

**Time-coded notes for Interview with Robert Lippurt
May 6, 1990**

1:00 I was born May 19, 1914 in Chicago. Prior to my education, I worked as a part-time general practitioner. I held a reserve commission for many years. After years in V.A. hospitals, I applied for active duty for more involvement in war effort, to utilize my abilities.

2:00 I entered active duty in May 1944.

3:00 I was assigned to 130th evacuation hospital, went to European theater with them, South Wales, in Dec. 1944. An evacuation hospital is mobile, follows the combat troops, served the wounded--emergencies.

4:00 We had to decide whether to treat them for 24-36 hours and send them back out for duty, or to send them to the rear to more permanent hospitals. Like a weigh station from which one could go back to duty or to rear. Until we got to camps, you saw the sort of sicknesses you'd see in the general population -- injuries, pneumonia -- brief treatment.

5:00 Functioned as an emergency room. Our whole function changed with the closing of the war; we found ourselves in the middle of Germany, there to service the prisoners who had been liberated from the concentration camp Stalag 7A.

6:00 March 1945 -- Germans were in retreat. We moved rapidly across France.

7:00 The amount of destruction and confusion increased as we got closer to areas of combat -- we saw casualties lying around. We took on function of serving former inmates of Stalag 7A, near Moosburg, a small rural German community.

8:00 The camp was large, with barbed wire and watch towers. The camp was improvised, not adequately heated -- conditions of barracks deplorable.

9:00 Sanitation was horrible, maybe one wash basin and a primitive latrine for hundreds of prisoners. Many of the prisoners were very ill - tuberculosis, mutilations due to surgery, chronic diarrhea, malnutrition.

10:00 There was one man with mid-thigh amputation - he had reported at sick call with ingrown toenail -- a few days later, the camp physicians decided to amputate. It wasn't uncommon for the German surgeons to perform experiments way beyond what was necessary, to keep themselves busy, or to study amputation and wound-healing. I saw no documentation - only the individuals.

11:00 A Polish chemist -- Lichtenstein -- he spoke several languages; he helped me to interrogate the former prisoners. I was functioning more as a general practitioner. I had served as a psychiatrist.

12:00 There was a sprinkling of individuals who were out of touch with reality. They even viewed the Americans with suspicion and disbelief. Many of the inmates had been so brutalized that they could not believe anything that was going on. We tried to provide reassurance, take away the threat. Some of them regained ability to communicate.

13:00 In early days there was not much will to communicate. They began to ask the Americans for information -- began to realize that the war was coming to the end. They didn't believe yet that it was safe to talk.

14:00 They were intimidated and withdrawn. They would respond to food and blankets. There were some who died from eating solid food -- had to start then intravenously.

15:00 Some would die before reaching the solid food stage. Before we realized the specialized method of treating them - mortality was 20% -- then we realized we couldn't be carried away by generosity with good will, you could kill them.

16:00 Dr. Lichtenstein helped me to communicate with the inmates--many inmates were Polish nationals, from Hungary, Yugoslavia, half of them were Jews. I saw very few female patients--there were only a few. Hard to guess the age of the inmates because they were so emaciated, like shadows.

17:00 Thirty years old looked like fifty or sixty. They would try to walk outside and acted like nocturnal animals. It was dangerous to let them walk around in that state. There were some German nationals too, usually dissidents, socialists, communists.

18:00 There were some trade unionists, like the man with the thigh amputation. The inmates came from all walks of life -- merchants, farmers, office workers ... Usually the professionals were kept separate from the lower-class workers and used by the Germans according to their functions. Lichtenstein somehow escaped letting them know his background in Chemistry.

19:00 He was given more menial tasks. He was in bad shape at first--took about ten days to get him back on his feet. Then he helped me a great deal .. I don't think the prisoners did any factory work in this camp.

20:00 In Mauthausen, they did hard labor. There was an Irish medical officer, Mulligan, who had been the sole medical officer serving the liberated prisoners. He turned the records over and was eager to get back to his homeland. He had been a prisoner in North Africa for several years.

21:00 He had a radio hidden, and they were able to hear what was going on in the outside world, and this receiving station was never discovered. I did not see any extermination facilities at Stalag 7A--no gallows.

22:00 I heard that prisoners were marched there long distance from other camps, with the encroachment of Allies, they were evacuated inland. They probably would have been evacuated further east if the war had continued.

23:00 We completed our mission in Stalag A, to classify the patients and set up a field station. Another army installation came in and took over after a month of sorting the camp victims, etc.

24:00 The orders were usually sent from 3rd Army: they were usually signed by Patton. The American Armies took care of civilians in disaster consistently and do today, even in times of combat.

25:00 A friend of his in Vietnam worked serving Vietnamese every day. We were at Stalag 7A a few hours after the liberation. We did not see any corpses.

26:00 We moved to Mauthausen by truck; it took about 12 hours. The situation was different there. We were a tent hospital. We picked up new supplies and equipment.

