

Hugh Jenkins

Tape 1, Side A

January 31, 1997

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Abstract

Hugh Jenkins was born on December 29, 1914 in Leicester, England as the youngest of eight children. At age 10 he entered a private boarding school in London. Upon graduation he obtained a position of bookkeeper and accountant in an international company where he remained for eight years. Hugh became a Quaker and volunteered to help at a hostel with 40 children evacuated from the Spanish Civil War and two teachers in Guilford. Hugh was a Conscientious Objector during the War and was permitted to do alternate work on the land instead of serving in the military. In 1942 he married a nursery school teacher who had come to England with the Spanish children. In 1944 the Quakers gave him training how to cope in unusual situations and he was placed in a team of 12. First they were sent to help with evacuating the inmates from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and placing them in a nearby new camp. His chief duty was driving a truck around to pick up newly harvested vegetables and drive personnel from one part of the camp to another. When this task was complete, they helped forced laborers to get home by assisting them to transfer from trucks to trains. Next they helped the Poles enter a temporary camp where they waited to get home.

Part two begins with Hugh Jenkins discussing his thoughts as a Conscientious Objector working in the Belsen Concentration Camp. Viewing the "walking dead" made him realize that methods other than war should be used to settle disputes. Next he was in charge of 3,500 detained Poles and his wife organized nursery schools. Then for six months they created training schools for those who crossed the Spanish border. Next he became Overseas Director of the British Friends Relief service until it ended in May 1948. Then he worked in Philadelphia where he became a Quaker. After two years, he was told to take over a house in Washington, DC for international students. Then he started the Foreign Student Service Council where he remained until he retired.

Summary

00:00 Hugh Jenkins was born on December 29, 1914 as Hugh Montfort (?) Jenkins in Leicester, England. He was the youngest of eight children. His father was a Baptist minister. At age 10 he was sent to a London boarding school in Somerset (?). It was called a "public school" but was actually a private school. It was considered a good thing to attend a private school for those who could afford it. His oldest brothers, Lincoln and Garfield, were twins. Next in line were his sisters, Myrtle and Iris. Next in order were Luke,

David, Knolls (?) and Hugh as the youngest. The twins were 14 years older than him. His father was a Welshman and was considered a wonderful speaker. He had a satisfactory career as a minister of Baptist churches in England and was somewhat active in politics. He was devoted to the church and to his family. Hugh's mother was Mary Elizabeth Pugh, also Welsh, and a singer. His parents met at a temperance meeting where his mother was the singer and his father, the speaker. His mother had four children under three so her major job was bringing up her family and she was active in church. Hugh feels it is a great tragedy today as many grow up without families. He felt that he had a great family. When he was five or six, his elder brothers went to university but they all got together at Christmas and holidays.

05:00 His two sisters ran a private school, two brothers became ministers and the others were businessmen. They lived through difficult times. A minister's salary is not really adequate to bring up eight children. His sisters realized that being two girls among six boys, they had to speak up and not become the housekeepers so everyone was given a task to do. Hugh's chore was wash-up. This helped make the boys good husbands. Hugh felt that going away to school at age 10 was a good but tough experience as the discipline was tough. When he completed his schooling, he worked as an accountant and bookkeeper for eight years the Merchants Manufacture and Shippers of the World, an international company in Guilford in Surrey.

10:00 Hugh was 25 years old when he left the job. He was involved with the Quakers and helped with the Spanish Civil War. The British government brought over some Spanish children to England and asked people to take care of them. Hugh volunteered to help at a hostel with 40 children and two teachers in Guilford. A friend had told him about this work and he agreed. Hugh was a Conscientious Objector during the War. He registered for this work through the Quakers. He had to go in front of a Tribunal to verify his beliefs and they thought he was sincere. Hugh was sent to the Army Medical Corps where he said he would not bear witness so he was sent to work the land instead. He met with farmers and they saw him in city clothes but needed laborers so hired him. He was the only Conscientious Objector in his family but others who worked the land held his beliefs and the Quakers supported him. He married and their accommodations were unpleasant. Luckily, teachers had priority and his wife was a nursery school teacher.

