

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

FREDERICK A. WALTERS

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Philip G. Solomon

Date: February 1, 1988

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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*SELF-TAPED MEMOIR*¹

FW - Frederick A. Walters [interviewee]

PS - Philip G. Solomon [Archive
representative]

Date: February 1, 1988

Tape one, side one:

FW: I'm Frederick A. Walters, and I live in Plainfield, New Jersey, United States. And in the Second World War in Europe, I served in Africa, in Italy, in France, and just before the end of the war, I served in Germany.

And I knew of the existence of the different concentration camps from notices in the *Stars and Stripes* and listening to the Armed Forces Radio Network. There were many reports. But we didn't attach much importance to it, never realizing that one day we would come upon one of these camps. And hearing about the mass murder of Jews in Europe, it was very hard to comprehend that it was really or actually going on at that time.

And as far as the camp that we liberated, and its location, it was the camp called Buchenwald. And it was just above the town of Weimar. And it was some time in April, I'm not sure of the date.

And the moment that I walked in, it was very difficult to hold back the tears because of what I saw: stacks of bodies lying off to the left and to the right, and people coming up to me in their concentration garb saying, "*Shalom*," or "Welcome," or whatever language they used. And as far as my feelings, all I know is that I had tears in my eyes because all the things that I had heard on the radio and from the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper became all too real, because I was right in the middle.

And I don't really know how many prisoners there were, but I would say there were at least 150 that were able to walk. I'm just guessing at that number. But I know that one man with mangled fingers that looked, appeared to be broken, and he almost had no teeth. And I was told that he was a former professor at a university in Hungary, a Jewish man. And his English was rather broken, but he did say to me, "When you go back to your country, please tell them what you have seen. Never forget what your eyes have seen. Let them know what went on in Germany. Let them know how we were treated, and what they have done to extinguish our hopes and dreams of the future."

And as far as responsibilities go, we were not involved in transferring or caring of the prisoners, but I didn't notice when I arrived in the camp if there were any Germans or other guards still left at the camp when we came. So all I know is when we did walk in, we gave out whatever food we had--C rations, chocolate bars, cans of food that I had gotten from home a few days ago--because many of the prisoners were of course, looked like they were starving. And there were trucks being brought in with food and medical supplies. And one thing I do remember at the moment that I was there, I didn't realize that there was a

¹Based on question provided by the Gratz College Holocaust Oral History Archive.

man giving out money to the prisoners--I don't know what good that would do to them at that moment--but he was handing out money to them and he also had a look of sorrow. And it turned out that after reading the history of Edward R. Morrow, and his time in Europe during the Second World War, he was also at Buchenwald on that same day. And just about, oh, a year ago I read the life story of Edward R. Morrow, and that was one of the places that he had been at on liberation day. So, if that's of any interest to anyone.

Now, the experience of seeing the prisoners have any effect on your feeling about being part of the war and fighting Germany. I had had that feeling some time ago, being of Jewish birth, that the cause was just. The war was just. If you can call killing people and the bombings and the, especially the atom bomb that was used to finish the war in Japan. But, you had a feeling of unbelievable triumph, if you can call it that, amidst these ragged and starving people in Buchenwald. But at least you had a feeling of--this was just, what we were doing, liberating this country from the scourge of Nazism.

I don't exactly remember the reactions of other men in my unit, because there were only a few other Jewish people in our unit, Jewish soldiers. And talking with them afterwards, they were just amazed. They had refused to believe the reports that were published and also broadcast. But now they could see it with their own eyes. And we remained in the camp for about four or five hours, and we went down into the town of Weimar, which was down in the valley. And one thing I will never forget, the town of Weimar, when we got off our two-and-a-half ton trucks that transported us, and we stopped in to have some refreshments at this, I guess you can call it a café, that the people there all said they had no idea what was going on up on the hill. It was a little difficult to believe. And there wasn't a person in that café who didn't plead innocence as to what was going on in Buchenwald. It's a little hard to believe.

And, I don't think after we left the camp that there was any official or unofficial meeting of our unit to discuss what we had experienced at the camp. And I know for sure that there was no regimental history that included this experience.

And I don't remember, in fact I'm sure, that I've had no contact with any of the prisoners that we helped to liberate, but that would have been rather difficult to keep up a correspondence with people that had been inmates at that, at Buchenwald. Because I know that the thought and the sight before my eyes will never go away, as long as I live. I don't think I'll ever forget it, because of man's inhumanity to man. And I immediately wrote a long letter to my parents telling them what I have seen. And no matter how I described it I'm sure I did not elaborate too well, because it was very hard for me to put it down in writing. But it's an experience that will stay with me, as I said, forever.

And, the only thing that I have to add is that when the war ended, I think that was May the 8th of 1945, we were given--if you can call it that [chuckles], we were all anxious to go home--but, we gathered in a camp called Twenty Grand in Northern France and we were shipped to Norway, to take care of the German Army that had surrendered in the country of Norway. Our job was to delouse the Germans more or less, and ship them back

to their Zones of Occupation--whether Russian, British, French, or the U.S. Zone. And I remember speaking to a few of the German soldiers who, because of my Jewish birth, and my knowledge of Yiddish, I was able to pick up a few words of German and understand what they were talking about. And I had asked many of them about their knowledge of the concentration camps and what the Germans, the Nazis had done to the Jewish people. And some denied it and said, "It's all lies. It's all propaganda. It's not true." But I said to them I had seen it with my own eyes. Well, that was very difficult for them to accept. They had no argument for that. And, but I would say more than half of these soldiers, the German soldiers in Norway that I had personal contact with, completely denied any knowledge of the so-called concentration camps as they called it, in Germany. And it was very hard for me to accept. And as many words as I could get through to them, you know, in my Yiddish, trying to make them understand what I was saying, I'm sorry I didn't have any pictures with me. But none of us had any cameras at that moment, you know, the moment of Buchenwald, so that I could have taken pictures to show them the actual, the truth, of what had gone on in their own country.

And when I came home, in November of 1945, the thing that really bothered me, and of course many years later after I had come home, is the declarations of many people throughout our United States who have claimed that the concentration camps was a myth, that the gassing and killing of the Jews was propaganda on the part of the Jewish people to help set up the country of Israel. And this still bothers me today, that these people are still expounding their theories about the false propaganda that has been put out by so-called people that are interested in maintaining the country of Israel. And that it's all propaganda, to help the Jewish people.

And I don't know what else to add. I hope I have been some help in this testimony, and I feel very privileged to have the chance--it's my first opportunity to really speak out to a, to a tape recorder--and give you my feelings on something that happened forty-three years ago. Of course it all seems like a dream, but it all comes back to me. And as I said, it'll never leave me.

This is Fred Walters, in Plainfield, New Jersey, hoping that I can be of some help in making this presentation a help in the, whatever you, whatever this organization is trying to bring about. And thank you very much.

PS: ...tape of Mr. Walters testimony [Release Form dated February 1, 1988] was submitted by Phil Solomon on February 8th, 1988. At the time of the liberation of Buchenwald, Mr. Walters was serving with the 474th Infantry Regiment.