

National Council of Jewish Women
Sarasota-Manatee Section

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JEROME GOLDMAN, Liberator
November 24, 1987
Long Boat Key, Florida

They were so monstrous that it's almost beyond one's comprehension and because our generation is starting to die out I feel that if these memories and events are not substantiated it will be easy for others to say it never happened. I know that it happened because I was there. I also feel that we must commit ourselves to memory and adjust for forgetfulness so if you will forgive me if I pause or hesitate, it's just that I have to recall, my memory's not as good as it was 40 some odd years ago.

I can tell you that these camps were a contempt for humanity. They're beyond anybody's imagination, in short it was terrible. Most speakers in order to get their listener's attention will begin with a humorous anecdote. I must tell you that today I have very little to say that might be interpreted as humorous. By the same token this talk is not to be nor am I preparing you for a shock treatment. I'm sure you've all had a bit of background information on the holocaust so you will know what I'm talking about.

I happened to be in a G-2 Unit out of Ft. Hayes, Ohio. it was in Columbus, Ohio. The way I got into the unit was most interesting. I was called in one day, into an auditorium, there were about 150 or 200 other men in there and we were given a portion of a poem to read. I read it as I remembered it, remembered it well and that was the end of that interview. The next morning I was told to be ready to leave on a Triple A-1 shipment, that I was to be in this particular unit. Not knowing what it was I went home, I did what I had to do to get my wife and youngster set up to go back to our home in Mansfield, Ohio and I left then for our port of embarkation. We stayed there for a while, the trip across the ocean of course was only interesting to us and we saw submarines all over the place, of course there were none. We landed at Liverpool, England, from there we went to Manchester where we trained. We were separated into units, I was in a six man unit. Each man was German speaking, some of us were good, some of us were not so good, but we could handle ourselves, we could speak all of the dialects so that we could feel almost at home wherever we were. I must preface this by telling you that all of this happened in one of the most sophisticated periods in the history of the world and you please must believe me when I tell you I do not condemn all Germans because in my opinion the German people are more like Americans than any other peoples of the world. They're family conscious, they're loving, they're industrious, inventive, patrons of the arts and medicines and most responsible. This evil time in the world history relates to a satanic thug by name of Adolph Hitler who took advantage of world economic conditions to exploit his own dreams of world domination by systematic cruel and calculating murder and murder is the only word there is for it.

As I tell you we were in Manchester, England billeted two men to a private home and our intensive training began. Training consisted of crash courses in German, all dialects, speaking with people who had toured Germany, had pictures of the area and getting a good education of land, escape routes, what to expect and so forth. At this point we were assigned to units with many units consisting of 100 or more men to administer to large cities down to "D" teams consisting of six men to administer to small towns. Each man had a particular specialty. it could have been hospital administration, security, health and welfare, general administration, finance, handling of displaced persons and so forth. Each man in an emergency could perform the other man's job. In other words, every job was covered. I happened to be on a "D" team otherwise known as an arrowhead team attached to whatever unit: infantry, artillery, military police, air force or wherever needed as an intelligence unit. We also were assigned a specific setting and area. We knew everything about our town which happened to be Fredrickshaupten as well as an escape route in the event we got into trouble. As per usual in the army we never got to Fredrickshaupten. While in training we were given a bit of an extra job, we were sent to Scotland to pick up and convoy 4 by 4 trucks to a port of embarkation for transfer to France. All of this before the invasion we delivered the vehicles to the FFV. On the beach was found gas bombs and in the invasion all people who participated had gas impregnated clothing. The vehicles were painted with a special white paint that turned color if gas was present. After the landing the French came until we crossed the border at the bridge into Germany where we did our thing. Getting information, infiltrating, interrogation, setting up security, taking care of displaced persons, setting curfew and preparing for occupation. Our usual stay in a location was about three or four days depending upon the problems at hand. Then we would proceed to another area with another unit. There were problems, there were good times, there were bad times. I can tell you something about life under the Nazis, it may be redundant but I think it's important. Life under the Nazis was complete subordination, a police state when one did not have the proper papers he would be absolutely immobile. He could go nowhere, he could not get food stamps, he could not survive. Children were organized into kinder camps for Hitler Yungen. They were encouraged to spy on their families and parents, neighbors and everybody. Life was ersatz, as you know ersatz is a substitute, there was a substitute for everything, flour meal, tobacco, coffee, gasoline. Everything was a substitute, it was an unbelievable life, it was a way of life.

