

RG-60.4914, Tape 2881, Krasna Collection

Liberation of Buchenwald (in color). 01:00.00.00 to 01:13.05.00

Narration: "Lest We Forget"

My name is Norman Krasna. I was a captain in an Air Force film unit. Before the war, I was employed by Warner Brothers Studios. Captain Ellis Carter of Paramount Studios photographed these pictures and Lieutenant William Graf, also of Warner Brothers, was the third member of our party, which reached Buchenwald, a concentration camp near Weimar, Germany, a few hours after our tanks bypassed it. We testify these pictures are truly as represented.

There were 21,000 people here the day we came, April 13, 1945. 19,000 people had been marched off the day before. These are Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Belgians, French, Norwegians, Czechs, English. Some Americans had been interned here temporarily. About half of these people are Jews. Legally, meaning Nazi legal, these people are political prisoners. Here is a three year old political prisoner.

150 people died the day we came, of malnutrition, tuberculosis, typhus, etc. 150 also died the second day, and also the third. You might ask why our humane army did not save them. Medical science could not. Before the sinking of their vitality could be arrested, they reached death. Most of these human skeletons are now dead.

If you were an inmate here, you would be fed soup once a day, and some bread. The amount varied. How little it was can be judged by the practice the prisoners had of supporting corpses between them at roll call, so they could have the dead man's rations. And this was punishable by death.

This loud speaker used to blare out numbers, day or night. If your number was called, you took your papers and reported to a room where you were hung on a hook, a foot off the ground. This hanging is not a drop of 20 feet, which mercifully breaks your neck, but a slow, agonizing strangulation, which takes 5 to 8 minutes. Two or three men would hang from the same hook. If you weren't dead, you were bashed over the head with this club. This wasn't in consideration for you, but for the man in charge of the ovens upstairs, who wanted his bodies to lie still.

We had colour film and could not photograph interiors, but you get the idea. There were two ovens, each with a capacity for 6 persons. Only 150 to 200 persons a day could be cremated. You would be surprised how hard it is to dispose of human bodies. The Germans used lime pits too, but this was at a Kommando, or subsidiary. There are about 70 persons represented in this pile, which makes excellent fertilizer.

This man was an editor of a newspaper in Warsaw. He is showing us where a Nazi hit him in the mouth with a rifle butt. He seems to be in good control of himself, but as he recalled the time the Nazis came for him, when they took his year old child and stamped on its chest, and shot his wife before his eyes for protesting, he became hysterical.

We were determined that the people of Weimar see a sample of their culture and we marched three thousand of them to the camp. They saw.

These are not pieces of parchment, they are human skins. They were used to bind books and make lamp shades. Here are a man's breasts...(??). The best samples were sent away of course, but a lamp remained. Some lamps were made with human bones. We had to be content with this one.

The wife of the previous commandant, a Madam Koch, was responsible for this art development. She would have men stripped, and if their tattoos pleased her, or as in these cases, if she thought they would please her, the man would be killed and the skin treated. This is a photograph of Madam Koch. She is 28 years old, an excellent horsewoman and known for her kindness to animals.

Shrinking heads was a lost art. It was a difficult matter to get heads to practice on, but the Germans licked that.

They claimed they didn't know this existed. Perhaps. But this camp is many miles long and broad, on the outskirts of a city. What did they think was here? And what of the two million SS men, with brothers and sisters and sweethearts? They must've known. How many millions must know something, before it isn't a secret?

The Germans are quite well dressed, better than any nation in Europe. Sweaters from Belgium, shirts from Czechoslovakia, stockings from France, diamonds from Amsterdam.

Here's a Belgian SS man. They drafted the scum of conquered nations into their ranks. Here's a German SS lieutenant. Here's a Ukrainian SS man. This is the wife of the local hangman. He left her behind when they ran away. He had hung over 5,000 prisoners.

The guards say they were forced to kill. This is a lie. The guards in Buchenwald enjoyed it. It was a huge circus, they made games of killing. By digging a pit and burying a man to his head, and then throwing rocks at the head until it disappeared. Or rolling a man in a spiked barrel down a hill. Or, as a Christmas present in 1943, making 23,000 people stand in the courtyard for 26 hours, many without shoes. For no reason, just Merry Christmas.

Here's how two American medical corps men reacted.

At Dachau we had the Germans clear the bodies. 70 percent of all autopsies show tuberculosis.

Well, that's what it was like. Except for the smell, you're now a big expert on Buchenwald. If anyone tells you atrocity stories are exaggerated, think of these people. Lawyers, doctors, editors, musicians, judges—it's hard to believe these people were rich and dignified, when their ribs are sticking out. And who can tell who's a Jew and who's a Christian in this pile? Perhaps the man across your dinner table, who tells you these things are exaggerated, knows the difference.