

USHMM

ORAL HISTORY QUESTION AND ANSWER SEMINAR WITH:

ROBERT MATTESON
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN/RIVER FALLS

SUMMARY:

A 90-minute question and answer seminar with an American counter-intelligence officer during WWII. Most of the video concerns Matteson's dramatic capture of one of the most notorious yet least known Nazis -- SS General Kaltenberger (sp) -

Matteson tells of following Kaltenberger 8 trail into the mountains near Austria where Hitler was supposed to have built a heavily fortified national redoubt. Eisenhower diverted Patton 8 Third Army from the capture of Berlin to what proved to be a non-existent mountain redoubt.

Matteson liberated the Evensay (sp) concentration camp and eives an eyewitness account of the horrors he saw and the back-breaking work inmates were forced to do.

He finally tracked Kaltenberger to a remote cabin in the mountains 6 hours from any town and tell~ how he and his armed guides and army soldiers surprised Kaltenberger in the early morning.

Matteson also was in charge of security at the Nuremberg trials and tells how he visited some infamous Nazis in their cell blocks. Kaltenberger was hanged for his crimes.

Towards the end of the video Matteson talks about his 1947 trip with Harold Stassen to Moscow and his 1 1/2 hour meeting with Stalin and describes how the Russians interpreted Stalin 8 conversation differently from his version.

Finally, Matteson discusses his most recent diplomatic mission -- as a private citizen he is trying to open up communications between the US and Cuba.

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0:00 - 1:00 (in progress) -- Hitler and SS General Kaltenberger (sp) were both Austrian. Kaltenberger succeeded Heidrich (sp) the Hangman after he was assassinated. in 1942. In charge of all intelligence services and the Gestapo. Eichman served

under Kaltenberger. Kaltenberger responsible for extermination of the Jews.

- 1:00 At the end of WWII, Kaltenberger and Borman were most powerful Nazis. Katzenberger was so little known that no photo existed of him. So, Army was using a photo of radio announcer H. V. Kaltenborn instead. Wrong photo.
- 2:00 Tells of his hunt for Kaltenberger beginning in Stiyre (sp), Austria. Gemunden (sp), south of the Autobahn, is where he got his first lead on Kaltenberger's whereabouts. General Patton's 3rd Army had been diverted to this region. Matteson misses Kaltenberg~by 4-5 days in Gemundon.
- 3:00 Heading south to where Hitler was making his last stand. Matteson comes onto a concentrati~camp in the mountains.
- 4:00 He broke lock of camp. SS guards had fled. This was Evensay (sp) camp. Inmates looked like skeletons. Crematoria had stacks of naked bodies waiting to be burned. Describes a chemical ditch where dead bodies thrown.
- 5:00 Bodies thrown into ditch after inmates shot in head; bodies decomposed in chemicals. The so-called hospital contained emaciated skeletons, nearly dead bodies, no food, lice on skeletons, inmates dressed in rags.
- 6:00 In Badishel (sp), the summer home town of Emperor Franz Josef, was where Matteson met Communist resistance leader who said Kaltenberger had gone to Strobel (sp) three days before.
- 7:00 So he went with Germans to Strobel and interrogates the Burgomeister, who was the leading Nazi in town, who was scared. Burgomeister says Kaltenberger in villa on outskirts of town.
- 2-
- 8:00 Went with interpreter to the villa. Kaltenberger's body guards escort them to the door. Kaltenberger's wife meets with them and tells them her husband had left the day before. Matteson finds first authentic photo of Kaltenberger and takes it. Kaltenberger's wife is arrested and taken to Badishel.
- 9:00 Kaltenberger's body guards have no weapons.
- 10:00 Kaltenberger is believed to be in the Dead

Mountain now. Next stop is a town called Altasay. (sp)

11:00 Coincidentally, a large collection of great European art treasures is located in the same general area. A detachment is being sent to protect the artworks -- priceless paintings and sculptures.

12:00 Matteson sets up an information gathering network. Lodges with a nobleman.

13:00 Sets up a radio station. Kaltenberger believed to be in a hut above the town, a 6 hour climb from town. Started in darkness with four armed guides. He is dressed in Austrian clothes.

14:00 His guides telescopic rifles and mountain climbing gear. Kaltenberger had made a deal with local miners who were protecting the salt mines where treasures were housed that he would not dynamite the mines if they provided him with guides to take him to his isolated hut in the mountains.

15:00 In addition to his four armed guides, Matteson also was provided with a squad of soldiers.

16:00 The squad equipped with hand grenades, rifles and ammo belts. They stayed well behind the guides. They got within 500 yards of Kaltenberger's cabin after a difficult climb. There was a porch cabin.

17:00 Matteson wanted to surprise them so he made a beeline for the porch. At that point, some of the squad members had dropped out.

18:00 Only six squad members left plus his four guides. He is alone on the porch. People inside still asleep. He knew that Kaltenberger was 6'4", 43 years old, dualing scars on both sides of his face.

19:00 Matteson is refused admittance to cabin but tells guard to give Kaltenberger a note from his mistress, a 22-year-old Countess. Kaltenberger had produced twins with Countess and three children with his wife.

