

Blowing Up the Swastika, Nuremberg, Spring 1945

*John Q. Barrett**

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Many scenes and moments in Nuremberg, Germany, before, during and after World War II have been preserved in still photographs and moving pictures. The universe of important and powerful Nuremberg film includes Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* footage of Adolf Hitler, his assistants and many thousands of other Nazis and their supporters at the massive Nazi Party rallies in Nuremberg during the 1930s. There also are excellent United States Army Signal Corps moving pictures and superb still photographs, many taken by Ray D'Addario and colleagues, of United States chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson and others, including judges, defendants, attorneys, witnesses and spectators, at the Nuremberg trials following the War.

Perhaps the most famous and powerful of all Nuremberg film is the footage that L. Bennett ("Elby") Fenberg, a U.S. Army soldier serving in the 163rd Signal Corps as a combat photographer, took at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg in spring 1945. Fenberg captured with his movie camera the huge explosion, detonated by U.S. soldiers, which destroyed the giant metal swastika atop the tribune at the Zeppelin Field on the Rally Grounds. This U.S. government film footage, created by Fenberg, has been used in many subsequent films—for example, the swastika and the explosion are in the 1961 Hollywood epic, *Judgment at Nuremberg*.¹

Mr. Fenberg died last month at age 87 in Houston—a story about his life is below.

In Germany, the decaying Nazi Party Rally Grounds, including the tribune on which the swastika once stood, are preserved by law, in

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¹ Fenberg's footage of the swastika and then the explosion are at the very start of a *Judgment at Nuremberg* trailer that is available at www.evtv1.com/player.aspx?itemnum=1992&aid=19.

conjunction with the adjacent Documentation Centre,² for education about the Nazi period.

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L. Bennett "Elby" Fenberg Shot of a Huge Swastika Demolition Symbolized Third Reich Fall; Combat Photographer during World War II

By Lynwood Abram
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L. Bennett "Elby" Fenberg, an Army movie photographer during World War II who filmed the demolition of a massive Nazi swastika in Nuremberg, has died. He was 87.

The dramatic footage of the event at a stadium built by Adolf Hitler has been featured in numerous TV documentaries and movies about World War II and Nazi Germany. It often is used to symbolize the end of the Third Reich.

"The swastika was about 50 feet across and was made of metal," Elby Fenberg said in a 2005 interview with his nephew, Steven Fenberg, that ran in the *Houston Review of History and Culture*, a publication of the University of Houston.

"I kept my finger pressed on the trigger of the camera, and I had my eyes closed the whole time," Elby Fenberg said.

"The explosion was so huge, a piece of metal about 10 feet long dropped right in front of me. If it had hit me, it would have cut me in half. About a dozen fellows got injured from the flying metal," he said.

Fenberg had no conception of the power of the images he had captured that day until he viewed the footage at a reunion of his Army unit in Chicago in 1951.

"We didn't get to see our film after we took it, because it was processed back in the U.S.," he said.

Fenberg earned a Bronze Star for filming the fierce fighting at Nuremberg. He voluntarily joined an advance infantry patrol as it approached the bitterly defended city.

"In the face of heavy enemy sniper, mortar, and artillery fire, he photographed the complete action of the patrol without regard for his personal safety," the medal citation said.

² www.museen.nuernberg.de/english/english/reichsparteitag_e/index_reichsparteitag_e.html

BLOWING UP THE SWASTIKA, NUREMBERG, SPRING 1945

Fenberg joined the Army during World War II and underwent basic training in California. He went on to learn the elements of combat photography at Paramount studios in New York City.

As a member of the 163rd Signal Corps, he served in Africa before heading to Italy, where he filmed combat during the battle of Monte Cassino and the liberation of Rome.

Fenberg then went to France, Austria and Germany, where he photographed the assault on Hitler's mountain home, the Berghof near Berchtesgaden, and the dictator's nearby tea house, the Eagle's Nest.

L. Bennett Fenberg was born in Detroit on Oct. 6, 1919, the son of J.A. Fenberg, a department-store owner, and Lillian Fenberg.

Elby Fenberg studied photography at Wayne State University, where he founded the Camera Club, Steven Fenberg said.

After the war, Elby came to Houston to join other family members who had acquired Nolen Jewelry Co. in downtown Houston.

He started a camera department in the store, which ultimately grew into a chain of about 25 outlets, including ones in San Antonio, Austin and Corpus Christi.

Elby Fenberg worked in the Houston stores until the chain was sold in 1992.

"Uncle Elby was a sweet, well-liked person who got pleasure from simple things. He loved dogs and enjoyed sitting on his front porch and giving biscuits to the neighborhood dogs, who flocked to him," Steven Fenberg said. Elby also enjoyed poker and fishing, his nephew said.

Elby Fenberg died Feb. 21 in a Bellaire hospital.

Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Marilyn Neidelman Fenberg, of Houston; a daughter, Jan Oberhettinger, and her husband, David, of Valencia, Calif.; a son, Larry Fenberg, of San Francisco; two sisters, Shirley Barish, of Houston, and Rhoda Krauss, of Detroit; and two sisters-in-law, Lenore Fenberg, of Houston, and Ethel Mellen, of Detroit.

Services were held last week at Congregation Emanuel in Houston.