

**Film Commemorating
Wöbbelin Concentration Camp Survivors
liberated by the
82nd Airborne Division
May 1945**

**Gift to the
82nd Airborne Division**

from the grateful

Wöbbelin Concentration Camp Survivors

The film you are about to see shows only a small portion from the lives of prisoners of the Wöbbelin Concentration Camp who died there and the few that survived.

The loosely paraphrased translation with *supplemented comments* is by Leonard LINTON. I was a paratrooper, sergeant serving at the time of the liberation in the 82nd ABN Hq. G-5, Military Government, and am acting as spokesman for the survivors liberated by the 82nd Airborne.

While watching this film imagine how many more horrors could not be recorded but did take place.

Commentary Script

The Wöbbelin concentration Camp, located near Ludwigslust, Mecklenburg in North Germany was built in 1945 for American prisoners. Americans came, not as prisoners but as liberators.

This Camp was known as: "The Horrible Wöbbelin Camp". David ROUSSET's description was titled: "Days of Our Death". It was an assembly camp in front of the Allied advance. The inmates were primarily work details from the larger Neuengamme Camp.

You will see a sculpture by the French artist Françoise SALMON an Auschwitz survivor. It shows what became of the captives.

This film is a gift from the survivors of the French Resistance and Belgian political prisoners of Wöbbelin. A photo shows the largest group of French survivors from Fallersleben in 1970. A 2nd photo shows the Franco-Belgian group which produced this film in 1985.

At the inauguration of this film at the Schandelah camp site at Wöbbelin, survivors assembled: from Parta, Misburg, Kaltenkirchen, Beldorf, Helmstedt, Langerich, an important group of Jews and a few women from the Wöbbelin Camp.

From 1933 to 1945 Germany became an immense concentration camp where opponents of Nazism, communists, Jews and Resistants of occupied countries were imprisoned. Former French and Belgian internees in their own countries were shipped in cattle cars under inhuman conditions during which many died.
Destination: Neuengamme.

In April 1945, after assignment to different details some prisoners were sent to the Wöbbelin assembly Camp. Maps show its geographic location and roads. Work details were evacuated from the central Neuengamme Camp to Wöbbelin. A stone is a marker of the former Wöbbelin entrance. A presently empty church overlooks the large lawn where the remains of survivor's comrades still rest to-day. A wreath is laid at the monument by Wöbbelin veterans.

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Early in the sixties, two common grave pits, of which only a portion was relocated were discovered at this site near the camp. Near the museum there are innumerable wreaths laid down by local children. SYDNEY & THOMAS are the cameramen who made these pictures.

First contacts during the liberation days between American and German officers regarding technical details. During the first days of May 1945 the German Army is directed to assembly areas to give up their equipment.

All of these tanks are still armed and in fighting condition.

DDT dusting of numerous American newsmen.

Germans in their turn learned defeat this day.

This grandfather and this child think no doubt about their dream's end: the end of the 1,000 year Reich.

The 21st German Field Army that surrendered to the 82nd ABN was about 150/200,000 men strong.

German Army Chaplains who took refuge in a Benedictine Monastery, came out proudly wearing their uniforms and crosses on their armbands, they were incredulous and ironic when told by their American counterparts of the horrible discovery of the graves, and of the miserable bodies; but were these men really unaware of this all?

General PATTON, among his generals, overseeing a pontoon bridge construction.

The Red Army meets the American Army with music. Weapons exchange among Americans and Red Army men; it was the time of fraternization.

Incomplete brick buildings, mostly without doors. Here is the Wöbbelin concentration Camp. In this building without water, used for washing, about 10 corpses of friends and comrades of survivors who were too weak to bring them to their graves are piled up.

I remember this corpse of a man who died while the first troopers arrived. This methodical German time table and notice belies the uselessness of the infirmary where it was posted.

Many inmates, although free, were too disoriented to leave their death camp. Some lost the will to live and looked through you with sad, big, beady eyes. Many were dying, freedom came too late for too many of them.

A water pump furnishing water of dubious cleanliness.

May 2nd in the afternoon, a French officer stands on a jeep and announces: "You are all free and will be repatriated". At the request of this French officer the French sing the Marseillaise, the Belgians and prisoners from the Eastern countries sing their respective national Hymns.

This one shows his emaciated body. These were the bare bunks where they slept and where many died. When I see these pictures I can smell again the unforgettable, nauseating sweetish stench of dead human flesh and rotting dirt. Although we were all troopers hardened by the war, it was a nerve shaking experience.

G-5 organized rapidly compulsory visits to the infirmary for German civilians from neighboring areas. They saw there many corpses but few ill survivors.

All Germans were grim faced, but many looked indifferent to me and were resentfully sullen when I forced them to look at what their Nazi Fatherland did to their neighbors.

Evacuation of the severely sick who will perhaps survive a few more hours continues without help, without litters, without sheets or covers, without modesty only with the help of comrades, companions in their misery who are barely better off than they. The French Doctor DÉFIEU and Belgian Doctor Hubert CLAUDE who can be recognized in these pictures are busy to evacuate these lifeless men.

Former baker from Antibes (*French Riviera*), Alain DESAIS recognizable here, carries an exhausted Spanish comrade.

A pity filled gesture from an American (*trooper*) for a man.

German civilians ordered to open common graves to transfer the cadavers for reburial in individual graves.

