

Time-coded notes of Stephen Gonczy
May 2, 1982

[At the beginning of the tape is some technical video and conversation about the microphone, with technical personnel. There is then some preparatory conversation with the interviewer and Mr. Gonczy. THERE IS NO CLOCK ON THIS

01: After basic training in the United States he went to England with the U.S. Army and participated in the Normandy invasion. He was assigned to unit 483G - Military Intelligence Team of the 1st American Army. He is a liberator. He was born in Hungary. At the time of the Liberation he was a sergeant and was a liberator of Dachau.

Backtracking, he was born in Hungary, came to the U. S. in 1939. He was already a young man and had a law degree from the University of Paige [ph] in Hungry

02: which wasn't recognized in this country, so he had to take some studies here - in Chicago and he received his Law degree in 1943 from _____.

03: He was not a U. S. citizen when in 1943 he entered the Army and the Army took care of that and made him a citizen. Because he knew the German language, he wound up in Military Intelligence. They needed people who knew foreign languages. He passed an exam...they were looking for people fluent in foreign languages and organized teams. Most on his team were European born, one was American-born. The others were Swiss, Hungarian and German.

04: Before this he was involved in the invasion of Normandy. In the Army it took some time to figure out who fit where - it was at the time of the Battle of the Bulge they picked him out for intelligence because he spoke a foreign language and he was sent to Intelligence headquarters near Paris.

05: Then he was reassigned to 483G and moved to the front and participated in intelligence - interrogating prisoners of war - looking for technical and strategic information. If German prisoners were captured, they would question them. In March of '46, they crossed into Germany.

06: They only had time to question the highest ranking officers. His division - the 63rd armored division, found itself with more prisoners and had to weed out the highest ranking and most knowledgeable officers.

07: At that time they were looking for long-range strategic information and what was going to happen on the collapse. He was involved in France in a special project.

08: At that time it wasn't certain when the war would end. And in France someone came up with an ambitious plan to pick out some anti-Nazi German prisoners and drop them behind German lines with radios and have them broadcast back to the American troops tactical information on movements from behind German lines. They did drop two or three behind the lines - A movie was made of that operation.

09: In March, it was clear that the war was going to end and people were giving up and becoming prisoners of war. By that time it was known that concentration camps existed - it was common knowledge. But few people really realized the extent of it. They knew about Dachau, about Auschwitz. They talked with people who in some way escaped or were released from the camps and they talked to German Nationalists.

10: Most of the Nationalists declined that they knew anything about the camps. They said - yes, they heard there were Jews and Catholics and Gypsies, but they didn't know what happened to them. When he got to Dachau, which is just about 4 km. outside the city of Dachau, they made a special project to talk to the inhabitants of the city of Dachau to find out what they knew. Everyone said they didn't know anything about it. Dachau had been a camp a long time.

11: When they got to the camp, they found the Germans - one thing about the Germans was that they kept good records - card systems. Dachau opened in '33. From 1933-1939, they found only 39,000 cards for those who went to Dachau. From 1940-1945, they found 161,930 cards. So, Dachau was not the largest camp by any means - actually it started out as a political concentration camp. In 1933, after Hitler came to power, anyone who was a member of the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, or had anything to do with them or was politically unreliable was sent to Dachau.

12: A famous prisoner at Dachau was the Reverend Martin Niemuller [ph], a Minister who spoke against the National Socialist Movement. Later Konrad Adenaur, who became Chancellor after the liberation of Germany in 1946, was in concentration camp and Wily Brandt, who became Chancellor after Adenaur also was in concentration camp and escaped.

13: In April of 1945, they were moving from a small town between Stuttgart and Heidelberg and they knew the collapse was near. They (63rd Div.) were given the mission to march toward Dachau and Dachau was by that time - it was the 29th of April - the 41st Div. was also nearby.

14: A select group preceded the actual troops - it was to get in ahead to observe conditions and see what was happening. It was a reconnaissance group. There was no danger anymore. They knew that most of the prisoners were organizing themselves. Some already came out from the camp to greet the American forces. The SS guards had left and the camp was officially closed two days before. This was on the 27th of April, 1945. There was total chaos.

15: Most prisoners organized themselves into groups by nationalities and attempted to take over the administration of the camp. Mr. Gonczy's first impression: He and his fellow men did not conceive the magnitude of what happened. It was later they found out. All they saw, outside of the camp - it was obvious there was a railroad track with 8 or 9 railroad cars. Bodies were lying around the track. Some feet and hands were hanging out from the doors, so they knew there were corpses in the cars. They didn't know how many or where they came from, but they knew there were corpses. Later they found out there were approximately 2 thousand prisoners shipped in from Ravensbrück in Northern Germany for the purpose of gassing and cremation, but meanwhile, the American forces had closed the camp, so they had no time even to put in railroad tracks into the camp.

16: They had no time, so they just left it over there. So it was up to the American forces to dispose of these corpses. They couldn't let it stand there - already it was becoming quite warm.

