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PAULA ZAHN NOW

Inside Look at Military Evacuations; Historic Newscast Recaptures Horror 60 years After Liberation of Nazi Death Camps

Aired January 26, 2005 - 20:00 ET

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PAULA ZAHN, CNN ANCHOR: Good evening, everyone. Thanks so much for joining us tonight. We begin in Iraq, where just days before its historic election, the U.S. suffered its worst one-day death toll since the invasion, 37 Americans killed. Most of the deaths, 31, came in a helicopter crash in western Iraq.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN (voice-over): The crash happened more than 24 hours ago. But the military is keeping cameras far away from the sight. These pictures only show the general area, near the Iraqi-Jordanian border. The helicopter that went down is a Super Stallion troop carrier, like this one.

The crash happened at night. CENTCOM says it may have been related to the weather.

GEN. JOHN ABIZAID, CMDR., U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND: It was not a special mission. It was a routine mission in support of the elections. That's all I know. I think it's a dangerous environment that we operate in Iraq. We all understand that. And, again, our condolences to the families.

GEORGE W. BUSH, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: Any time we lose life, it is a sad moment.

ZAHN: At the White House today, President Bush acknowledged the loss, but emphasized the positive in Iraq.

JOHN KING, CNN SR. WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT: What would you say to the American people, including a significant number who supported you at the beginning of the war, who now say this is not what we were led to believe would happen?

BUSH: A couple of things, John. I would say the world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power. A world with Saddam Hussein in power would have been a more dangerous world today, secondly that we're making progress in helping Iraq develop a democracy. And, in the long term, our children and grandchildren will benefit from a free Iraq.

ZAHN: The top American commander in Iraq echoes the president's assessment.

GEN. GEORGE CASEY, ARMY VICE CHIEF OF STAFF: Things get better in Iraq every day.

ZAHN: However, General George Casey says the U.S.-trained Iraqi security forces aren't ready to take over the fight against the insurgency.

CASEY: They are going to continue to get better with our help to the point where, at some time, they are going to have the lead and we're going to be in the back.

ZAHN: There's no additional word about American hostage Roy Hallums or additional details about the tape released yesterday where he was seen pleading for his life.

He was kidnapped back on November 1. Wednesday, just four days before Iraq's national elections, insurgents set off at least eight car bombs, killing at least 13 people, injuring at least 40, including 11 Americans. There were also attacks

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against schools, where Sunday's voting will take place.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: And back to that helicopter crash from earlier today. Many of those killed were Marines based at Camp Pendleton in California. That was home to an extraordinary group, the men of Pale Rider 3.

Tonight, we're taking an extended look at the sacrifice these men have made so Iraqis can have better lives. In last year's battle for Falluja, that 43-man infantry platoon lost eight members, more than a dozen wounded. But the survivors emerged with a firm conviction that what they did was right.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: These are the men of Pale Rider 3.

LT. WADE ZIRKLE, PLATOON COMMANDER: Some people, they ask me, if you had to do it over again, would you join the Marine Corps after everything you have been through? I look at them and I say, without a doubt.

ZAHN: The platoon commander, a squad leader.

SGT. BILLY CONARD, SQUAD LEADER: Combat is combat. If you have never been there, you are never going to really experience what it's like.

ZAHN: And the platoon's medic. This is the story of their war and of the men they left behind.

JOAN BEKOWSKY, MOTHER OF U.S. MARINE: I always expected him to come home. I never thought that he wouldn't come home.

ZAHN: Their journey follows the evolution of the war, from the initial invasion to the chaos in the streets of Falluja, the elusive threat of suicide bombers and roadside explosives. JOE "DOC" WHORLEY, NAVY CORPSMAN: It was Labor Day. That was easily the worst thing that I will ever go for the rest of my life.

ZAHN: First, a prologue, early 2003, with each of these men in separate units, each getting ready to invade Iraq.

ZIRKLE: The expectations are always very foggy. You read a lot about it. You see a lot of movies about combat. But you really don't know what it's going to be like. And it's something you think about a lot.

ZAHN: Wade Zirkle was at the tip of the spear, part of a light- armored vehicle unit whose job was to plow ahead of the main Army, race north all the way to Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown. For Zirkle, the hottest action came deep in enemy territory just north of Nasiriyah.

ZIRKLE: We were surrounded one night by several hundred Iraqis. And they kept coming at us. And we were in a circular, 360-degree formation with all our weapon system pointed outboard. And they kept coming at us in waves and we kept taking them out and they kept coming. It lasted from sunset all the way until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning just nonstop.

