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P R O C E E D I N G S

(TAPE 25, SIDE B)

MS. SOLOMON: My name is Kathy Solomon. I am at the Witness to the Holocause Project at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and here in Washington, D.C. at the International Liberators Conference, with William A. Scott, also from Atlanta, Georgia, a liberator of Buchenwald.

Mr. Scott, tell us what your military unit was at the time that you were a liberator of Buchenwald.

MR. SCOTT: I was with the 183rd Engineer Combat Battaion. I was a reconnaissance sergeant with that unit. I first joined the unit in December of 1943. We were organized in a small camp in Mississippi and we trained there, maneuvered in Louisiana, and then we went overseas in the late Summer of '44, and eventually, by way of Liverpool, England, to Rouen. When we got off the boat at LeHavre we went up to Rouen.

MS. SOLOMON: I am going to stop you for a minute so we can get some of the other information for the records.

MR. SCOTT: Sure.

MS. SOLOMON: What was your prospective

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profession at the time that you entered the war?

MR. SCOTT: Well, I was a student at Morehouse College. More or less I was born into a newspaper operation. My father started a small newspaper in Atlanta in 1928; and from 1928 I have lived in Atlanta, and I went to Morehouse College for one year and a semester and I was drafted in January, 1943.

MS. SOLOMON: And you are now?

MR. SCOTT: Well, I am still with the newspaper.

MS. SOLOMON: With the newspaper. I see.

MR. SCOTT: Over forty years. Presently I am the director of circulation.

MS. SOLOMON: I see.

Your rank at the time you liberated Buchenwald was?

MR. SCOTT: Well, I was a sergeant at the time.

MS. SOLOMON: All right.

Take yourself back into Buchenwald now. You entered how ... Did you know anything about the camp?

MR. SCOTT: Well, during the progression up through France and into Germany, we had been shown film of atrocities and told about it during what they called

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indoctrination periods, orientation, discussions.

MS. SOLOMON: When was that? What year was that?

MR. SCOTT: I would say in the Fall of '44, when we first got off in France.

The Army had always sort of told you what to expect when you were going somewhere.

MS. SOLOMON: So, you saw films of atrocities?

MR. SCOTT: Atrocities. We were told about atrocities, yes.

MS. SOLOMON: But not specifically of any camp?

MR. SCOTT: Well, it was sort of a vague thought. They would name the camps but the names meant nothing to us. As a matter of fact, most of us really, in talking about it, we didn't believe it. "This is not this bad," you know, with bodies piled up and bulldozing them away.

So, in getting around to, you might say, the dash across Germany, my unit was motorized and we had hit Eisenach, and as soon as we got there we got immediate orders to go to Buchenwald --

MS. SOLOMON: You were given orders?

MR. SCOTT: Yes.

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MS. SOLOMON: That said what?

MR. SCOTT: As I remember it, our company--we had four companies in my unit, but my company was the one that directed activities of the entire battalion--and my company got orders from Third Army; what we understood, Patton says go directly to Buchenwald, which was just a few miles east of us.

MS. SOLOMON: Did they tell you what to do when you got there?

MR. SCOTT: To go to see Buchenwald.

MS. SOLOMON: Just to see it?

MR. SCOTT: Because it had been taken that day, and I think it was about April 11th, at least the way I remember it, and I was a photographer also with my unit and the battalion historian, and we drove over and the MPs were giving directions how to get there, and seemingly some MPs were not able to give proper directions, so we circled around for a half an hour or so looking for the camp, and I can recall saying that, "This place doesn't exist. They just tell us it does and they tell us to come over and look but we're taking too long to find it."

And finally, when we did find it, the way I

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remembered it, we drove in and I said, "Gosh, it's not as bad as they say. It looks just like a regular prison."

And we drove around some buildings and I saw all these people milling around and they were in terrible shape. And it was really like that. I realized it was as bad. As a matter of fact, I ended up saying it was worse. And I said, "There's no way you could describe it." And I took a few photographs outside.