20:00 The guard reads the note slowly.

21:00 The note says for Kaltenberger to come down to Altasay because the Russians are moving in and may be rougher on you than the Americans. The guard says he doesn't know who Kaltenberger is.

22:00 The guard sees the guides with rifles and goes inside and locks and bolts the door.

23:00 Guides and Squad members start knocking down door until four German soldiers come out with hands over heads. Kaltenberger dressed in medical officer's uniform. Found Kaltenberger's Nazi badge, which he is holding in hand in videotape.

24:00 Also found Kaltenberger's silver #2 Gestapo badge, which Matteson later lost.

25:00 Also discovered Kaltenberger's last communication sent to Himmler ordering Stuka (sp) dive bombers to destroy concentration camps.

26:00 Kaltenberger's plan apparently had been to hide out until things quieted down, then help the Americans fight the Russians.

27:00 Kaltenberger thought he would be used as an ally against the Soviet Union. He had food, weapon and ammo in his cabin. When arrived back in Altasay a large crowd had formed.

-4-

28:00 His mistress and the wife of an adjutant threw their arms around their respective men. British intelligence took over interrogation duties.

29:00 British treated Kaltenberger roughly to exact confessions; he was given little food, but he refused to talk.

30:00 Kaltenberger did acknowledge that he was head of the main security apparatus for the Nazi regime. His connection with concentration camps, he said, was arresting those who opposed the Nazi regime. He maintained his main interest was in intelligence, not the Gestapo.

31:00 Kaltenberger admitted to no war crimes. At the Nuremberg Trials, Matteson in charge of security.

32:00 To test the security system Matteson dressed in SS uniform and was allowed to enter area where the 22 principal Nazi war criminals were being held.

33:00 He should not have been, but he was allowed to enter.

34:00 He visited Julius Stryker (sp), a Jew baiter and editor of Der Sturmer (sp). Matteson then tried to get back into main cell block and again was

allowed in.

- 35:00 He visits Herman Goerring; after that, Matteson reports that security is not good and a shakeup is needed.
- 36:00 One night, a Russian comes into his hotel lobby and falls dead in a pool of blood at his feet. At night, terrorists emerge from catacombs and shoot American and Russian soldiers. Difficult to control this activity.
- 37:00 Russians told he he must get better security. Kaltenberger has cerebral hemorrhage on first day of trial and returns December 10th.
- 38:00 Kaltenberger pleads not guilty; is found guilty on two of four counts and is hung in 1947, and then cremated. One of the 11 of the 22 criminals who were hanged.
- 39:00 Saw Speer later in Heidelberg, in 1978. Met with him for two hours, very intelligent. Hitler's architect. Claimed to have no knowledge of concentration camps. Speer last saw Hitler in a bunker and thought him a genius but too fanatical toward the Jews.
- 40:00 Speer talked about the Nazi counterfeit money operation to buy art objects and to sink the Bank of England and to finance the intelligence operations. Phoney money was printed at Evensay concentration camp and was of such good quality even the Swiss banks were fooled. Operation Cicero (sp) involved:
- 41:00 The valet of the British ambassador was being paid by Kaltenberger to take documents from the British ambassador and feed them to Berlin. They paid the valet with the phoney money. Professor Wilhelm Huddle (sp) operation.
- 42:00 Speer knew of Operation Cicero and the printers at Evensay. See the book, "Hitler's Paper War." Speer claimed he did not know what was happening in concentration camps.
- 43:00 The town of Evensay was 2 kms. from the concentration camp. In the camp were 42 steps; inmates hauled large marble slabs up and down these steps. Villagers didn't know what was going on in these camps. The local Nazi leader committed suicide after he learned what had been happening in his area.

44:00 The national redoubt was believed in until April 25, 1945. Ike thought Hitler was going to make a break for the mountains and that factories would be transferred there and that weapons would be stashed in caves.

45:00 Therefore, Ike diverted Patton's army in the direction of the redoubt, where Matteson found Kaltenberger. On April 25th, Ike learned that Hitler was not there.

46:00 Czech partisans killed Heidrich (sp); Kaltenberger is therefore put under a heavy guard.

47:00 Not much developed in national redoubt area.

48:00 Plan to divert Americans from their attack on Berlin.

49:00 The area was thought to be the safest place to go. Thought it would be fortified but it was not. Artists, musicians, noble people lived in the area.

50:00 The SS leave the area one day before Matteson arrived.

51:00 Count Folke Bernadotte (sp) head of Swedish Red Cross, has a special mission to free concentration camp survivors.

52:00 Matteson saw the count in Minneapolis in June, 1946. He was killed in Palestine.

53:00 Matteson returned to Autasay in 1985 for a reunion with the Austrian guards who had helped him capture Kaltenberger. 3 of 4 were still alive.

54:00 On that trip, he stopped by and visited with Kaltenberger's son. At first their meeting hostile-

55:00 -- but after Matteson explained he was only doing his job by arresting his father they sat and talked for an hour and a half. Evensay camp is now a memorial park.