We traveled hundreds of miles through Iraq and nobody got hurt. And we just drove home when it was all done. So it wasn't -- it was real combat, but it was almost too good to be true.

ZAHN: The other Marines scattered , in different units for the invasion, had similar stories of rapid and surprising success, intense firefighters with remarkably few casualties.

ZIRKLE: I think early on it was. But I think a lot of units had stories like that, of enemy who were very determined , but were pretty stupid and pretty blind about what they were up against.

ZAHN: But if the enemy was stupid then, it didn't stay that way. And when the men came together a year later in the platoon called Pale Rider 3, when they deployed to Falluja, everything had changed.

CONARD: We actually got hit with mortars, small-arms. So the very first time in the city, a group of us with the Army got hit. And they brought us out. And we're like, wow, if it's going to be like this the whole seven months, then it's going to be -- it's going to be a rough time.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: Unfortunately, squad leader Billy Conard's feelings were a dark omen.

When we come back, the fight for Iraq turns deadly for the men of Pale Rider 3.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: And welcome back.

We continue now with the story of Pale Rider 3. Lieutenant Wade Zirkle had already done a stint in Iraq when he was named platoon leader. They wanted someone with experience. The platoon's mission in the spring of 2004 was to go to Iraq's most dangerous city, Falluja.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN (voice-over): At home, the political campaign was in full swing, the war in Iraq, its execution, the growing body count, all potent political issues. But the men of Pale Rider 3 had no qualms about the war they were being asked to fight.

ZIRKLE: When we got fired at, we have positive identification on our enemy targets, and we take them out and we do away with the terrorists.

We wanted to show the people of Falluja that we weren't afraid to go in there and to assert our presence and to help people out. And that's what we did.

We go in with a couple Humvees with heavy machine guns on them. And the rest of the Marines are dismounted. And, yes, we walk through the city and we have interpreters and we talk to the people and we see what they need.

ZAHN: At first, the Marines carried out small-scale incursions into the city, eager to hit the enemy hard, but restrained by commanders trying to avoid bloodshed. It was on one of these patrols on the 26th of March, Pale Rider suffered its first loss, Private 1st Class Leroy Sandoval.

ZIRKLE: My platoon was tasked with setting up a blocking position on a major intersection to let some other units egress out of town. And right as we were setting up the blocking position, we came under pretty heavy fire with RPGs and machine guns on some rooftops very close to us and one vehicle driving by.

WHORLEY: You know what? We had went through Falluja with the greatest us of luck and God by our side, because we literally had rockets shooting between people talking. And the concussion, numbing their ears, and gunshots literally spraying, almost circling you, and I'm getting chills talking about it.

CONARD: There were on the rooftops shooting down at us. It was intense, because, all of a sudden, it went from zero to 60 in just like that.

ZAHN: This satellite image shows the precise location, a series of low buildings on the edge of the city.

ZIRKLE: Leroy Sandoval, he was on a Humvee. We had two Humvees with the platoon at that time. And he was manning his machine gun. And he effectively suppressed the enemy on the rooftops and took them out.

WHORLEY: He played a vital role in clearing the most busy side of the fire coming at us. And I will -- you know, I held his hand and told him that, you know? I told him, you saved our freaking lives, because I will tell you what, man, he was a good kid.

CONARD: It was weird to hear those words, you know, "Where's Sandoval?" and hear the words, "He's dead." It's because I didn't experience that the first go-around. I have never experienced -- never been -- well, aside from my first time, this was my first real big combat experience. And to have an actual Marine in your platoon killed, it kind of sends a shockwave to you, like how real it really is out there.

ZAHN: Sandoval's death hit the platoon hard. A few days later, four private contractors from the Blackwater security firm were ambushed, their corpses mutilated. Dark days. When the order came to take the city, the Marines were ready.

ZIRKLE: When we found out about the Blackwater killers, it again reaffirmed what we knew about these people that we were fighting. They were bad, bad, evil, horrible human beings, if you can even call them human beings.

ZAHN: The men of the platoon say the invasion that followed went well. But then the decision to pull back.

COLIN POWELL, SECRETARY OF STATE: We're hoping that the tribal sheiks who have come to help with the situation will be able to talk to the people inside the town and say, let's end this. Let's bring this to a conclusion.

ZAHN: From the edge of the city, Pale Rider 3 watched the Iraqi government forces struggle, while the insurgents built strength.

Back home in Concord, California, the increasingly violent war was taking a toll on the family of one of the Marines, Corporal Mick Nygard-Bekowsky.

J. BEKOWSKY: It's gut-wrenching, you know? You don't sleep at night. You don't eat. You worry about your son. They all become your sons. So you worry about every single one of them. It's a scary thing for a mom to go through. I'm sure same for a dad, same for a grandma.

ZAHN: Brian and Joan Bekowsky's son had signed up with the Marines just before 9/11. They say he was born to be a Marine, full of bravado and the fighting spirit.

BRIAN BEKOWSKY, FATHER OF U.S. MARINE: Told him, you don't have to go. And he looked at me and he says, no, dad, I want to go. I want to take the shot. And what he meant was, he wanted to take Saddam Hussein out if he had -- you know, if he had the opportunity.

ZAHN: Now their son was in the thick of it and as the Marines attacked Falluja, then pulled back, the Bekowskys were feeling frustrated.

B. BEKOWSKY: They are trying to solve these issues through diplomatic means. They are failing. They are failing. These people don't care. What they care about, what they understand is that it -- is the force.

ZAHN: Wade Zirkle has a different perspective.

ZIRKLE: As Marines in Falluja, we wanted to continue the mission and keep on rooting out the terrorists. But hindsight is 20/20 in situations like that. In any kind of combat situation, you can always do things differently. But I think it was noble that we were giving peace a chance and working out a negotiation. And the understanding, if the negotiation failed, we'd be back. The negotiation failed and we came back and we really completely crushed the terrorists in that city.

ZAHN: While they waited for the final assault, they patrolled the periphery of Falluja, routine, punctuated by random violence. And the Purple Hearts kept coming.

In June, an Iraqi on a motorcycle dropped a grenade into a Marine fighting hole. Lance Corporal Ben Gonzalez instinctively rolled away and took the blast on his back and legs. His body shielded the Marine next to him. Lance Corporal Matthew Bozevert (ph) lost a leg when his Humvee hit an IED, all preludes to catastrophe.

WHORLEY: Anything that you see on "Private Ryan," all those -- that's what it felt like when you run up on the scene and there are literally about 20 bodies on the ground.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: With the fighting in Falluja on hold, the end of their duties was nearly in sight. But as you'll see, for these Marines and their families, tragedy still lay ahead.

That part of the story when we come back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: The men of Pale Rider 3 may have suffered the highest casualty rate of any platoon in Iraq.

Last summer was supposed to be a quiet time during the war. As diplomats tried to negotiate a peace in Falluja, Pale Rider 3 watched over a major road west of the city. The men were guarding against insurgents planting roadside bombs.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN (voice-over): Labor Day of 2004 and the men of Pale Rider 3, just a month from coming home, were on patrol. Over all those hours in Humvees, the men had grown close, especially the more senior Marines, Conard, Zirkle, and Corporal Mick Nygard-Bekowsky.

Back home in Concord, California, Mick's parents, Brian and Joan, were making plans for their son's return, less than a month away.

B. BEKOWSKY: We were talking about going fishing and riding motorcycles and just talking. He was he was gearing up to come home. He was ready to come home and live a little bit.

ZAHN: The Marines were well aware of the danger of thinking too much about home, smelling the barn, they call it. But nothing short of blocking the busy highway could have prevented what happened next.

CONARD: We were going to relieve 1st Platoon. And we were just -- just like we had always done, we loaded up, headed out in the area. And, boom, that's when it happened.

ZAHN: As Pale Rider 3, 45 Marines, including the drivers, drove along in a convoy of three 7-ton trucks and a Humvee, an Iraqi suicide bomber drove a small pickup alongside the lead truck, where Wade Zirkle was riding, and detonated a massive bomb.

CONARD: I looked down. I had a radio. And I was making sure the handset was screwed in nice and tight. And about the time I looked up, I just saw this huge fireball ahead of us. And it was -- you are -- kind of shock and awe. You're like, wow, it all just happens.

I told myself on the way up there I'm going to see some things I figure I need to prepare myself for, some things I won't like. And it was just utter chaos. We got up there and the truck was just pretty much obliterated. It was -- for a big truck, it was just looked like someone had taken a can and just crumpled it.

ZIRKLE: I remember the initial pop that I heard. And then I was unconscious for I guess about a minute when I get thrown out of the truck. A huge explosion had gone off. And I couldn't really see very well, but I could tell that I'd probably lost some Marines. And it turns out there were seven Marines that were killed in the bomb.

ZAHN: Zirkle was blown out of the truck, his hands severely burned.

CONARD: I remember coming out and I saw him laying outside of the truck. And I was -- I was kind of stunned, because I saw him laying there. He didn't have any of his gear on. I guess it was blown off in the blast.

ZIRKLE: My corpsmen, Doc Santos (ph) and Doc Whorley, ran up and started treating the Marines that were injured and saved -- I know for sure saved one life of a Marine and definitely, definitely...

ZAHN: Only five of the 12 Marines in the truck survived. Doc Whorley, traveling in a truck behind, sprinted to the scene.

WHORLEY: And you can't really touch anybody, because you have to literally run around every single person and see, get a general quick, quick -- I couldn't even touch them, really -- as quick assessment of how bad everything was and who I needed to start on, because there were things -- running around left and right saying, you know, Marine, come over here. Put your hand here. If I don't see you putting every bit of pressure you can on this, I'm going to come over and hit you.

Lay your head near his nose about every 10 seconds. And if this guy stops breathing, you scream for me so loud that there's no way I can miss it.

And you just run off. And you come back to them whenever you can.

ZAHN: Among the dead, Mick Nygard-Bekowsky.

J. BEKOWSKY: And my mom called me on my cell phone to tell me to rush over, to come over to her house. And I heard it in her voice. I didn't realize it, what was going on. I thought there was another issue that I had to go handle. Maybe she fell.

B. BEKOWSKY: I did the same thing. You tell yourself that it's got to be some other thing.

J. BEKOWSKY: Well, I thought to myself, it was another thing. I never even thought about Mickey (ph) until we were driving home or driving to her house. Then it dawned on me, this is what I may be coming into. But, you know, there were two Marines at her door. And it was -- it was really bad for my mom. It was hard for her.

ZAHN: As the Bekowskys prepared to bury their son and Wade Zirkle was evacuated to Germany, Pale Rider 3 was disbanded, its surviving members sent to different platoons. They had lost too many men to continue as a unit.

Doc Whorley and Billy Conard were transferred to another platoon. And a short time later, they were hit again by an improvised explosive device, a roadside bomb.

CONARD: I watched the whole thing happen. I was on the radio. He was running. Then, all of a sudden, there was an explosion. And when it cleared, he was just laying there. So, instantly, I thought he was killed, also. So, I called it in. We had another KIA.

And I looked away and I looked back and I saw him sit up. So I called back that he was still alive. And about that time, the Marine was making his way to him. So, at that time, Doc Whorley, I hollered at him, asked if he was all right. He said no. He was started to put his own tourniquet on, take care of himself. Then he had the other Marine assist him a little bit. Then he got the morphine, put a little morphine in him to ease the pain. And they put him in a vehicle.

ZAHN: Doc Whorley's war was over, his leg gone, many painful operations ahead, but a profound appreciation of life, friendship, and God.

WHORLEY: God gave me the strength to just roll over and just start working on myself and put a tourniquet on my own leg and save my own life. That was something that God gave me the strength to do. And I have come away from Iraq with some of the greatest friends I could ask for and just about Job's faith in God. ZAHN: Faith, love, grief and pride, the emotions they carried home.

BEKOWSKY: I know the Marines that they are fighting for their country, they're fighting for our freedom. And I have been told the only way for a Marine to die is on the battlefield. So, these Marines died doing what they loved. And that's how it makes it easy for me to deal with. The worst part for all of us was knowing that six families, seven families, were going to get notified that they had just lost a son.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: When we come back, homecoming and healing, loss and pride, the final chapter in the story of Pale Rider 3.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: We have heard about the ambush outside Falluja that shattered the Marine platoon known as Pale Rider 3. Now the final part of their story.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN (voice-over): In Falluja, a field memorial, seven Marine boots lined up next to the three of the Iraqi special forces killed. And, in California, Mick Nygard-Bekowsky came home. He was buried in his hometown.

ZIRKLE: Doctor.

WHORLEY: How are you doing, sir?

ZIRKLE: What's going on? How are you?

WHORLEY: I'm doing great.

ZAHN: In Doc Whorley's hospital room in Washington, D.C., Zirkle and Whorley reflect on their experiences.

WHORLEY: All these people taking care of me. I have got -- I can do 1,000 different jobs coming out of this if I wanted to, where people -- people are so awesome.