I will try to take you now into the preparation for getting into Dachau, the major camp we participated in the liberation of. One Sunday afternoon about one o'clock the six of us were having lunch in a small town. It was a bitter cold day and the name of the town escapes me at the moment. A courier contacted us and ordered us to a rendezvous point about 70 miles distant. Being in the branch of the service we were we had been alerted to this day and we knew what it meant but we didn't know when. We hurriedly packed our three jeeps and trailers and were on our way. Upon our arrival at the rendezvous point we saw the largest concentration of Allied troops we had ever seen. How many people I don't know but there were English, Canadians, Aussies, Dutch, French, Luxemburgers and of course our own people. After a briefing and full inspection, we were given a hot meal in preparation to leave. Just before dark we

started on our journey. it was bitter cold, it was snowing and under General Patton's orders the windshield were down to prevent reflection. Complete blackout with only half lights showing when we started out. Ten minute break every hour and believe me Patton didn't make any points with the GI's with opened jeeps. I must add that at this point in time resistance was at a low ebb. Everybody knew the war was winding down, everybody in Germany knew it was a lost cause. Soldiers of the Wehrmacht were surrendering or deserting. They were tired of war and at the deprivations of the war as were the Canadians and civilians, Canadians as well as everybody else. Everybody was permissive and control was very easy for us. Of course there were some that were hardhearted and they wanted to continue the battle. We got into Munich about 3 o'clock in the morning, kept if for ourselves for approximately an hour, then to our assigned area before daybreak. Dachau was our baby. Dachau is a paper mill town approximately 15 to 16 Kilometers from Munich. When we entered Dachau there was no resistance, it was like a ride in the park. Upon entering the camp chaos was the order of the day. Prisoners running around uncontrollable but too weak to cause real trouble. Our team had assignments, each team had assignments. There were four Allied troops, two Canadians, two Americans and our specific job was to get into Dachau to gather information. We had to find them which we did. Medical treatment, food, delousing stations were set up. Clothing stations were set up, interrogation and release for rehabilitation. I forgot to mention that prior to entering the camp we were all dusted with DDT and a new product to protect us from typhus and so forth. My partner and I we worked the buddy system. Our experience was in the Commandant's office and I won't go into that because I don't like to remember that. The camp itself upon reflection when things quieted down looked like a walk in the park. As you entered the camp it looked like a military school, green grass, lots of trees. A huge sign over the entrance to it "Arbeit Mach Frei" which means work makes freedom and that was true, work did make freedom but the freedom could have been death. We, at this point had set up, we had set up our stations there, my partner and myself who happened to be a Jewish boy, Ernie Greenwald decided that we would like to go and see the conditions there, where the people were living. They were almost indescribable, five or six layers of wood slabs, one above the other. People were living on straw, dirty, filthy straw mattresses. They had little or anything or covering. We had prepared ourselves to go into this place, into this barracks but we never dreamed we would see what we saw. When we told the inmates that we were Jewish, I hesitate to use the word inmate but I don't know a better word. Prisoner I guess. We told them that we were Jewish, they kissed our shoes, they kissed our hands, they cried, we cried. We had taken everything we had in there with us. We broke cigarettes in half so they could all get some. We took candy bars which we distributed, we took fruit in there which we distributed and it was a very, very trying thing for all of us. I met one man in there who had a very, very low number tattooed on his arm. This man was not a Jewish man but he was most articulate in his speech and was a political prisoner. He told me something that I have never forgotten. He told me that when you entered the camp, you knew your fate was sealed, you just didn't know what it was going to be other than death but how you were going to meet it. That was the thing that he didn't know. The camp itself had many kinds of torture. There was a moat, there was an electrified fence, the guards had police dogs with them that could tear a person to pieces. One particular thing of