17: There was already an odor. It was out of the question to give a decent burial. They called in the engineer [?] troops and they dug holes four or five feet deep - trenches, not holes. They brought the railroad cars into the camp, put the bodies in the holes and covered them with lime. Identification was out of the question. Most were naked anyway. They met all the prisoners, at least their representatives. They organized an International Prisoners' Committee. The President was Petro Colari [ph], a Major from the British Army.

18: They had a Russian General in it, a Belgian named Hugo Artur [ph] who was a member of the Belgian Parliament and naturally, he being Hungarian, he was interested in the Hungarian group which was headed by Count Georges Parlovechini[ph]. The book he is reading from is a book which was published after the liberation by the 7th army, G2 Section (Intelligence Section). All contributed what they could to it and gave pictures and at that time the Assistant Chief of Staff was Col, William W. Quinn, Colonel, 7th Army.

19: Mr. Gonczy recently had occasion to see Col. Quinn again in October of last year when they met at a Conference in the State Department and he had occasion to talk with him. This report is very rare now.. there are few left. There is one in the Archives in the Pentagon and General Quinn has one copy. No original ones existing. Copies were made by the hundreds.

20: It was felt very important to document everything. The Signal Corps of the U.S. Army photographed everything and the photos were used in the Nuremberg trials. He was in Dachau from April 24 - was there 10 or 12 days and then they were reclassified as the War Crimes Commission of the 7th U.S. Army. He returned to Ludwigsburg [ph] where they set up a camp for German internees. He returned to Dachau several times later on in the capacity of war crimes investigator.

21: In the initial days, at the end of April and the beginning of May, once the camp had been liberated - their jobs as military intelligence personnel gave them responsibility only to the highest headquarters.

22: They wore uniforms, but most did not wear insignias, because, according to the Geneva Convention, captured prisoners could only be interrogated by an officer of the same rank. So they just took off their bar and put on an eagle or wore no insignia at all.

23: What were the prisoners' reactions? For most, very traumatic. They showed very little reaction - they were not in physical or mental condition to react. Most died in the next 2 or 3 weeks. They were beyond rehabilitation. There were two units involved in rehabilitation: the Medical corps - medical officers - Penicillin was the most important thing to prevent further infection; and the quartermasters who brought in the food.

24: They had to be very careful because if they ate a lot after starving for two or three years - they would die. They didn't really want to tell their story - all they really wanted was to be

liberated and know they will live and have strength. They knew they will not go to the crematory. One person did type out his story.

25: He came from another camp by cattle car. They were 250-300 people and the cars were designed for 40 or six horses. It was out of the question to sit down. Most died on the way. They were lucky if they reached the camps. When they died they were just thrown out of the car. This one person wrote his story and he said that there was cannibalism.

26: The Prisoners had started to organize themselves and wanted to get identified. And wanted to get out as soon as possible. UNRO (United Nations Relief Organization) took over and tried to reunite the people - the ones who had relations in the United States and Czechoslovakia. Most had no relatives left. Most of the people who survived were youngsters, 14-15-16 years old. 90% were teenagers.

27: By the time they got to the camp, there were some German guards left. They were discharged five days before liberation. Every guard was given his discharge paper and were told--take off, try to get civilian clothes and try to disappear because if the Americans come and you are in SS uniforms, you will be shot on sight.

28: Most took off and those who stayed masqueraded as prisoners. They got the striped pajamas and tried to pass as prisoners. Physically they were robust. They were obviously recognized and the prisoners would beat them to death. Prisoners usually took care of them. He was a witness to one of these beatings of an SS guard--saw them beat him to death.

29: Kapos were more hated than the guards themselves. They were the real criminals of the camp because they were prisoners themselves and were trying to save their own skins by doing dirty work for the SS. This was more prevalent at other camps than at Dachau. Dachau, when fully occupied, had 60-70,000 prisoners at one time, while in Auschwitz there were 250-350,000.

30: Because they had not enough SS men, they delegated power to the Kapo. A Kapo took one block and that was his responsibility. He was the one who picked out people for the gas chambers. They found this license in the possession of a Kapo in 1945 which licensed him to wear long hair and a wristwatch or pocket watch. It was dated 12/17/42. He was a German Ernst Schmidt, 24 years old.

31: They never found out why he was in the camp. He could have been a political, criminal, or homosexual prisoner. They all wore different kinds of triangles. They found this license on him in the War Crimes Camp. He was arrested.

32: The U. S. Government, after the liberation of the camps, organized an operation to use German civilians from the city of Dachau to bury the dead and made them witness it. This was not only in Dachau. Not every German, but from his internees in the camp in Ludwigsburg, organized details were sent to witness. Mr. Gonczy was in other camps - not concentration camps - internee camps - most were in Ludwigsburg. There were also a few special camps for women prisoners.

