

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **Archives**

### **Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center**

**Interview with Victor Wegard  
May 4, 1987  
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## **PREFACE**

On May 4, 1987, Victor Wegard was interviewed on videotape by Mark Lender and Bernard Weinstein on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

**Summary of the**  
**Interview with Victor Wegard**  
**May 4, 1987**

Victor Wegard, a New York born Jew, joined the army after graduating high school. After serving in Trinidad and Italy, he volunteered to become a paratrooper and was instead assigned to the War Crimes Division of the United States Army. Victor was sent back to the United States to be trained for entry into the concentration camps. He returned to Europe in 1944 and became Chief Warrant Officer in the Third Army's War Crimes Investigation Team, unit #6832. His unit arrived at Flossenbürg concentration camp in Germany the first day of its liberation. Their investigation took them to a neighboring town called Namerding (ph) where they found bodies of people who had been executed, yet townspeople claimed that they hadn't seen or heard anything. Later, Victor was assigned to the defense of war criminals at the trials in Dachau, Germany. He talks about the "sordidness" of trying to cajole the perpetrators into testifying in exchange for their lives. Victor also speaks, in particular, about the trial of Andreas Müller, the commandant of a German troop who massacred 44,000 Jews in Kovel, Ukraine. Victor believes that revisionism and denial of the Holocaust must be refuted with facts.

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**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Victor Wegard  
May 4, 1987**

01:01:00

Victor Wegard was born in New York. After graduating high school, he joined the army at age eighteen. He wanted to be a court reporter, but thinking he would get to China, he enlisted and became a reporter for the army war college. He was in Trinidad when Japan invaded Hawaii and was "yanked out" of Trinidad to become an aide to the United States Army General Patton in the 1943 invasion of Africa. Unfortunately, he was stranded in Sicily, Italy away from combat. He volunteered to be a paratrooper and wound up in the United States Army War Crimes Division. He returned to the United States and was trained for entry into concentration camps at Cumberland University in Tennessee.

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They studied each camp one at a time (though they did not cover Flossenbürg concentration camp in Germany, which Victor actually helped liberate). Basically, they studied the more famous camps. They knew nothing of the "politics" behind the camp system, only that these were "war crimes." He was sent back to Europe in 1944, first to England, then to North Brabant, Netherlands. He was settling claims against the United States which had invaded Holland. He was rushed to Paris and became part of the War Crimes Commission. He was in unit #6832.

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Four warrant officers and 12 enlisted men were in his unit. They had carte blanche to draw on infantry or other combat units. They received orders to secure the Palace of Justice in Nuremberg, Germany. They received orders to attach themselves to the 91st infantry division, going to Flossenbürg. They had heard that Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Chief of Abwehr, the German military intelligence, might be incarcerated there. Also, Kurt von Schuschnigg, the chancellor of Austria, and many clerics. They thought their mission was purely military. They got to Flossenbürg late in the first day of the camp's liberation. It was a thickly forested area, situated beyond an electrical fence. They learned that Canaris and the clerics had recently been executed and that Schuschnigg was still alive. They were told to assist in the apprehension of perpetrators and gathering of evidence for a war crimes trial.

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They thought there were about 5000 prisoners there. Actually, the majority of prisoners had already been marched out of the camp. The investigation came to a town called Namerig, (ph) which had not been touched by the war. Townspeople claimed that they has seen no prisoners. They saw "nothing" and heard "nothing." He knew they were lying. He went on, came upon rotten corpses and saw a fresh mound of earth. The Colonel and others started digging; they saw bodies still bleeding; heads blown off.

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He couldn't take it anymore. He found mostly men, hardly any women; mostly Czech and French priests. The Americans proceeded to bury the bodies properly. They took pictures and then forced every man, woman and child to look closely at the bodies. The citizens were generally stolid, but a few women were emotional. To this day, those Namerung citizens still alive have not admitted to seeing the prisoners who had been marched to their deaths. Those prisoners had missed being liberated by about a day and a half. Germans felt, he believed, that they were sending the more educated from the camp, and keeping the "lower caste."

