HANSARD

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STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Thursday, February 24, 2000

Committee Room 1

Prisoner of War Camps

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VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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In Attendance:

Darlene Henry
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WITNESS

William Gibson, Royal Canadian Air Force veteran

House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, FEB. 24, 2000

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

9:00 A.M.

CHAIR
William Langille

THE CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I guess it is time to start. It is 9:12 a.m. and we have our quorum so we will start. I would like to welcome Mr. Bill Gibson, member of the Royal Canadian Air Force who was a prisoner of war in the Second World War in a concentration camp. The camp you were at, Mr. Gibson, was called?

WILLIAM GIBSON: Buchenwald, Beech Forest is actually the interpretation.

THE CHAIR: Before we start with you, Mr. Gibson, I would just like to say to my colleagues that there is a package that was handed out. Did you get a copy, Mary Ann?

DARLENE HENRY: Yes, she did.

THE CHAIR: Oh, you did get a copy? Okay. That is just what we have been doing since September. I will get to that later.

Mr. Gibson, I understand you have a presentation and if you would like to proceed.

WILLIAM GIBSON: My name is Bill Gibson and I am going to talk to you today about concentration camps and prisoner of war camps. In 1944, we took part in the D-Day Invasion and from then on were bombing marshalling yards all around D-Day. They cut out the German's ability to reinforce their troops.

On the night that we were shot down, we had evaded 13 different fighter attacks and the first I heard of what happened was the cannon shells took the bottom off my turret, back here in the tail, and then I heard my pilot - who never smoked, swore or drank in his life - say, Jesus Christ, Red, get out. My parachute is stowed up here. I had to get out of my turret, get

my parachute on and jump out the back door. When I opened the back door, I could see the tail plane and I thought well, if I am going to get hit, I will hit my feet so I dove out in a beautiful swan dive and I pulled my rip chord. Fortunately, it opened; one side was hooked on. I forgot to hook the other side on. So I was spinning around coming down. I had no control, whatever, of my parachute.

About five minutes after I bailed out, I heard somebody hollering and I looked over and it was my pilot. He was about 30 feet away from me and we talked to each other coming down. I landed on the thatched roof of a little cottage and he landed on about three cases of empty champagne bottles in the backyard. Now if you can not make a noise in enemy territory in the middle of the night, that is not the way to do it. We ran all that night and from exhaustion, I guess, we just fell off and fell asleep. At dawn we were awakened by an awful noise and when I opened my eyes, there were two ME 109 aircraft, German fighter planes on dawn patrol. We were at the base or at the end of the main runway at Le Mans Airfield. That was the German airplanes going out on their dawn patrol.

So we continued crawling through the wheat, which was very wet and cold, and eventually found a man who turned out to be a Spaniard. My language training never took me into Spanish at all but in our escape kits, which we all carried on operations in our battle dress pocket, was a card and it contained all the languages in Europe with the English interpretation of it. So this is the way we communicated with this fellow. Eventually he went and brought some food back, so-called. It was in the morning in France and very hot. When he opened this package, it was a piece of greasy, greasy meat. I don't know what it was, but I couldn't eat it.

We continued on until we met a farmer who was hoeing potatoes, and we whistled to him and whistled to him and he completely ignored us. He was going up and down each row, and rather than give himself or us away he continued until about dusk, and then he had the row that we were in. In our escape kits we also had a little card with all these languages and the English equivalent. I could speak a little French and a little German, not much. He came over and asked who we were, and I said, je suis Canadien. Oh Canadian Français. I said no, no, je suis Canadien, just Canadians, not Canadians French, not French Canadians. He couldn't get that in his mind at all, there was no such thing as Canadians, they were all French Canadians.

He took us to his house and he put us in the backyard in a little shed, a horrible place. I remember falling asleep immediately; I was just exhausted. About 3:00 o'clock in the morning he came out and took us in the house. My pilot never smoked or drank in his life. They had some coffee made from roasted acorns. I know it sounds horrible to you people but to us it was very good. The lady kept pouring alcohol in it, it was absinthe, which is something they have in France. Anyway she was pouring it in and my pilot kept saying, more and more and I said, Steve, that is alcohol, you don't drink. He insisted, so anyway they gave him all he wanted. He took one mouthful and they wore the rest of it all night long. That was our beginning.

We stayed with them for one day and then they turned us over to an elderly couple who were looking after a church in the village. We stayed with them, we were eating their chickens and their tame rabbits every day. That was all the food they had and I enjoyed it, but my pilot kept complaining about the food. He was a PIA, really. Anyway, this day the man came and said they were going to take us to Spain, which is logical, take us to Paris first and then we were going to Gibraltar and catch a boat back to England.

Well, he arrived and we got in his car and we went supposedly to Paris, but as we turned the corner I happened to notice that there were swastika flags flying ahead of us. When we got abreast of the entrance to these flags and a courtyard, the van turned in. There were 30 SS troops lined up with machine guns waiting for us. I felt something in my ribs on the left side, looked down and it was a 45 automatic. The guy said to me in perfect English, German police, you are my prisoner. That was it. That is how simple it was to get arrested. We trusted somebody and we trusted the wrong people.

I was put in - as my pilot was - a French prison in Paris. I spent 32 days in solitary confinement. I had two guards, one was an elderly man and the other was a young man who had just gotten back from Russia; he had been wounded. The older man used to treat me like a son, he had been a prisoner of war in England in the first war and he understood what was going on. He always fed me. One afternoon I heard the trolley coming down, because in French prison they had companionways and they had trolley tracks and they used to put a bucket of soup on it, and that was how you got fed once a day.

When it stopped, I got up and looked, went out, my door opened, and there was a new guard, he was from the Russian Front, a youngster. I think he was a youngster, I was only a youngster too, I was 17 then. I looked at the stack of books and there was one in English. I picked it out, and he looked at me and said Engländer? I said yes and he belted me. Every time he was on I got nothing to eat; he wouldn't feed me. When the old fellow was on, he found out about it and he gave me double, so I lived like a king one day and a pauper the next.

Then one night, I forget the dates exactly but it was sometime in 1944, there was an awful racket and I opened my cell door, I was alone upstairs, and they emptied the whole prison, women and all. Incidentally the guillotine was still being used for executions in those days - this is in 1944, they were killing people by guillotine. We were all taken in trucks with little compartments on the side, like telephone booths, two people to a booth. We were taken down to gare est station in Paris and loaded onto a freight car.

Now these boxcars were called 40 and 8's. They were built in World War I to hold 40 men or eight horses. They were stuffing in anywhere from 90 to 110 people per car. We had one bucket of water for the whole train for everything; men, women and children were put in the same cars, didn't matter. That night we pulled out and the French started to sing the

Marseillaise, which is normal, I guess. Anyway, the Germans looked after that, they said if you don't shut up soon we are going to throw grenades in the car. So they sort of shut up then.

We continued on, and the following day I heard rifle shots, machine gun shots, and I got hit across the forehead by a bullet that bounced off the ceiling of the boxcar. The train stopped and they opened the door and they asked who it was, and apparently this French kid, he was 17 years old, had his hand on the barbed wire, the only window that was in the box car, and the only way he could keep his balance was to hold on to that. They shot him through the hand, the bullet hit the roof and hit me. So all they said to him was two words, Engländer or Franzose, English or French? He said French, they said march, so he walked out of the boxcar and jumped. He turned his back and he walked two paces and they opened up the schmiesser and killed him. Then an officer went up and shot two bullets in his head to make sure he was dead. Two shovels were handed out to two of our boys and they had to bury him, but there was no earth, just rocks. From then on we travelled naked for the rest of the journey, which was another five days.

We arrived at Buchenwald concentration camp at about 10:00 o'clock at night. We weren't off the train two minutes when the guy next to me got hit in the face with a rifle butt; we met the SS. I don't know if you are familiar with the German Army but the SS are probably the worst that there are. They have no compassion whatsoever. They will shoot you as quick as look at you and kill you just as quickly. That would be in August 1944, and until November 1944, that was my home, in Buchenwald. One hundred and sixty-eight of us: 26 Canadians; some Australians, New Zealanders, RAF boys; and one person from Jamaica, they called him Cocoa because he was darkly complected. We had appel in Buchenwald twice a day, 6:00 o'clock in the morning, 6:00 o'clock at night. Every person in that camp had to be counted and a tally was made up. If the count was not the same as in the morning, you stood there until it was, whether it took all night, it didn't matter to them.

When we got there we were taken to the crematorium and they had piles of clothing from people they had executed that day. I ended up with a pair of Serbian breeches and a Serbian Army shirt. Those were my clothes, no shoes, and a little hat. You must always remember that this hat is very important because whenever a German guard of the SS walked by, you had to stand to attention and remove your hat. Appel, which happens twice a day, at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and at 6:00 o'clock at night, every prisoner was counted and the order was given, hats off. That is when the commanding officer arrived.

We had bread that was 80 per cent wood content. We had honey made from coal dust. We had two kinds of soup, whispering grass and purple passion. Purple passion was made from purple cabbage leaves and whispering grass was made from grass. That is what we ate and that is what we survived on. You ate the bread; even though it was wood, you ate it anyway. On August 24, 1944, we were all down at the lower part of the camp, and we heard aircraft coming over and the Germans made us lie on our bellies, face down, we were not to look up. One

hundred and twenty-four American Fortresses came up the valley, turned over Buchenwald and dropped their bombs. They were after a radio factory which was on Buchenwald and they got it, but they killed 800 prisoners and 200 guards doing it.

The fellow lying next to me said he was hit. I looked and he had a piece of shrapnel sticking out of his shoulder about an inch and one-half. I managed to get this hand over and grab it and pull it out, but I forgot it was red hot and my fingers got burnt. When we left Buchenwald for a prisoner of war camp, the Germans took that piece away from me. I wasn't allowed to keep it. You tell me why? I don't know.

Anyway, one day we were called to the main square and that usually meant an execution. When we got up there, there was a German Sergeant Major from the Air Force, the Luftwaffe, and in perfect English these are the words he said, according to the Geneva Convention, if you attempt to escape, you will be shot. Well, according to the Geneva Convention, we should not have been there. However, we left by boxcar again and we were sent to Sagan which is the home of Stalag Luft 3, the largest prisoner of war camp for the air force in Germany. That was also the camp of the Great Escape and also Sagan is the resting place of 50 people who were caught after they did escape. They were executed by the Gestapo.

I was there until probably December 1944 when the whole camp was evacuated because the Russian Army was advancing and we had to walk and carry whatever we had to eat down as far as Dresden which was an eight or nine day travel through a blizzard carrying whatever we had with us. We slept in ditches wherever we could. A lot of fellows did not make it. I was put on a train down in Dresden and sent up to Luckenwalde which is about 70 kilometres south of Berlin. It was a mixed prisoner camp: army, navy, air force.

I must regress a bit because the night we bailed out, one of my gunners who sat up here, he had two guns, he and I bailed out together, but nobody saw him again and this is nine months later. I just arrived in the camp and somebody came and they said, is your name Gibson? I said, yes. The guy across the road wants to see you. I was wondering who would know me in this place. So when I got up there, it was one of my gunners sitting on the ground. I said where in the hell have you been?

This is his tale as he told me. He is dead now. He buried his parachute the next morning, which is the proper procedure. He walked along a forest path and he encountered a German convoy, army convoy. He walked the whole length of that convoy and nobody challenged him. He had his air force uniform on, his air gunner's wing, Canada on both arms. Nobody picked him up until the last truck and a German lieutenant happened to be coming out of his truck and looked at him. He saw Canada on his arm, halt. That is when he became a prisoner of war and he went through the normal process, going to Frankfurt which was a sort of a sweating camp. They put you in a room and they will heat it up that you are sweating and then they will freeze you in the hopes of getting information out of you, interrogation. He landed in Stalag 3A in

Luckenwalde about a month before I did and we were there until the Russian Army came along and released us. That would have been in April 1945.

The American lines were 106 kilometres to the west and we left camp one day. We saved our bread ration and we decided we were going to meet the Americans and we did, 106 kilometres away and we walked. We were shot at by German snipers. We were ignored by Russians and American-built tanks with a star on, but we made it. I will tell you this in all fact, at 3:30 a.m., the mess sergeant got his whole crew out of bed, the American Army, and made them give us a hot meal, make clean beds up in a gymnasium and when we were all tucked away and asleep, he released them. That is the truth.

[9:30 a.m.]

We were there for three or four days and there was a Dakota coming from Le Havre, France, daily, taking people back and finally after three or four days I went to the commanding officer and I said we would like to go home too. Well, he said, there are no airplanes. I said, well, it would be nice to have one. So about two or three hours later I got a message from up above that there was a Dakota coming in and we could go back to LeHavre. When the Dakota arrived, the pilot surely to God, was younger than me and I was only 18. He had map read his way from LeHavre to Hildesheim. So going back I mapped the way back for him until he reached the channel and then I started to get scared because to land in LeHavre you had to approach from the channel, but you had to stay above the cliff when you came in and he kept dropping below during his approach. Finally he made it, but I don't know how. I lost 10 years of my life there. The rest I don't know.

In Le Havre the American Red Cross met us and gave us beautiful hot cross buns and doughnuts. Everybody has to eat doughnuts and we couldn't eat anything; one doughnut and we would have been full for a week. So we refused their food which they did not appreciate. We were put on a Liberty ship that night and sent across the Channel because the German subs were still active in the Channel in those days. We ended up in Portsmouth Harbour the next morning. I would say 99 per cent of the people on that boat had been captured at Dunkirk, which was five or seven years before. I never saw so many tears in my life. Where they got them I don't know, but they were throwing apples, oranges and bananas from the shore onto the boat. It was almost worth your life to go outdoors, but anyway we got off and we were sent up to an army barracks and we were given our meal which wasn't very big, but it was a big meal for us, with a cup of coffee and a hot dog and that was it, we were full.

We stayed there for a few days and we kept getting signals from Bournemouth, which was our base, to report to Bournemouth immediately and we kept ignoring it. Finally they got disgusted and said you get here or you will stay here forever. So we went back and I was only back there two days when I took sick. I was put in 23 Canadian General Hospital in Watford, outside of London. I was there for about three weeks. While there we had a British major who

came around daily because in military hospitals over there, boy, you don't get out of bed until they tell you you can get out. The beds are about 12 inches apart. In the bed on one side of me was a little guy by the name of Ross. He had a TB spine and he couldn't move. The fellow on the other side, I forget his name now. He is from Halifax. They brought him in from Holland. His hand was lying on my bed because there is only 10 inches between beds and they removed the field dressing and the whole palm of the hand came with it. He got hit with a grenade blast. It took a piece out of his hand, a piece out of his chin. He couldn't walk.

I was there about a week. The doctor was a colonel in the army and he came along and said, were you in a concentration camp? I said yes. He said, we got a guy downstairs who is not going to make it. I said, well, who is it? He said I don't know. He cannot speak English. He couldn't speak French, nothing. So I went down anyway. He looked like he was dead to me, but he wasn't, he was alive. We talked for maybe two or three hours. I went back upstairs and about three days later the doctor came along and he said, you know the fellow who was downstairs? I said yes. He said, he is going to make it. Maybe because somebody else survived he figured he could too.

Anyway, we eventually, after missing five or six boats because I was in the hospital, we got a signal from Bournemouth to report immediately. When we did, they sent us up to Gourock, Scotland we got a boat, the Ile de France and came home to Pier 21. The irony of that is that when we arrived, they wouldn't let us off the boat. They wouldn't let me go ashore at all. I said my people live here. Sorry, cannot go ashore. Nobody was allowed off the boat. So there was a group captain on the boat and he started to argue with this corporal service policeman and they were fighting back and forth. So while they were fighting I walked the gangway and phoned home. My mother, father and brother came and to this day I don't know why, but my brother brought me a bag of cherries and I hate cherries with a passion, but he brought me a bottle of Scotch too so I forgave him. We had a few drinks. They put me on a train at 3:00 a.m. I got as far as Truro. I just got to sleep in Truro when somebody shook me and I woke up and it was a dear old lady. She said, would you like an apple? No way. I thanked her very much and went back to sleep again. I went to Lachine, I was there one day and I signed my name in one place. They gave me $100 and a warrant back to Halifax.

This will get you because it still bothers me. I went to the liquor store in Lachine to get a bottle of Scotch to come home with. You had to show your ID card in those days. I was 19 years old. Sorry, I cannot sell it to you. I said, why not? He said, you are under age. I said you have got to be kidding. No, he said, I cannot sell it to you. I said that is all right. So I went out and as I was going out the door this girl came out behind me. She said do you want a bottle. I said yes. So I gave her $20 and she bought me a bottle in a brown paper bag. She gave me the change back and the bottle and I got on a train. I got as far as Truro when the big explosion took place in 1945. The train rocked back and forth.

A reporter came by and he said, it's no good going home. He said, the whole North End is gone. I said, oh, my God. So I opened the bottle and it was Geneva gin; perfumed, and gin I can't drink. A service corporal in the army came along and I said, corporal, do you have any bootleggers in Truro? Yes, sir. I said, can you get me a bottle? Yes, sir. I gave him $20. He came back and he had a bottle of scotch, and he gave me change. I said, look, that's not right. He said, what's the matter? I said, bootleggers don't give you change. He said, they do me. (Laughter)

I didn't open it until I got to Waverley. There was a second big explosion that went off and the train was back and forth this way. Back I went to Truro. Then I really opened it. So between Geneva gin and scotch, I had a nice night. (Laughter)

I got off the train the following morning down at the station here. I was walking up Barrington Street with these two bottles sticking out of my tunic, one on each side. I can remember coming by St. Paul's Cemetery over there and going up Spring Garden Road. A little white Pomeranian followed me all the way up from the station, a dirty, filthy dog, barking and yapping away.

A city policeman came over to me. He said, you can't go down like that. I said, like what? He said, with those two bottles sticking out. I had one on each side. I said, well, I will haul one bottle out. There was about that much in it, so I drank it and tossed the bottle into the cemetery. I said, well, that takes care of that one but the other one, I can't. Get out of here, he said. So I went.

I looked at Citadel Hill, the Commons. I ended up down at Point Pleasant Park. I couldn't find anybody because the whole North End was gone. No one was allowed down there. So, finally, down in Point Pleasant Park, I met a girl who had lived across the street from me. I said, did you see my parents? Yes, they left a little while ago. That was around 5:00 p.m.; I think it was 5:15 p.m. when they allowed the tram cars to run again. So I beat it on the tram car to get home, got off at the corner of Agricola and Bloomfield, looked down the street in time to see my parents go around the corner to get on a tram car to go down to the station to meet me.

I caught them. Apparently, they called the railway station and they were told that I would be in at 7:30 but they didn't say when. They thought it was 7:30 that night and I came in at 7:30 that morning. I caught them and that was my homecoming.

If you have any questions, I am here to answer them. That is my life.

THE CHAIR: First of all, thanks for that presentation. I know everybody is amazed at what you went through. You are here today, in the year 2000, to tell us about it; 1944, of course, was the year I was born.

I would like to open it up with the honourable member for Kings North.

MARK PARENT: I have two questions for you. Thank you for your presentation, it was very moving. The first question that came to mind, of course, was with your experience with the German concentration camp, Buchenwald, how you feel about the few people - fortunately only a few people - who still continue to deny that there was a Holocaust and that concentration camps existed?

WILLIAM GIBSON: They have my deepest sympathy, believe me. I can't accept anyone that ignorant. I would say that they don't - I mean, it happened.

MARK PARENT: You experienced it.

WILLIAM GIBSON: Yes, I did.

MARK PARENT: The second question is, perhaps, a harder one. Down in the United States, Mr. McCain suffered horribly as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. He was criticized for his use of a certain word, talking about the past and his treatment in Vietnam. I guess he was really accused of being racist. It would be difficult, I think, going through those experiences, not to harbour grudges against the German people. Do you, or are you able to separate, with the distance now, the treatment that you received by individuals from the German nation?

WILLIAM GIBSON: I don't think it is about the Germans per se. I think it is just the SS. I have friends and my wife has friends who are Germans. I talk to them and I talk to them in their own language, too. You can't harbour those grudges.

MARK PARENT: That's good to hear.

WILLIAM GIBSON: We formed a club in Buchenwald and that is the pin, the little five-pointed star; the KLB club, Koncentration Lager Buchenwald. In fact, I called one of the boys out in Victoria last night to tell him I was coming down here.

We have a bond. There were 26 of us and a lot of them died, a few of them of alcohol poisoning. But a lot of them are still going strong. In fact on the Internet we communicate daily, with e-mail. I think it is a bond that will never be broken. Even down in the States, the boys down there they are just as close as can be.

We have been fighting for German compensation since 1945, but we haven't got it yet and I don't know if we will ever get it because I don't think there is anybody in Ottawa who has the intestinal fortitude to go after it. It is there.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Kings South.

DAVID MORSE: Mr. Gibson, I wonder whether you would like to just go over some of the veterans' frustrations over the German compensation. Maybe you could give us a little history of this.