15:00 His landlady knew that he was a Conscientious Objector. Living in England was difficult for three years as they were preparing for a possible invasion. He registered with the Quakers as a volunteer to go overseas for the Spanish Civil War but the war ended before he received his summons in 1944. He got married in 1942 after working the land. His wife came with the Spanish children. The Basque government had received an invitation from the English to bring children over. She completed her education as a teacher and came with the children. At the end of the war, some of the children returned to their

parents. Then his wife became a teacher in an English nursery school for children of mothers who worked in the factories.

- 20:00 First they waited from 1939 to 1942 for the war to end but when there was no end in sight, the couple got married. In 1944 the Quakers asked Hugh to go to London for training and this was acceptable by the government. He felt the training objective was wonderful. Instead of making you into a highly skilled technician, it was to train you to cope in unusual situations. They had a model home as a made-up refugee center for German refugees. One-half of the trainees served as refugees and one-half as helpers. Those acting as refugees would say they do not want to register or give out their names and the others would have to cope with this. Another time, they had a made-up air raid and the house was destroyed. They had a vegetable garden to try to stay alive. They had to learn to do things that they never did before. They started out as a miscellaneous group and later picked to be part of a team. He was picked to go to Poland. Quaker practices were part of the training. Two members were from his congregation. They had silence before discussions to prepare themselves. He was aware they represented the Quakers so carried out its principles.
- 25:00 Hugh worked during the war and during the occupation. He was given supervision by the Quakers and by the military advisors. In one town, the Army was billeted in a house where two or three family members lived on the top floor and the Army took over the rest of the house. They all got along as the family appreciated their work. Hugh had been called up in 1944 and after training was assigned to Antwerp, Holland but due to emergency relief, did not go. They were told to pack up to live six months on the road. He went with 12 men and women in their mid-twenties to mid-forties.
- 30:00 They placed all their equipment in a truck. **Tape 1, Side B** They arrived in Belsen on Sunday, April 22nd to the children's area. The camp was originally for 3,000 people and was in terrible condition. It was the last days before they took it over. There was no food or water. They placed all the children in one barracks to look after them. He had to drive an ambulance into the camp to get the children out. Three miles up the road from the camp was a big German army establishment with barracks that they made into a reception center. Between the concentration camp and the new camp, the ambulance divided them into two groups. Some went to the stable where they set up an arrangement and the other side was the clean ambulance going to the new establishment. This was to make insulation between the diseased camp inmates and those who were washed off, disinfected, wrapped in blankets and placed on the other side in the clean ambulances.
- 35:00 Hugh's first job was to drive the dirty ambulance. As things were unsettled, the girls were not allowed into the concentration camp so they were assigned to the reception center. At first there were SS guards and SS women there so the situation was rough. No one knew about Belsen as an extermination camp so it was a peculiar unsettled situation.

The Army authorities were in charge. The Army medical authorities created a hospital in an empty building and had supportive services. There was a British nurse and young medical students. Everyone did whatever was needed; not an orderly procedure. They were an evacuation camp.

- 40:00 They saved 25,000 inmates. It was haphazard. Hugh was told to take his truck and find towels and linens. He went to the German houses for the high command which were empty. He found kitchen utensils, towels, linens and picked up anything he thought was useful and took them to the camp. Their team discovered unharvested vegetables so were told to scour the countryside and find fields of wheat or vegetables and get the local Germans to help them identify the vegetables. A German man was helpful who knew the village and recruited people to help. Hugh had a Red Cross flag on his truck. When Hugh got a load of vegetables, he got people to pick them and took it to the hospital. The helpful man was anti-Nazi and helped Hugh to organize this activity. A lady who was married to a high official who was away denied knowledge of the concentration camp so Hugh informed her.
- 45:00 The inhabitants of the village were forced to walk through the concentration camp and view the dead bodies. A first-aid station was placed inside the concentration camp. Many inmates were evacuated each day. The workers tried to beat the evacuation record of the previous day. Hugh worked at the first-aid station which was mostly run by inmates. It was open from 9 to 6. There were about 2,000 inmates in the camp. They slowly made their way to the station as could not walk. Some arrived before it was open. A young girl asked for medicine for her mother but the center was closed. She did not bring her mother. Hugh gave her aspirin. Three to four weeks later, the camp was burned down and everyone was in the new camp. The young girl came to him and said that he saved her mother.
- 50:00 The night before they burned down the old camp, the inmates held an impressive concert in the new camp. There was an orchestra and an opera singer and everyone sang. Hugh acted as an errand boy using his truck. The first authority was the team leader for the 12 workers. He gave general instructions and the Army gave specific instructions. Hugh mostly went around checking the vegetable gardens in surrounding areas. He kept five vehicles operating and drove the truck so got away most of the time. The trucks worked well. He drove workers around from one area of the camp to another area. The camp was controlled by the British Army. Hungarian soldiers did some jobs.
- 55:00 There was a truce to create a Sanitation Zone with no fighting. They had TB and typhus in the camp. The camp was handed over by the Germans. There were guards in the camp. The German Army from Bavaria and the British Army were fighting so made this deal. The Hungarian soldiers were with the German Army but they were not the prime enemy so they served as guards around the perimeter of the camp. Hugh did not have

