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INTERVIEW PORTRAIT OF MR. HENRY CLOGENSON, DEPORTED FROM THE VOSGES AND GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE UNADIF, PHOTO 'EST REPUBLICAIN' C. DAUMERIE

The Nazi concentration camps*
*Talk given to interns at the Instructional Center of the 5th Armored Division of the 1st French Army, in FRIEDRICHSHAFEN, on October 5 and November 1, 1945.

Today, I will describe to you the German concentration camps as I experienced them. Perhaps, some of you went there, but you've all heard of them or read documents or viewed photographs about them. Names like SCHIRMECK or BUCHENWALD are probably familiar to you; nevertheless, there is never enough said about what life was in those deportation camps and the extent to which the Nazis refined the process of slow death and the extermination of several million people from countries that they had invaded during the war years.

We will see the origin of the concentration camps, the camp itself, the clothing, the food, the care, hygiene, the different types of people that one could meet there, as well as the abuse inflicted by the SS and their auxiliaries. Finally, we will examine how those thousands of inmates spent their day of labor, whom the Germans viewed as criminals.

Initially, the German concentration camp was a place to which common criminals were sent to complete their sentence. In FRANCE, those condemned to hard labor went to CAYENNE or to BELLE-ILE by the sea; in GERMANY, they went to one of those camps. In 1933, Hitler comes to power. All those who opposed it were interned in those camps; thus, the German intellectuals from BAVARIA, who were against the regime, were locked up at DACHAU and almost all of them died there. IN 1936, the annexation of AUSTRIA allowed the master of GERMANY to increase the number of inmates by imprisoning the enemies of the ANSCHLUSS. Then war came in 1939 and the occupation of various European countries produced massive deportations. The Jews, HITLER's number 1 enemy, were the largest victim group; several million Israelites may have gone to AUSCHWITZ. When I was sent to AUSCHWITZ with 1000 Frenchmen, we were given numbers in the 200,000 and 201,000 series out of the 4 million. Hence, the concentration camp became as of 1933 the place of internment for political prisoners.

Usually, the camps were located near a city in order to facilitate the shipment of prisoners to work sites, to supply them and even to cremate the dead, because in some of these camps, where there were no crematoria, corpses were taken to the furnaces of the neighboring town where they could be incinerated and transformed into fertilizer. In the middle of the camp, there was a large roll call area where we had to spend long hours. Wooden barracks of different size surrounded it, depending on the camp: at SCHIRMECK and AUSCHWITZ, we were 200 and some per bloc, at DACHAU, 1500 to 1800; at the BUCHENWALD camp, part of the "large camp" (because there was a small camp or the quarantine camp) was comprised of stone or brick buildings. Then there were the dependencies, the offices and the kitchens, the storage areas for food,

clothing, the showers, the disinfection rooms, the bathrooms, and let's not forget the torture chambers and in some camps, the gas chambers. Sometimes, standing atop these buildings, there was the chimney of the crematorium as well as an inscription on top of the building. The SS barracks were located near the camp, which was surrounded by 3 to 4 meter tall barbed wire; at night these wires were electrified; moreover, there were guard towers where sentinels armed with machine guns or rifles kept watch. As soon as night fell, the barbed wires were lit up by projectors or lampposts. At DACHAU, there was also a canal and the SS barracks before the exit. All this to say that it was very difficult to escape. People say that since 1933, only three inmates were able to escape from that camp and were never captured.

In addition to all these buildings that housed these various services, there was a building or a barracks in camps like DACHAU, AUSCHWITZ or BUCHENWALD that served as a bordello; it was located in a corner of the camp. Admission was restricted to German "common criminals" who paid 1 Mark; they were presumably allotted only fifteen minutes under SS supervision.