interrogation and torture we found was a platform about six or eight feet long, at one end of it was a chair that was on a swivel. At the other end a man stood, a German person stood who was going to be the interrogator. He had two handles and with those handles he could swivel the chair from left to right. On either side of the person sitting in the chair nude in freezing cold weather or whatever the weather might have been, he was turned for these people for questioning. We noticed on the floor a hole about an inch deep. We couldn't figure what it was until we went back to the person who was regulating the handles and we found that there was a pedal on the floor and when you stepped on the pedal, a spike came up to this man's derriere and the hole was made by trying to get away from it and putting his foot down. This was one form of interrogation. There were so many forms it's hard to remember what they did, teeth were knocked out, hair was pulled out, fingernails were pulled out, anything that was terrible, anything you could imagine was terrible was used. How did they separate, how did they put the people into various groups? As the cars were unloaded, they would march the people to separation points. The old people, old and weak people or sickly people were put aside at one point, mothers and babies were set aside at another point. Strong young people were set aside at another area, young girls were set at another side, another point and used as prostitutes. It was well regulated, it was like everything the Germans did, it was in order. An interesting thing that I must tell you, previous to getting into Dachau I had found a Torah in one of the rock houses, one of the court houses. I was taking it home to give to my grandfather who lived in Cleveland, Ohio, and he had set up one of the first synagogues in Cleveland. While in Germany I was carrying it with me and sitting around one day waiting for something to happen, a Jewish Chaplain came into our office. He looked at me, I looked at him, we knew we knew each other but we didn't where until we established that when I lived in West Virginia, he was the student rabbi who came to our town every two weeks. It was almost the first of May and the Russians had already celebrated May Day. I gave him the Torah so he could hold services with the Torah in Dachau. He was forever grateful and I think it was one of the nicest things I have done in my lifetime.

Let me tell you a little about the city of Dachau. Dachau itself is a paper making city of I would say and this is merely a guess of 8 or 10,000 population. The odor in Dachau was terrible. People in Dachau did not know, they claimed they did not know there was such a thing as an extermination camp within a few kilometers of them. However the tradesmen, the bakers, the butchers, the candlestick makers were all employed by people, by citizens of Dachau. To get into Dachau, to go to the camp at Dachau this is what we found. On a spur, on a railroad spur going in we found fifty, sixty gondola cars still with bodies. Some were alive and some were dead. We recruited volunteers and I use the word volunteers with quotation marks. We told who would separate the living bodies from the dead. We gave them the best medical treatment we possibly could, we had called in hospital units there and they got the best that could be gotten. Let me tell you a little bit how, let me expand upon what happened to the people after they were separated into these units. The old and inform, people they could not use for anything were told to undress that their clothes would be sent some place to a delousing station. They undressed, they were given a bar of soap and a towel. They were then taken into a large building, clean as it could possibly be, I shouldn't say as

clean as it possibly could be, it was clean, it was very clean. It had a large sign over it: Baden which means shower bath. The method of execution once they were in there was done by people not Germans but by people who were bribed by a piece of bread or a potato and they are the people who turned on the gas. After the people were gassed, the room was cleaned up because certain things happen to a body after they die. People were loaded on little carts and it was a methodical preparation for the ovens. If there were gold teeth they were taken out. Their hair was cut off because hair can be used in different ways or have some kind of military use. They examined the body cavities to see if anything had been hidden of value. They were then stacked; they were ready for the ovens. They were put on another cart, they were turned into ashes at that point. The ashes were used for fertilizer.

What can I tell you. In spite of the hate groups in the United States like the group in California who claim there was no such thing as a holocaust. I know the head of this group. He's a young man who grew up with my three sons. I will not tell you his name because I don't want to get involved in a thing like that. As I say he comes from my hometown. There are many Neo-Nazi groups located in many sections of the United States. I can tell you that there was a holocaust. There were six million Jews exterminated; there were fourteen billion non-Jews exterminated. Think of it, Germany, one of the world's most progressive countries in the world. A country known for its music, its art, its profession and its many gifts to civilization left in ruins and chaotic conditions. it was this war caused by Hitler and his cohorts to put this world in a battle for survival. The time is proving that we are surviving and will continue to do so. I must tell you people and young people especially if you intend to become a member of our society, you must be on the lookout. you must recognize the signs of hatred starting out. You must be alert to other actions of other countries as well. Please recognize the fact that I am not trying to tell you that democracy is the only way of life. In my opinion it is the best way of life. For some perhaps a different form of government is best. I've been to Russia and can with a positive voice say that's not for me. I'm sure unless you would like a police state it's not fore you. In a word and in capital letters, it is terrible. It is a dictatorship and again in three stronger words, it is terrible. Just in case you haven't recognized it yet, we live in the best country in the world. if I would say some of the things that I have said today in communist countries I would be exiled, destroyed or have my tongue cut out. Not only do we live in the best country in the world but being relatively a new resident of this area, I happen to think we live in one of the best areas in the country.

Good luck and thank you for giving me this time.