

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

LIBERATOR ANONYMOUS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: November 10, 1987

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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LIB - Liberator (Anonymous) [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [interviewer]

Date: November 10, 1987

Tape one, side one:

PS: This is Phil Solomon, interviewing a U.S. army veteran of World War II. The gentleman prefers to remain anonymous. The date is November 10, 1987. Sir, can you please tell me where in Europe and in what unit you were serving before you arrived at the site of the concentration camp?

LIB: I was a CIC [Counter Intelligence Corps], special agent, military intelligence, war department, at the rank of captain.

PS: Did you, can you, do you recall about what date you arrived at the sight of the concentration camp?

LIB: It was Dachau. I believe it was in April. We were sent in to interrogate Nazis that had stayed there, because they--through my interpreter, I was told that they thought that the United States government would be easier on them if they told the truth, and they also were afraid that the Russians would kill them. There were men and women, Nazi soldiers, at the camp, and, oh, when I entered the camp, let me to tell you what I saw first. When I had entered the camp, with approximately six or seven other agents for interrogation, I was taken by the, by some of the Nazis, I was taken to one building which was an outside building. I believe there were five or six ovens. The ovens were open. You could still smell the flesh, the bodies that were burnt in the oven. In fact I can still remember today what the smell smells like. Behind the ovens still it was dried blood. You could see blood on the back, on the walls. And I was taken further down in the camp. There was a hanging post. I was told by the Nazis that stayed behind, through my interpreter, that the post was used for any of the prisoners in Dachau that worked for the officers in their living quarters. That if anyone was caught stealing they would be hung. There was a major, I do not remember his name. This has been so long ago. And if anyone was caught, he would take them out and have them hung in the middle of the night. Through my interpreter, one of the Nazis told me that this major had taken a fourteen-year-old boy outside in the middle of the night and hung him because he was caught stealing. It was either bread or some potatoes, in the officers' quarters. And I was also told that this Nazi, this major, got a kick out of it, and thought it was fun, like a hobby. And I also was told that he had several people hung. This was outside of one of their officers' quarters. And I also saw a pile of bodies that was covered by army tarps. That's further on down in the camp. I was not allowed to look at the, further down in the camp, at the gas, where they gassed, where they gassed the people that they had there.¹ Because it was all surrounded by the army troops. As I say, I

¹ According to the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Vol. 1*, in Dachau there was no mass extermination program with poison gas. There was a crematorium. (pp.340-341) In 1942 a gas chamber was built, but it

was only there for interrogation, and the Nazis that stayed behind, I would like to emphasize, that they said that they only stayed behind because they would be treated fairly if they told us the truth, which we did give them our word, and that they were afraid the Russians would kill them. The high-ranking officers did not stay there. In other words, they were taken away by the United States Army, when they had first arrived to take over the camp. I'm trying to remember what else I can remember. It's so long ago.

PS: The German officers that you mentioned...

LIB: They, some of the German officers and some of the German Nazis there were also women, male, and female, who stayed behind in the camp.

PS: They were there when the camp was liberated by the First...

LIB: Yes.

PS: They were there in the camp then?

LIB: Yes.

PS: And you say, you said that they remained voluntarily.

LIB: Voluntarily.

PS: Within the camp.

LIB: Because they were told they would get better treatment, and we were sent there to interrogate them, through my interpreter, who spoke five languages. I do speak broken German myself.

PS: Before you arrived at the camp, had you heard anything at all about the mass murder of Jews and political prisoners and others in Germany at that time?

LIB: No, only through rumors while I--before I was sent there.

PS: Now you said...

LIB: About our job, about the nomenclature of our job was what to do or expedite when we arrived.

PS: Expedite the interrogation?

LIB: Yes.

PS: In this interrogation, are you free to reveal things that were revealed to you, or to the general intelligence agency?

LIB: Only my name and the officers in charge of my unit. I cannot give the names. But I am telling the God's honest truth.

PS: Was there anything revealed in the interrogation of these Germans that was...

LIB: They were Nazis.

PS: Nazis.

LIB: Right.

PS: They were in the German Army.

LIB: Yes.

PS: SS also?

LIB: Yes, SS

PS: And some who served within the prison as guards?