The arrival of a convoy in a camp did not lead to an anticipated respite for those who were part of it, from the time that they had left the previous camp. Many forms had to be filled out before being able to rest. The prisoners were counted once, twice, ten times (in that regard, the Krauts were not very good at counting, because they would get confused if you were not in a row of five), while in the office they noted down the names of the new arrivals. After waiting for several hours, these prisoners, one after the other, had to go to an office (usually set up outside) and give their name, date of birth, address, occupation (this did not matter because you would always be assigned to digging trenches). They also had to indicate which camp they came from. Once this phase was completed, they were given a small piece of paper on which a number was written, because, from now on, they no longer had a name but a number. They would never hear their name pronounced (except by their friends). At AUSCHWITZ, in order to be recaptured easily in the event of an escape, or perhaps to make sure not to forget our number, it was tattooed on our left forearm. We went with this piece of paper to a room where we undressed in front of a "German common criminal"; if we came directly from FRANCE with our own clothes, this individual took everything he wanted (scarf, gloves, sweater…). If one or the other is cold in the winter, it won't be him. All you were left with were your shoes and a belt and that was not guaranteed either, the rest of your clothes were sent to be disinfected. Afterwards, assuming this was your first camp, you went to meet a bureaucrat to whom you consigned your ring and your watch, then he wrote down your gold teeth in order to recover the metal on the day you died. Not exactly a comforting thought, since you were told this all this in a most natural tone of voice. Still wearing this light outfit, belt around your neck and shoes in your hand or on your feet, you crossed long glacial hallways and went to the shower room. There, the German "common criminals" or their Polish or Russian lackeys were responsible for shaving your hair from head to toe, leaving no hair unshaven; they were very lax in the way they accomplished this task and oftentimes you came out of that session with torn skin. Afterwards, someone used a brush to smear your head and your private parts with a disinfectant liquid; there is no use telling you that the disinfectant liquid on torn skin provoked horrible itchiness. These were the first mundane torture scenes. In some camps, like at BUCHENWALD, "the painter" was replaced with a large round tub filled

with a blackish liquid in which you had to be completely submerged; those who hesitated to dip their head under water were shoved into it by the room supervisor. Finally, equipped with a soap bar (or rather a bar of sand), we went to the showers; as is always the case, there was very little time and we had only a few minutes to get clean. Once that was done, we were given our clothes, a pair of pants, a jacket and a shirt regardless of the size. Hence, there were men who were six feet tall who had to put on pants which would only fit a boy. Once we were dressed, we were sent to a block and were now part of the camp. Most of the time we spent "in quarantine" several days or several weeks following our arrival in a new camp. That meant that we were always in the same block or near it and never went to work. These registration, matriculation, and disinfection tasks could last one or two days, during which your only meal was the hot water from the showers, provided no one saw you do that; indeed, it was absolutely forbidden to drink water in any of these camps.
These procedures were in place for when you left the camp or arrived at the next one. An SS person subjected you to a meticulous search, which included every part of your body.

There were two kinds of clothes; either striped or "zebra", as we used to call it, or civilian. In the first instance, our wardrobe consisted of: a pair of pants, a jacket, a beret and sometimes a coat, all made of blue and light gray fabric that was almost white. Those clothes of rayon cotton were not very warm. But in POLAND, where the weather is worse than in GERMANY, the inmates' clothes or "pajamas" to use the correct word were made of hemp. You can see how the Germans did not omit any details. If you were dressed as a civilian, you had the same wardrobe but your clothes were civilian or military and came from all across Europe; you frequently saw inmates dressed in a French officers' britches and the jacket of a Russian or Italian soldier. The jackets and coats were marked on the back with a cross, a dash mark or a KL (Konzentrazion Lager), with red or yellow paint. Sometimes I saw one of us with a Cross of Lorraine on his back. The painter certainly did not do it accidentally. Oftentimes the paint mark on your back was replaced by a window, in other words, a small square was cut out of your jacket or coat and replaced with a striped piece of fabric. Civilian pants were covered with a daub of paint on the outside part of each leg.
You wore a number on your jacket together with a triangle (red for political prisoners with the letter "F" for Frenchmen); the same was true for the pants.
As undergarment, we were given a shirt and only occasionally briefs that we could change once every 3 or 4 months (or if we changed camps). The shirt was very short, those who had previously worn them had taken the sleeves to make handkerchiefs out of them or "Russian socks." Obviously, there were no buttons and the thread of the seams had been burned off as a result of disinfection.
Our shoes were mostly made of wood; we wore this outfit to work outside, every day regardless of weather conditions. In one camp where there were very few shoes (LANGENSTEIN), I saw inmates walking around with wooden boxes, tied to their feet with a leather strap.

