

**Time-coded notes of Walter Gray**  
**December 20, 1982**

00:01 The interviewer states that the taping is part of the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois. The Tapes are a record of the eyewitness accounts of liberators of concentration camps. The purpose of the study is to preserve what they saw for future research and educational purposes.

00:02 The interviewer introduces Dr. Walter Gray, Chairman of the History Department at Loyola University. During WWII, he was a soldier in Germany who came upon Ohrdruf shortly after it was liberated. She introduces herself as Dora Schwartzstein. Dr. Gray states his full name as Walter Dennis Gray, born on July 20, 1925 in Yakataw, Washington. His age at the time of Visiting the camp was 19 years old.

00:03 Dr. Gray states that he was in the Regimental headquarters Company of the 354th regiment unit part of the 89th Division, which was part of Patton's third army. Dr. Gray shows a book, listing the accounts of the 89th division during the years of 1942 through 1945. His rank in the army was a Private. He saw the camp of Ohrdruf. He shows the location of the camp on a map.

00:04 Dr. Gray traces his division's route on a map of Germany.

00:05 Dr. Gray maintained a log while in Germany, even though he stated that soldiers were not allowed to, for fear of being caught by the enemy with it in possession.

00:06 He describes places where he stayed while in Germany.

00:07 He states that one of his jobs was running observation posts, one of which was outside Ohrdruf. From a Hilltop, he watched the town with powerful binoculars and directed arm fire if he saw any German military activity.

00:08 In the adjoining town of Vitzlaven, German activity was taking place, so they leveled the town and took it. The General wanted them to see the concentration camp.

00:09 Dr. Gray was taken to the camp. He saw no rails or transportation to the camps which might have been used for transporting prisoners.

00:10 The entire population of the town of Ohrdruf was being marched into the camp. As one came into the town, the camp was on the left.

00:11 As Dr. Gray and his regiment entered the camp, they saw a group of about forty or so inmates who had apparently tried to escape or were just gathered around the gate where they should not have been. They were all shot immediately. They were just left laying there, most of them being shot in the back.

00:12 The sight was shocking to Dr. Gray. When he entered the camp, it was a whole different story. The soldiers were toured around the camp. When he looked into the camp, it looked as though there were stacks of wood or something. There were several low buildings where the inmates were housed. The U.S. soldiers were taken inside, where they saw the inmates, sleeping in layers of bunks up to the ceiling. The soldiers were told not to feed the inmates anything or give them cigarettes, and most of all, no liquor, because they were bringing in medical supplies for the inmates and it could kill them.

00:13 Dr. Gray saw that the inmates were disoriented and had no idea what was going on. The inmates recognized the soldiers as friends. On the other side of the camp, it looked like stacks of wood, which were cadavers under lime. There were fires going, where they were trying to burn the cadavers, but this failed miserably because there were far too many of them. The American advance was so rapid and they had taken the town the day before - the German's were caught off guard.

00:14 The Lord mayor of the town had committed suicide, as did his wife. Dr. Gray reads Patton's memoirs from the day: they describe the horrors of the camp. He reads about the area where inmates were hanged for trying to escape - how they were hanged so their feet barely touched the ground, choking to death for fifteen minutes because the fall wasn't sufficient enough to break their necks. The next inmate to be hanged had to kick the board out from his fellow inmate's feet, causing him to hang.

00:15 Dr. Gray continues reading Patton's memoirs, describing how the soldiers next toured the whipping quarters. Whipping was performed with a whip larger than the size of a pick, while two German soldiers held the inmate, whose feet were bound. Next to the whipping chamber was a shack where bodies were stored, not as a means for getting rid of the stench, but it was inefficient. Some 200 emaciated bodies were piled in the shed. After the shed became full, the bodies were removed and buried. An inmate told the soldiers that some 3,000 bodies had been buried since January of that year (1945).

00:16 There were quite a few living inmates - they looked demented, in a state of shock, As we entered, they looked terrified, as if we were there to do them some harm.

00:17 Some inmates were marked with the Star of David. All were in a striped uniform, very dirty, and they were very long garments. Most of us were so stunned, we didn't do much talking.

00:18 Dr. Gray did not see any ovens, like in Auschwitz, but he definitely knew that extermination was going on. The Germans had tried to cover up some of this as a last minute effort before the U.S. took over the camp, but what had been occurring was too obvious. Dr. Gray did not know whether the camp was primarily a labor camp or a death camp. He did see a shed full of bodies. He spent several hours at the camp.

00:19 Dr. Gray wrote a letter home on April 15, 1945, which was roughly five days after his visit of the camp. All of the letters were censored, so many things were cut out. In his letter, he writes home, saying that the horrors of the German concentration camps were not exaggerated.

00:20 They ran into Belgians, French, Russians, and Poles in the camp, who were being freed from slave labor at the time. They seemed to be mostly Eastern Europeans. A considerable amount of them were Jewish, but many of them weren't.

00:21 We tried to communicate with them - they all wanted cigarettes from us, but we were told not to give them to them because of medication that they were on, and the last thing we wanted to do was give them something to kill them immediately after they had been through the tortures of the concentration camp for several months. We spoke no common language with any of them, so I suspect that they were mostly Russians or Poles or something. They were so emaciated that we couldn't make out the nationalities of their faces.

00:22 All prisoners looked the same - like they had been on diets of ten calories or something. I saw no children they were all men. I saw no women either. I don't know if they were political prisoners or what. There were several hundred, maybe more - we didn't go into every building, and a lot of them were laying in these bunks, several bodies high.