LIB: As guards, as guards, and more or less, I would say as a strong arm.

PS: Do you know how many...

LIB: I would not use the word "guard". I would use the word "strong arm".

PS: Do you know how many days after the initial liberating troops entered Dachau that your intelligence unit entered?

LIB: I would say two to three days.

PS: I wonder, these Nazis who remained behind, they were not attacked by the concentration camp survivors who had, who were free at that time?

LIB: We were told that, but our, the troops that were guarding the place when we had entered, were given strict orders not to harm any of them, and not to let anyone else harm them, because our main objective was to interrogate and find out the truth, to the best of our ability.

PS: Can you estimate how many prisoners were there when you entered?

LIB: I would...

PS: Survivors.

LIB: I would say, God, I would say, oh, approximately [pause] oh my God, I, I was never told. I would say approximately six, maybe six to seven hundred, a little less or more. I'm not sure.

PS: Survivors, that is.

LIB: Yes.

PS: And of course the bodies that you saw, would you say far out numbered the number of survivors?

LIB: I don't know. I know that was, to my right as you entered the gates, further down there, the building that was guarded by the United States Army, I would say, it's, it's hard to say when you see a pile of bodies, which were covered with United States Army tarps. In fact you could, the smell was horrible. It was terrible.

PS: Sir, you yourself interrogated some of these Nazis?

LIB: Yes. With other CIC.

PS: Right.

LIB: Special Agents.

PS: During that interrogation, did you yourself learn of anything that you didn't know up to that point?

LIB: Yes. About the major that would take some of the people out and hang them in the middle of the night if he thought they stole food while working in the officers' quarters. And he, I was told by the Nazis that stayed back, that he didn't care whether they were children, men, women. He got a kick out of it, like it was a game.

PS: Do you know if this particular camp was set up for Jews only or if it was a mixed camp?

LIB: No, it was mixed. I was told by the Nazis that stayed behind that approximately 80, 85 percent were Jewish, and the other 15 or 20 percent were Poles, Czechoslovakians, and I don't know what other nationalities. I can't remember.

PS: Did you see any children?

LIB: No, I did not see any children there.

PS: Living, or bodies of children?

LIB: I did not lift up the tarp to see. That I do not know.

PS: Were you given any responsibilities, to sign and arranging for the transfer or care of prisoners?

LIB: No. Only for interrogation.

PS: Can you describe, did, you have personal contact with some of the prisoners in Dachau?

LIB: No, no.

PS: Can you describe the behavior pattern of these Nazi soldiers who, as you say, of their own free will remained behind?

LIB: They were very calm, because we had promised them fair treatment. We would promise them anything to get the truth out of them. So I know this is the truth, because they were afraid of their lives.

PS: Did the experience of seeing these prisoners alive and dead, and speaking with the German, the Nazi guards, have any effect on your feeling about being part of the war and fighting Germany?

LIB: Yes. Even up to this day I still remember the smell of the ovens. What I saw, it was unbelievable.

PS: Do you recall the reactions of other men in your unit? Did you talk with them about what you were experiencing there?

LIB: Yes, they felt the same way I did. It was unbelievable.

PS: Can you please tell me how long you remained in the camp, and whether your experience lingered after you left. Has it had any influence on your thinking, as you look back?

LIB: Yes. Still I cannot forget what I saw, never. And what I smelled.

PS: In your own mind, can you explain German decisions that led to the setting up of concentration camps?

LIB: To exterminate, I was told, also in interrogation, that the Nazis told me they were only following orders, and they thought that the Führer, Adolf Hitler, was eliminating people of the world that would only harm Germany.

PS: How long, approximately, did you remain at Dachau?

LIB: Well, I came in, in the morning. I mean, I know it was in the morning. And we left, oh my God, I guess we left very late at night. It must have been at least somewhere around, close to midnight, maybe eleven o'clock.

PS: And that you recall was the latter part of April of 1945?

LIB: It was in April 1945, in April of 1945.

PS: Now, after you left Dachau, can you tell us where you went from there and what your unit participated in after leaving Dachau?