And we were told by some of the survivors that over 30,000 had been killed in a two-week period and that the Germans were trying to kill all of them before we got there.

And just to show how late, one SS trooper was still there the day we got there and they beat him to death --

MS. SOLOMON: Who is they?

MR. SCOTT: Some of the survivors there.

And they asked if we wanted to come in the building. I didn't go in the building while they were beating him to death. But some of the men in my unit did go in. But it appeared to me that the SSer wanted to die because he remained right up to the minute he was taken

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right outside of camp. But --

MS. SOLOMON: That was the only SS person you saw then?

MR. SCOTT: Yes.

And I walked into the furnaces, the incinerators, and took some photographs --

MS. SOLOMON: Do you have any of those?

MR. SCOTT: I only have a few contact prints. I did most of my processing in the field and most of my photographs were turned in to my unit because it was disbanded in Marseilles in July.

And I have some scenes that I took ... we took of some of the youngsters --

MS. SOLOMON: I was going to ask: You saw children?

MR. SCOTT: Yes.

MS. SOLOMON: Yes.

MR. SCOTT: As a matter of fact, I had said they were ten years old but I was told that they were older than that. None that young survived.

But if that photograph could be blown up--I don't have the negative to it; as a matter of fact I turned in all the negatives. This is one enlargement that I did

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have of some of the bodies still piled up outside of the incinerators and --

MS. SOLOMON: Did you see any bodies, any skeletons in the incinerators?

MR. SCOTT: Yes. Yes.

As a matter of fact, I didn't have any of my flash equipment that day and I took some delayed time exposures--not too much; one second, two second shots of some of the skulls and the bones that were still in the incinerators.

As I say, they were trying to kill everybody before we got there and they just didn't have the time.

MS. SOLOMON: What did you do when you were in there? You were a photographer, I know.

MR. SCOTT: Well, after awhile, as I say, after I started taking these shots, I went into some of the barracks that some of them had lived in. They were pointing out what had been done --

MS. SOLOMON: Who was pointing this out to you?

MR. SCOTT: The survivors.

Because they weren't speaking, they were just --

MS. SOLOMON: Pointing.

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MR. SCOTT: -- they just let us look. And some of the things they pointed out you just couldn't believe that it happened.

I saw one cross-section of a brain with a slice down the middle and no ragged skin. I couldn't understand how they could do it, what kind of sharp instrument could cut a brain, a head down the middle and placed against the jar, or the glass, so that you could see the cross-section --

MS. SOLOMON: Were you in the so-called hospital section or experimental section?

MR. SCOTT: Well, no. I was just walking around to the extent that I think I got to the point where I said at one time that I was a survivor. I was walking around just as they were walking around--in a trance, sort of a numb situation.

And as I say, I put my camera up after awhile and I just stopped taking pictures. The type of situation, as I say, was unbelievable to the extent that I can understand today when some people say it didn't happen. This is what I was saying as I was driving into the camp. "It's not that bad."

And as I would tell it, people wouldn't believe

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me either until I actually saw it. And then you don't. Then you become ... it's like worse than a dream --

MS. SOLOMON: It's so horrible that you numb yourself to --

MR. SCOTT: Yeah. Some of the things that they did I never did try to describe often but only once in awhile.

MS. SOLOMON: Were you married at the time that you went?

MR. SCOTT: Yes.

As a matter of fact, my wife and I joked--we celebrated our fifty-second anniversary this year --

MS. SOLOMON: Congratulations.

MR. SCOTT: -- but that was because we started in the second grade in 1929.

But we got married on a furlough in August of '44 and so --

MS. SOLOMON: Was she aware of your experience? Had you ever discussed your experiences?

MS. SCOTT: No. I didn't write or anything. As a matter of act, some of these photographs, I never did bring them out for awhile. I did show them to my kids when

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they were old enough to understand what's here. They know a little bit about it.

When I came back I did tell my wife I did see the lamp shades made from the skins --

MS. SOLOMON: Did you share what you saw with any of your buddies and --

MR. SCOTT: Well, yeah. I know those of us who went over saw it --

MS. SOLOMON: You saw it together.

