

-TITLE-ERNST REITER
-I_DATE-MAY 30, 1990
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESS
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-GOOD
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-1 HOUR 15 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-GERMAN WITH MINIMAL INTERPRETATION INTO ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Ernst was born 4/11/1915 in Graz. His mother's maiden name was Waldinger. His father was a stone mason. he had no siblings.

:02 He became a J.W. in 1931 or 1932. His parents were free thinkers, did not attend any Church. Ernst became an apprentice in a grocery store, then became a salesclerk in the store.

:03 At Hitler's advent in Germany, 1933, Austria's regime is described by ernst as Catholic-conservative. Ernst was able to continue in his job and obtain regular deferral from military service. He did have anxiety re- his J.W. status, because he knew of German J.W.'s being incarcerated in camps in Germany.

:07 After the Austrian "Anschluss", 3/13/38, J.W.'s in started meeting underground. The German S.A. infiltrated all organization, sports, music, religious etc. This led to a dispersal of the J.W.'s.

:08 Ernst was arrested September 6, 1938, because he had refused military service. This first lead to a police interrogation. That in turn lead to a military interrogation and trial. He was then condemned to a 6 months sentence in civilian prison. Treatment in prison was "reasonable". When his sentence was up, he was intercepted at the exit of the prison by Hauptman Bongrad (SS), who tried to force his to serve in the army. Ernst refused, asserting that he was a civilian and had received a civilian sentence, not a military one. Ernst stuck to his pacifist belief. (It is to be noted that in this interview, Ernst repeatedly quoted the Bible.

He also makes general comments on J.W.'s belief.) Despite his protests he was re-imprisoned. he then gives an account on instruction he received from another prisoner on how he was to behave in the presence of German officers. in his second military interrogation, which took place in Ringsburg, he was threatened that he would not survive. However, Ernst asserted (and firmly believed) that only God would decide that. At the conclusion of the interrogation he was condemned to a term of 18 months in a (military) Zuchthaus) (penitentiary). In the event, he was transferred to Flossenburg concentration camp in November 1939.

:20 Interviewer asks why the Nazis were so opposed to J.W.'s. Ernst does not respond to the question, but answers for himself: God's commands were higher than human commands, especially the command of "Love your neighbor like yourself." He again quotes from the Bible. He, Ernst did not want to offend Jehovah, and he felt protected by Jehovah's angels. He refused military service, because Jesus Christ had commanded man to walk in God's way, and to beat swords into plow shares. Nation must not battle nation, and no longer learn warfare.

:27 In the camp he was almost drowned, severely beaten and severely kicked. Jehovah helped to overcome all that.

:28 He recalls an incident during which one of the commanders of the camp, Schulze, kicked him into a corner: however, Ernst comments that eventually this man Schulze, saw "through" the Nazi regime, and subsequently landed himself in the Mauthausen camp. Schulze's successor, Schierda, was a true SS officer with all the mannerisms of the SS. Schierda specialized in teaching his subordinates in the art of hand grenades. He too, eventually left Flossenburg camp.

:31 J.W.'s were ridiculed in the camp, but they all survived this, thanks to Jehovah. (cf. below)

:32 What was his first day in Flossenburg like? Having been told that his commanding officer was well trained in the Bible, he, Ernst looked forward to an exchange with him. It turned out that the man did not know the Bible. Originally there were only three other J.W.'s in his block. The J.W.'s of the camp did manage to arrange meetings. They tried to meet in the mornings. Those who were assigned quarry work, as he was, also exchanged Bible lessons during work time.. The quarry work they were assigned to was destined for a monument in Munchen.

:35 How were they able to keep up their J.W.'s routines? They did not have any Bibles. They did receive some of the literature, smuggled in via packages. He recalls a particular issue of the Watchtower.

Food consisted of so-called coffee in the morning, and 200 gram of bread with some margarine. (No evening meal is mentioned): midday meal consisted of some murky stew. Some prisoners received some food packages.

:40 Classification of prisoners: prisoners were denoted by triangles: J.W.'s triangle was purple. His number in camp was 1,035. There were political prisoners, a-social prisoners: immigrants, and Jews.

:42 Jews received the worst treatment in the camp. The Jews had to work everyday, while J.W., for instance, did not have to work on Sunday. There was also a difference in food rations. German and Austrian prisoners received tobacco rations, others did not. Ernst did not notice any rivalry among the prisoners. The Kapos varied.

:44 His own work assignments: " originally he was put on construction work, but this quickly changed. he was apprenticed in the quarry. Working in the quarry protected him (and others) from the vagaries of the weather. Furthermore the prisoners were taught quarry work civilians, not by the military. Civilians dealt decently with the prisoners.

:48 While in camp was he asked to denounce his faith? No. But there was a time, when the J.W.'s were all gathered in the shower room. and told that they had a chance to volunteer for SS service. None volunteered. As a consequence some J.W.'s were badly beaten, i.e. Brother Kellner from Leipzig.

:51 Did conditions change in the camp over the years? Not marked. He recalls the death of only one J.W., adding that, that particular brother had "a demonic aspect".

:55 Were J.W.'s ever put together? Yes, once, at the very end. On 4/20/1944 (Tr's note: 1945?). Hitler's birthday, all the prisoners were collected on the Appellplatz, and then the prisoners were marched out of the camp in groups of 2,000 men. (They had already become aware of the approach of Allied troops). On the first stage of this death march they marched through the night, and into the evening of the next day, without food or water, still being surrounded by the SS. They marched again the next night. Stragglers were shot. The groups of 2,000 diminished to 200 or 300. On orders the dead were buried by the remaining prisoners. This death march was far worse than any camp experience. The total length of time was three nights and three days, without food, and without proper shoes. Then they saw airplanes. When it was evident that the planes were U.S. planes, the SS fled.

1:01 At liberation the U.S. forces fed them it was heavenly. The liberation feeling "cannot be put into words." He imagines that the advent of Armageddon will be like that: Peace, but over the whole world.

1:02 How many J.W's died in Flossenburg? Ernst states 26.(??)

He then shows a postcard of Flossenburg, taken in 1958. He points out the various buildings, e.g.. the laundry, the kitchen. mentions that there had been an orchestra. He points to the "reception hall", where the civilian clothes were handed in. Mentions that the entrance (or the reception hall) carried the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei". Indicates the barracks: there were a total of 32 barracks (stone and brick). The time there were Watchtowers, and electrified barbed wire, surrounding the camp. off to the side was the crematorium.

1:05 The dead were burned in the crematorium. he does not know the total number of dead. he mentions the stench of burning flesh, suffusing the entire camp.

Those who could not be burned were buried, until there was a veritable pyramid of corpses, leading to further stench. He thinks that the daily count of the dead was 200, aside from the shootings.

He remembers the arrival of a whole train wagon filled with women's corpses. The corpses had been mutilated: all the women's breasts had been cut off. Doesn't know whether they were Germans or Jews. "Dreadful."

1:07 What are his thoughts, looking back? He is thankful to Jehovah who allowed him and enabled him to live through this experience, which only reinforced his faith.

1:10 Post War? Each on his own. He did not stay in touch with fellow prisoners. Most of their families were dispersed. Many came back to families, where a family member, father, son, brother, was dead or imprisoned by the Allied on the whole the J.W.'s had no difficulties. They obtained food and money from the authorities, especially from the U.S.

The U.S. gave them bikes, on which they returned from Germany to Austria. He returned to Graz in September. Unemployment post-war was great. He lived on unemployment compensation for a while. Then went back into business and worked successfully for the next 25 years. He had a good life post war.

Family, i.e. wife, daughter and two granddaughters, introduced.
.END.