

-TITLE-ALEXANDER BREUER  
-I\_DATE-OCTOBER 1981  
-SOURCE-INTERNATIONAL LIBERATORS CONFERENCE  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-DURATION-30 MINUTES  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-

:01:26 Mr. Breuer now lives in College Park, Maryland. He was born May 6, 1926. He was 18 and a half years old at the time of liberation. Alex arrived in the United States only four years before he entered the war and at that time not have any occupational goal for the future. Now he is a practicing attorney. He was in the second battalion, 319th infantry regimen of the 80th infantry division. His rank was a PFC.

:03:30 Growing up in Austria, Alex was completely assimilated with the German-Austrian society. He spoke in German. He did not even know how to speak Yiddish. The foods his family ate were of the typical Austrian-Hungarian-German cuisine- never Jewish food.

:04:40 Around this time he could sense or anticipate that something was going to happen to the Jews. The assassination of Andre Dollfus, the Austrian Chancellor by Nazis in 1936 was a sort of forewarning of things to come. There were also several bombs and terrorist acts on the part of the Nazis directed towards the Jews. Every one was aware of the situation, it did not come as a surprise.

:06:34 His older brother went illegally across the Slovak border to join his grandmother. Upon his brother's success, Alex then followed suit in May to join them in Czechoslovakia. He was twelve years old. The rest of his family remained in Austria. This all happened before Kristallnacht in the middle of November 1938. The day after Kristallnacht occurred, his father was taken to Dachau.

:08:30 Alex says that there was a difference between the German Jews and the Austrian Jews. The German Jews were very nationalistic whereas the Austrian Jews were assimilated but did not share such a great feeling of Nationalism. The German Jews believed that the Nazis were against the Jews of Eastern Europe - not them. The Austrian Jews acted more immediately. Eventually the Germans entered Czechoslovakia and Alex and his brother escaped illegally to Vienna, in 1939, where they met up with their parents.

:11:39 Curiously, his father was permitted to leave Dachau, this was before the Final solution, with the assumption that he would leave the country. The Jewish community leadership in Vienna fell into the hands of Adolph Eichmann. This man would round up Jewish men and women who needed to leave Austria, enticing them with the illusion of migrating east and working on a cooperative farm. Only the privileged members of the Jewish community could go. Their final destination, however, was Auschwitz. His father was amongst the "chosen", but at the last moment he decided not to go. Instead he and his family were among the very last few allowed to go to the U.S. They arrived in New York in January 1940.

:14:55 When he arrived in America, there wasn't a feeling of great concern that the war would involve the U.S. Americans were involved soon enough, however, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in '42, Alex wanted to enlist, but he was too young and also considered an illegal alien. So he waited until he turned 18. Alex was not aware of any sort of special aid for the Jews in Europe, or any other organizations in the United States to help the plight of the Jews. He was aware of the fact that there were very few countries, if any that would open their doors to the Jews. He was aware that if no one did anything the Jews in Europe would die. Twelve of his mother's siblings died as well as all of her nieces and nephews.

:15:37 He was assigned in France to the unit of intelligence reconnaissance at the lowest level of the infantry. Because he spoke German, he was often asked to translate interrogations of POW's. His unit eventually found themselves at the gates of Weimar - a German city that the Americans considered culturally rich. Instead of blowing up the city, the US negotiated with Germany for the surrender of the city. Alex took part of these negotiations, Alex says that the Mayor of Weimar mentioned off handedly the existence of Buchenwald. "Incidentally there is a place called Buchenwald that you may be interested in ..." the Mayor referred to it as a KZ: K meaning concentration (konzentration) and Z for zeta (ph). This is the term the Germans used in reference to the concentration camps.

:17:04 The mayor led the American lieutenant and the unit to Buchenwald. When they arrived, all the SS men had already fled. What Alex saw was atrocious : thousands of dead bodies stacked up like wood planks. Among the dead there were still living people. The most horrendous part of all this was the smell. Alex can never forget the smell. When he entered the camp the first thing he thought of was "thank God it is over". By this time Alex had become hardened by the war. The enormity of it all is unexplainable.

:20:15 As an afterthought, Alex informs us that the Mayor of Weimar who led them there and who knew about its existence committed suicide three days later. Alex says that even the Mayor had no idea of the enormity of the situation.

Part of Alex's duties involved guarding German prisoners of War. Alex kept a fairly strict composure of not mixing his feelings with his job. However, in one instance a German soldier approached his unit, wanting to surrender. Alex's chief would not be bothered by the whole process and ordered Alex to shoot him. Alex refused.

:23:32 In other encounters with Germans after the war, Alex kept hearing the same thing. "We (the Germans) never wanted to fight against the Americans, we were fighting against Russia."

:24:00 Returning back to his experience in Buchenwald, Alex tells how in one small hut there was a concentration of about 150 teenagers. These children looked flabbergasted, they didn't know what was happening to them. The general reaction of the prisoners was disbelief. Many believed that they were being tricked again. Alex was struck by their blank looks.

:26:18 Alex has told his two daughters about his experiences. He has mixed emotion about the Holocaust movie. He was glad that it was shown, but believes that some aspects were misrepresented. The Jews were portrayed as a flock of people walking voluntarily to their deaths. The truth is that no one knew what they were walking into. The Germans fooled the people at the very last moment - that according to Alex was the biggest crime of all.

:27:33 Alex was brought up as an orthodox. He now calls himself an "orthodox sinner" because he doesn't try to excuse his behavior. His two daughters are very religious. His experience in Buchenwald has not altered his beliefs in God. He's a traditionalist. He believes in God. As a human, he can say that he no longer observes them. He can not deny that they do not exist. He did think of God many times during his experiences. He often felt like there was very little he could do. Every step he took was guided. He saw no sign of religious material in Buchenwald.  
.END.