I mean, I am convinced that I can get a job on a marathon team and they would give me the job, just because they have so much love and respect for their -- the veterans, that they would give me a job. I would sit on the bench all the time, obviously, but, by God, I would be there wearing the shirt. And, you know, there's just almost too much support to ever acknowledge. It's been awesome.

ZIRKLE: Some people, they ask me, if you had to do it over again, would you join the Marine Corps after everything you have been through? I look at them and I say, without a doubt.

The Marine Corps is such a huge part of who I am, and not just the Marine Corps, but also the combat experiences and the relationships and everything that I have learned. It's just -- it's part of me and it always will be, and absolutely. I mean, it's just -- it's a wonderful organization with outstanding people. And I would do it over again 100 times.

CONARD: Combat is combat. If you have never been there, you are never going to really experience what it's like.

But some of the memories I have is just the bonds you make with the guys you're over there with. These guys are -- like I said, your family, your brothers. You are there with them through it all. So, it is just -- it's just times hanging out with the guys. You know, there were times when, you know, we were just tired, sometimes cold, hot. And you just kind of look at each other, and you're like wow, this is terrible. But you just laugh about it and you just carry on. You get done what needs to be done.

And then I said we can all look back at it now and said maybe cry a few tears for some of the brothers we lost.

ZAHN: Those who didn't make it home live on in the hearts of those who survived from the platoon, the company, the entire corps.

JOAN BEKOWSKY, MARINE'S MOTHER: He died with pride. And I'm very proud of my son. I miss him. I wish he didn't go. I wish he didn't die. But I am very proud of my son.

BRIAN BEKOWSKY, MARINE'S FATHER: I want people to remember that these kids, these boys and girls, these high school students, barely out of high school, are willing to go and do anything that we ask them to do, not because of politics, not because they are going to get any kind of fame out of it, not because they are going to get money, just simply because we ask them to do it. I want people to ask themselves what have I done today worth somebody giving their life for me?

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: The men and women on the front lines as well as their families are the real story of this war.

Starting tomorrow, we will spend the rest of this week focusing on the sacrifices made so Iraqis can go to the polls this Sunday. Christiane Amanpour, Anderson Cooper and I will host a two-hour prime time special, "Iraq Votes."

We'll talk with Iraqis and Americans as we look ahead to Sunday's historic election. "Iraq Votes" tomorrow from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Eastern.

And when we come back tonight, racing against time to save our wounded warriors. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: When Americans die on the battlefield in Iraq, we, of course, hear about it. But we don't hear as much about the wounded and the great advances made in keeping them alive. Our own Alex Quade spent a month with U.S. medical forces in Iraq and was given extraordinary access to every step of the survival chain. And as part of our two-hour special tomorrow night we will see her complete report. Tonight, a preview of "Wounded Warriors."

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

ALEX QUADE, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): The journey of the wounded warrior usually begins like this.

Amid the chaos, the pain, army medics or naval corpsmen take life saving action while lethal combat continues around them. They bandage them up, carry them out, if it's too hot for a medevac helicopter to land, it's in the vehicles near the battle site.

And on to the next level of care, a fallback position outside the kill zone.

This is triage, Navy shock and trauma platoon members collect and clear the wounded. Stabilize and back-to-battle or on to the next level of care.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Urgent! Urgent! Urgent!

QUADE: Urgent means medical evacuation. Get them to a combat field hospital within one hour of being wounded. What is called the golden hour. Odds are, they'll survive.

It's time for the medicine man. Medicine man, that's the call sign of the U.S. army medevac unit.

C.W.2 HARLEY MAST, MEDEVAC PILOT: Guys in the field will get injured during the battles and they're EMTs or their medics on the scene can only treat them to a certain extent. Our job is to grab them and pick them up and bring them to a hospital or whatever further care is needed for the patient.

QUADE: They pick up the freshly wounded, care for them in flight, bring them for the combat hospital or to a forward surgical team. It's a hand over to the surgeons.

There are 4 combat hospitals in Iraq: in Tikrit, Mosul, Balad, and here, in Baghdad. The former private hospital for Saddam Hussein and his family now run by the U.S. Army.

The medical work here is raw, dirty, emotionally wrenching.

CAPT. SUDIP BOSE, U.S. ARMY E.R. PHYSICIAN: Blood and guts, you're kind of trained for that as a doctor. You are ready for it. But what is different here is another level of attachment to your patients which are the soldiers, because they are like all of us, they left the states, they're are hoping to go back. And, you know, some of them and process aren't expecting it and they get badly injured, or God forbid killed. That's what makes it different. There's a level of attachment here to the patients.

QUADE: After the patients have been stabilized, it's on to the next level, to Balad Air Base.

A series of tents make up an Air Force theater hospital, E.R., O.R. and an I.C.U. This is the most frequently attacked base in Iraq. A loud speaker announces alarm red when it is happening.

LT. COL. DON JENKINS, U.S.A.F. SURGEON: When you are in the operating room there's really nothing more that we can do than keep operating. We've built up as best we can around the operating theaters with big concrete barriers and sand bags and that's where it is.

So, those folks that aren't scrubbed and in sterile gear do have the opportunity if they can get to their gear safely, put on the helmet and their flak vest. We don't stop what we're doing just because the attack is going on.

QUADE: When the patients are stabilized, it's on to what is called the CAFSA, contingency aeromedical staging facility.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: We're like a medical air terminal.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: Prepare to lift. Lift.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Our patients when they come here, they're pretty much knowing, OK, this is my last step before I go back to the states, or before I go to Germany and then go back to the states.

We get them here, we get them medicated and get them comfortable.

QUADE: And then time to load the patients on to a C-141, converted from cargo planes to flying hospitals.

Patients are wrapped on to hanger litters inside the plane. Then the plane goes dark for tactical tack-off. This is light discipline. Only low red light until we clear Iraqi air space. The flight medics go to work. Using chemical glow sticks, or tiny light, they squeeze between patients and litters.

CAPT. ASSY YACOUR, CCATT PHYSICIAN: Whatever care they were getting, we continue that care. We continue mechanical ventilation on them to keep their respiratory status in check. We continue drips, et cetera, like they need to be sedated, they need something for pain.

QUADE: After clearing Iraqi airspace, lights on. Six hours later the plane lands at Ramstein Airbase, Germany. The patients are off loaded.

SR. MASTER SGT. TERRY KENNEDY, USAF FLIGHT EMT: I will never forget any of their faces, and you just want to hug every one of them for what they've been...

QUADE: Then on to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. There, usually it's more surgery. From battlefield to this hospital in Germany, it's precision, speed and care every step of the way, which is saving lives. MAJ. TIM WOODS, USAF PHYSICIAN: Our air vac system right now is unbelievable. We hear what happens on the news pretty much and, you know, within 24 to 48 hours these guys are getting -- getting into our hospital. And we're having to take care of them.

And usually within a couple days after that we're trying to get them back to the states so they can be closer to their family.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Do you have any pain right now?

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: Wounded warriors, a remarkable story told by Alex Quade. It's just a preview of what you'll see here tomorrow night. Remember, we have a two-hour special getting underway at 7 p.m. Eastern time called "IRAQ VOTES."

When we come back, 60 years ago, one of the most powerful pieces of journalism ever recorded.

(BEGIN AUDIO CLIP)

EDWARD R. MURROW, FORMER CBS REPORTER: As we approached it, we saw about 100 men in civilian clothes with rifles, advancing in open order across the field. There were a few shots. We stopped to inquire.

(END AUDIO CLIP)

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: Tomorrow will be the 60th anniversary of the day Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz, the death camp in Poland where the Nazis systematically murdered 1.5 million people, mostly Jews.

Survivors and world leaders will gather there tomorrow to remember the Holocaust.

Two months after Auschwitz was liberated, American forces freed the prisoners at Buchenwald, a camp in Germany where the Nazis literally worked people to death.

Edward R. Murrow of CBS News was one of the first western journalists to report from the concentration camps. After 60 years, his radio report from Buchenwald is still one of the most powerful and riveting pieces of journalism.

We're going to play it for you now with pictures we've added, many from Buchenwald and from other camps, as well. Or you might just want to close your eyes and listen the way America heard for the first time what Edward R. Murrow saw.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

MURROW: 1945. April 15. During the last week I have driven more than a few hundreds miles through Germany, most of it in the 3rd Army sector and beyond. I propose to tell you of Buchenwald.

It is on a small hill about four miles outside Weimar (ph). And it was one of the largest concentration camps in Germany. And it was built to last.

As we approached it, we saw about hundred men in civilian clothes with rifles, advancing in open order across the field. There were a few shots. We stopped to inquire.

We're told that some of the prisoners had a couple of S.S. men cornered in there. The prisoners crowded up behind the wire. We entered.

