

IN RE 'HOLOCAUST'

On the 6th of June, 1944, the Armies of the United States, Canada and Australia executed, on the beaches of Normandy, France, the greatest amphibious landing in the history of mankind, and began the invasion that would defeat Adolph Hitler's Germany, and destroy the Third Reich for all time. The ~~first~~ advance elements of the First U.S. Army, of which we in the 602nd Engineer Camouflage Battalion were a part, landed on beaches designated Omaha and Utah. Our battalion engaged in the landings with a platoon on each beach.

On the 4th of July, the remainder of the Battalion landed on Omaha, and climbed that famous cliff. At the top we were greeted by the sight of an American helmet, hanging of a fence post, with a .50 Caliber bullet hole in one side and out the other. With German planes raiding another part of the beach, we were in no doubt that we were in the war. Some days later, the sight of a German Panther tank, well camouflaged in some trees, and six American Sherman tanks, burned, and with armor piercing shell holes through the white stars on their sides, put there by the German, left no doubt that we had an important part to play. The white stars had been ordered, to identify American vehicles to friendly planes. One of our first acts was to order their obliteration, under the authority of the Army Engineer, and to begin an immediate and massive program of camouflage pattern painting for this purpose. But back to the six tanks. A look inside one of them was enough. There sat two charred fragments of what had been American soldiers. One in the driver's seat, and the other in the gunner's seat. A black charred knob on the top, the head, a length of connected segments, with small protrusions on each side, the ribs, and a knob on the bottom, the hips. I mention all this to point out that fire is common in war.

By the time of this invasion, the war, of course, had been going on for a long time. Poland, Italy, Africa, Stalingrad, Alemein, Salerno, Dunkirk, were all ~~behind~~ history. But Hitler's dream of a Master Race, and his concomittant program to eliminate all those not qualified to be members of it, begun in the early days, was still on-going. The pictures that you will see show a small part of how it was, for ordinary people, to be caught up in that dream.

It was Hitler's intention to exterminate every Jew on the face of Europe, and alsomost of the slavic races, as well as all incapacitated and dissenting people. First they were robbed of their businesses, houses, factories, bank accounts, furniture, cars and clothes, in a systematic program of oppression. Then they were sent to the concentration camps, with two suitcases allowed, which were taken from them on arrival. The Jews habitually carried their valuables with them. Entire trainloads of gold trinkets, diamonds, sapphires, rubies, silver ingots, gold dollars and banknotes were shipped to Germany. The program was planned and executed in three phases. First, the gathering and robbing of the victims. Second, exploitation of their living bodies $\frac{1}{2}$ the profitable use of the calories left in them, through work without enough food to stay alive. Third, exploitation of their corpses. Hair was used for felt Army boots. Gold teeth were melted down. Ashes from crematories were used for fertiliz̄er, and body fats were rendered down for soap, but this was found later to be uneconical.

As early as 1938, Berlin had established a large installation at a place called Riga to use as a transit camp for Jews from Germany and Austria. At that time there were 320,000 German Jews, and 180,000 Austrian Jews there. By 1941, tens of thousands had been exterminated, mainly in Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Ravensbruck, Dachau, Belsen, Therienstadt, and Buchenwald. Work was begun to expand six extermination camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobiboro, Chelmo, and Maidanik. Until these were ready, Riga was chosen to 'store' the jews. Between August, 1941 and October, 1944, 200 German and Austrian Jews were shipped to Riga. 80,000 died there. 120 were shipped to the six extermination camps and eliminated. / 600

The Reich Economic Administration Main Office, mentioned earlier, was the middle section of the operation. Identification of the victims, rounding them up, transporting them, and then executing them after the economic exploitation, ~~was/the~~ were the tasks of the RSHA, the Reich Security Main Office. The term 'Security' was used in the sense that it was the Reich's security that was being protected. The RSHA was divided into six departments, called 'Amts'. Amt One was Administration and Personnel. Amt Two was equipment and finance. Amt Three was the Security Service and Police, headed by Heinrich Heydrich. They devised and used the tortures to make suspects talk. Amt Four was the Gestapo. Its Jewish Section was headed by Adolf Eichman, who, after the war, was kidnapped in Argentina and executed in Jerusalem by the Israelis. Amt Five was the Criminal Police, and Amt Six was the Foreign Intelligence Service. The two successive heads of Amt Three, Heydrich and Kaltenbrunner, were also the over-all chiefs of the whole RSHA, and the head of Amt One was their Deputy. It has been said that, if guilt were to be specified, most of it rests with these two departments, involving some thousands, and not the millions who make up contemporary Germany, some sixty million Germans, including small children, women, old-age pensioners, soldiers, sailors, and airmen, who had nothing to do with the holocaust.