WILLIAM GIBSON: Some years ago when the new Chancellor, well not too many years ago really, Schröder is the new Chancellor in Germany, he made a public statement to the fact that he would be paying all victims of Nazi aggression. To date we have not seen it. When that was announced, the information was sent to Prime Minister Jean Chretien who was then in Auschwitz looking at the concentration camp there and he didn't have time to read it.

I have been insulted by receiving a cheque from Mr. Mifflin for $1,000.80. I don't want the Canadian money and neither do any of our boys want Canadian money. It is not up to them to pay us. We want the Germans to pay us. They are the ones that put us where we were. Why should the people of Canada take on that responsibility? When Herr Schröder decides to pay us, then we will get our money, not until.

DAVID MORSE: So the Chancellor of Germany has indicated that he is willing to make the reparations.

WILLIAM GIBSON: He made that statement publicly in the Toronto daily paper, must be six months ago now. Chrysler and a few other automobile companies are also being hauled in on it because they were the people who used forced labour to build the cars in Germany. We are looking at both sides of the dirty war.

DAVID MORSE: I guess that we are looking for some movement on the part of the Prime Minister.

WILLIAM GIBSON: Well, we are looking for some movement from somebody. Now Mr. Mifflin, I think he took more of his time drinking than he did working. We haven't had a decent Foreign Affairs Minister for a long time, Veterans Affairs either. There might be a good man there now, I don't know. In my experience with these people, it is amazing how stupid people can be and be in such a position in life. I am serious. There is enough publicity out, not only by us but by the German Government, as to what happened during the war. We don't fabricate these stories, by any means. We did it, we suffered, and by damn somebody has to pay for it.

DAVID MORSE: I would hope in some small way that your appearance here today will perhaps move you, and the other veterans who suffered this, a little closer to compensation and an official acknowledgement that has been most appropriately offered by Chancellor Schröder. It is disappointing to hear that your struggle is now within.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I don't know if our struggle is within, we can't deal directly with the German Government. They don't talk to us.

DAVID MORSE: No, I mean within your own country or with your own country.

WILLIAM GIBSON: It has to be coming from the Minister of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa. He has to get the intestinal fortitude to go and say, you have to pay. How come the Americans get their money?

DAVID MORSE: Mr. Chairman, would it be appropriate for this committee to perhaps forward a letter on behalf of the former prisoners of war to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and request that he take the appropriate action?

THE CHAIR: Yes. Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

I believe it would; in fact I think that if we did not take this route that we wouldn't be doing our job as the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We will certainly send a letter to the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs. With the fact that the Americans already received theirs, and the chancellor made a commitment in Toronto that he would be looking into this, and the fact that nothing has been done so far, and the fact that it has been 56 years since you were a prisoner of war, yes we will certainly do that on your behalf.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I appreciate that. Thank you very much. I was 18 years old in Buchenwald. That is when I had my birthday - no cakes, no celebrations.

DAVID MORSE: Mr. Chairman, there are other questions that I would like to ask, but perhaps I should share it out. I have one last quick one. How long - and I hope that you did get your shoes back, or somebody's shoes - before you got shoes?

WILLIAM GIBSON: How long before I got shoes? Not until I got to Stalag Luft 3, that would be in November 1944.

DAVID MORSE: So we are talking about what period of time that you were barefoot?

WILLIAM GIBSON: We got to Buchenwald in August and I got out in November. Now it is not long as a period of time but it is long in a lifetime, believe me. You have all heard of Ilse Koch who was the "Bitch of Buchenwald". She used to line prisoners up; mainly Polish and Russian prisoners who would have tattoos that extended from shoulder to navel, and it would normally be an eagle with either a snake or a naked woman that was coloured. She would then have them executed, have that piece of skin treated, and make a lampshade out of it. Now she was the commandant's wife and the commandant was executed for stealing money from the SS. Nice people.

THE CHAIR: The honourable member for Preston.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Mr. Chairman, before I ask a couple of questions, I also want to pass along a hello message from an old colleague of yours, Kathleen Stirling Cameron. I guess you worked with her at the Red Cross doing some things. She told me that I would be intrigued with your discussion today and she is quite right. She works in our caucus office and she wanted to say hello.

In regard to the announcements by the new Chancellor for Germany, we see in the news he made a recent trip to Israel and apologies were made there. There is more and more talk about the release of Nazi gold in the Swiss bank accounts, trying to get it back to the people it came from. Even in our own country, Canada apologized to the Japanese prisoners of war and compensated them accordingly. In regard to your claims and requests for compensation from the German Government, what do you feel would be adequate compensation? Has there ever been a comparison of what other countries have received in regard to compensation?

WILLIAM GIBSON: The Australians and New Zealand Governments paid their own people because when the treaty was made - get this now - the United Kingdom and Germany made a treaty in 1945 paying all members that were mistreated by the Germans. But in fine print, it said not to include any colonials. At that time, Canada was a colony, so was Australia, so was New Zealand. We didn't get a penny of it, it went to Great Britain.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Is it just the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs who has to bring up the issue or should it be the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs?

WILLIAM GIBSON: Well, I don't think it is any good for the Prime Minister because he was in Auschwitz at the time it was made public and he didn't have time to read it. He was too busy apparently. I would say the Minister of Veterans Affairs would be the logical person.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Mr. Chairman, I would suggest that a letter be cc'd to the Prime Minister, as well as to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to make sure it is on their acknowledgment list and agenda for information purposes. Also I think you should share it with all the MPs from Nova Scotia because we are very proud in this province of our respect of history for veterans and the military. I think all of our MPs probably should know of this concern as well as the survivors and even the list of all the 26 Canadian citizens should be attached so they would know where all these citizens reside in this country. They would know where their remaining families are, or where their survivors are now living. If that information was made available, perhaps that could be utilized in trying to encourage other representatives from other parts of the country to carry this case forward also.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I can give you a list, I think. Right now I don't have it off the top of my head. It is not hard to get.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Pye.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, it is okay. My questions have been asked and they have been answered.

MARK PARENT: How many people would be on this list, Mr. Gibson?

WILLIAM GIBSON: Well, originally we were 26 but how many are alive today I don't know. I think there are around 18 left alive, but I think the widows of the deceased should be getting the benefit too. I think it should be classed as 26 people, and if the serviceman is not alive then his widow should be receiving it.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Well, we have seen the Merchant Navy just recently get their compensation, after many years of fighting. I think that the fight continues here.

WILLIAM GIBSON: Of course when you get ministers like Mr. Mifflin, it is not hard to believe anything.

DAVID HENDSBEE: I won't make any personal . . .

WILLIAM GIBSON: No, I know you won't but I will. I met him personally down at Province House one day and he and I don't get along very well, have never.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Perhaps he is not a Scotch drinker.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions?

DAVID MORSE: Before a question to Mr. Gibson, I just wonder if maybe those copies of the letter might be perhaps sent to all the federal Party Leaders, if we want to make sure that it gets some attention in the House. If we are going to send copies, and that is just a suggestion that I throw out to the committee, hopefully we would only need to send one letter to get the desired result this time but maybe that is something we could talk about afterwards, or leave to your discretion.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I will give you the name of the person who might be of great help to you, he has been to us, that is Mr. Gordon Earle, the NDP member. He has done more for us than anybody that I know of.

DAVID MORSE: I think that Mr. Hendsbee's suggestion would cover that one. I also know that Mark Muise from southwestern Nova Scotia has been helping a lot with people suffering from . . .

WILLIAM GIBSON: Post-traumatic stress syndrome?

DAVID MORSE: Yes.

WILLIAM GIBSON: It is a pretty common ailment apparently.

DAVID MORSE: Yes, I have a friend that seems to be going down for the third or fourth count with that one.

WILLIAM GIBSON: It is not nice.

DAVID MORSE: It is very distressing how we have treated them. Mr. Gibson, after having gone through all of this as a child, but a child that I suspect grew up in a hurry, what lessons do you think we have learned, when you look at what has gone on in the former Yugoslavia?

WILLIAM GIBSON: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. They are just as cannibalistic and murderous as they ever were.

DAVID MORSE: Deja vu.

WILLIAM GIBSON: There will never be any change in this world. People are people and you are not going to change them.

MARK PARENT: I hope you are wrong.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I hope I am wrong too, but I am not.

THE CHAIR: Are there any other questions from the committee? Mr. Gibson, do you have anything else to add?

WILLIAM GIBSON: No, I was just going to say I think if you look back since World War II, what has happened? The same things have happened over and over. You can go to Europe and there have been power wars over there, there have been atrocities committed in many countries. Nobody has put a stop to it. It just seems that it is part of the human growing up purpose, you have to go and destroy somebody.

DAVID MORSE: Turning back the clock, would you do it again?

WILLIAM GIBSON: Sure. I would do it again. Maybe I am stupid, but I would do it again.

DAVID MORSE: Thank you.

WILLIAM GIBSON: I am the son of a military man. My dad was in the first war. He fought in the South African War. It is in my blood. We suffered, sure, but so did other people.

DAVID MORSE: I think, through you, Mr. Chairman, sometimes veterans like people to thank them for their sacrifice. I know that that is perhaps not often done enough. I certainly extend to you my thanks for your sacrifice.

WILLIAM GIBSON: Thank you.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Mr. Chairman, may I be so bold as to suggest that I am very impressed with Mr. Gibson's standing and making his presentation. I think that we as a committee should stand and applaud him for his efforts. I would like to make that suggestion.

THE CHAIR: I think it is a suggestion well taken. I think that we will do that. (Standing Ovation)

WILLIAM GIBSON: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Gibson, it has been a pleasure having you here. All of us have learned a lot from what you have said. I would just like to say that I had the opportunity to visit Holland and went to the War Museum in Arnhem and also visited the graves of our veterans there. As you know, there are many Air Force veterans still in Holland from the Second World War. It was certainly enlightening to me to see the whole re-enactment they have there for the people of today. I think it is fair that we not let our people forget the sacrifices that our veterans made.

For your information, we are looking into this. We are trying to incorporate it into the education curriculum in Nova Scotia, of the World War: First and Second, Korean War and so on. That is being done as I speak. I think we will have some movement on it, we have been working on it for the last six months. We cannot let our children forget your sacrifices either. I thank you very much for coming, Mr. Gibson.

WILLIAM GIBSON: You are welcome, and I might add that I will go anywhere and talk to any group at any time. I do every year, I go to a school and give a talk.

THE CHAIR: I thank you again for that. We will take a break for now and then we will get back to business.

[9:57 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:04 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: If we can resume the meeting, everybody has a package that was given to them this morning and it is just recapping what we have been doing since last year. Just to bring you people up to date, I had a meeting with the Provincial Command and the Finance Minister yesterday at which time we discussed a few issues. One of the issues was the

incorporation into the education curriculum in Nova Scotia for the children, which I said previously, in regard to the Boer War, First World War, Second World War, Korean and possibly other conflicts since then, just so that they will remember why we have the democracy that we have and so on.

We are looking at a target age in there of what grade - I know that there has been studies on Grade 6, but I want to get into that aspect now. Right now there is about a two inch paragraph on the Korean War, in the schools now and that is about it. So I think it is important that they add that to their criteria in their history class. We have written a letter to Miss Purves and she has addressed it. It is in your package.

We have issues on the VLTs, video lottery terminals. In December I was talking to the secretary of the Provincial Command, Frank Fudge. At that time I had Mr. Fudge contact his people to submit all the monies that the Legions put back into their communities as a non-profit organization which came to one point $1.5 million, which is quite a sum. That is not only from VLTs, it is from other sources too, the fundraising and so on, but we have to acknowledge that the Legions are a non-profit organization and they are contributing to our communities in that regard.

The issue of home care came up and also the issue of transportation, which are important issues. The Legions are working with the VONs, the Victoria Order of Nurses, and they are pretty compatible with the VONs, with regard to supplying Meals on Wheels, home care and so on. So they have quite a few issues, and it would all be in your packages. As we know, the Dominion Command is hosting the Legion in Halifax in June. They expect at least 3,000 people. I believe they have booked the rooms and I am not sure of the dates, I believe it is around the 15th, is it? Do you know?

DARLENE HENRY: No, I am not sure.

THE CHAIR: Tentatively, I think it is June 9th to June 15th of this year, somewhere around there. Just for your information, they are going to have the longest parade since the Second World War, since 1945, here in Halifax. They are going to start from Pier 9 and they are going to walk To the Parade Square at City Hall. The veterans, of course, who will not be able to walk, they are going to have special floats for them. It is going to be a busy time for the Legions of Nova Scotia, as well as Dominion Command.

DAVID MORSE: What date is this, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIR: I believe it is around June 15th, I am not clear on the dates yet.

DAVID HENDSBEE: It would be during the convention?

DAVID MORSE: I wonder, Mr. Chairman, whether it would be appropriate that you, or indeed all the members of the committee, offer to participate in any way in this if the Legions want us, or maybe they should be asking the Premier.

THE CHAIR: I believe they will be extending an invitation to us if they so desire. I don't really think it is our position to self-invite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIR: Are there any questions?

DAVID MORSE: My intention was not to muscle in. As I understand it, Nova Scotia is the only provincial government that has a Veterans Affairs Committee and I just think they should be aware, in my opinion, that we are there to advance their cause, be at their beck and call.

THE CHAIR: You are correct in that and I think this package will show what we have been doing and they are fully aware of our participation in their causes. They are definitely. They are very pleased with the results that they have been getting from the Standing Committee on Veteran Affairs and very happy. They showed their appreciation to me yesterday.

MARK PARENT: Are we finished with that? Regarding the letters, I just want to go on record how pleased I am that we are successful for the time being on the VLT redeployment and just encourage you, as Chairman, to stay on top of that issue.

THE CHAIR: Like I said, we had a meeting with the Finance Minister yesterday. Clarence Dawe, the President, was there. The only person missing there was the Secretary, Mr. Frank Fudge. I didn't ask why he couldn't make it, but the other three gentlemen were there from the Legion, from the Provincial Command. We are working on that and the big thing is I think the reason we might get success is because we are showing what they are putting back into the community. They would like a higher per cent of the profits for non-profit, but whether they will get that I don't know. We have made our pitch and I think that is as far as we can go.

Mr. Pye.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, when you met with the Minister of Finance, did you also meet with the head of the Gaming Corporation, the new head?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I suggested they meet with the Alcohol and Gaming Corporation, which they did, and then I suggested they meet with the Minister of Finance. The reason I did that was the Gaming Corporation, they are set up, and their goal, I guess if you would want to call it that, is to make a profit, but I wanted them to see a far-reaching aspect and that is input

back into the community. We are not just talking about profit when we talk VLTs. We are talking about input and that is why I suggested the meeting with the Finance Minister.

JERRY PYE: I thought it would important to have a meeting with both the Chairman of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission or the Gaming Commission and the Minister of Finance in the same room, primarily to make sure that they could reach some agreement there at that time rather than continue to draw this out. The Finance Minister recognizes the impact of the amount of revenue that comes through to operate the province. So he has an important say as well in this matter.

True, the Gaming Commission is in the business of generating revenue and generating revenue for the province as well. So I think that it is a matter, in my opinion, that may not be resolved unless all three parties are represented, from Scotia Command of the Legion along with the Minister of Finance and the Chairman of the Gaming Commission. I am just saying that this might have to happen in the future. I am prepared to accept what you are doing now to see if, in fact, there is a gentle and a quiet resolve to this issue, there is no question.

THE CHAIR: I don't think there will be another meeting because they did get the meeting with the Gaming Authority and they also got the meeting yesterday afternoon, which I thought was very productive and so did the Provincial Command, with the Finance Minister Neil LeBlanc. So they are well aware of what is going on; the Gaming Commission is, the minister is and the Provincial Command is. I think we were fortunate to get those two meetings and in the future, who knows, maybe we will have to go that route again, but it will not be for awhile yet I can assure you that, where we just had the meeting.

The honourable member for Halifax Fairview.

EILEEN O'CONNELL: Mr. Chairman, I was just looking at the correspondence on the teaching of history which is a great interest of mine. I see that the Minister of Education answered your letters on December 12th and the second last paragraph says:

"I have asked Mr. Doug Nauss, Acting Deputy Minister, and Mr. Tom Rich, Executive Director, Program Branch, to meet with the Committee on Veteran Affairs to discuss the concerns and issues that you have brought forth.".

Am I missing something? Have we made a decision about whether to bring someone from the Department of Education to the Veterans Affairs Committee?

THE CHAIR: No, although it will be in the future.

EILEEN O’CONNELL: That would be great. I would recommend that one of the people who come - whether in addition or substituting for these two people - be someone with some experience in Social Studies. I do not believe that either Tom Richard or Doug Nauss is

a teacher. I understand that John Stone is working at the Department of Education now, and he has a huge knowledge and background of Social Studies curriculum. It might be wise either to substitute or to add. I would also urge that we do this. I think this is a really important issue. I think schools have become ahistorical and it is showing in terms of how young adults view themselves in the world. I think it would be a terrifically good act to move on this.

THE CHAIR: I thank you for that. These people you recommend, who are they again?

EILEEN O'CONNELL: Mr. Doug Nauss, Acting Deputy Minister of Education - he still is, isn't he - I am not the Education Critic any more. Who is the acting . . .

DAVID HENDSBEE: Dennis Cochrane is the new deputy.

EILEEN O'CONNELL: Oh, that is right, there is a new deputy minister. Well that would be really good, to have him, but I am suggesting that we have someone who actually has some expertise in the teaching of social studies and some historical perspective on what has been taught in the school. John Stone has worked for the Department of Education before; he has been a Social Studies teacher; has been a Canada Studies teacher; and I think Maritime Studies; and he has also been a school principal. He has a wide range of skills and knowledge.

THE CHAIR: Is he with the Department of Education now?

EILEEN O'CONNELL: He is with them now, yes, since last fall. I think, in fact, he is something in the Program Branch. I don't know his title, but I can get it for you.

THE CHAIR: What we could do is make an enquiry. It is up to, I guess, Miss Purves to send who she wants. We can certainly make an enquiry to see if he could be included for the reasons of his expertise.

EILEEN O'CONNELL: I would recommend that we do that because I think, with a new deputy minister who comes from another province, and basically an executive director, we won't get much information about programs, what has gone on in the past, what is really going on and what needs to be changed. So I would strongly recommend that we request from the minister that she send, there may be someone else equally good there but John Stone is the name that comes to my mind.

THE CHAIR: I thank you for that. I will put that to the floor. Is it the consensus of this committee that we request?

Is it agreed?

It is agreed.

We will put a letter to Miss Purves requesting that Mr. John Stone be included to meet with the Committee on Veterans Affairs, if it is her wish. We will make the request and then pass it on to her. I thank you for that.

Are there any other questions?

We have an agenda for next month. On the Walter Callow Buses, there is a tentative date of March 9, 2000. Since this will be a very short meeting, perhaps 15 minutes, maybe that can be included in the March 23rd meeting, rather than have such a short meeting on March 9th.

JERRY PYE: Mr. Chairman, can I ask that information be sent out to the members of the past Veterans Affairs Committee, with respect to the Walter Callow Buses, because the past Veterans Affairs Committee has done a tremendous amount of work around the Walter Callow Buses, even to the point where they were going to try to get some private investment into the purchasing of buses and so on. I think there has also been a letter sent by Murray Scott with respect to that and signed by former members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I think that I would like to have that information in advance so that I can see that information prior to coming here when Walter Callow makes a presentation.

THE CHAIR: Yes. Is that the information that Mr. Hendsbee asked you?

DAVID HENDSBEE: It's the fine print.

JERRY PYE: The fine print. I would like to have the Hansard copies of the discussion around that, along with all correspondence that has occurred, to all members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, so that they can be prepared for this when we meet.

THE CHAIR: By March 23rd, prior to March 23rd, I should say.

JERRY PYE: Prior to.

THE CHAIR: Right.

DAVID HENDSBEE: With our orientation package that we received in our first meeting of this committee, this Legislative Assembly, I thought that was already included. I thought we had the previous year's activities in that book.

THE CHAIR: I don't know about Hansard but I know that the letter was certainly in there and they had all the signatures. I read that. Is it proper to put another package together with that?

DARLENE HENRY: Sure. You want a package together this week?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

DARLENE HENRY: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay. I don't think that is a problem to be able to do that.

Okay, so is it agreed that we put the Walter Callow Buses into March 23rd?

DAVID HENDSBEE: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

EILEEN O'CONNELL: So there will be no meeting on March 9th? Is that what you're saying, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIR: No meeting on March 9th.

DARLENE HENRY: For this education meeting, should I try to get a tentative date for some time in April, if it can be worked out, bring them in, in April? At least give them some time-frame as to when you want to see them.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we will give them a lead time and maybe we could ask them when they can meet with us. We are requesting the meeting but I think it is going to be up to them to give us a time. I don't know how busy they are. I know that we are all in for a busy spring and I would like to have it done by June, if we could.

DARLENE HENRY: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Well, if the House goes back in within a couple of months, will that interfere with our time of this committee?

DARLENE HENRY: No, we will be meeting in the mornings.

THE CHAIR: Yes. We have met in the mornings prior to that.

Okay, if there is nothing else there, we will conclude our meeting.

DAVID HENDSBEE: Motion to adjourn.

THE CHAIR: I thank you all for coming.

The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:23 a.m.]