And now let me tell this in the first person, for I was the least important person there, as you shall hear. There was around me an evil smelling hoard. Men and boys reached out to touch me. They were in rags and the remnants of uniforms. Death had already marked many of them, but they were smiling with their eyes.

I looked out over that mass of men to the green fields beyond where well-fed Germans were plowing. A German came up, Fritz Kerzheimer (ph), came up and said, "May I show you around the camp? I've been here 10 years."

I asked to see one of the barracks. It happened to be occupied by Czechoslovakians. When I entered, men crowded around, tried to lift me to their shoulders. They were too weak. Many of them could not get out of bed.

I was told that this building had once stabled 80 horses. There were 1,200 men in it, five to a bunk. The stink was beyond all description.

When I reached the center of the barracks, a man came up and said, do you remember me? I'm Pedro Czenkis (ph), one-time mayor of Prague. I remembered him but did not recognize him.

I asked how many men had died in that building during the last month. They called the doctor. We inspected his records. There were only names in a little black book, nothing more. Behind the names of those who had died, there was a cross. I counted them. They totaled 242. Two hundred and forty-two out of 1,200. And in one month.

As I walked down to the end of the barracks, there was applause from the men too weak to get out of bed. It sounded like the hand clapping of babies. They were so weak.

The doctor's name was Paul Heller. He had been there since '38. As we walked out into the courtyard, a man fell dead. Two others, they must have been over 60, were crawling toward the latrine. I saw it but will not describe it.

In another part of the camp they showed me the children, hundreds of them. Some were only 6. One rolled up his sleeve, showed me his number. It was tattooed on his arm. D-6030 it was. The others showed me their numbers. They will carry them until they die. An elderly man standing beside me said, "The children, enemies of the state." I could see their ribs through their thin shirts. The old man said, "I am Professor Charles Richaux (ph) of the Sorbonne."

The children clung to my hands and stared. We crossed to the courtyard. Men kept coming up to speak to me and to touch me: professors from Poland, doctors from Vienna, men from all Europe. Men from the countries that made America.

We went to the hospital. It was full. The doctor told me that 200 had died the day before. I asked the cause of death. He shrugged and said, "Tuberculosis, starvation, fatigue, and there are many who have no desire to live. It is very difficult."

Doctor Heller pulled back the blanket from a man's feet to show me how swollen they were. The man was dead.

Most of the patients could not move. A small man totted up, saying, "May I feel the leather, please? You see, I used to make good things of leather in Vienna."

Another man said, "My name is Volta Reuter (ph). For many years I lived in Joliet. I came back to Germany for a visit and Hitler grabbed me."

We went again into the courtyard. And as we walked we talked. The two doctors, (UNINTELLIGIBLE), agreed that about 6,000 had died during March. The German said back in the winter of '39 when the Poles began to arrive without winter clothing they died at a rate of approximately 900 a day.

Asked if I would care to see the crematorium. He said it wouldn't be very interesting, because the Germans had run out of coke some days ago and had taken to dumping the bodies into a great hole nearby.

Professor Richaux (ph) said perhaps I would care to see the small courtyard. I said yes. He turned and told the children to stay behind.

As we walked across the square, I noticed that the professor had a hole in his left shoe and a toe sticking out of the right one. He followed my eyes and said, "I regret that I am so little presentable, but what can one do?"

We proceeded to the small courtyard. The wall was about eight feet high. It adjoined what had been a stable or garage. We entered. It was floored with concrete. There were two rows of bodies stacked up like cordwood. They were thin and very white. Some of the bodies were terribly bruised, though there seemed to be little flesh to bruise.

Some had been shot through the head, but they bled but little. All except two were naked. I tried to count them as best I could and arrived at the conclusion that all that was mortal of more than 500 men and boys laid there in two neat piles. There was a German trailer, which must have contained another 50, but it wasn't possible to count them.

The clothing was piled in a heap against the wall. It appeared that most of the men and boys had died of starvation. They had not been executed.

But the manner of death seemed unimportant. Murder had been done at Buchenwald. God alone knows how many men and boys have died there during the last 12 years. I was told that there were more than 20,000 in the camp. There had been as many as 60,000. Where are they now?

I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I have reported what I saw and heard. If I have offended you by this rather mild account of this camp, I am not in the least sorry.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: Edward R. Murrow, CBS News, from some 60 years ago. A first person report I don't think any of us will ever forget.

Time to check in with Larry King right now.

Larry, for those of us that worked at CBS News, I think you can well understand why he set such an incredible standard for journalists to reach for.