It is against the background described above, for deliberate, commanded, organized, staffed, financed and equipped forces, specially selected and trained, and motivated, for the active and continuous forceful selection, torture and murder of more people than live in New York City and Chicago combined, that the photos of Buchenwald should be viewed. The photos of burned bodies are from a different camp, one named "Schoenenfeld", or " Beautiful Field", of all things. These photos are gruesome enough, to be sure, and they depict a heinous and inhuman action. When the guards at this camp realized that the Allies would shortly arrive, they herded the inmates into wooden barracks, locked them in, spread gasoline on the buildings, and ignited them. In one of the photos, a ~~group~~ group of bodies may be seen huddled in a corner, presumably the last place to be burned. But some of the victims apparently escaped the building and ran, as flaming torches, probably demented by pain. The guards had stationed members of the Hitler Youth - 10-12 year old boys, their heads filled with propaganda about the glories of the fatherland - and these were armed with sub-machine guns. They shot down the burning victims who escaped the buildings, and it is these that are seen lying within the barbed wire of "Schoenenfeld". But, while these people died in agony, it should be remembered that death by fire is, and has always been, common to war. Our own Army, and all others, inflict such death with flame throwers, when attacking a fortified position, and, of course, with gelatinized gasoline called Napalm, dropped from ~~the air~~ the air on strong enemy positions. The action at Schoenenfeld, thus, is an isolated incident not unlike other warlike acts, except that it was inflicted on helpless non-combatants. But it was not planned that way.

But the larger story is embodied in the photos of Buchenwald. Buchenwald was one of the Death Camps. It is located just outside of the city of Weimar which, ironically, was the home such German cultural greats as the poet Goethe, and the composer Franz Liszt. It was also the home of the Post World War I German (or Weimar) Republic, which was overwhelmed and replaced by Hitler's Third Reich.

There is a photo of a group of inmates, standing around and smiling, in front of the main gate, from which the machine guns have been removed. They are fortunate to be able to stand around, and to smile, because these are very recent arrivals, not yet subjected to Buchenwald's specialties. One of them gave me a piece of German paper money, a Buchenwald Reichsmark, with which the inmates were paid for their labor. These marks were for the purchase of such extras, in the camp store, as butter, sugar, coffee and tobacco. Only, there never was, nor had been, any butter, sugar, coffee or tobacco available, in the store.

~~Had this~~

Had the war continued, this group of inmates would inevitably have ended up looking like the group of bodies stacked like cord wood against the outer wall of the crematorium. These are bodies awaiting their turn to be burned to ashes, cremated, in the four specially designed ovens inside this building. The bodies are stacked head to foot, to prevent the stack from toppling. Tattooed identification numbers may be seen. Every inmate of a concentration camp was permanently marked in this way. You will recall that these people were forced to work at hard labor so long as they had sufficient strength. That strength was slowly, but deliberately and ~~surely~~ surely taken away from them by the enforced diet, which was scientifically designed to be just below the minimum required to sustain life. As you can see, they were finally reduced to ~~what~~ what is plainly skin and bone. A person in that condition cannot walk, or even sit up. We saw them, in what was reported to be the 'hospital', an ordinary wooden one story barracks, with six-foot deep ~~shelves~~ shelves, four high, against the walls, and a single wood table in the aisle, holding a filthy half bottle of what looked like iodine and some filthy rags - the total extent of their medical supplies for this hospital- and them ~~lying~~ lying on the shelves, in rags, with about a foot and a half of space each, in rags, and with no covers, moaning, dying, or dead. There were many, many dead. Buchenwald executed some 56,000 people. There were about 17,000 there when our First Army liberated the camp. They were dying at the rate of 700 per day, of starvation and exposure, and disease. The crematorium could not accommodate that many, so that many were buried in mass graves, or, in the end, just dumped ~~into~~ into the quarries that they had worked. The smell of death, once experienced, is never forgotten. The smell of death permeated the camp of Buchenwald, and was carried downwind for miles. The people of Weimar must surely have smelled it, when the wind was right.