LIB: We went, we went back to Munich, turned in all of our reports, and we still had to go through an oral, we had to go through an oral talk of our, of our investigation, through our interpreters. And I had also taken pictures. I didn't take them. I had another investigator with me, another special agent had taken pictures--of the ovens, of the bodies, of the hanging post, which was the most horrendous thing I could, one could even picture. And we had to turn them in. It was, why I don't know. And there are certain things that I am not able to talk about, and certain names. Now, the major that would have these people hung, when they were caught stealing food, I don't remember his name. If I did, I would give the name. I also was told by the Nazis that stayed back that he would make an excuse up to find someone stealing, even if they did or did not steal, just to keep himself busy. He enjoyed it. He was, he was, I guess he had to be crazy or, I don't know what.

PS: This major of whom you speak, he was not one of those who remained behind?

LIB: No, he was taken out, immediately on the first wave, when the whole American troops...

PS: Oh he was...

LIB: ...came out.

PS: He was captured?

LIB: He was taken out on the first wave, immediately.

PS: At the time that you were witness to the concentration camp at Dachau, were you aware at that time that this was just one of many Nazi concentration camps?

LIB: No, I knew there was more, more than that concentration camp. I heard there was more. I was never to any other concentration camp.

PS: When you left Dachau, you say you and your unit reported back to Munich.

LIB: To headquarters.

PS: Yeah, the headquarters. And you gave your reports.

LIB: To our commanding officer.

PS: Right. Then, where did you go from there, from Munich?

LIB: I was sent to transportation quarter, headquarters, for other assignments, which had nothing to do with prisoners.

PS: Now...

LIB: For under cover as a CIC agent.

PS: Between then and the time you left Europe, were you in contact in any other way with any other concentration camps or Displaced Persons Camps?

LIB: Not with any camps, but certain agents that were my friends and were with me.

PS: After the war, you say that you were a part of administration or investigative work within DP camps, Displaced Persons' Camps?

LIB: Yes, I stayed for the occupation until 19-, I left approximately 1948.

PS: Which was...

LIB: I was stationed at Coburg, Germany, which had, I believe, the largest DP camp in Europe, which was mostly Jewish, and Polish. But like Dachau I would say, it was 90 percent Jewish. And our job was to search the DP camp in Coburg. They would wake us up three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, in the afternoon, to go into the camp, search each room, and we would search for gold, silver, watches, rings. We were not told why. When we did find them, we would have to turn everything over to our commanding officer and in the room, I'd like to emphasize in the DP camp in Coburg, Germany, some of the rooms were as big as the room I'm sitting in now, which would be--what size room do you think I'm sitting in now, approximately.

PS: Oh, I would say about 10 by 15? About 15 foot square.

LIB: There would be families in each room. Some families would have approximately seven, six, eight people in one room. And they, we also had the biggest riot at this camp, because of waking up the people, searching them all times, night, morning. We were never told why, only what to look for. Up to this day I still don't know why.

PS: Were these people of which you speak mainly survivors of Nazi concentration camps?

LIB: Some of them were, yes. Some of them were, yes.

PS: Now, most of the concentration camps were liberated, oh, pretty much during the month of April, 1945. These people, therefore, had been in the camp for approximately how long a period at the time that you arrived?

LIB: Well, that I don't know what time, how long they were there. This--I was stationed in Coburg, assigned to this duty in 1946, or 1947. It's been so long ago. I do remember the camp was, the building of the camp was an ex-German Army post, which was all marble. Everything was marble, the walls, the floors. And we also had to have guards inside the building, with rifles, outside of the building, outside of the camp. When we had the riot, which was in 1946, when the DP camp rioted, our outfit had to come in with fixed bayonets, loaded rifles, and they were told--of course I wasn't told, because I was only there for interrogation, but I was there and watched that if anyone tried to walk out of the compound, out of the camp, or try to climb over the fence, the orders were to shoot or bayonet. Why? I do not know. I don't know.

PS: And again you s...

LIB: Up to this day.

PS: And again you say that these people were survivors of the concentration camps.

LIB: Some of them were, yes. Some of them, well, I was told some of them were, yes.

PS: Were there charges against these people that you know?

LIB: No, no. They were only, they were only, there until the United States government could find other towns and houses to spread them out. Because I also went on trains with the DPs from Coburg, to various towns, where they would be set up to go back to wherever they had lived before, or, we were never told why.