The reburial site chosen by the 82nd ABN was in front of the pretty castle of the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg which became Major General GAVIN's Hq. The entire civilian population of the small town of Ludwigstust was ordered to participate in this reburial. I was very busy seeking out German duty shirkers from hiding places under beds, in basements, attics and other incredible places and bringing them to this unpleasant task. They all deserved it for cheering the mad dog HITLER into power and never revolting against the uncivilized outrages perpetrated by Nazi Germany everywhere they penetrated with brute force.

Major SEWARD Commanding Officer of G-5 with back to camera; now in center facing camera.

Note the expressions of deep agony on the deceased attesting the brutality of their deaths.

Every available German means of transport was commandeered to transport the exhumed bodies to their decent reburial grounds.

Led by tall general von TIPPELSKIRCH, commanding general of the 21st German Army, his staff is marched to witness the reburial. Most troopers had no respect for the Wehrmacht for being an actively willing participant in uncivilized barbarism, hence no saluting or other observance of military protocol toward them can be noticed.

The painters were lucky; they all painted simply the many crosses.

In Wöbbelin there were relatively few Jews among the many nameless victims.

This reburial was a big, big job.

All German civilians were ordered to walk past the open graves so that they shall never forget the Nazi crimes.

Unfortunately it was not possible for us to march the entire German population from all of Germany past the evidence of their national misdeeds.

Still refusing the terrible truth, the shame, German officers walk indifferently with faces fixed forward, refusing to look.

The ceremony starts under the auspices of the 82nd ABN's Major General GAVIN. The Division Chaplain, Major WOODS delivers a moving burial address.

The survivor's voice says: "Our Liberators, General GAVIN, the youngest General in the US Army, assisted by his Chief of Staff, Colonel WINNICKE"

At Cpl. PETERS' microphone, the newly appointed mayor talks. He replaced the predecessor who committed suicide with his wife and daughter.

Cpl. PETERS made many of the reburial arrangements. He was in G-5, a comrade of mine. We ordered the graves to be 6 feet deep, the same as for our own dead.

The survivor's voice says: "Had HITLER's troops won the war obviously we would not have been able to show you these images, you would have followed us to your doom. Let us never forget, that is our Motto. It is inscribed at the Deportee's Memorial at the Isle de la Cité in Paris. Yes, let us never forget."

Explanatory Notice

After the Battle of the Bulge a Military Government Section was added into the 82nd ABN Hq. designated as: G-5. G-5 was under command of Maj. SEWARD. Each of the Regiments also received a Military Government Section in its Regimental Hq. designated as: S-5. The total MG strength in the 82nd ABN was about 15 officers and men; its prime function was to govern the German territory taken and held by the 82nd ABN. Solving of problems related to the unexpected liberation of the Wöbbelin concentration camp was G-5's responsibility.

Every trooper in the 82nd ABN helped to make the survival of many detainees possible. Unfortunately many died after the liberation because their condition was medically too far gone to make it possible for them to survive; a few died because none of the troopers had the "know-how" to handle so many people on the threshold between life and death due to hunger, exposure and the innumerable cruelties inflicted by their German captors. A few died because some troopers gave, with good intentions, a chocolate bar or some condensed milk to survivors too weak to absorb such food. To this day my similar mistake still haunts me.

How to Show the Video Film

THE FILM HAVING BEEN PRODUCED IN FRANCE WAS RECORDED IN THE FRENCH PAL VIDEO SYSTEM WHICH IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE VHS SYSTEM USED PREDOMINANTLY IN THE UNITED STATES. THE FILM WAS CONVERTED FROM PAL TO VHS INCLUDING ITS SOUND TRACK.

THAT SOUND TRACK INCLUDES COMMENTARIES IN FRENCH AND BACKGROUND MUSIC WITH THE US NATIONAL ANTHEM AND TAPS DURING THE BURIAL CEREMONY. A TRANSLATION OF THE COMMENTARY INTO ENGLISH WAS RECORDED ON A STANDARD AUDIO CASSETTE TO WHICH LINTON ADDED HIS OWN COMMENTS DERIVED FROM DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN THE EVENTS DEPICTED. THESE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ARE *shown in italic* ON THE PRECEDING COMMENTARY SCRIPT.

THE TRANSLATED COMMENTARIES ARE SYNCHRONIZED WITH THE VIDEO FILM. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT:

1. FIRST THE AUDIO CASSETTE IS TO BE STARTED. DURING THE INITIAL 3 MINUTE & 40 SEC. RUN THE INTRODUCTION AND THE COMMENTARY IN ENGLISH WITH THE SOUND VOLUME ADEQUATE FOR THE SITE. THIS WILL BRING THE AUDIO COUNTER TO 40.
2. AWAIT THE CUE: "NOW LOOK" 3 MIN 40 SEC AFTER STARTING THE AUDIO PORTION. IMMEDIATELY WHEN HEARING IT START ALSO THE VIDEO FILM. DURING ITS SOUNDLESS BEGINNING THE ENGLISH AUDIO WILL CONTINUE FOR ABOUT 1/3 MINUTE. KEEP BOTH RUNNING SIMULTANEOUSLY AT ABOUT THE SAME VOLUME LEVEL. MOST OF THE ENGLISH COMMENTS SHOULD BE HEARD DURING LULLS IN THE FRENCH COMMENTARY.

APPROX. TOTAL AUDIO TIME: 40 MIN, AUDIO TAPE COUNT TO END: 550. VIDEO TIME: 37 MIN. 41 SEC.

THIS SHOULD PERMIT AN ENGLISH SPEAKING AUDIENCE TO HEAR THE ENGLISH COMMENTARY AS WELL AS THE BACKGROUND MUSIC FROM THE VIDEO RECORDING WITH ITS ORIGINAL FRENCH TEXT.