The bodies shown stacked against the crematorium wall are only a small fraction of those that were there when we ~~(The Bn. C.O. and myself)~~ (The Bn. C.O. and myself) first visited the camp. There was also a very large wooden farm wagon standing nearby, which had just returned from its daily collection tour of the camp, and was stacked with about fifty bodies.

As soon as the First U.S. Army, of which we were a part, liberated this area, a full Field Hospital unit was ordered into Buchenwald, to treat the sick and starving, save those that could be saved, feed and cloth and care for, all of the inmates, and provide for necessary sanitation, clothing, housing, and medical help. The dead were buried with appropriate ceremony and respect.

Nevertheless, in order to preclude forever the possibility that these horrible deeds might some day in the future be ~~explained~~ explained away as mere rumors and war stories, as had happened after World War I, General Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, ordered that a portion of the bodies remain as they were found, until U.S. Senators, Congressman, other officials, and reporters, cameramen, and others could be brought from the U.S., to document for all time exactly how it was. Except for the wreaths on the walls, which were placed there by sympathetic inmates and visitors, these bodies lie as they were found, and are what were saved for the documentation. It was at this time, several days after our first visit, that I again visited the camp, with our Bn. photographer, Mr. George Nejdil, to make this record.

Now, there were several ways in which the inmates of Buchenwald died. In this camp there were no gas chambers. Most commonly, they starved. But many were hung. Hanging was a favorite ~~of~~ SS method of execution. A short leather loop was used. With the loop around his neck, the victim was hoisted to an iron hook, slightly higher than a man, and left to straggle. The crematorium building was surrounded by a concrete area, and enclosed by a high wooden board fence that could not be seen through. Inside this fence there stood a simple scaffold. It didn't have to be much, because the bodies were so light. It consisted only of a ~~stand~~ base, with two upright two-by-fours and a crosspiece at the top. This two-by-four crosspiece held six equally spaced small iron hooks. It could thus accommodate six hangings at once. How many times it was loaded during a day probably depended on how fast the ovens inside could process the bodies.

There was another method, presumably reserved for special cases. It was innocent in appearance, but devilish in application. Near the wall of the crematorium there was a round hole in the concrete, covered by an iron 'manhole' cover. And indeed this was a 'manhole'. The hole extended vertically to the level of the building's basement floor. There a horizontal hole extended through the building's foundation, into the basement. The victim was led to the manhole and forced to jump in. He was then covered by the manhole cover. His only avenue of escape was by crawling along the horizontal tunnel, into the building. Ash's head emerged from the tunnel into the basement, one of the guards or 'operators', standing there in wait, with a large wooden club, shaped exactly like a wooden potato masher- having a large lump on the business end- smashed his skull with a heavy blow to the back of the head. We personally observed this club, leaning against the white painted wall of the basement, near the tunnel. It was covered with blood, brains and hair, on its large end.

Victims were also hung in the basement. There were about six iron 'meat hook' like hooks attached to the white concrete walls. The walls beneath them were disfigured by the frantic kicking and scratching of the men who had been ~~hung~~ hung on them. Several of the leather strangulation loops lay about.

In the basement were two other elements of the process. One was a white metal table, like an operating table. It held the body of the newly executed, while the teeth were knocked out, to recover any gold or other valuable metals. Here also, all clothes removed. The other was an elevator, with a special sliding table. The body was placed on this table, and when called for from above, the elevator carried it upward, into the main crematorium, positioning it directly in front of the appropriate oven. When the oven door was opened, the sliding portion of the table moved into the oven, emptied the body on the grate, and retracted. The door was then closed, and the fire was applied.

Ashes were shaken into a separate small room in the basement. These ashes were ~~the~~ later used ~~as~~ as fertilizer, in the fields and gardens in the surrounding countryside. A small metal box, about a foot square, was used to measure this issue, and appears on the floor of the photo of the ashed. ed

As mentioned earlier, the ovens had been especially designed and built for the purposes which have been described. The entire crematorium had been kept clean, painted white inside, with a neat and orderly appearance, no doubt to aid in an ~~fast/and/bride~~ orderly and efficient operation.

Now, a crematorium in itself, while gruesome in its detail, is not an unusual thing. Every city ~~has~~ probably has one, to accommodate those who prefer that their bodies be cremated after death, instead of being buried. But Buchenwald had either four or six, and it is the inhuman motive of exterminating entire races of people, Genocide, that we abhor. It was a common saying there, among inmates, that: "You enter Buchenwald through the gate, but you leave by the chimney". And 56,000 people did.

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