



*Photo courtesy the Benson Family*

## *Why did a witness to liberation keep his photographs of the atrocities of the Holocaust?*

# FRANK BENSON

Frank Benson was born in Macon, Georgia on January 2, 1919. The Benson family moved to Atlanta in 1924. Frank graduated from Boys High School, one of only six high schools in Atlanta at that time. He had his sights set on becoming a lawyer and began his studies at Atlanta Law School. Before he had a chance to start his career, the United States entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.



*Photo courtesy the Benson Family*

Frank enlisted in the military on June 22, 1942 and was sent to basic training. His past experience working on phone systems made him a perfect candidate for signal training. He was assigned to the 17<sup>th</sup> Signal Operation Battalion and went through training in a number of locations across the country: New Jersey, Missouri, Tennessee, Oregon, Washington and New York. Frank recalled that he and his fellow soldiers knew that they were going to be sent overseas. In October 1942, they boarded a ship bound for Europe.

They arrived in Scotland and worked to prepare for the D-Day invasion. They were sent to Bristol, England and assigned to the 1st Army Headquarters as a Signal Battalion. They were not designated as combat soldiers. From there they moved to Southampton, England to get ready for the D-Day operation. The young soldiers, including Frank, were fearful of what lay ahead.

The D-Day invasion began early in the morning of June 6, 1944. The first Allied forces landing on the French beaches faced horrific opposition from the German military. Many of the soldiers in the first landings were killed or wounded. Over the course of the next few days, the tide turned and the Allied forces made good progress.

Frank Benson's battalion landed on the beaches of Normandy on June 9 and began setting up communications. He and his



*Photo courtesy US Army*

comrades did their work in the midst of sniper fire, landmines and bombings. They set up communication lines between England and France. This allowed the Allies to share information regarding troop movements and supplies.



Photo courtesy US Holocaust Memorial Museum

As the Allies continued to push the German troops back, Frank ended up in Weimar, Germany. There, he entered the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was witness to horrible scenes: piles of corpses, survivors who looked like “walking skeletons,” gallows, ovens for burning bodies. He took photographs to document what he saw. He knew that he was taking part in history. For the remainder of his life, Frank kept those photos in an album in his home.

## “Don’t tell me it didn’t happen!”

Frank Benson returned to the United States after the war ended. He was reunited with his wife, Edith, who he had married before being shipped out to Europe, in February 1943. He remained in the National Guard for thirty five years. He and Edith lived in Loganville, Georgia. They raised two daughters and had grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Frank knew that what he had witnessed during the war would always be a part of his life. His strongest memories were of man’s inhumanity to man. He hoped that his experiences and photographs would help to teach these lessons. Frank Benson passed away at the age of 95 in 2014.



Map courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum