

-TITLE-JACK LA PIETRA
-I_DATE-10/24/89
-SOURCE-INTERNATIONAL LIBERATORS CONFERENCE
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-FINE
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1:01:00 Sent to England, the 9th Air Force, Tactical Air Command

1:03:45 Their mission was air support for the Third Army, strafe and bomb targets. He was a pilot for 'The Black Widow' or P 61

1:07:30 It was Christmas, 1944, the biggest battle, The Battle of the Bulge, German's made a grand last stand, the weather was terrible. Tactical Air Command gave support to General Patton and the Third Army. They moved very rapidly, the fastest of them all. They got to Buchenwald but had to wait for the Russians who bogged down

1:10:30 Buchenwald, outside of Weimar, 130 miles SW of Berlin, was thought, at that time, to be a prisoner of war camp. Jack La Pietra, and some of his squad members, decided to visit the camp. It was just 2 days after the SS had fled, it was still "raw". He brought his camera, a 35 mm Argus, an outdoor camera. The group was accompanied by a guide/translator named Reinhold. Reinhold had been a seaman and had lived for a while in the U.S.

1:11:10 The ensuing pictures and the article Mr. La Pietra wrote, were originally intended for his parents and to express a personal need to graphically describe the incomprehensible horrors he found. Believing, as he did, such atrocities could never be committed in a modern, civilized society, perhaps in earlier era of history, not in the present.

1:13:01 He reads from his letter/article; photo #1 shows members of his unit and the guide. Photo #2, outside the main gate of Buchenwald, soldiers and Red Cross workers. Inside the gate, some internees (photo #3) these were the relatively healthy ones, the ones who had the strength to venture outside the barracks. Photo #5 some young boys, there were about 1200 in the camp at one time or another. Most inmates were "political prisoners", vast majority were Jews, from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania etc.. Of these 51,000 were officially killed.

At least 31,000 died of "natural causes" the result of starvation and disease. Photo #6 homes where SS lived; photo #7 the beating block, where prisoners were beaten with a club; the uniform of a prisoner has been stuffed and placed to resemble the actual happening. Photo #8 the barracks with the hanging tree; the place where prisoners taken to die after beatings, like a "crucifixion". After that to the crematorium. Photo #9, the crematorium; there were 6 ovens, remains of charred skeletons were clearly visible, clearly human. There was a plaque with a German saying: Allow Not Disgusting Worms to Eat My Body, Give Me The Clean Flame.

1:19:55 There were nooses convenient to the crematorium, those not yet dead sometimes were hanged first, the carts depicted carried off the remains, dumped down a cellar chute.

1:21:25 Graphic portrayal with carts, skeletons. Some carts with no sides. Photo #15 is a close-up of dead faces, La Pietra wonders how people can sleep nights, how Germans could deny.

1:23:20 He visited inside the barracks to those unfortunate souls, half naked bodies, who could not come out. Someone gestured for a cigarette; he gave them all he had plus some chocolate bars. It caused a squabble and an awful sound. The guide suggested the chocolate might contribute to a quicker demise because their stomachs might not be able to handle the rich chocolate.

1:26:00 He talks about Block 36. People were brought in as healthy recruits and fed and rested for 3 weeks. A leisurely existence, until they were then injected with deadly diseases in the name of science. They were observed, dissected, preserved in specimen bottles. He was struck by a human head, half of which was a human face in torture and agony, "Tell the world" it seemed to cry, the other half was the exposed workings of the brain.

1:30:00 With some prompting, La Pietra talked about the Commandant of Buchenwald, Koch and his infamous wife Ilse. She was known as "The Bitch of Buchenwald". Ilse Koch had a fascination for tatoos. All incoming prisoners were screened for her. Those with tatoos were killed quickly so she could have their skin, tatoo intact, tan it as leather and create lamp shades. There is a photo included here with a choice specimen preserved, before it could become part of a lamp shade. They speculate that it resembles an American Indian Chief. (Photo #15)

1:36:20 Photo #14 shows dead bodies piled on sidewalk, no one weighing more than 70 pounds.

1:37:55 Photo #16 inside the camp, photo #17, a monument made by carpenter inmates - KLB, Konzentration Logge Buchenwald, - 51,000 - official number killed here. The guide helped them understand much of what they saw; he also told them of how Russian soldiers were murdered on the site.

There were 400 Russian prisoners of war; they were stripped, brought to a sound proof room, guards dressed in white to look like medical staff, walked them to a wall with a kind of window, they were shot in head, the "medical men" caught them, dropped to a slanted area, blood drained off. Bodies carted to crematorium.

The last 25 minutes of this tape deal with personal philosophy and personal family history. La Pietra is a liberal Catholic with sons who have become Baptist ministers. Two daughters are both grown, married, involved in business. One married to well known newsman, Bill Curtis. The trip through Buchenwald has had a lasting effect on his life. The letter has become part of teaching curriculum, he has had it reprinted for distribution at his own expense. He is not familiar with Jewish history, he is just an American man with a strong sense of right and wrong.

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