MR. SCOTT: Yeah.

-- there was nothing much we could say --

MS. SOLOMON: Did you talk to each other at the time that you were witnessing this human catastrophe?

MR. SCOTT: Well, it was kind of a weird thing, I guess, because maybe I did block out a lot of things.

I found an old scrap book that my wife's aunt had kept, and quite often you want to keep things, and it had a story that I had given in January after I came back out of the service. And I talked about the experience, the odor, and I just don't remember giving this interview. I don't even remember the story.

Occasionally I have brought out the photographs,

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I guess maybe about once or twice in the past thirty-or-so years --

MS. SOLOMON: Tell me, when you got in there you saw the prisoners and they saw you: How did they react to you?

MR. SCOTT: Well, they wanted us to see --

MS. SOLOMON: As a black person having walked into this camp, which was an additional ... it was an experience for them as well as for you, what was --

MR. SCOTT: They wanted us to see what had happened.

I can recall I had just learned, a few months earlier in Luxembourg, how to play chess and some of the survivors, with their clothing torn and their body exposed, were kneeling on the ground playing chess out of some makeshift sets, and they were just oblivious almost to what was going on around them even. And I said, "Well, this is a fantastic game."

I had learned it and had begun to develop some feeling for it and I eventually, as I say, became very interested and played it on a ship. I was on a ship from Marseilles to the Pacific for sixty-five days and I got

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involved in it. And this can keep your mind from going off the deep end so to speak --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you saw this inmate playing chess --

MR. SCOTT: Yeah. I saw several of them --

MS. SOLOMON: -- and completely oblivious to your entrance --

MS. SOLOMON: Yeah, and what was going on around them. I meant by the suffering that they themselves were having because their bodies were so ... and their clothing was torn, as I say, they were completely exposed. It was fairly good weather that day and they were able, as I say, to take us --

MS. SOLOMON: We hear testimony of prisoners coming up to the liberators and hugging them and touching them and putting them on their shoulders.

Did you have any experience like that?

MR. SCOTT: Well, it probably was ... we may have been the second wave that they had seen. We were busy helping to take some of the people out and, as I say, I took one photograph of a line of young people and some of the older people --

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MS. SOLOMON: Oh! These were the people that were able to move and get about, yeah.

MR. SCOTT: Yeah. We took those out.

And again, as I say, I would suspect I was like one of them because, as I say, after awhile I just put the camera down and just walked right --

MS. SOLOMON: It was like a violation, taking pictures.

MR. SCOTT: Yeah.

And had I thought about it at the time I might have taken more photographs, I might have been more explicit.

But there was just a complete blast, a reversal, of what ... going right into it, it's not that bad.

We have a prison in Atlanta, a federal prison. It almost looked like that federal prison when we turned into it.

And of course the Americans, the Allies, had developed the capability of knocking out buildings, and some of the buildings were knocked out. We were able to do this. And we might have saved some people because we had developed pinpoint accuracy in air strikes sometimes

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and this had helped some people --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you think maybe some of the crematoria or --

MR. SCOTT: Well, as a matter -- well, yeah --

MS. SOLOMON: -- you saw the crematoria --

MR. SCOTT: Yes. It was still there.

But some of the other facilities for the --

MS. SOLOMON: They weren't touched.

MR. SCOTT: -- prisoners. As a matter of fact, I remembered Buchenwald was supposed to have been a national major prison --

MS. SOLOMON: Political prison.

MR. SCOTT: And there was a group of people there by the thousands that looked in better shape than the others and we asked about them, and the way that I remembered it, we were told that they were Russians and the Germans didn't bother the Russians as much as they did others..

And I can recall reading ... I read a book about some of the types of atrocities that could be committed. It was a book entitled, Out of the Night, Jean Valtain, and I read this while I was going around

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pieces at a time --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you have a lot of that information too.

MR. SCOTT: Yeah.

