

Eyewitness to Evil

Chassey Confronting the Horror



Sketch image of Ohrdruf Concentration Camp

Ohrdruf Concentration Camp

April, 1945--Chassey was dispatched with two officers and other enlisted personnel to an abandoned airfield in the vicinity of Ohrdruf Concentration Camp, part of the Buchenwald Concentration Camp network. The mission was to repair two aircraft with mechanical problems that had landed at this airfield.

April, 1945--He visited the concentration camp outside of Ohrdruf, since it was decided to approach this camp and evaluate the situation. This camp, liberated on 4 April 1945, was the first Nazi concentration camp liberated by the American army. Chassey arrived shortly after the American infantry.

“This is what I witnessed:

The Camp was enclosed by a large fence with strategically placed gun towers. The buildings were crude one story barrack style of wood construction. On entering one of such buildings there was a single pathway down the center about two yards wide. On either side of this passageway, the length of the building, were bodies stacked like cordwood. Between the layers of these bodies were layers of lime to kill the odor. In this one building there were hundreds of bodies in various stages of decay.

At the end of the center walkway was a gallows. Going out the door at the end of the walkway and a few yards from the building were the ashes of the burial pyre. It was the custom of the German Camp leadership to herd the able bodied into the neighboring wooded area, force them to cut firewood, carry it into the Camp. Those who were ill, or elderly, or disabled, those for whom there was no use, were executed by hanging, or gunfire, cast aside like so much trash. The able bodied were made to stack the dead, layered with firewood, creating a large funeral pyre, about 20ft by 20ft. What I saw was a large pile of ashes.

In the open area adjacent to the gate through which we entered the Camp, civilians from the village of Ohrdruf, on orders from the General in Command of the American troops, were carrying out emaciated bodies, wrapping them in sheets, in preparation for burial.



Those scenes will never leave my mind and soul. I will take them to the grave.”

May, 1945--The three squadrons of the 354th Fighter Group had destroyed over 700 enemy aircraft in the air and on the ground. The 354th Fighter Group received the Presidential Unit Citation two times and the French Government had bestowed the Croix de Guerre on the group two times. Forty-four pilots of the group became aces – destroying five or more enemy aircraft in the air.

October, 1945--Chassey returned to the United States and was reunited with his family.

He went to college on the GI Bill to be a teacher; and eventually moved south and taught history at the high school level in Rock Hill and Greenville, South Carolina.

1958--George Chassey attended The School of Theology at The University of the South at Sewanee, TN. He became a priest 15 years after the war. He continues to practice as an Episcopal Priest.



George Chassey, first row, 4th from left.

“I walked in the presence of evil. It was an experience which I did not realize at the time would change my life. It was a strong contributing factor that led me to the last 50+ years as a Priest of the Episcopal Church. What we remember here this day is from another era, another century. Let us remember evil does not fade away. It lurks in many shadows. There are many forms that can enslave the human soul.

Reverend George Chassey



We of the present must maintain eternal vigilance by speaking up for those who have no voice in the public debates that affect the general welfare and promote the common good; we must stand for those who have no power in the political or financial fabric of the community; we must speak up for justice where injustice prevails; we must raise our voices for tolerance where intolerance is present. It is the responsibility of the religious community to speak to the issues of peace, justice, and righteousness, so that evil cannot find the light of day in our day, place, and time or in the lives of those who follow us in the journey of humanity.”