

-TITLE-BERRIE VAN DER EIKOFF
-I_DATE-SEPTEMBER 13 1991
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESSES
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-GOOD
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-90 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-DUTCH WITH INTERPRETER IN ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

.00 Berrie was born 2/17, 1941 in Haarlem, but moved, as a small child, with his family to the Hague. Both parents were Dutch. His father's first name was Hubertus. He had two sister, the oldest of which, age 90, still alive. His father was a machinist for the railways. His father had, in 1900, worked for a year at the Ford factory in the USA.

.02 Berrie had grammar school education, going to work at the age of 12 yrs. In later yrs he attended some evening classes. Berrie worked for 40 yrs in the Dutch Civil Service employed in the Postal Service; he was stationed in the Hague.

.04 Asked about the political situation prior to may 1940 in Holland, Berrie states that they were aware of threats from abroad, but that people did not expect Holland to become involved. States that Dutch Prime Minister Colyn followed a policy of pacifying the population.

.06 Berrie was introduced to J.W. in 1939, while serving in the Dutch Army, (rank of sergeant). He was introduced to the J.W.'s creed by a man who refused to serve in the Army. Berrie's assignment was to guard this J.W. As Berrie became converted to the J.W. faith, he became aware of the intrinsic conflict between faith and his serving in the Army. He was able to arrange to obtain business leave from Army and return to his civil service job.

.08 Berrie had married in 1938. His wife became a J.W. after he had become one. He and his wife both became J.W. pioneers.

Post German invasion of Holland he could not pursue his pioneering .10 work openly. However he was permitted to carry a Bible and could not be arrested for just carrying it. When, in conversations with people, he found that they were interested in J.W. faith, he would follow up with J.W. literature.

.13 Mentions that Dutch J.W.s sent letters to German authorities protesting the unfair treatment meted out to J.W. in Germany. Asked whether he was personally afraid of the Gestapo, he answers that he was scared, but without any specificity, since he did not know what exactly to be scared of while relying on his faith to be a strong.

.14 Conditions at work: with the exception of one colleague-supervision, a J.W. himself, it was not known that he was a J.W.

.16 Berrie was arrested at work (No date given) by the Gestapo, who were armed, thus obviating any chance of escape for him, lest he endanger his fellow workers.

.18 He was taken to Gestapo Headquarters in the Binnenhof, where he was interrogated by two SS men (Engelsman and Barkie). He was stripped naked for interrogation (in the presence of two women), which took place under bright lights. When he refused to give the information requested re J.W.s he was pistol whipped, punched with brass knuckles. His nose, several ribs were broken, and many teeth knocked out. He continued refusal to betray.

.21 He was shown photos of other J.W.'s most whom he recognized, because he had over the years become the leader of 5 groups of J.W.'s. He quickly decided that he would not admit to knowing any of the .

.23 This refusal resulted in his being locked into a very small box, in which he was to remain for 24 hours. On being freed from this box, in much worse physical condition, he was subjected to interrogation again. He then decided to tell the Gestapo that he knew some of these people only by their numbers, not by name, His own number was 1,043. This further enraged the Gestapo.

.25 He was then presented with papers stating that he would renounce his faith and cease having any J.W.'s in his house. A female Gestapo secretary also proposed to him that he could become a spy for the SS in Eastern Holland and be paid Fl 400 per month. His then current salary was fl 60 per month). He refused again.

.30 He was subsequently taken to the prison in Scheveningen, where most of the prisoners were political prisoners. he landed in a cell which already contained five men (and one mattress). When the SS discovered this the other five were taken out of the cell, lest Berrie convert them to his faith. A (pleasant) side effect was that Berrie was given five extra food rations which he was able to save and eventually share, when he was transported to the concentration camp in Amersfoort the next day.

.36 In Amersfoort he was placed in a large barrack. He rapidly was assigned work sorting the belongings of newly admitted prisoners.

He "took" the Bibles belonging to J.W.s, and then later returned same to the J.W.'s. Asked by interviewer whether he was ever able to explain his faith to the Gestapo, the witness responded that there was no opportunity for than. Communication with his jailers was limited to answer of "yes" or "no", and prisoners were strictly forbidden to look the Gestapo in the eyes. One Gestapo threatened to kill him. (this Gestapo alleged that he had become a murderer after hearing of the Russian atrocities committed on Germans). J.W.'s were able to talk with each other at work.

.40 Questions by the German jailers were limited to J.W.'s opposition to the roman Catholic Church, not discussions of opposition to the nazi regime.