00:23 There were doctors there - we were to leave the prisoners alone. I saw no living guards - I saw some dead ones. They weren't very far from the dead inmates - they were just across the road. The German soldiers had SS patches on their sleeves.

00:24 The German civilians were stunned - I could not speak German though. The general feelings of the troops around was the hatred of the Nazis.

00:25 We were staying in a very wealthy person's home and every-where you opened drawers were French and Belgian chocolates, which had obviously been stolen. The wine cellar was magnificent, filled with French liquors and wine. I went down and took a huge swig of liquor, which I'd never done in my life, but I was so traumatized. Everyone was really horrified. But we saw it and went off to the next town, and then two days later, Roosevelt died.

00:26 I did see the outside of Buchanville, but I had no desire to go in. I had no doubt that all of this indeed happened. Whenever anyone expresses any doubt about the Holocaust or the concentrations camp, I always express my opinion - as an eyewitness - that none of it was exaggerated.

00:27 I only talked about it when the occasion presented itself. I told my family about it, but no one can comprehend the capacity of evil the Nazis had. No one can comprehend it unless they have seen it like myself.

00:28 I feel it is important to give testimony today because I feel that if I could be any help - I am a historian - that I should give testimony. I have taught 20th Century history, and I told my students about the Holocaust. When they challenge me whether or not it really happened, I do my best to convince them it did.

00:29 I want to do my best to make sure this never happens again, in El Salvador or Uganda or other various parts of the world.

00:30 As an educator, I do my best to convey my message about the Holocaust.

00:31 Interviewer thanks Dr. Gray for sharing his feelings and remembering his experience.

00:35 I was working with the 89th division, which worked in tandem with the fourth armored division, so where one was, the other was there to. So, when we were taking over Ohrdruf, the armored division went in, and then the infantry followed. The date I visited the concentration camp on April 10, 1945, at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and stayed for a period of about two hours.

00:36 After the war was over, I had considerable experience with displaced persons camps. After the war, I was transferred from the 89th division to the eighty-third, which ran a series of the camps. I worked in the office of an intelligence officer.

00:37 My duties were, from December 1945 until April 1945, to keep a tally of the number of persons every day in the camp in the city of Lentz, Austria. I made several visits to these camps.

00:38 We had about thirty different nationalities - and had about 30 to 40 thousand refugees in Lentz. There were many Jews, but they were mostly mixed - Poles, French, Italian - everything in Europe. One would think they would have been repatriated by six months after the war, but they weren't, which is one of the great tragedies.

00:39 There must have been a reason they didn't go back - I was very young and naive at the time - some could be collaborators and some couldn't go back. In April, I went back to the United States and was discharged.

00:40 It was the duty of the 83th division, and then it switched to the forty-second, to run these displaced persons camps. The camps were all over town. They were converted Nazi camps. They were converted and de-loused, and sanitary, or as sanitary as they could be, given the conditions. People were no longer in the layers of bunks; everyone had their own bed.

00:41 There was an enormous upheaval in Europe at this time - the Russians moving nationalities out, the Yugoslavs doing the same, and the Poles were moving the Germans out. And all of this was dropped in the laps of the Americans, French and English. There were relief agencies, but it was extremely difficult to cope with.

00:42 I visited the camps - I went to a party at one of the camps - it was very sad because these people should be in homes of their own, there was no reason for them to be living like this. It was not a natural situation for them to be in.

00:43 The people in this camp were mostly Polish and Ukrainian - and Jewish, of course.

00:44 Prior to entering the army, I had read about the Germans setting up these concentration camps - it was forty years ago, so I can't be specific, but I had read quite a bit about it. I was

quite aware that there were concentration camps, but I didn't know the extent of them. I didn't have even an incline about the Final Solution, or anything like that, but I knew the camps existed.

00:45 I talked with my school mates about this. My area in high school was mostly German, though, so no one believed the Germans could possibly be doing anything bad. We had no idea of what was going on in the camps. The only time I began to hear was after I had already entered the army, just before we went to Europe.

00:46 Even still, we wondered whether this was something to inflame the soldiers or what. I had never heard of Ohrdruf. I had heard of Buchanville, but even so, I had no idea what was going on inside of the camps.

00:47 My experience in WWII and afterward, living in Europe, did have an effect on my choice of profession. My small part in the war has made me very interested in Europe. In my classes, I try to teach my students about the origins of racism and genocide and the terrible consequences they can have. I always make a point to express these things; I don't ignore these problems.

00:48 If I'm confronted by a student who does not believe in the Holocaust, I speak very strongly about the truth of it. I let them know I was there.

00:49 I'm influenced strongly by Hannah Aaron's novel *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She shows how imperialism and the various class structures that grew up in Germany and the anti-Semitism could all form a basis for a totalitarian structure. These things are all very important to look at.

00:50 Professor Butts is a professor at Northwestern university who wrote a book stating that the Holocaust did not exist. I know that it did, and I can't believe an educator could write such nonsense. I feel that it has really set back studies on the Holocaust and on the Final Solution because I feel that it really is a book that cannot be taken seriously.

00:51 Professor Butts calls it *The Hoax of the Holocaust*. It represents a denial of the Holocaust. Practically any source from this time period admits the Holocaust is a reality.

00:56 Interviewer repeats opening of video tape. (minutes 00:01 and 00:02).