

Andrew Kiniry
Oral History Transcript

Andrew Kiniry: We went into Buchenwald, but we went to Nohra. When we went to Nohra, then we took a day trip into Buchenwald.

Historian: Tell me about your reaction when you first entered.

Andrew Kiniry: It was just unbelievable to see. You couldn't—there was so much of it, you couldn't grasp at all. We just see these people standing, you see the bodies. You see the ashes. You see the ditches. It's just—I can't really describe it to tell you, you know, how horrendous it was to see these people treated like animals. You might see even worse than that, even worse than that.

And to see that, I mean, and the people in Weimar, which I think was about nine miles from there, said they didn't know anything about this. The stench, and the wind had to take that stench that far. You know, it was just—they couldn't, you can't believe it.

And [US Army General George S.] Patton, I think it was Patton, I think that came under the Third Army, because we had, I think we had moved into the Third Army then—Patton brought I don't know how many people out of Weimar, marched them down there to show them what went on. They said they didn't know anything about it.

It's hard. It's hard to believe. It's just hard to believe. And I say, we went in there when it was a hospital unit. We took German people and finished cleaning up what hadn't been cleaned up, and it was still a lot to be cleaned—believe me, a lot. We took German people. We supervised the cleaning up of that area. Our sanitation department supervised the cleaning up of that, the grounds of that camp.

But it's just something I can't really describe what you saw when you went in there.

Historian: Did you help supervise the digging of graves?

Andrew Kiniry: There were graves near the trenches with bodies in them, you know, it's—how do you do this? How do you live with yourself and do this? To me, the severest punch of punishment going is not severe enough for the people that did this. Of course, people say, well, and I agree with them, they were doing it under orders, but I don't know. I don't know whether I could do it, or if I'd be the one to let them shoot me or whatever. I don't know.

It's something that would have to be dealt with at a time, you know what I'm saying? But some of those people, and reading the book, some of those officers had no compassion for any life at all. But the graves, the pile of ashes, the pile of bones, the people, the carts with the bodies on them, you know, it's just unreal that somebody could do that. That's the best I can describe it, what we saw that day.

And we were in there as a unit and we did our job. You know, I said we got a citation for it. And I mean, they talked about the, you know, the way we would, people who were brought in, they were brought in on a stretcher to the ward and we transferred them, and we transferred them with care.

You know, these people were hurting. I mean, they were skin and bones. I mean, you couldn't, I don't know how else to describe it, you know? They were fragile.

Historian: What did you hear about the camp? When you first went in?

Andrew Kiniry: I don't know. I couldn't bet on this, but I don't think they told us what we were getting into when they put us on the trucks that day we went in for the day or what part of the day or whatever it was. I don't think they told us what we were getting into.

Historian: There were a lot of units already there before you arrived.

Andrew Kiniry: There had been units. Yeah, in fact, I knew a gentleman that was one of the first, his outfit was one of the first ones in there. It was an armored division, I believe. I don't know that for sure now, but yeah, he was one of the first ones in there. But yeah, they had, there were all kind of units.

Now, we were not the first evac hospital in there. There was another one there before us, but I think they took care of—because I said the females were gone when we got there—they took care of them. But it was, you know, it was a big job no matter what, who went in there first or what.

You're talking, I don't know, what, 25, 30, 40,000 people, you know, that took a lot of, a lot of care.

Historian: And what were you treating? Tuberculosis?

Andrew Kiniry: Tuberculosis was what we were looking for. You know, what we were screening them for, I guess, is a better description of what went on. We were screening them for that. X-rays, the lab work, all this kind of stuff. And as I say, I think the severe cases, if I remember, were sent, I think they were sent to a TB hospital.

Historian: Did you see a few of them die while they were being treated?

Andrew Kiniry: I can't remember, but I'm sure there were. I wouldn't bet, you know, I could almost bet on it and I only bet on sure things. But yes, I'm sure that while they were in our care, they were in our hospital in a bed, yes, I'm sure there were [deaths].

Historian: How long were you there for?

Andrew Kiniry: Two weeks.

Buchenwald, 28th of April, '45, to the 11th of May of '45. So roughly two weeks we were there. And I'll say, we were there the day the war ended in Germany, but we still had work to do. It didn't stop us. You know, we still had patients to care for.

Historian: Anything else comes to mind about those two weeks you were there?

Andrew Kiniry: No, not that I can think of offhand. ... The patients came in and we took care of them and, you know, I can't tell you how many, how long they stayed. Maybe some of them stayed for a couple of days. Or maybe some of them stayed, you know, I can't remember how long it took for the tests to be done.

The X-rays, you know. Well, even back then, the X-rays, today you can get them, you know, and lab work—I'm not sure how long it took for the lab technicians to give an answer on whatever specimens they were checking. And I never got involved in that part of it.

You know, the doctors would get that information. And if I look at a chart, to tell you this to this day, I couldn't tell you what I read on the chart.

Historian: Tell me about the showers.

Andrew Kiniry: I wasn't involved in that. But one of the gentlemen, the only one that I know is living today, he was telling—because he was in charge of that—they set up the tents with the shower units in them. And I don't know how many showers were in there, I had no idea. But once they got in, and they had their portable generators for heating the water and so forth, but the problem they had originally was getting the patients to go in there and take a shower because they were afraid of the—they were going to be gassed because they had been through, I guess, this kind of stuff, they knew what was going on. I mean, they hadn't been through it, but they knew what had been going on.

But finally, somebody got up the nerve to go in there, and then after that, they followed. But they had to be, you know, because they were ... I don't blame, believe me, there were, you know, lice, they were filthy. I mean, 'cause I don't think they had probably had a shower or bath in how many years, I don't know.

But they had to be, and their clothes were just, their clothes were taken off them and just disposed of. They were I don't know whether, I have a feeling, I could be wrong, but I think their clothes were burned. I don't remember for sure, and again I was up in a hospital unit, they're outside there, you know.

Now, see, I think the gentleman that was in charge, that if the hospital had been in full operation, he would've been in something, either, I think it was in pre-op where they get them ready for the operation. So we didn't need that there. Or if they did they didn't need all the personnel, maybe had one person there, you know what I'm saying?

But he had charge of that and, but he said he had trouble getting them to start [showering]. But once they got started and they did it, you know, but—and I got to say, I don't blame them, they were filthy. You can't live that many years, and with lice and everything else.

Historian: Were you able to speak to some of the prisoners? A lot of them spoke Yiddish but were you able to speak to any of them?

Andrew Kiniry: I can't remember, but basically, you might say [we used] sign language, you know what I'm saying? Because I, you know, I have trouble with English. But, you know, what I said, like with the food, they eat their food, then they bring you back half. And they point to their stomach and they shake their head. They couldn't take that much of it.

And so even though they, you start out, what I read and so forth, I can't remember. Well, that happened before we went in, they were giving them soup, you know, things that were heavy, but their stomachs were shriveled so bad that they just couldn't take that much food.

And, you know, in all my life, I have never encountered anyone that was in that, in Buchenwald.