.41 Asked re his wife's fate, witness knew that while he had been in interrogation his child (born in 1941) had been taken hostage to pressure his wife to give information, which she refused. He and Ax? and his wife had made prior plans about hiding J.W. literature in case of arrest. Once the witness was imprisoned his wife was released and their child was returned to her.

.43 In Amersfoort the inmates were eventually divided into groups, and Berrie was one of thirty J.W.'s shipped to Buchenwald concentration camp. J.W. were identified by purple triangles.

.44 In response to a question by the interviewer whether Berrie had met Brother de Jong (another J.W. interviewed), Berrie said that he had met him both in Amersfoort and in Buchenwald, adding that Brother de Jong unfortunately in a special punishment group in the latter. Those prisoners were identified by a red circle over imposed on the purple triangle. Inmates as well as jailers were encouraged to mete out extra punishment to those prisoners.

.48 In Buchenwald Berrie was assigned to work in the quarry., where after three months he made contact with other J.W.'s, including one German one. Their supervisors learned that the J.W. did not sabotage work. In view of that J.W.s (including woman J.W.) were much in demand for household tasks in the quarters of German officials.

.53 Berrie testifies that he saw a lot of mistreatment and gratuitous beating, aimed primarily at Russian prisoners.

.56 The worst times for all inmates occurred when one or more prisoners tried to escape. After an escape attempt to her inmates had to work two extra hours, and they had to spend extra time on the Appellplatz outside, which led to immense fatigue, often to exhaustion, and subsequent death. After an attempted escape the night patrol also made inmates get up for five minutes for every 15 minutes of sleep. Apprehended escapees were hanged in front of the inmates, who were forced to view the hanging.

Another instance of very dangerous times: the delousing routine, when prisoners clothes were taken away for the delousing process, leading to prisoners standing naked in the unheated barracks, to be sent to near scalding showers, to be sent to the outside (at temperatures sometimes as low as -25 degrees), without drying. This frequently led to pneumonia, then death, then overcrowding at the crematoria.

1.00 All prisoners at some time had crematoria duty. In summer time corpses were often left outside: stench was overwhelming. SS refused to go near the area.

Near Buchenwald was the estate belonging to Himmler. In addition to Himmler his personal MD, Dr. Kaestler resided there often as did von Papen. In 1944 at the estate some J.W.s were employed, of these both a female and a male Roman Catholic Church. The male J.W. was extremely well informed resulting in his being asked his information several times. Presumably this J.W. was told by von Papen that the Nazis had had a meeting at the Vatican in the course of which a decision had been made that the war would end May-June 1945. The J.W. to who this was told, in turn told Berrie.

1.07 Berrie himself was repeatedly interrogated re J.W. opposition to the Roman Catholic Church His answer was that the Roman Catholic teaching was not in agreement with the Bible. He never had a chance to explain his position fully.

1.09 Asked the name of the J.W. who spoke with von Papen, Berrie refuses to reveal same.

1.10 End of the War: At that time Berrie with eight other J.W. was on the Island Ruegen in the Ostsee, under the guard of an officer who was in charge of provisions for the German troops. (The move from Buchenwald to Ruegen is not explained in this interview.)

The prisoners were liberated by the Russians, after a very brief battle between Germans and Russians. Just prior to the liberation the supervising SS, who had changed from uniform into civvies, threatened to kill the J.W., but in the event did not follow through.

1.15 The Russians treated the prisoners well. There was delay of several days in conveying the men from the island to the mainland, due to needed repair of the connecting bridge.

On the mainland there were further delays due to lack of trains. Eventually Barrie met up with a Dutch ex-prisoner, and thus heard about some possible transportation. Berrie took his chances and he together with some other J.W. hopped on a train which supposedly was 1.19 only for Russians. Thus he reached Rostock, which had a Russian camp for refugees.

Asked by interviewer about current thoughts re hunger, Berrie says that he had no immediate associations to concentration camp experiences invoked by hunger sensations. He does associate his camp experiences with bad October-November weather, AND when seeing smoke plumes.

1.21 Asked about reunion with family, he responds that those emotions cannot be put into words, ever be explained.

1.22 Other comments: He was condemned to death three times: the people who condemned his are dead themselves now...

He is currently sometimes disappointed by the lack of understanding and the non-believing of his war experiences on the part the next generation, a non-understanding and not believing which includes J.W.s. He expresses hope that with a knowledge of history similar events won't, cannot happen again.

.END.