33: Most Germans reacted by pleading not knowing anything about it. They didn't want to know too much. A great number were truly shocked to find out. Even after seeing all the railroad cars, they were shocked. Dachau was primarily a concentration camp. The most infamous camp was Auschwitz.

34: Most of the men he worked with were mentally accustomed to this type of work after going through two years of combat and seeing bodies and didn't shock easily. But this was different.

35: People at Dachau were beyond imagination. They were like animals - most living in their own dirt and their own filth with no clothes and no food, because it was a matter of survival. It was unimaginable that a mother takes a piece of bread from her own child because she can't stand hunger any longer.

36: The soldiers talked quite a bit about the inhumanity. Most were of European background and were more affected being European, than the Americans. But even those Americans worked up such a hatred against the Germans; it was unimaginable. They wanted to shoot every one of them.

37: Mr. Gonczy's own response - he couldn't help but work up an immense hatred, but at the same time, he had to recognize the fact that the collective guilt was a misconception, because there were Germans themselves who suffered through this. And, as a result, he came back with a German wife. He was in Germany for a long time. After that they organized internment camp at Ludwigsburg and he became the Chief Interrogator of the camp (camp #74).

38: His job was to interrogate interred German civilians. The war was over. PWs were all in PW camps, in France in the United States. Their job was to punish those who were responsible for Nazi atrocities. They set up the War Crimes Commission.

39: And those who were interrogators during the war and knew the language were reclassified as interrogators - War Crimes investigators. They set up the camp at Ludwigsburg and in that particular camp - he was involved in and lived there one and a half years - there were about 10,000 prisoners. Out of these, about 700 went to the War Crimes Trials and their job was to prepare them for trial. To select those who were war criminals, get confessions if possible; if not, evidence, witnesses, information were sent to Nuremburg or the Allied Military Tribunal for lesser criminals.

40: Nuremburg, in 1946, October, sentenced 17 major war criminals to death and they were executed in very good time. There were DP camps set up by UNRO and they saw those people, but they had little to do with them because they were so busy and had to do their job and get prisoners to the War Crimes Tribunal as soon as possible. Some of the interrogation focused on their work in the camps.

41: That was their main purpose. Their job was to talk to these people - it was very tedious work. Most knew if they confessed, they would go to War Crimes Trial and the belief was that

the Americans would hang everyone who was in the concentration camps. That did not happen. These were not soldiers - they were civilians.

42: They were Nazi Party leaders. For example: there was one prisoner at Ludwigsburg, an elderly man of about 55 and there was quite a denunciation of him. People told about him - that he was a leader of the local Nazi Party. Naturally these people thought they themselves would be treated better if they denounced someone else. They told that if the investigators would look into it, they will find the bodies of three American fliers who were shot down not very far from this village and they were brought in by the police to this village and this man was responsible for shooting these three prisoners and buried them somewhere in the woods. They found the bodies.

43: And they identified them and knew that this man was responsible. It took some time to make him confess. This was a civilian internment camp and still exists. His wife was a Medical student and he met her in German hospital. She was a teenager during the War.

44: Her mother was taken away by the Nazis. Her father was a Lutheran Minister and Professor in Seminary in Schtepten [ph]. He knew his wife when the Russians captured Schtepten [ph] and the father was killed. Her mother was taken away because she spoke out against the Nazis and never heard from again. He came back to the U. S. at the end of 1947.

45: After being in Europe five years he wrote and talked quite a bit about his experiences to various groups - Kiwanis clubs in various places - many times in various places in Chicago - about 20-25 times.

46: He gave facts and showed pictures. People were interested then; unfortunately, no longer. Response at that time was quite emphatic. But 30 years is a long time and people don't like to talk about it. He has talked to his children about his and his wife's experiences. But, for anyone who wasn't there, it's very difficult to conceive of the enormity of it. It is beyond imagination.

47: He was very glad to see - knows about Elie Wiesel. Glad to see him in Washington. Thinks he is going through a welcome change and is becoming more mellow. He is resolved to the situation and will never forget. He would like to also mention that Kissinger is speaking about his book and says that although he is not a practicing Jew, he cannot overlook the fact that 20 members of his family were killed in concentration camp.

48: Mr. Gonczy is not surprised that survivors are speaking out after so many years. Time has a mellowing effect on everybody and you can't forget, but you look from a historical perspective. At this point, Mr. Gonczy holds up documents for the camera and describes them: 1. Book on Dachau - shows inside pages - photos of naked bodies. Remarks that Dachau had a very small percentage of women. 2. Discharge paper of SS prisoner - five days before the liberation. 3. A card taken from a Kapo - himself a prisoner in charge of other prisoners. Name: Ernst Schmidt. Comments that in Auschwitz there were Polish, Russians and Jews. In Dachau at the time of liberation less than 8% were Jewish the reason for this was that most had been killed.

Comments that as early as 1942, it was determined that the Jewish population would be totally annihilated. Reports were sent that certain villages were "Judenfrei [ph] - Jewish free.