The food was barely adequate to prevent us from dying of hunger quickly. The whole idea was to die slowly through gradual weakening. The last months were the worst, especially as of January 1945; the very last weeks were horrible and the deaths increased

rapidly. Those who had been at BUCHENWALD in 1942 or 1943 can tell you that until the landings (June 1944), the food was much better than what we received in the last ten months, and with the few parcels that the Red Cross had managed to send us, it was possible to hold on… At DACHAU, in late 1944, we received in the morning a half liter of a liquid called tea or coffee; the only positive side of this concoction was that it was warm. At nine o'clock, for those who worked, a small piece of bread (150 grams) and a slice of sausage known as "dog". At noon, a liter of soup, in other words, water in which three or four spoonfuls of rutabaga or carrots amount to the main course. In the evening, after work, 300 grams of bread and ½ liter of tea with the slice of sausage or a piece of margarine. Not a grain of salt in any of this. It might seem to be the meal of a prince compared to what we received in the last months. At LANGENSTEIN, right before Liberation, there was a single meal every 24 hours; 12 liter of soup always clear and 300 grams of bread; we received 180 grams during the last days.
We would not have lasted long on this regimen, especially since we had to work 12 to 16 hours, not counting the back and forth trips and roll call.

Hygiene varied from camp to camp, but mostly from person to person. Hence, of all the people who were in those camps, the French were neither the cleanest nor those who desired to wash themselves. Camps like DACHAU, AUSCHWITZ or BUCHENWALD had good sanitary facilities, large shower rooms, toilets with water closets. But the small camps had very little or nothing at all; at the Arbeitskommando LANGENSTEIN, there was one tap for every other block (or 1200 men), located in a small building which could only hold 20 people. At 4 in the morning, you washed in pitch darkness because there was no electricity there.
Furthermore, if water and toilets were available, you were never given enough time to wash; when we went to take a shower, no sooner did we get wet than the screaming voice of a Kraut or a Pole would yell: "fertig alles raust", the water was shut off and we had to put our clothes on as dirty as ever. The towels and the soap were lacking most of the time. We used our shirt or our pants to dry ourselves.

If hygiene was not great, care was non-existent. Sure, there was a health room (several blocks at DACHAU), but those were set aside for the few who were on good terms with the SS doctor, or else for those who were used as guinea pigs, before being sent to the crematorium. At BUCHENWALD, Block 46 was for the cowboys; those who went there came out by the chimney of the oven.
There was a medical checkup conducted by a prisoner physician inside the blocks, the only medication we received were his kind words; from time to time we saw him come to the block holding two boxes; there was black powder in one of them, white powder in the other. He would walk between our bunks and ask "for or against." Since almost everyone suffered from dysentery, the answer was always "against." The doctor gave everyone a spoonful of black powder until there was none left, it consisted of crushed coal which did nothing or very little. That was the extent of the care we received; at the health room, the physician took in some of the most severe cases. I, for one, had a growth on my feet, and the only treatment that I received every eight days was an incision and bandages made of paper without any disinfectant. The only way that I would have been cured was by dying.

This brief overview of the concentration camps would not be complete if I left out the methods of punishment and torture. We were left bare-chested for nothing at all on the roof of the guard station (DACHAU) for an entire day; in winter, it was not warm. Or else, we stood in front of the guard station, near the SS barracks. Every SS man who came or went was free to do what he wished to you. One unfortunate inmate who had taken a rutabaga or several vegetable peelings near the kitchens remained in the roll call area his arms tied to a post (LANGENSTEIN). The one who had stolen a piece of bread or a slice of margarine, or who had torn off a piece of his blanket to wrap around his neck, were hanged on Sunday in the roll call area for all his comrades to see (DACHAU). Attempted escapes resulted in the same punishment (AUSCHWITZ). In October 1944, at DACHAU, four Russians who had tried to escape were captured by the SS, sentenced to 25 lashes every day; during those sessions, we were heard them scream from the other side of the roll call area. At the end of each punishment, their clothes were no longer blue and gray but soaked in blood, while their SS henchmen seemed rather overheated, from the exertion of hitting them. At work, we expected the SS to hit us with rifle butts or sticks, whether or not we were at fault. As for Kapos and Vorarbeiter, mostly German, Russian or Polish "common criminals," they, like the SS, never knew when to stop; after having been hit by others when they were simple inmates, they returned the favor on their peers now that they were given a smidgen of power. It was rather common to bring back to camp in the evening a comrade who had been struck during the day and was unable to withstand the blows.
The torture was used on those who had refused to work or who tried to fake an illness. Experiments were performed on inmates who went to the health room (Revier), and complained of pain; one of my comrades at the BUNA-MONOWITZ camp (AUSCHWITZ III) had a toothache and ended up having three teeth pulled out, and then had his skull fractured most likely afterwards. [he suffered from headaches.]

A concentration camp was comprised of men who were sent there for different reasons; the "German common criminals," who wore a green triangle with a number on their jacket on the left side where the heart is. Saboteurs and those who refused to work were given a black triangle. Homosexuals had a pink triangle. Jews were given a yellow triangle, with the point tipped upward across a red triangle with the point tipped downward. And so forth and so on. Finally, the red triangle was assigned to "political" prisoners; the letter of the country of origin appeared inside the triangle (F for France). There were people from all over EUROPE including small countries like LUXEMBOURG, ESTONIA or ALBANIA; some of the inmates were bandits, thieves or murderers whom the Germans had removed from prisons, then the Russian partisans and French maquis. And there were the hostages and the innocent victims picked up during razzias on a given day in PARIS, BRUSSELS or PRAGUE. All those races together amounted to a rather disparate group of people, because, although they were all prisoners, they were not all that unhappy. In addition to the Germans, Poles or Russians who ingratiated themselves with the SS, and who were given jobs in the blocks, the stores, the kitchens (blockaltester, kapo, stubendienst, lager-polizei, vorarbeiter) or as camp guards, thus achieving the goal put forth by HITLER in "Mein Kampf": use prisoners to guard other prisoners.

The SS watched the outer perimeter of the camp, while the thuggish German or Polish prisoners guarded the inside perimeter. They would tell us, each time we complained about their brutality: "we are here, be thankful; if we were not, it would be the SS and life would be even worse."
Personally, I don't think it would have been any worse if the SS had served as block chiefs (blockaltester). Note that most prisoners suffered more at the hands of the "common criminals" than the SS, which does not minimize in any way the culpability of the SS for the living conditions inside concentration camps.

Let's see now what a day looked like at DACHAU for instance: at three thirty, a stubendienst entered a room that slept about 500 men (that's room 1 in block 19) on three-tiered wooden beds; that room measured 13 square meters, which gives very few cubic centimeters of breathable air for each inmate. The air was suffocating; the windows were open but did not suffice to replenish the fetid air. Those who slept on the lower tiers literally froze from the cold that entered through the windows; the clothes that covered them as well as their blanket (when they had one) could not keep them warm. On the other hand, those who slept on the top tier were bare-chested and sweated large amounts. From time to time, they had to get out of bed and breathe some fresh air from the outside. The room was dark; there was only one light bulb.
After being awakened, we had to clean up at the sink very quickly because 500 guys had thirty minutes at most to wash up and there were only twenty sinks. At 4, everyone left the block and was given ½ liter of a concotion known as coffee in a bowl. Once we drank it, we had to assemble in groups of 50 and go to the roll call area with the KAPO. The wind blew and the snow was swirling about, but that didn't matter; we had to remain standing for three hours depending on the mood of the SS. Around six thirty or seven, the gate opened which separated the camp from the SS. We could see the POSTEN, with a weapon under their arm, lined up on both sides of the alleyway. Shortly thereafter, the parade started, in rows of five, marching in step, head high, cocked to the right. We doffed our berets when told "Mutzen ab" in front of the SS charges. After we crossed the gate, we put our berets back on when told "Mutzen auf" and surrounded by SS or SA men, we marched to the camp station, located on the other side of the SS barracks. The cars were either there or not there; sometimes we had to wait for them for long periods of time. Then each kommando of 50 inmates climbed into the freight car, with 5 guards. The train left at a different time every day; to go to MUNICH, you had to figure at least forty-five minutes to three hours depending on the locomotive or the track switches. Finally, we reached the sorting station at MUNICH at eight or ten o'clock, who cares; the goal had already been accomplished: the prisoners were exhausted since the day had begun at three in the morning. After getting off the train, everyone received a small piece of bread and a slice of pate (margarine on Saturdays).
Then each 50-strong kommando began work under the supervision of a Reichsbahn employee, guarded by the SS and the kapo; throughout the day, prisoners were hit without reason. The SS would take a rifle or the German Meister would brandish a shovel and strike without reason. The work was very hard; shovels, hoes, forks; we had to fix what the Allied planes had destroyed: replace the rails, the ties, the fills, plug the holes produced by the bombs, unearth those which had not exploded and heap the remnants of train cars that the bomb blasts had scattered. At noon we stopped working;

