

Jerome Stasson
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Abstract

Jerome Stasson, a Jewish soldier from Detroit, Michigan discusses his unit's liberation of Buchenwald. He and his colleagues were unprepared and shocked to view the dead bodies and dying people.

Tape 1 of 1

00.0 Jerome Stasson was born Jerome (Stashevsky?) in 1922 in Detroit, Michigan to Bernard and Sylvia (Schaindel?) Stashevsky. He has a brother Yiska? who resides in Israel and a sister, Geraldine Levine who lives in Farmington Hills, Michigan. He considers them both Jewish activists as the brother chose to live in a kibbutz in Israel and the sister has a TV program for (Shaare Tsdek?). He was brought up in a Jewish middle-class area of Detroit. His father sold paper bags to the local stores. He considers his family to be observant as he was in Hebrew school through high school and his grandfather, Pincas Stashevsky, was active in Shaare Tsedek.

05.00 Jerome played the violin in high school. He was drafted into the Army in 1943 where he was initially placed in the infantry and later transferred to a unit in Columbia, South Carolina and was placed with a string quartet. Soon he was sent overseas to England and then to Normandy, France where he participated in five battles. His position with the Headquarters company consisted of keeping records and acting as messenger. His unit followed General Patton to Germany where they liberated Buchenwald.

10.00 His unit was one of several that entered Buchenwald. The soldiers were shocked as they had only heard rumors but were not given any facts. They entered and immediately saw dead bodies stacked eight feet high and 40 yards long that were soaked in kerosene awaiting burning. They saw some people that looked dead, some that appeared to weigh about 80 pounds and some were crawling. He said in Yiddish to one of them, "Can I help you"? The Polish SS were running away and the inmates killed two of them. He and his colleagues were shocked and horrified and the 10 to 12 soldiers, all gentiles, were in tears. Jerome reported that he can still visualize this scene and when he heard about denial groups, he decided to tell this story as he was a witness.

15:00 After about an hour, he was told to leave Buchenwald for another assignment and another unit entered to work with the survivors. His unit only walked about 40 to 50 yards into the camp and saw the deteriorated wooden barracks but did not enter them. They did not have an opportunity to discuss what they saw until after their next assignment. Jerome only spoke to one survivor as the others did not speak and he does not know if they survived. He was discharged after a few months and returned to Michigan. He decided to go to college

where he met his wife and they both became music teachers. From Germany he wrote his mother about Buchenwald and sent pictures that others had taken. His mother would read and reread the letters which saddened her so he threw them out which now he realizes was a mistake. His mother's family had Rabbis and had come from Spain to Poland. Jerome could not understand how the Holocaust was allowed to happen.

20:00 After viewing Buchenwald, no official time was taken to discuss the event. No one foresaw the immensity of the holocaust. The Germans that they met claimed they were not Nazis and knew nothing though they resided close to the concentration camp with ovens. The allies found Nazi notes in their attics. Since Jerome spoke Yiddish, he was assigned to billeting to determine in which town the soldiers would live. He visited the Burgomeister? in each town. The civilians appeared happy to see the American soldiers and there was no problem with his replying in Yiddish to their German.

25:00 Both the vision of dead bodies and their odor and the odor of the kerosene made the soldiers nauseas. One soldier got ill and left but Jerome felt he must remain as he was Jewish and wanted to be able to describe it later. Years later, in Southfield, Michigan, a jeweler came to his house to sell him a charm bracelet for his daughter. After talking, they realized the jeweler was one of the survivors of Buchenwald. The jeweler had cut off his toes to survive and he thanked Jerome for saving him.