PS: You say that you had orders to shoot or bayonet.

LIB: I didn't have orders.

PS: Well I mean...

LIB: The troops had orders.

PS: Yeah, the troops.

LIB: Right.

PS: Therefore, we would assume that these people were not given the freedom to leave the confines of the grounds...

LIB: They were not.

PS: When they wished?

LIB: No. No they were not.

PS: Were there many attempts, do you know...

LIB: Now...

PS: To escape?

LIB: Not really escape. It's so hard to explain. They were fed. They were given medical treatment. But the living conditions was just, I guess it was the best that the United States government could do. Like I say, in one room I, when they would go on raids--I would have to go as an, for interrogation if someone was found with something they would be interrogated why they had it, where did they get it. But I was never told why we had to search each room at the DP camp in Coburg. Everything that was of any value, which, when I mean of value, a watch, a ring, anything that was gold, silver, of any value. And each room would be searched. It would have to be turned over to our commanding officer. I would ask why, what is the reason for it? Aren't they allowed to own anything? I was never given a reason why.

PS: And...

LIB: I still don't know, up to this day.

PS: And these people to your knowledge were not enemy.

LIB: No, no. They did receive their food, medical treatment.

PS: As to the medical treatment, would you say there were adequate doctors and adequate medical supplies available?

LIB: Yes, oh yes. Yes, I would say that. Yes.

PS: For the most part?

LIB: I believe one of the main reasons I was also told, I did speak broken German and I did have an interpreter at my side at all times, no matter where I went. I once told my interpreter, which I wasn't--I was breaking regulations--that they were so tired of being locked up in one room. They weren't locked in the room. They were so tired of being billeted in one room, and so many people, not enough bathroom facilities, six and seven people. This included the families, the children, the husband, the wife, in one room, with a, three or four toilets on one floor to go to the bathroom. They were just tired of living the way they were. But we had no other place to put them.

PS: For the most part, were there many deaths among the residents during the time that you were there?

LIB: Yes. Like, someone would die of maybe pneumonia or old age, but it wasn't through no fault of not receiving medical treatment.

PS: You would say probably that many of the deaths were caused by their long...

LIB: Natural causes.

PS: Well, and their weakened condition.

LIB: And weakened condition, but they were fed very good.

PS: Yeah.

LIB: And they did receive...

PS: But they were for...

LIB: ...good medical help.

PS: They were for the most part, though, survivors of concentration camps.

LIB: Yes. I don't know how many.

PS: So that their physical condition probably was poorer to begin with.

LIB: Yes, oh yes. But I would say in this camp in Coburg, there had to be approximately, oh my gosh, close to a thousand, I would say, close to a thousand people. Or maybe eight or nine hundred.

PS: Would you say that considering the available facilities that these people received the best care that could be afforded them at the time and place?

LIB: At the time, yes, because this, this, this was, was right after the war.

PS: Do you have any idea of how long these people lived under these conditions?

LIB: Well, I was only stationed there for approximately eight months before I was transferred. I was transferred to another constabulary [district of town connected to a police force], which was the 53rd Constabulary, in Füssen, Germany.

PS: Do you know, who administered this camp? Relief organizations or...

LIB: The United States Government.

PS: Oh, this was directly under the care of the United States Government.

LIB: United States Government.

PS: Did this include, do you know, people who were, who survived camps other than concentration camps that the U.S. Army liberated? In other words, like Bergen-Belsen was liberated by the British.

LIB: Yes, yes.

PS: There were?

LIB: Were mixed.

PS: They were all mixed.

LIB: All mixed.

Tape one, side two:

PS: Doing the interview by Phil Solomon, on November 10th, 1987. There were no other governments then involved?

LIB: No other...

PS: Among the French or the British?

LIB: Only the United States Army. I also would like to say that I was told one reason why the search and seizure for contraband at the DP camp in Coburg, we were told that black market, they may be used for black market. But I still couldn't understand what would be the difference. I don't know how they could use it for black market, because they were not allowed to leave the camp.

PS: Again, getting back to the people who were residents of this DP camp, did these people perform any physical work or services during the stay? Those physically able, of course.

