we were enemies for, in the beginning. They were almost afraid of us and then when they realized what, why we were there they, some of them just broke down and almost cried. And a lot of these men who were just skeletons and stark naked, I don't think they realized that we were women. They didn't show anything different around us as they did when they looked at the men. I mean we were all just there. That's how bad they were. They didn't, they made no effort to try to, well they didn't have anything to cover themselves with. You saw them in the...stark naked, a lot of them, and they were just skeletons but they were alive. And hopefully some of them did live but some of them didn't. Some of them died when we were there. We knew that. And if they hadn't been liberated, if they'd have waited another three or four days to liberate them they would have been in the furnace. They knew that too. But they were kind of numb by then. They didn't, they were just kind of like walking zombies. They didn't respond to anything.

Question: I was going to say, did it affect their mind also?

Answer: Yeah, the human brain can only take so much and then in a way it's fortunate that it turns off because the pain is kind of gone then, both physically and mentally.

Question: It's just amazing when you look at these photographs.

Answer: I think so. There not, you know, you must remember how old those are. They're not particularly good but they haven't faded really, very much. And it was just a cheap camera that he carried around with him. You photographed what you wanted.

Question: Kind of photographed everything, yep.

Answer: Yeah. He, it's Paul, is that what you..?

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Question: Karl.

Answer: Karl. Karl asked me what I had done to get the Bronze Star and I told him that it was written up in there.

Question: Yeah, I photographed your citation also..

Answer: Oh, okay.

Question: So I have that now.

Answer: I didn't really do much of anything. I told Karl they probably had some left over and didn't know what to do with them.

Question: Do you know what this house is?

Answer: Well, it was somewhere that we passed on our truck not too far from Buchenwald and that's why this was taken... what does this say? Near Buchenwald but I have no idea what it is.

Question: So maybe just cause it was an interesting house?

Answer: And it's the, well, we, meaning our unit, some of us that saw it, decided that that's where the commander lived. But I don't know that that's true but that's what we, we named it the commander's house, the commander of the camp.

Question: Sure. Huh.

Answer: And we decided that his wife and kids lived there and they didn't know anything about... they thought he worked in a factory. Or owned the factory.

Question: Did you meet the townsfolk in Weimar Sp.?? Cause Weimar was by Buchenwald. Did you meet the people of Weimar?

Answer: No. We never ever got into the village. We may have passed through it on the way but no. I don't think that the people of Weimar knew what it was. I think they thought that it was a big, smoking factory of some sort.

Question: Did they bring German civilians in to Buchenwald to help move the dead and bury the dead?

Answer: I don't think so. They used slave labor, the inmates..

Question: To bury..

Answer: To bury, well they weren't buried; they were just thrown in a pit. They weren't covered up. We have pictures of the pits.

Question: But the Americans didn't bring the Germans...

Answer: Oh sure, well, they had brought in... no they brought in their own GI's, their own men to do it. We didn't, you couldn't trust those, you didn't know what

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was going on with those others and they might just as soon shoot you as look at you. I don't know that, I don't know that for a fact. That's what we were told. No, we had nothing to do with them.

Question: Did your, when your grandchildren saw your uniform and your battle ribbons, do you explain to them what the little Bronze Stars were on the ribbons?

Answer: They know the battles we'd been in, the number of battles.

Question: Were they impressed?

Answer: I think so, don't you Hardin? (They were interested at least.)

Question: Cause it's not very many American women that have battle stars on their ribbons are there?

Answer: No there are not.

Question: Something to be pretty proud of huh?

Answer: It was kind of scary.

Question: Karl said or you said that you were at the Bulge, were you, at the Battle of the Bulge?

Answer: Oh yeah. That's..

Question: Did Karl ask you about toilet paper? No I didn't ask you that one. We talked to some other, the GI's that were there and they had the camouflaged toilet paper. Did you ever get any of the camouflaged toilet paper?

Answer: I think I forgot what toilet paper was.

Question: This was famous I guess because the ink that they used on it didn't set very well.

Answer: You came up kind of blue.

Question: Well they, they were known as green asses. And being known as a green ass was good because that meant you'd survived in a number of battles.

Answer: I know.

Question: Well thank you very much.