the kommandos gathered in a corner of the train station for soup. Either it was there or it was not, because if the alarm went off, the truck that carried it stayed at the camp and we'd have to wait until evening before having anything to eat. Out in the open air, everyone swallowed his liter of soup (hot water) which the snowflakes quickly cooled down. The work resumed at one in the afternoon at the same place as in the morning. At four in the afternoon, we put away our tools and returned to the cars which had brought us in that morning. The return to the DACHAU camp always occurred after six in the evening; oftentimes we got there at ten at night. One day, we arrived at a quarter before midnight because the car that I was in had derailed. All the prisoners who were behind our car and in ours had to fit in the cars up front. We were now 150 to a car instead of 50, in cars that the French Army used for 40 men. We remained in that situation for five hours, with no air to breathe; many became sick and their soaked clothes, which dried on contact with each other, exuded a sickening smell. The air was unbearable. When we reached the camp, after the SS checkpoint, we raced to the block because the first ones who got there were the first to eat and the first to go to bed. We had to enter the block one by one, hold out our bowl (which was always with us) and be given our tea or soup; we held the bread in our left hand then we went through a checkpoint in order to make sure that some did not try to get a second helping. Finally, we went to bed and savored that excellent meal before falling asleep. The last ones in the block had to wait outside while the 400 or 500 in front of them had gone in and been served. We all went to bed feeling sated, but dreading the cry of the Stubendienst—"Aufgen" that would announce a new day, as exhausting as the previous one; the hours of sleep, which were not that abundant, were interrupted by fleas, ticks and lice which devoured our tired carcasses. We also had to contend with neighbors who vied for extra space on our side of the bed or who tried to steal our blankets. The beds abutting one another were 90 centimeters wide and about two meters long, we were five and sometimes six in two beds. We had to lay like sardines on our shoulder; when one of the 5 or 6 turned to lie on the other shoulder his comrades took the opportunity to do the same thing. Oftentimes, there was no straw and no blanket (1 blanket was the most one could get).

The daily routine which I just described was not the worst of the ones that I endured. At LANGENSTEIN, a BUCHENWALD Kommando, the work day lasted 12 hours during the week and 16 hours on Sundays (that's when we switched teams). We worked at night every other week. We would get up at four thirty; after a roll call which lasted three hours, we spent our twelve hours of work underground burrowing new tunnels to harbor an airplane factory. At eight in the evening, the night crew relieved the day crew.

At AUSCHWITZ, we worked an eight-hour day, because in Upper SILESIA, it was impossible to work before eight in the morning and after four in the afternoon in wintertime, because the wind and the cold were so intense in POLAND. Don't forget that the SS who kept watch over us were not that warm, despite the fact that they wore more clothes than we did. We had to dig trenches in frozen ground that were 40-50 centimeters deep. In order to incite inmates to work or to distract them, there was music whenever we left or arrived at AUSCHWITZ III; indeed, about forty prisoners with one conductor, played in the morning and the evening for about one hour, the time it took to

march 10 to 15,000 inmates (in rows of 5). Of course, they played German military marches.

Before returning to the camp in the evening, there were brick chores; this is what we had to do: every inmate that walked past a pile of bricks along the road (which other comrades had unloaded from cars during the day) had to take 4 bricks and carry them to the future site of the SS barracks. At that location, the blockaltester and the SS equipped with whips kept guard over the prisoners so that they would unload the bricks at the right spot. That was one place where we were hit for no reason; moreover, many inmates, exhausted from having to carry these bricks dropped them before reaching their goal.

These crimes must be punished; unfortunately, it appears that the Allied governments are forgetting all too easily and too quickly the misdeeds of the Nazis. The idea is not to do to the perpetrators of these atrocities what they did to their victims. But it is necessary to mete out a punishment upon the SS other than imprisonment or even freedom. Moreover, if we, the French, and perhaps even the Anglo-Saxons, wish to inflict upon the SS and their auxiliaries a punishment that fits the crime that they perpetrated, we would not be able to do so. Indeed, despite having had to endure the worst suffering, a Frenchman remains human even towards his henchman; hence, when NEUENGAMME was liberated, near HAMBURG, the Allies asked a French political prisoner if among the SS in the camp, there was one who had been especially abusive towards him. After pointing out one particular SS man, the Allies wanted the Frenchman, wearing shoes to climb on top of the body of the SS man who was pinned to the ground by four soldiers. Even though this SS man had struck and tortured this Frenchman, he could not muster the courage to trample the man on the ground; he took the pistol of the Allied soldier, and unloaded it into the skull of the SS man.

I think that these details have given you a fair idea of what life was like in the Nazi concentration camps. I am certain that books will be published which will reveal to the whole world the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. I can personally attest that what has been said and written as well as the published photos is neither propaganda nor a shadow of the truth, but quite the opposite.

Henry CLOGENSON, deported from COLMAR—VORBRUCK SCHIRMECK—DACHAU—AUSCHWITZ II AND III—BUCHENWALD--LANGENSTEIN