

-TITLE-RICHARD ELBERFELD
-I_DATE-OCTOBER 1981
-SOURCE-INTERNATIONAL LIBERATORS CONFERENCE
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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01:00 Richard volunteered for the American Field Service which was an ambulance unit attached to the British army. He was in India for a year, and then transferred to European Theater of operation of 1944. In Bergen-Belsen for 4 weeks, he saw thousands of unburied bodies, and thousands more near death in the fields, in huts, and on the compounds near the huts. There were bodies in all states of decay. They were responsible for recruiting Germans from the village to clean up the grounds. Initially he responded with abject horror he says, he knew there were concentration camps but he did not realize the enormity of them. The camp was located in Northwestern Germany, not far from Bremen, an isolated camp. Richard worked and cleared the barracks, and he was responsible for deciding who they should attempt to save. He gave priority to women and children.

04:00 Also took part in cleaning the inmates. They went into the huts, separated the living from the dead - people would be stuck together due to human excrement, most were unable to move. They would then carry them from the huts, strip their clothing and take them to be washed, shaved, and deloused. From there they went to the hospital. (Interviewer speaks of the Swedish nurses, DDT powder, etc.) He remembers strained relationships with the Germans, and the people of the town denied knowledge of the camp, although they could see it.

06:00 He recalls finding children in a sub-barracks of the camp. The children would also stand at the fence and look through the wires. One indelible impression was of a child who Richard said looked as though someone had thrown tapioca over his head, it turned out to be louse nits all over his head. He gave this child priority treatment.
(Interviewer adds that 3 weeks before the liberation they had no water, and she hadn't washed for 9 weeks... epidemic of typhoid fever because of the lice and the Germans did nothing. Also the British came completely covered so as not to catch anything.)

08:00 In June 1945 Richard was released from service. He feels that in response to the historical revisionist claims, there is no question that it existed. He had a definite idea that Hitler was anti-Semitic, but he didn't know he was as effective as he was. Richard also felt that there was a tremendous difference between the deaths of soldiers and the deaths in the concentration camps - the people in the concentration camp were civilians.

END.

This is a second version of story.

:98:57 WHEN DID YOU ENTER THE ARMY? VOLUNTEERED MAY 1943; SENT TO INDIA TRANSFERRED TO EUROPE 1944; NO RANK, CALLED "CAMP FOLLOWERS" DID MEDICAL WORK.

:98:51 WHICH CAMP WAS LIBERATED? WHEN WAS IT? APRIL 1945; BERGEN-BELSEN; WAS THERE FOR FOUR WEEKS.

:97:51 WHAT DID YOU FIND? I AM A SURVIVOR I WAS THERE FROM DECEMBER OF 1944 UNTIL LIBERATION APRIL 15, 1945.

:97:32 WE FOUND THOUSANDS OF UNBURIED BODIES AND THOUSANDS NEAR DEATH. WE WERE RESPONSIBLE TO CLEAN AND WASH, DELOUSE AND SEND TO CASUALTY CLEARING STATIONS.

:97:11 DID MANY PEOPLE DYING STILL WHILE YOU WERE THERE? THOUSANDS DIED AFTER THE LIBERATION.

:96:54 WHEN DID YOU COME TO BERGEN-BELSEN? RIGHT AFTER THE MIDDLE OF APRIL.

:96:39 DID YOU FIND BODIES THAT WERE THERE FOR WEEKS? FOUND BODIES IN ALL STATES OF DECAY AND DECOMPOSITION--CLEANING THEM UP WAS HANDLED BY GERMANS; GAVE GERMANS ORDERS.

:96:16 WHAT DID THEY DO? POPULATION OF BERGEN-BELSEN? CLEAN UP? BURY? WE GOT THEM AND THEY HELPED.

:95:54 WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION? AN OVERUSED STATEMENT, BUT ABJECT HORROR. I KNEW THERE WERE CONCENTRATION CAMPS, DIDN'T KNOW THE MAGNITUDE.

:95:19 BEFORE LIBERATION DID THE ARMY PREPARE YOU? NO. TOLD ONE DAY OUR NEXT ASSIGNMENT WAS BERGEN-BELSEN. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS UNTIL I GOT THERE.

:95:01 EXPLAIN THE LOCATION. HOW DID IT LOOK, WHAT DID YOU FIND? NORTHWEST GERMANY IN COUNTRY, ISOLATED--WORKED IN BARRACKS--WOULD GO IN AND CLEAN--DECIDE WHO TO ATTEMPT TO SAVE.

:94:18 WHO HAD PRIORITY? IN MY MIND, PRIORITY WENT TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN. IN TODAY'S WORLD THAT WOULDN'T GO OVER TOO WELL.

:93:51 HOW MANY PEOPLE HELPED, WHAT DID YOU DO WITH THE SICK PEOPLE? WHEN I WAS THERE I WAS ONE OF THE SICK PEOPLE TAKEN OUT-- PUT IN HOSPITALS ALSO CLEANING PROCESS--WERE YOU TAKING PART? YES.