It talked about the type of atrocities that were committed by the KGB and the Russian secret service people and --

MS. SOLOMON: Were you a religious man at the time that you had this experience?

MR. SCOTT: Well, I'm classified as a protestant. Both my grandparents were ministers. And my family tree comes out of Mississippi and you had to be religious to survive in Mississippi to a degree. My great grandfather was a slave and performed in a fashion similar to mine--in the Civil War he was sort of a scout with the Union Army. And after the war a Union Army officer said to him that he would help him, "What can I do for you?" And as I understand it, he helped my grandfather, my father's father, get to a school in Ohio, where he graduated and became a minister--a little school called Hiram College --

MS. SOLOMON: Oh, yes.

MR. SCOTT: -- And in Ohio he met a young

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person, my grandmother, East Liverpool, Ohio. She said she was so cold you could spit and it would freeze before it hit the ground when she was in school back in the 18s.

But anyway, they married in the 1890s and went back to Mississippi and raised nine children, and the fourth William A. Scott --

MS. SOLOMON: Of the role --

MR. SCOTT: Of William A. Scotts. The role of slave and minister. And my father. My father ended up at Morehouse College in Atlanta in '23, the year I was born, January, '23. And he got involved with student publication, the year book; and eventually, as I say, started a newspaper in 1928.

And my mother's father was a minister also --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you have a lot of religion --

MR. SCOTT: I sat on the front row, I'd say, the first five years of my life.

But after awhile, I guess, my pastor tells me now he doesn't know what I look like, he hasn't seen me in so long, you know, it's been a little wait.

I don't know whether I have developed ... I'm not as going to church as I was. I grew up and I was in

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a Boy Scout troop. I came here to Washington in 1937 to the First World Scout Jamboree, 26,000 Scouts --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you were very involved in your community and --

MR. SCOTT: Sort of. Sort of, yes.

I consider myself --

MS. SOLOMON: Which family background?

MR. SCOTT: I consider not a very ____________ religion. In other words, as I recall, I've had a wide range of exposures, you might say --

MS. SOLOMON: Okay.

Within that framework did you consider this in retrospect or perhaps even while you were going through the experience, the holocaust experience, as a Jewish problem, a Jewish situation?

MR. SCOTT: Well, I can recall thinking about, when I went into the service, that I never knew that other people had been subjected to the types of abuses that we had, blacks had --

MS. SOLOMON: As black persons. Certainly.

MR. SCOTT: -- and in the Army, in my unit, there were some Jewish officers that they had problems with

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their fellow officers.

My unit was all black except for the officers and three black warrant officers. The Jewish officers -- well, I think there were three different types: one who accepted the abuse and went along; another who stood straight up, don't bother; and a third who was a doctor, so he didn't get any flack.

But the one officer incidentally was in my section who got a lot of ill treatment from his fellow officers --

MS. SOLOMON: Was this your first experience in seeing how --

MR. SCOTT: Well, this is when I began to realize that there were problems other than just a black --

MS. SOLOMON: For the black person --

MR. SCOTT: Yeah. And then --

MS. SOLOMON: Did you go into Buchenwald with a Jewish officer?

MR. SCOTT: I don't recall.

I do ... let's see, wait a minute. On this picture now, this is an officer in our unit and two other sergeants and a person. I don't think he was Jewish, I'm

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to go to Marseilles.

But when we got to Marseilles, the driver-- our driver was always close to him--told us that when we had gone down there without orders and the Army disbursed or disbanned my unit. Half the men in my unit ended up coming back to the States and I got shipped to a unit that was going to the Pacific. And that's how I ended up in the Pacific.

And we never really talked a lot about this, I say the Buchenwald experience. As a matter of fact, I even got more into books. I read about twenty-five books or thirty books --

MS. SOLOMON: After.

MR. SCOTT: -- during and up to a time. I really guess I'm not as much observant as I should have been because other fellows fraternized, whereas --

MS. SOLOMON: That was wartime --

MR. SCOTT: Yeah.