LIB: No, only to keep the camp clean. That is all. Only to keep the camp clean.

PS: Were any German civilians employed within the camp?

LIB: No. No. It was strictly forbidden.

PS: Were there any attempts to locate the families of these survivors?

LIB: Oh yes, yes, but I had nothing to do with that department.

PS: But there were attempts.

LIB: Oh yes.

PS: To your knowledge, there were attempts being made.

LIB: Oh yes. Yes. In fact when they did find relatives they would try to ship them out in boxcars. I went with boxcars with displaced persons. And it was, I mean they were in boxcars, no seats, no nothing. Maybe 50 to 75 people in one boxcar at a time. And then they'd stop at a town and the boxcar would be opened, and then food was given, water. But it was the best we had with the, with so many people, with, it's all we could do.

PS: Yeah, sir, you...

LIB: The transportation was bad.

PS: You yourself do feel comfortable in the fact that the best possible was done for these people.

LIB: No, I don't really feel comfortable now, no.

PS: Is there anything in particular that does disturb you regarding this?

LIB: There should have been more help given, more food, more water, better way of transportation. That was, in my opinion it, there could have been a more humane way for the nomenclature of the transportation of these displaced persons, in my opinion.

PS: And you do feel that given all the facilities available, it would have been possible to care for them in a little better manner?

LIB: Yes. I don't know who would have the authority to do that. I do know that myself, and many of the troops would give extra candy, if they had it, for the children, and

anything they could find, to make their trips more comfortable. But there was no way the trips could be comfortable, because some of the places they were taken from, the camp were 60, 75, 100 miles where they had to be relocated. So it was, it was very inhumane but...

PS: Do you believe that any of them were transported to possibly other Displaced Persons Camps where the facilities would have been, where there would have been more room and they wouldn't have been as confined as they were in this particular camp?

LIB: No, I don't. I really don't.

PS: Were you aware of the distribution system that was used at this camp? In other words, were they released and transported mostly in cases where families were located? But...

LIB: No, oh, sorry.

PS: Or, do you have any idea how long a period of time most people remained here?

LIB: Well, I stayed there approximately eight months before I was transferred, and I would, I used to know some of the people stayed there so long that I would know them by name. Like, "Good morning Mr. So-and-so, or Mrs. So-and-so," so I know that some of them stayed there at least six months, maybe longer.

PS: In your own mind, can you explain the German decisions that led to the setting up of concentration camps?

LIB: Only what the Nazis had told me that were left back at Dachau, that Hitler wanted to get rid of the Jews, especially the Jews. That they were just no good to his country. And they would always say they were following orders. To them it didn't even seem like they were, when they were being interrogated, that they weren't even doing anything wrong.

PS: Huh?

LIB: It's unbelievable.

PS: Did any of the prisoners you liberated ever contact you or your unit?

LIB: No, no.

PS: Do you think that your, do you think that you would have felt the same toward the war, that you would have had the same feelings had you not had these experiences and been eyewitness to the atrocities in concentration camps?

LIB: Yes. Yes, because it was unbelievable.

PS: Sir, would you like to add anything to your testimony?

LIB: I just wish that the United States Government, and the other governments of occupation had of taken care of the displaced persons far more better than they did. It should have been set up more humane. There could have been more room for them, but when I, when I look back I can't think of any other place we could have put the displaced persons. There were so many of them, but, so many, thousands, so many of them. I would

see them come in and out, trainloads, boxcars. And I was always mad because they transported them in boxcars. Because, that would be the same way as Hitler had the people taken to the concentration camps, in boxcars. That's my only criticism I really have.

PS: And yet, wouldn't you say that, according to your standards, the treatment and the conditions under which they lived was far from the best, and yet considering they had just been snatched from the jaws of death, from concentration camps, that this was in your opinion a tremendous step in their salvation, in their liberation?

LIB: Yes, because I believe that in the back of many of their minds, when I would talk to them, on the side, that it was like bringing back memories and fear of not knowing what really is gonna happen, when they reach the next town. I was told that by many of the DPs. And I would always try to console them and tell them, "Well, this is the best transportation we have. I don't know any other way."

PS: Sir, we thank you very, very much, for your important testimony. Thank you, thank you.

LIB: You are quite welcome.