:93:24 WHAT DID YOU FIND, HOW WAS IT DONE? WE WOULD GO INTO THE HUT AND SEPARATE THE LIVING FROM THE DEAD; PEOPLE WERE STUCK TOGETHER WITH HUMAN EXCREMENT-COULDN'T EVEN MOVE- CARRY THEM FROM THE HUT, STRIPPED BLANKETS AND CLOTHES, THEN WASHED, SHAVED AND DELOUSED THEN THEY WERE TAKEN TO GERMAN HOSPITALS.

:92:40 I REMEMBER MANY NURSES FROM SWEDEN, FROM HOLLAND.. CAME AND VOLUNTEERED TO WASH US. WE WERE WITH LICE IN OUR SKIN, SICK WITH TYPHOID--SHAVED AGAIN CLEANED WITH DDT POWDER.

:91:39 HOW LONG DID THE CLEANING PROCESS TAKE? A FEW WEEKS? I WAS THERE FOR FOUR WEEKS--THE PROCESS WAS STILL GOING ON WHEN I LEFT.

:91:39 WHILE THERE WHAT DID GERMANS DO? DID YOU SPEAK WITH THEM? WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION? OUR RELATIONSHIP WAS VERY STRAINED. WE WENT TO THE VILLAGE AND RECRUITED--NOT VOLUNTARY. MANY PEOPLE DENIED THE CAMP WAS THERE, BUT YOU COULD ALMOST SEE THE CAMP FROM THE TOWN.

:90:58 DID YOU SEE CHILDREN IN BERGEN-BELSEN? WHERE AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES? ONE GROUP IN SUB-BARRACKS, STANDING AT THE FENCE STARING--ONE CHILD LOOKED AS THOUGH A BOWL OF TAPIOCA PUDDING HAD BEEN DUMPED ON HIS HEAD--THESE WERE LOUSE NITS/EGGS--ALL OVER HIS HEAD. THIS WAS AN EXAMPLE OF PRIORITY.

:89:58 THREE WEEKS BEFORE LIBERATION THERE WAS NO WATER AND I MYSELF DIDN'T WASH FOR 9 WEEKS OR TAKE OFF MY CLOTHES. I KNOW WHAT IT WAS LIKE. THEY DIDN'T GIVE US WATER TO DRINK. THERE WAS A EPIDEMIC OF TYPHOID BECAUSE OF THE LICE. WHEN I WAS LIBERATED BY THE BRITISH THEY CAME IN WITH MASKS AND GLOVES AND BOOTS--WHOLE BODY COVERED--AFRAID TO BE IN CONTACT WITH US.

:89:08 WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS? DID IT AFFECT YOU? CHANGE YOUR WAY OF THINKING? ALONG WITH THOUSANDS OF OTHERS, I HAD NO IDEA OF THE ENORMITY OF THE CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY AND SUFFERING. AT THE TIME, AFTER BEING RELEASED IN JUNE 1945, I HAD EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS BECAUSE OF EXPERIENCE AT BELSEN CAMP.

:87:41 WHAT DO YOU SAY WHEN PEOPLE SAY IT NEVER HAPPENED? I SAY THEY ARE DAMN FOOLS. IT WAS THERE. IT HAPPENED. THERE IS NO QUESTION. IT EXISTED.

:87:21 DID YOU TALK TO THE GERMANS? ONLY TO ORDER THEM TO DO WORK.

:87:00 IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU REMEMBER THAT YOU WANT TO TELL ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AT THE LIBERATION? NOT REALLY: HONORED TO BE AT THE CONFERENCE.

:86:30 ARE YOU TALKING TO YOUR CHILDREN AND FAMILY OR HAVE YOU KEPT IT SILENT THESE YEARS? I'VE SAID VERY LITTLE. NEWS RELEASE CAME OUT LAST WEEK ONE OF MY CHILDREN, 30, CALLED AND ASKED ABOUT IT--HE NEVER REALIZED I HAD BEEN INVOLVED. FOR A FEW YEARS, DIDN'T TALK AT ALL.

:86:09 AT THE TIME, DID YOU KNOW SO MANY JEWS WERE KILLED? NO. AT THE TIME OF LIBERATION I KNEW MANY, BUT NOT THE MAGNITUDE.

:85:54 BEFORE ENTERING THE SERVICE DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN EUROPE? I THINK SO. I KNEW HITLER WAS ANTI-SEMITIC AND HE HAD A PROGRAM TO DESTROY JEWS, BUT I DIDN'T REALIZE IT WAS AS EFFECTIVE AND WIDESPREAD AS IT WAS.

:85:27 IN THE ARMY YOU SAW MANY THINGS. DID IT SHOCK YOU THAT PEOPLE WERE DYING WITHOUT A REASON, WITHOUT BEING SHOT? I HAD BEEN IN THE ASIATIC THEATER AND DIRECTLY INVOLVED WITH COMBAT TROOPS--WORKED WITH CASUALTIES. THE SOLDIERS KNEW THERE WAS A RISK OF BEING SHOT OR WOUNDED--BUT THE PEOPLE IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS WERE CIVILIANS, WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

:84:29 DID YOU KEEP ANY MAPS, DIARIES OR PHOTOS FROM GERMANY? NO I DIDN'T.

:83:46 I WILL NOW CLOSE THE INTERVIEW. WE WAITED FOR MANY YEARS TO BE LIBERATED.

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