

HE SAW HER BURNING

von Joan Jonas

fragments of a work in progress

assisted by Cynthia Beatt

with I Sa Lo

Shaun Lawton

Daniel Lengyel

Lied: Vera und Labor Body

Production coordinator Frank Barth

technical assistance Michael Schrader

Music: The Residents

and for "golfdance" - Peter Gordon

Super 8 film: Camera + editor: Cynthia Beatt

News report

This afternoon an american soldier, 3rd brigade, 8th US Infantry division, Mannheim stole a 60 ton tank called "Luke" and drove it through the center of Mannheim throwing traffic and pedestrians into a state of panic, while attempting to reverse it on the bridge crossing the Neckar River the soldier lost control and the tank tipped backwards into the river.

The general and other sources have been unable to explain the reason for the soldier's behavior. Damage was estimated at 1,1 million DM. It took a 100 ton swimming crane called "Achilles" to get the tank out of the river.

News report

Chicago

A woman walking down the street burst into flames for no apparent reason and police have said there was no immediate explanation. Bomb and arson investigators were called in to determine whether any accelerant was present but police said there was no evidence of accelerant at the scene.

A witness told police he noticed the woman walking across the street and when he looked at her a second time she was aflame. The witness was sitting in his car about a block away. He saw her burning and then she fell. The woman was burned beyond recognition and no identification was immediately available. There was no clothing or anything left that they could check for samples.

Eight incidents of human spontaneous combustion are listed in reference books. Two as recently as 1957. The first incident involved a countess from Italy in the 18th century. Neighbours noticed yellowish smoke coming from her bedroom and a maid discovered a heap of ashes by her bedside. Her legs were said to be untouched by the flames.

Videotape 2

Questions:

Where have you been?

I have been in the North watching seals.

Why did you come back?

Well, actually I didn't want to come back but I had to find out what had happen to the two of you.

What were you doing?

I told you I was watching the seals and following their movements.

Look out the window.

I always liked this window.

What do you see?

A grey boat gliding up the river slowly overtaking barge. The grey boat examines the barge - the captain of the barge I don't think he gives a damn about grey boat he is thinking of his sweat-heart and there is a car parked by at the side of the street is that the same ...

Yes, that's the car

You mean you still have the car. That's the car you were sitting in that d y.

Yes, I saw her burning.

That's why I came back. I heard stories.

Do you remember her?

Sometimes I remember her as if she were beside me and then I don't think of her for months this room reminds me of her, these things....

Do you remember that house?

How can I forget that house. I remember when you could drive all around the lake, and the time the three of us went to the party in that house ...

What do we have in common?

The sentimental things apply as times go by.

Do you play golf?

Sure I do.

Videotape 3

as told by Shaun Lawton

Well, I was just waiting in my car, you know and we - I was going to meet her and we were going to have a round ou golf up at the course there over at the base and I was there waiting and I saw her in the distance about a block or a block and a half away just crossing the street and I heard some sort of noise behind me - I looked around and it was only a second or two seconds more, and when I looked back it was as though flames - I suddenly saw flames coming out of her body and she was on fire and it was so freaky man, it was all these flames coming out and she walked a bit and stumbled - then she fell - I don't k ow - I never saw anything happen - I only looked away a second or two, that's all ...

I don't know what happend . I never saw anybody near her or anything - she wouldn't be carrying anything like that would be inflammable - she wasn't involved in any sort of things like that - you know, I was just, we were going to have a game of golf - she was going a bit of shopping it was so weird, it happend all of a sudden ...

It was so freaky to see someone burning, flames coming out of her body - it was weird - she just fell and people started gathering around ...

I just got out of the car and started running - we got an ambulance and got her away but I could hardly recognize her already. I don't know anything about these weird things.

Videotape 4

He stole a 60 ton tank. I saw him. He was trained to fight with that tank and was stationed 4 miles from the center of Mannheim. He told me he could drive a tank. He broke the lock on Saturday just before 2 pm. I saw him from the golf course overlooking the base, we were supposed to meet there but he never came - I waited and then I saw the tank crash through the gate and drive at 60 KPH toward the city center. I saw a sergeant jump on the tank but he was thrown to the ground. He ran amok, the soldier I mean, he went berserk.

He drove straight into a street car full of people, flattened 8 cars and light poles, broke numerous plates, cups and glasses - he careened down Main street - I watched people flee in panic. They ran for their lives before the rolling tank.

He reached the bridge, stopped, turned the gun turret around and around, put the tank into reverse and tipped for the bridge into the river.

He probably lost control - he was a good driver.

What was going on in his head I will never know.

He fell into the water. The tank fell into the water. I don't know what to do.

How through a miracle were not more people thrown into suffering.

Videotape 5

Berserk

Running berserk

a fit

written by Shaun Lawton

Berserks were often used in war as a weapon. They would run into battle in a frenzy. Running amok without armour, without thought of death to themselves, immune to pain, unstoppable, striking terror into the hearts of their opponents whose only thoughts were to flee.

A berserk in the peak of his fit seems not to belong to this world - his actions seem illogical, his strength superhuman, his purpose unanswerable. He cuts a savage swath through all that stands in his path. He is beyond communication, beyond control, beyond reach.

We'd like to interview our special correspondent on berserk affairs. Good Evening.

I understand you have recently made a study of berserks and related phenomenon.

Have you ever seen a berserk?

Would you know a berserk if you saw one? I mean is it possible for the ordinary man in the street to tell whether or not a particular person is berserk or is capable of being a berserk?

Can you describe a typical berserk fit and its accompanying actions or symptoms to us?

Are berserks normally normal people or is there any basis to the old popular belief that berserks are in possession of supernatural powers? Could running amok be described in a court of law as a premeditated offence?

Can an attack or fit be brought on at will or is it dependant on mitigating circumstances?

Would a latent or repressed berserk, instead of having a fit or attack, accumulate the excess energy generated until it reached critical mass and simply consume him or herself in a blaze of heat like, for instance, spontaneous combustion?

Well thank you, that's all we've got for the moment and we hope you look in on our next program.

Thank you.

Videotape 6

A boat carrying Thorstein Black and 11 of his men ran into difficulties in Breidafjord during sudden appalling weather conditions. They eventually floundered on a submerged reef not far from land but because conditions were so bad they had to remain in the boat an hope that it could be refloated at high tide.

Throughout the day they saw an enormous seal swimming in the current. It circled the boat all day. It had huge flippers and everyone thought its eyes were those of a human. Thorstein Black told his men to harpoon the seal but all their attempts failed. Eventually the tide began to rise but just as the boat was about to be refloated a violent gust of wind broke upon them and the boat heeled over. All but one of these on board were drowned.