56:00 Matteson and wife and one other man were at Evensay on 40th anniversary of its liberation. That man was George Havas, who was in the hospital when Matteson came to the camp in 1945. Havas still bitter at Americans for telling inmates they had to fend for themselves in the countryside after

the war.

- 57:00 After the war ended, Havas was in ~ camp for 6 months before boarding a cramped freight~ ~n headed home. He was very distant toward Matteson as he had bitterness toward Americans. Now, he lives and works in the US, at the Library of Congress.
- 58:00 &
59:00 Matteson met with him a few years ago, his attitude had changed and they are now good friends.
- 60:00 There was one single track RR line to take the marble out of Evensay, but it was not working.
- 61:00 Matteson went to Mauthausen after the war ended.
- 62:00 Doesn't know about the complicity of residents of Dachau.

TAPE #2

- 1:01 Matteson doesn't know if Germans could have seen what was happening in concentration camps from top of a high building. Could smell concentration camp a few kms. away if wind blowing in their direction. But townspeople could not see inside camp.
- 1:02 George Havas weighed 86 pounds. Matteson was on mission to get Kaltenberger and couldn't linger in Evensay after he broke the lock and entered the camp.
- 1:03 Matteson not allowed to go to Russian territory. 1947, Harold Stassen started two year quest for Republican nomination.
- 1:04 Matteson is Stassen's director of research. Went with Stassen on a 16 nation tour of Europe where met world leaders. Highlight of trip was in Moscow when met with Stalin. Stassen was one of the members of the UN Charter conference.
- 1:05 Stassen met Molotov who invited him to Moscow. Concurrently, there was a Foreign Ministers Conference being held in Moscow and George Marshall, Secretary of State, was there.
- 1:06 Describes being taken to Stalin's office in the Kremlin.
- 1:07 In Stalin's officer were English language newspapers.

- 1:08 Both interpreter and Matteson take verbatim notes of the meeting between Stassen and Stalin. Stassen asked Stalin if he thought it was possible for the US and Soviet Union to co-exist in peace in the coming nuclear world, given our very different economic systems. We are a democratic people's capitalism. Stalin said of course, why not? Then Stassen said that at the 37th
- 1:09 -- Plenum Marx, Engels and Lenin talked about funeral bells tolling for capitalism, Stalin had said that it's not possible, they can't exist in harmony but if they have a desire to cooperate it's possible. Stasse~then quoted Stalin; Stalin denied he could have said that. Matteson thought they were going to be thrown out. Said Stalin was a Genghis Khan figure.
- 1:10 Stalin responsible for death of his first wife, Lenin, Trotsky, the leadership of the Central Committee. Stassen then asked about freedom of the press. Why no free reporting? Stalin then told of an incident where he did not punch someone but the US press reported that he did. Also, the US press said there was political infighting going on when there was not.
- 1:11 So, therefore wanted to limit press freedom because they were not reporting accurately. Secured the credentials for a NY Herald Tribune correspondent.
- 1:12 Stassen defended people's capitalism, where the system is moderated for its ups and downs in the business cycle.
- 1:13 Matteson worked all night on transcript of their 1 1/2 hour meeting. Give copy to translator. Three days later he and Stassen returned to Moscow.
- 1:14 Meets with translator to discuss their translations.
- 1:15 Meets with Pavlov, the translator; Pavlov's interpretation not accurate. Matteson released his, not Pavlov's version.
- 1:16 1985, a researcher at MIT studies the Stalin-Stassen transcripts, which were key factor in succession debate over who should succeed Stalin.
- 1:17 Malenkov (sp) says that according to the transcript the Soviets can cooperate in peace. TASS radio broadcast air Stassen's transcript; Pravda, which Stalin would read, printed Stalin's transcript.

- 1:18 Stalin at the time of their meeting was 68; Stassen 39. Stalin as evil as Hitler. Currently, Matteson trying improve relations with Cuba.
- 1:19 Matteson has 650 pictures that his uncle took of Cuba in 1904. Had been to Cuba 5 times in 2 years as a private citizen. Included in this collection is a shot of the George Washington of Cuba -- General Maxim Gomez~)a leader during the Spanish American War -- and his family. A rare and unique photo that the Cuban government is interested in.
- 1:20 Cuban government let him in, want to look at photo, this is part of his private U.S.-Cuba photo diplomacy effort.
- 1:21 Matteson was on CIA board of estimate in 1959-62; overt operative; says Castro in those days was not Moscow-oriented but rather Marxist-Leninist; but Dulles overruled CIA's assessment because Dulles wanted to knock Castro off as he done in Guatemala to a ruler.
- 1:22 Nixon meets with Castro in 1959 and within a year a memo is being prepared that will result in the Bay of Pigs.
- 1:23 When Matteson visited Cuba they knew he had been an overt operative.
- 1:24 Result of Matteson's photo diplomacy is there was a Cuban baseball team that played against the best US college baseball teams and beat them. Also, a photo exhibit, an art exhibit and lectures.
- 1:25 US does not have normal diplomatic relations with Cuba and this is a way to help get back relations.
- 1:26 US drove Castro into arms of the Soviets.
- 1:27 The State Department does not like what Matteson is doing regarding Cuba.
- 1:28 END