LARRY KING, HOST, "LARRY KING LIVE": He was pretty -- pretty good at what he did. I got to meet him once. And you know, he really -- his smoking habit was terrible. You know he lit one cigarette a day, and every other cigarette lit the other. He never -- he never did not smoke, and he died of lung cancer, tragically, early in his 60s. But what a journalist he was.

ZAHN: What a gift he had. Just the observations that he made.

So what are you doing tonight, Lar?

KING: Reverend Robert Schuller is here tonight. And Linda Carl is with him. Her husband, you may remember, Johnnie Carl, a little more than a month ago, committed suicide at the Crystal Cathedral. He was their musical arranger. Strange story.

And Sara Edmondson (ph). Her 2-year-old son, her husband and her mother are still missing in the tsunami. She's going to fly from Sweden. She'll be with us from London. She still holds hopes.

Paula, carry on.

ZAHN: I will carry on. It is amazing how many families are still in that situation today.

We will look for you in about 10 minutes, or actually, less than that, Larry, six minutes. See you at the top of the hour. Thanks so much.

KING: Thanks.

ZAHN: And like the song says, teach your children well. When we come back, a look at how one school is making sure the past is not forgotten.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ZAHN: We are remembering the Holocaust this week because, as difficult as it is, it is too important not to remember. An unspeakable evil happened, and it's up to all of us to make sure it never happens again.

Our Kyra Phillips and how one teacher is doing just that.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: There have been things that hit you, like keep repeating itself.

KYRA PHILLIPS, HOST, "LIVE FROM": When it comes to the Holocaust students at Pope High School just outside Atlanta have lots to say.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I look around the room, and I think about how devastating it would be if two thirds of us were gone. All at once. I can't understand how that could happen.

PHILLIPS: One student saw how it happened. She visited Auschwitz.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: It was like a barn house. And it still -- it smelled awful. That you could smell the -- just people still there. I mean 60 years later.

PHILLIPS: After 60 years, the Holocaust is not forgotten. Not here.

BETH MULLING, HISTORY TEACHER, POPE HIGH SCHOOL: One of the most important things that we talk about in world history is tolerance.

PHILLIPS: These high schoolers are passionate about the past because of this woman, Beth Mulling, a history teacher with a personal connection. Her father fought in World War II. He brought back the photos, a Nazi flag, and a message for his daughter. She was to take his evidence of an evil past and teach.

MULLING: You can see anguish and agony. Their eyes are still open. You can see physical features on their faces. And you see capos, Jewish guards, dragging their victims to the ovens. And those photographs, when the kids see them for the first time, are quite shocking.

PHILLIPS (on camera): Do the kids start crying?

MULLING: Yes, absolutely. It's terribly emotional.

PHILLIPS (voice-over): The lessons have given her students new perspective.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: If someone is strong enough to overcome something of that magnitude, if we can take that hope for life and that reason to live and we can bring that all together, we can definitely change the way that the future is headed.

PHILLIPS: And a new sense of responsibility.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I think most powerful thing is stuff like we're doing right now, getting together in groups, talking about it. Why did it happen? How can this never happen again? What can we do to make sure that this doesn't happen again?

PHILLIPS (on camera): Why do you think it's so important to remember that time in history now, decades later? Sixty years later?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: We can't just let a day like this pass without appreciating the significance of it. It can't be, you know, something that you turn on the news and you see it on the bottom of the screen and then you change the channel. People have to really come to terms with what happened so that we can make sure that it doesn't happen again.

PHILLIPS: You know, you take on a tremendous responsibility, teaching the Holocaust.

MULLING: Absolutely. And one that I relish. I get emotional about it. I get upset about it. I cry. I cry in front of my kids. It's embarrassing. My nose turns red. My makeup runs.

And I do it gleefully twice a year, because it's the most important thing I'll ever tell my kids. And I tell them from the very get-go, I'll never tell you anything that matters any more than this. And you don't have to remember any dates, and you're not having a test on it. This is about basic humanity. And that's why it matters so very much.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

ZAHN: Guess it should be encouraging to all of us that we not only see young people care about something that happened so long ago but really become engaged. Kyra Phillips reporting for us tonight.

And that wraps it up for all of us here tonight. A quick programming note for you. Tomorrow night, please join Christiane Amanpour, Anderson Cooper and me for our prime time special, "IRAQ VOTES," starting at 7 p.m. Eastern. Hope you'll join us then.

"LARRY KING LIVE" is next. Again, thanks for dropping by here tonight. Good night.

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