

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HERMAN KRAUSER

Transcript of Self-taped Memoir

Date: March 8, 1988

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HK - Herman Krauser [Self-taped memoir]¹

Date: March 8, 1988

Tape one, side one:

HK: My name is Herman Krauser, and today is March the 8th, 1988. I served in Germany with the 89th Infantry and my outfit was part of General Patton's Third Army.

As an Infantry Sergeant, news about the camp did not dwindle down until we were nearing the site. As we were coming down the road, toward the camp, we met two ex-inmates of the camp, still in their striped uniforms. I stopped them and questioned them as to where they were from, and where they were going. It was then that I learned of the camp in a small town named Ohrdruf. They said they were trying to make their way home to see if there were any survivors of their family. I gave them a knapsack filled with food and C rations to take with them. Tears came to their eyes when they saw the oranges.

Before we arrived at the camp, we had heard of the mass murders from our Jewish chaplains. We were also advised to get rid of our dog tags as Jewish prisoners were murdered if captured.

The camp we liberated was named after the town which, nearby, by the name of Ohrdruf. It was the first camp inside of Germany. The first unit of our division entered and liberated the camp April the 3rd, 1945. My company passed, bypassed the camp and then continued pushing the enemy back. But in a history report written of this incident later, here is a description told by the units entering the camp:

"At Ohrdruf, the 355th Regiment and the Fourth Armoured Division pried a scab from one of Germany's ugliest sores when they captured the largest concentration camp liberated by American forces up to that time. It was located in a lonesome barrack area near a large army post, which until the preceding December had been a German OCS training center. According to prisoner accounts, the occupants of the camp, mostly slave laborers from Eastern Europe, had been callously starved and beaten to death or shot down at the whim of the S.S. overseers. Many who had died in the camp had been buried in huge common pits near the barrack areas. When news came of the approach of the Americans, belated attempts were made to cover up the horrors of the place. Prisoners were forced to exhume the decomposed bodies of their former comrades and then cremate them on a makeshift grid of railroad rails set up near the pit. With the American armour only a few hours away, the S.S. guards had abandoned this project in a grisly state of half completion, machine-gunned those prisoners too ill to walk, in the courtyard of the concentration compound, and had fled. One guard attempted to disguise himself as a slave laborer, but as he hurried through the gate, along with a few prisoners who managed to escape in the confusion, he was recognized by former victims of his brutalities and was killed on the spot

¹Interview conducted by mail. Mr. Krauser answered a questionnaire.

with a heavy truck crank. Included among the dead, shot in the courtyard when the GIs entered, was the body of an American flyer who had been brought to Ohrdruf from a Polish prison camp and became ill en route. He was shot as he lay on a stretcher. Dusted over with lime, the bodies of about 40 victims of the camp were stacked in a beating shed, where they had died while receiving a customary punishment for minor infractions of rules, 150 strokes on a naked back with either a cudgel or a heavy sharp-bladed shovel. One of the few men ever to survive this punishment was a German ex-convict, who was employed as a lord boss at the camp. He had been surprised by the S.S. in the act of giving men under his charge more bread than the one slice daily what they were supposed to receive. When the other German personnel in charge of the camp fled in terror, he stayed behind. He seemed to be getting on famously with what few of his ex-charges remained alive. He had been employed in German concentration camps, he said, for 11 years and regarded Stalag Nord Ohrdruf as one of the less severe. He estimated the number of men buried in the common pit at 9,000. Shortly after the arrival of the armour and infantry, the Burgermeister of Ohrdruf and his wife were forced to visit the place. They disclaimed any definite knowledge of what had happened there, and committed suicide that night."

After the war ended, the servicemen who had the most points for being in many battles were the first to be sent home. While I was waiting for my turn to leave, I was assigned to oversee three Displaced Persons Camps. I had to see that the inhabitants had proper living quarters, medical attention and proper food. This was the most rewarding experience I had from all of my army services. Thank you.