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Flossenbürg was a quarry town, one with transient workers and buildings made out of wood and concrete. The Germans claimed that Flossenbürg had the most "efficient" gas chamber. This really was a "death camp." Victor later learned that the Germans had killed thousands of Russian prisoners in the camp. Approximately 100,000 were eliminated. That was where Messerschmitt, German aircraft, was built with slave labor. Prisoners were exultant when they saw the Americans. There were few Jews in the camp, (although Wegard found a cousin there). He found Yugoslavs, Greeks, and German political prisoners, including members of the "white rose" resistance group. While helping the allies to defeat Nazism, the "white rose" group was decimated.

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Wegard was greatly injured by the "terrible shock." It had to be recovered from quickly. though. You couldn't let it "get you." What struck him the very minute he entered the camp was the "spectra of death" (Colonel Bates said the same thing). He thought they were carrying the plague and other diseases. The investigators took off after the escaping German guards within an eight mile radius. They caught the commandant, adjutants and others. They found some SS and Ukrainian guards. Among the SS were Waffen (military) and Tottenkopf (concentration camp guards), and also Hitler's personal body guards.

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In interrogating, they tried to "handle" two at a time. They had to decide whether to put them in one or another camp. His group was responsible for about 1500 prisoners. Though the prisoners were arrogant, they were not defiant. The one who admitted his crimes was SS Lieutenant Colonel Jochen Peiper, who carried out the Malmédy massacre of American soldiers in Ardennes, Belgium. Yet he said it was a "military decision" because he had been ordered not to take prisoners.

01:41:00

Peiper was captured in November of 1945, brought to Dachau, and tried as a war criminal. He was given 20 years. Later, he went to France and was shot by a member of the Maquis, the French resistance fighters. Later, Wegard was at the Dachau war crimes trial. At that time, Dachau, not Auschwitz, was the "drawing card." The trials of the major defendants' (Hermann Goering,

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Rudolph Hess, Joachim von Ribbentrop, etc.) were held in Nuremberg. The so-called "lesser trials" of the actual perpetrators were conducted by the Third, Seventh and Fifth armies at Dachau.

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This series included the Dachau war criminals themselves. Now they had the job of defending these criminals, under General Lucian Truscott of the Third army. They carried on this mission in addition to other duties. Victor describes a famous thanksgiving dinner in which dignitaries were being feted while the interrogation was going on.

01:51:00

Victor admits the "sordidness" of trying to cajole these prisoners into testifying to "save their lives." His job was to see that the fairest possible case be provided. Wegard was the only Jew in the group. The defendants were generally honest, except when it came to their own personal culpability. Dr. Klaus Schilling, who conducted malaria "experiments," was one of the few who did not blame others. Schilling had been an outstanding scientist before the war. Three prisoners were defended between September and November of 1945 and executed between January and February of 1946. He would not have volunteered for the defense, but he had no choice. He considers himself "proof" that the Holocaust did occur. He believes it is important that the story be told. "Revisionists" can be answered only with the truth.

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Every case in which the file could be closed once and for all was considered a "success." There were frustrations. One particular case stands out: August 11-14, 1941, the Germans massacred 44,000 Jews in Kovel, Ukraine. These troops were supporting the Wehrmacht's plunge into Russia. Officers were to exterminate and leave no evidence. In 1945, the perpetrator, Andreas Müller, was alive and well and living in Bamberg, Germany. This was to be both a war crimes trial and an atrocities trial. They captured Müller and brought him to Nuremberg.

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Müller tried to commit suicide, but he failed. A case against Müller was developed that was remarkably strong. He was a fierce Junker, an overpowering figure. He would never plead guilty, claiming he was under orders. The case was remanded to the judge advocate's for trial. A week later, the case was ordered closed by the United States Secretary of State Edward R. Jr. Stettinius who made him build airfields. Müller died in bed, a wealthy man, in 1961. Complaints were made but dismissed, on grounds that no military crimes were committed by this man against the United States.

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The normal layers of bureaucracy prevented appeals to Wiesbaden, Germany from being fruitful. Justice was not always done, and one became frustrated. Victor points out, we are now spending millions to find Nazi war criminals. Yesterday's enemies are today's friends.

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Victor believes it can and will happen again. He wants to be seen as an educator who is teaching others to prevent it. At the time of the Holocaust, very accurate information was being gathered and collated. We were rather good at selecting targets, and he implies that we could have done more. Victor believes that today, "venom" is being spewed in the form of "revisionism" and denial and these must be refuted with facts.