much contact with the inmates so was not worried about catching their diseases. He went to sleep at 10 after working all day. The deceleration increased with less people and less crisis each day. They were served the Army field meals.

60:00 Hugh saw his team every day as they lived together and held meetings at night. He did not see them during the day. The girls served as nurses or worked in the kitchen. There was a Jewish girl who came early. She wore a large copper Star of David to show she was proud of being Jewish as the inmates were forced to wear the Star of David on their sleeves. The morale was good as they were too busy to allow the environment to affect them. Every responsibility was urgent and individual. The impact came when they left the camp. They suffered delayed shock at the next assignment. First they were undisciplined and then they settled down. They did not talk about the horror. They left the day after the camp was burned down as their job was completed.

65:00 First he had a temporary, interesting job. The German railways were badly bombed so were reconstructed. Thousands of forced laborers wanted to get home. Trains were coming into Germany and trucks were used as transportation to the beginning of the railway. People transferred from trucks to trains and they had to be assisted. He did this work for a couple of days until the railway was repaired and then was sent to Brunswick. There were 2,500 Poles and it was a difficult situation as they considered themselves the first fighter as they were the first country to be attacked by the Germans. The Germans treated them badly as considered them second-class citizens whereas the Poles considered themselves heroes. The Poles wanted to go home but problems inside Poland caused them to live in a camp.

68:00

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Tape 2, Side A

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Summary

00:00 This tape starts with Hugh's thoughts about Belsen. He indicates that it made him think about being a Conscientious Objector. He felt that the concentration camp was terrible with the "walking dead" upsetting him the most as they were dying in front of him. He could not believe that he was working the land and the sun was shining not far from where this camp was under the same sky. The Germans gave up the camps only after the War was over. Since he was a Conscientious Objector, he refused to participate in the struggle. He still believes that war is not the answer to settle disputes and other ways

must be used instead of war. Eventually, armies must be given up. He cannot imagine himself bombing. Even today, he feels desolated over this. Since World War II did not solve the problems of Europe, there must be another way.

05:00 After Belsen, Hugh was in charge of 3,500 detained Poles. It was fun but he felt that he was placed in an awkward situation. They needed help to break up a riot so requested help from the police but felt that was unsatisfactory. Hugh's wife joined him at the camp. By this time she was a qualified Nursery School teacher. She set up a school with UNWRA's help and also helped organize schools in other camps. Then they left and they were assigned for six months to help those who crossed the border from Spain. They developed training schools and next the Quakers sent him to London to coordinate their overseas work.

10:00 He became the Overseas Secretary for Europe and frequently traveled including travel to Poland and Auschwitz. In times of need a temporary organization, the British Friends Relief Service was created. The Quakers had such a service in Ireland, during the Franco-Prussian War, one in the First World War and this one that ended May 1948. He was the Director. Hugh loved the work but it was only temporary, in time of need. The Quakers also have some continuing services in some countries. When the work was completed, the Americans asked him to go to Philadelphia. He was there for two years and was told that they have a house in Washington, DC which provides accommodation for international students. It is a beautiful house on R Street. In 1951 he moved there and never left. He started the Foreign Student Services Council which is not a Quaker organization.

15:00 There was a need for services for the many foreign students in Washington, DC. He remained with the organization until he retired. Hugh had become a Quaker in Philadelphia. When he worked with the team, he was a Baptist and the team leader and one worker were Quakers.

17:00