Well, "Where is Scott?" I was reading a book somewhere. I didn't fraternize much. I couldn't speak the language that some --

MS. SOLOMON: So, you didn't speak to any

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German citizens at all.

MR. SCOTT: No.

All I knew is that they totally surrendered. When we went into Germany there was a white flag in every pile of rubble going across Luxembourg, northern Luxembourg, and into Trier, the Mosel Valley, Mommenheim and Oppenheim, up the Rhine River.

They surrendered because after the Bulge, which we were involved in, the Allies and the American Army, we shot up just about everything that was able to be shot up. And as I say, the people wanted to possibly communicate but not just say, "We're through." This is the way it was. They just opened up everything --

MS. SOLOMON: As a result of this experience, did it change anything for you as far as your thinking in later life and your position today, your attitudes?

MR. SCOTT: I don't know. I've often said --

MS. SOLOMON: Civil rights or --

MR. SCOTT: Yeah.

Well, I've said I've had a multiplicity of exposure. There's an experience I can recall thinking that most of the time a person's attitude really is,

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according to most psychologists, is developed in his formative years--I would say the first six, seven years.

As to whether or not it changed me, it may have given me a broader perspective than what I had been able to have prior to it.

I know coming back from the Pacific, I ended up--the atomic bomb was dropped when we were two weeks out of the Panama Canal, I was on a ship that was headed for the invasion of Japan. There were 8,000 troops on my ship and when we heard the bomb was dropped we were glad because maybe it would end the war.

And we ended up anchoring at a place called Eniwetok, the Yap Island group, and stayed there for twenty-two days. I was on the boat for sixty-five days total --

MS. SOLOMON: That was a good time for chess playing.

MR. SCOTT: Yes. That's when I really got involved.

And then I went on up to Okinawa and stayed for a month or two in preparation for coming back. And on the boat coming back I became very friendly with a

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fellow Georgian white and he gave me some of his thoughts --

MS. SOLOMON: About?

MR. SCOTT: Oh, life in general.

One day he said to me, he said, "Look, Scott," after we had been together for awhile, he says, "when we get back to Georgia, do you think you're going to have your rights? You're not going to have any rights unless you stand up and act like a man."

And this was a thought that developed, that maybe he would kick me around if I let him. And this is what he was trying to tell me, that this has been part of the problem, that people have allowed themselves to be kicked around.

And I later have, come to think about it, in connection with what happened in Europe, although I don't know whether or not it's a close parallel, I've said that there's really not a parallel, or as some persons would want to say, between what happened to the Jews and the blacks other than the magnitude of the situation in Europe was, as I say, just unbelievable.

Here in America a few slaves in Mississippi, for example, during the height of slavery, some history

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states that there were 500 blacks to 1 white and whenever there was a rumor of a possible revolt the slave master would go out and pick out the most militant appearing, surly black and kill him right before the other slaves, or maybe kill a hundred, as has been said, at one time, across a particular high density situation, and it was done out of fear.

This is possibly the basis for some atrocities down through the years, that they're done out of one's fear of others.

And I know I did read again a book on Haiti, in which a revolt developed, and according to this particular book that I read--it was called Kristoff--the slaves eventually captured the island; and when Toussaint L'Ouverture, who was the leader, was taken out on a boat on the truce and taken back to France, the slaves who some of them had been protecting some of the whites who remained on the island, couldn't get off, turned around and killed all of them. There were thousands, supposed to have been about 6,000 that were killed in Port-au-Prince.

And this is the type of situation which brought reaction against black possible revolts in this country.

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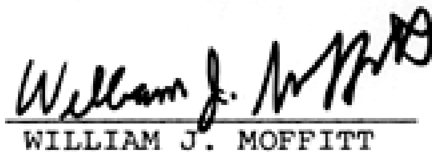
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the foregoing proceedings, in re. interviews of individuals appearing before the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, 1981 International Liberators' Conference, were transcribed as herein appears and that this is the original transcript thereof.



WILLIAM J. MOFFITT

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