

This is a collection of mounted photographs and text documents covering a period from April 14, 1945 to August 1945.

This collection involves the service exchange program whereby Air Force personnel visited the 238 Combat Engineer Battalion at Nordhausen, Germany, and assisted in cleaning up a German Concentration Camp. A letter written by one of those engineers about his experiences and three pages of photographs are included.

The final section contains photographs of a display for the French population at the Eiffel Tower in Paris and photographs with captions of the 599th Squadron, 397th Bomb Group base after the group had returned from Y-55 to A-72.



DIXON DEEMER 599th-397th
Feb. 2000

Remember April 1945 when we had some infantry flying missions with us? They were told five missions would qualify for an Air Medal. I don't remember any that went the distance. of my seven April missions, five were milk runs but those two with an infantry passenger were definitely not!

In the same program, Jack Balfourd the tail gunner I trained with at Lake Chares with some others in the 599th drove to the front. Enclosed are some photos taken from a home in Cologne. I still have a dress bayonet and other loot he gave me. With the 238 Engineer Combat Battalion they came to Nordhausen. Note the memories of Ernest James and William Rule. Jacks description (his photos) of what he saw was an unforgettable education.

FROM A LETTER DATED DECEMBER 1988, WRITTEN BY WILLIAM RULE.
1ST LT., 238 ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION TO ERNEST C. JAMES:

One day, between April 14 and April 17, some of the troops went ahead to Nordhausen and found a concentration camp where **workers at the Messerschmidt and V-2** factory were housed. I first went into the Railroad yards. All through the area down wind from the town, there was a terrible stench. Residents of Nordhausen were breaking open the doors of railroad cars to get whatever was inside, primarily food. There was one train sitting along a siding which they

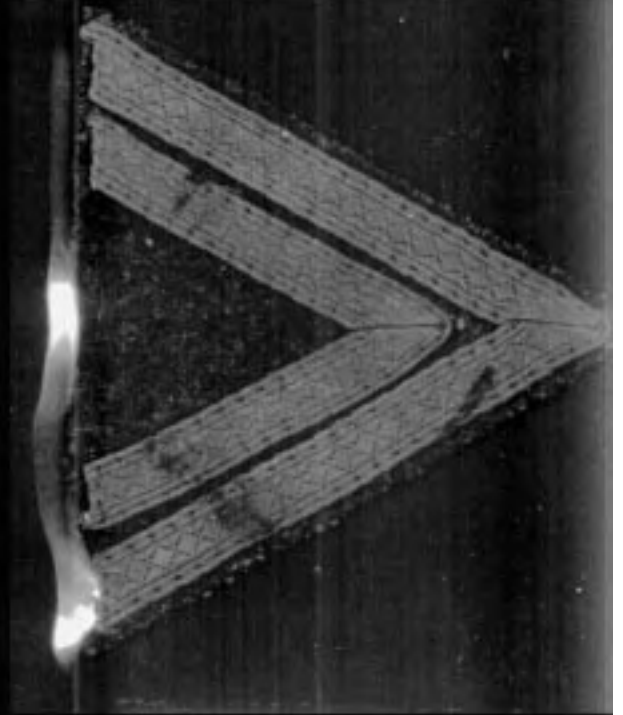
were ignoring. We went over there, and observed fluid dripping out. On opening one of the doors, we found the car full of dead bodies.

In the concentration camp, we found hundreds of dead and dying people. Most of them had been starved. Troops were sent into the town. The Burgermeister was routed out and all able bodied men, mostly older men, were ordered, with guns 9,,z,.s in their backs, to help bury the dead. Trenches were dug with bull dozers and cleaned by hand. The civilians were ordered to take individual bodies, pick them up on litters, and carry them to the mass graves. The smell was overpowering and it was dirty work to pick up decaying bodies, but the civilians were forced to continue. I did not remain to-see the whole operation but assume that the dozers filled the trench after all the dead were buried. I also do not know what happened to those left alive.

From all the civilians came the same answer: "We didn't know it was happening." I assume many of the civilians supervised these very persons!

You asked for my remembrance of Nordhausen. Frankly, I don't remember much except for the awful odors as you came down into the valley. The piles of bodies that hadn't made it to the incinerator and the telling of gathering up the natives and using doors and boards to transport those bodies up the hill where our dozer had dug a trench for a common grave.

I do remember vividly my little off the record trip we took through the two tunnels cut through the hill nearby where the V1 and V2 rockets had been built. Those "dead laborers" were the ones that had dug the tunnels. The assembly line which progressed through those tunnels was truly amazing. There were several connecting bays between the tunnels that were quite deep and where the rockets could be stood on end for additional assembly work. They were then returned to the laid down position for further work. Above a couple of those galleries were storage areas for tools, micrometers and all manner of gauges. They even machined their own aluminum bolts and fastenings. In the process, toward the end of the assembly line, when all of the tubing, tanks and motors were in place, one side was open and everything was wrapped in a fiberglass like material for insulation. At the ends, a door system behind blast-proofed walls opened to either take in the raw material or at the far end, roll out the completed rocket. It was fascinating, and it had taken a lot of engineering and slave labor to build that wild dream. Werner Von Braun was the brains behind that project. It was from here that he and many of the other rocket scientists contacted the American Army and were brought back to the United States for work on the American rocket programs.



Taken from home in Cologne
by Jack Balfourd April 1945
Spent 1 week with Infantry
while liberating Nordhausen,
Nazi extermination camp.

450 × Burtenbäch

2441

Absender: *Ritzmann
Stübchenhof Spitzingau*



Besondere Vermerke des Absenders (s. Rückseite):



An

Freigebühr (Rf)

Postgewicht (Gg)

*familie
Ritzmann
in Berlin (Bez. Luftw.)
Hauptstr. 158*

Strasse, Postamt (S. 42) (S. 42)

C 20 Die A6



Pictures by Jack Balfourd 397th-599th
at Nordhausen concentration camp
April 1945





In August 1945 the Air Force displayed our planes to the French. I took these pictures on July 30th during the preparation.







Balfour & Gustafson



Donald E. Whitmire Engineer for Pilot Robert M. Miller. I flew about 15 of my missions with them.



Mess Hall at Athies with German KP's.



599th headquarters in Athies (A-72)
after we returned from Venlo (Y-55)



Balfourd & Roberts

