
Young Charlotte Doctor Among the First to See Horrors of Buchenwald Camp

First Lieutenant John Ogden Lafferty writes eye-witness report of unbelievable atrocities!

Truth or propaganda? That is the world, or at least some of the world is asking about reported German prison camp atrocities. Especially of the widely publicized Buchenwald camp. Well, Charlotteans are now given a chance to decide. For a Charlotte doctor was a member of the first medical unit to enter the camp after its liberation. He is First Lieutenant John Ogden Lafferty, son of Doctor and Mrs. R.H. Lafferty of 1960 Crescent Avenue. When he entered the service in July 1944, he had just completed his internship at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was a resident in radiology. He went overseas in December 1944, with the 120th Evacuation Hospital unit, U. S. Medical Corps, with General Patton's Third Army. Lieutenant Lafferty saw the Buchenwald Concentration Camp at its worst. His first-hand investigation of German atrocities leaves him with disgust for the whole German race, as he implies in a letter just received from him by members of his family.

Here is what he wrote:

April 27, 1945

Germany

Dear folks,

I am going to do something that I have never done before and that is to make three copies of this letter and send one to Mother and Daddy, one to Peggy (his wife), and one to Robert and Lil. This is because I am going to tell all about our experiences at Buchenwald concentration camp, and as it would be the same thing to everyone it would save hours of writing. I won't do this very often, though.

We were sent there to establish medical service in the camp, which at the time was estimated to have 21,000 prisoners, of which about 10 percent were supposed to be sick. When we arrived about three days after its liberation, the prisoners were spread for miles around the countryside, but they were trying to round them up to count them, and make arrangements for sending them home as soon as possible.

The first thing we did was to make a tour of the camp and get a general idea of the layout. We were the first medical unit to arrive, and things were fairly well confused. The camp was unbelievable! Their standard of sleeping space on these shelves they had was 12 men in six square meters, and that gave them only room enough to lie on their sides. These shelves they slept on were four deep, and sometimes when a prisoner got too sick they couldn't get down. And of course, there were no bedpans, so you can imagine the filth. In addition to that, many of the men did not use what sanitary facilities were offered, so that added to the filth. They would have as many as 1200 to 1500 men in a small barracks no larger than an American Army barracks used for 65.

At the time the Americans arrived they were having about 150 deaths a day, and the bodies were just being stacked outside the crematory. When we got there they were stacked like cordwood. Must have been a couple hundred. In former times, the SS troops had a certain quota of the number that had to die every day, and if the patients did not cooperate by making that quota, the sicker ones were helped along with an injection of formalin. They would also get a hundred or so in the basement of the crematory and hang them on 50

books they had around the wall. There is no need to tell how the last ones must have felt when they saw the first ones. We saw partially burned bodies in the crematory where they had run out of coal before that had finished burning.

It was reported to us, though never verified, that the day before the American troops arrived, they took 250 paratroopers out and shot them. These were prisoners of war (American) and the day after they arrived after the SS had gone orders were telephoned in from Headquarters somewhere to line them up and machine-gun them. And from the other things we saw both of these were perfectly plausible.

There were children in the camp who had been there for years, some since the age of two, which was the earliest they took them. We saw one kid 8 years old who hadn't been out of camp since he was four. There were about 500 children in all.

The commandant's wife had a weakness for tattooed skin, and whenever a prisoner came in with a nice tattoo he was killed, skinned, and the skin was tanned and mounted as a plaque. There was one lampshade in the HQ building covered with skin. The guards had also learned the art of shrinking heads to about one-fourth normal size as is done by certain South American Indian tribes, and we saw several to which this procedure had been applied. They had a beautiful medical research lab for typhus research, and humans were used as guinea pigs.

As a form of punishment the guards used to tie the prisoners' hands behind their backs, and hang them up with a pole through their arms.

The medical service of the camp was taken care of by doctors who were prisoners. They had several buildings used as hospitals but not nearly enough. The surgical section was fairly well organized and they had a right good communicable disease place. But outside of that they had very little and almost no supplies. We furnished supplies and advice.

Our first problem was to get the sick men out of the compound up into the SS barracks on the hill. This was accomplished by separating the men by nationality and putting a doctor of that nationality in charge. The main problem was diarrhea, probably nutritional. So we tried to get them some food and IV fluids, and most of them straightened out fairly rapidly. Malnutrition was severe. There were about 2500 cases of typhus, 250 of them in one building, all of which had positive sputum, and it was estimated that 2000 more were around camp; pneumonia, scarlet fever, and every disease imaginable. There were leg ulcers, bed sores, and wounds that were not healing. We never set up X-ray or lab as we thought the main problem was to feed the people and clean them up, and we were relieved before that was accomplished. (All Americans and British had been removed before we got there, and they were working on the French.) Most were Poles, Russians, and Czechs, and a lot of German Jews. We finally got about 1800 moved out, which were the worst ones. The other prisoners did most of the dirty work. We de-loused them as they came in the new buildings, as most of them were lousy. Probably the average weight was not over 80 pounds.

And in the midst of all this, the Commandant and his permanent staff had beautiful houses just over the top of the hill. Most of them were of rather cheap construction and would have made nice summer cottages, but they overlooked a beautiful spruce forest quite similar to the one on top of Mount Mitchell. It was a lovely spot, and the view of the surrounding countryside was magnificent, as it was on top of a hill, higher than anything for miles around.

“I forget to tell you about the house of prostitution there for the prisoners. They had about 15 girls (who were still there when we arrived) and a man had to be in the camp for six months before he was eligible to go there. And the prisoners had an underground organization which forbade them to go, so as a consequence the girls had only three or four customers each a night.

“Many of the prisoners could speak English, and I found that I could understand a little French, and we had Poles and Germans in the outfit who acted as interpreters, so we could find out about these things that had happened. John Morton and I spent one morning talking to a doctor who spoke very good English, about the post-war problems of Germany. He was Jewish, and a communist, and we learned from his conversation the root of all the European trouble, and the cause of the next war. In spite of five years in that place, his definition of co-operation of political parties against a common enemy is still “You do what I say”. But it was a very interesting conversation and brought out some of the problems we will have to face in the reconstruction of the German nation. Apparently these men who have been in the underground have a complete list of all members of the Nazi party as well as those who have cooperated with the Nazi’s, and it is their feeling that they should be given the works.

“The prisoners make a distinction between the Wehrmacht and the SS troops, as some of both were captured while we were there, including the SS hangman for the camp. The Wehrmacht wasn’t molested very much, but the SS hangman hanged himself after he had been worked over a little, as did two of the other SS men. We saw them before as well as after, as well as the hangman being worked on. He was an ape-like man, who looked suitable for the job. The working on was brutal, I couldn’t watch it, but I would be the last one to stop it.

“The German civilians from Weimar were being taken through the camp in groups of 100, but from the looks of them it made no impression. Some women were crying and others looked a little pale, but as they left they looked completely unmoved. And you can’t tell me that something like that was can go on within five miles of a city of 50,000 without their knowing something about it. They are all guilty and they must be punished for these things. You can believe anything that is said about these people as they are a brutal as well as uncivilized race. I hope pictures of this gets spread brough all of America, for those who advocate a soft peace. This is not rumor, it is the truth. I have seen it with my own eyes, and have gotten the same story from about 50 people. The people of Americas should be made to realize what they are dealing ith and act accordingly. It is not just the Nazis--- they are all guilty and must be punished.

“I will write individual letters later, but this tells most of what I saw. There are other stories I saw. I wait until I see you.

Love

Jack