27:00 The camp facilities were so poor, that we would clear a field and put down a wood floor. We would work under tents, and would sleep on the ground. The patients slept on the ground also on air mattresses we gave them.

28:00 Mauthausen situated in a beautiful rural Austria, not far from Alpine provinces. No evidence of war there until we saw the camp. The camp was a huge permanent installation with barbed wire, guard tower -- very high security. The war was almost over.

29:00 The 11th Army Division actually liberated the camp, arresting officials, incarcerating them. The inmates themselves were setting fire to the barracks. Our mission was to prevent this so they would not destroy the housing they would have to depend on.

30:00 The weather was not mild; there was occasional snow so the inmates had to continue to use the barracks until we could set up tents, more hygienic. The tents were large enough for 40-50 patients.

31:00 Many had to be treated with insecticides for lice, etc.. We immediately knew the process of treatment, intravenous feeding, etc. There was evidence of gas chambers and crematorium here. I saw a grave that was practically bulldozed over.

32:00 There was a bulldozer stalled in the middle of a big grave. In their haste, the Germans were trying to cover up their crimes. They fled leaving partially covered graves. There were corpses in the grave. The crematoriums were still warm -- there were ashes.

33:00 I did see tables with pathetic rows of sorted out shoes, eyeglasses, fillings from teeth. They were very methodical; tried to recycle everything they could for their uses. There was a rumor that the more bizarre, perverse Nazis who made lamp shades from human skin. I didn't see any, but I did see some cured skin to be used for gruesome memorabilia.

34:00 The assistant camp director was rumored to be beaten to death by enraged inmates. Others were arrested and subjected to trial much later when I wasn't there anymore. I was asked

to interrogate two uniformed women who worked for the Nazis -- we had to give up on it. One was very violent.

35:00 She threw something at me. The hospital commander decided to let the military police handle it. I did not work as a general practitioner or psychiatrist at any time in Mauthausen. You did whatever had to be done.

36:00 Trying to determine medical problems -- the quickest way was to do mass chest X-rays to find out what kind of tuberculosis, which were infectious, which were not, etc. I suggested the X-rays, but the chief of the medical service was determined that we would not waste film--he would not proceed along lines of good medical practice. He reprimanded me.

37:00 An order by Patton came through with a phrase "these heroic individuals who suffered mightily under the tyranny of the Third Reich deserve the same treatment we would give our own personnel." I was then glad to be with our army. We began the X-rays.

38:00 Pulmonary tuberculosis was an important problem--starvation predisposes you to diseases like this. The overcrowding encouraged small epidemics of this, all you needed was one active case to start an epidemic. Mauthausen was in rural area.

39:00 Alongside of the camp, there was a stone quarry, an excavation a half-mile in diameter and several hundred feet deep. Had tools for cutting stone and train cars for transporting. The stones were used probably for civilian construction. They were quarried by the inmates, even when they were too sick to stand on their feet.

40:00 The stones were moved mainly by man-power. The inmates were said to be shot if they could not accomplish the work in the quarry, which harnessed the slave-labor and helped to gradually butcher the inmates. This was later corroborated.

41:00 It was an extermination facility slower than the gas chamber, but same plan. These prisoners had not been marched anywhere--it was a definitive death camp.

42:00 It was lesser known, tucked away in beautiful rolling hills. It would be difficult to discover, unless you knew. Stalag 7A seemed to be put up in a hurry by the Germans in their escape. Mauthausen was only about 80 miles from Vienna.

43:00 There were some Austrian prisoners there. A heterogeneous camp: there were some Spanish loyalist prisoners taken by Franco. They were picked up by the Gestapo, but not butchered, because they were considered special and informative. They were trained.

44:00 At its peak there were about 25,000 prisoners there. It was about half-full when we arrived. Prisoners who were well enough went to prisoner-displacement centers. The ones too sick to be transported were treated by us.

45:00 The Americans were really horrified. There was very little discussion at first; it was too difficult to talk about. The opinions varied with the class, social consciousness of the individual. Professional people were more aware of what needed to be done.

46:00 The enlisted young men were very giving, dedicated, even more so than professional. Some professional thought this was not our position; they thought we should be in combat.

47:00 One man was disgruntled because he had been drafted from his large practice at home. There was an American/Japanese orthopedic surgeon who was injured, and was not able to say no to our commander back in the U.S., and joined our unit as surgeon.

48:00 He had been part of the famous Japanese combat troops in Italy and was on his way home. He could not say no to our unwitting commander. He had a breakdown. It was a mistake to expect him to go back a second time.

49:00 Most of the men worked very efficiently, except a few, like one who felt concern for the economics part, the need to hold back on supplies, until Patton's order came through. There were not enough nurses, personnel. We had about 30 Army nurses.

50:00 We got some nurses from the regular German Army -- they were young and eager to be helpful. Some of that may have been due to guilt, but they were able to follow orders well.

51:00 They worked well with the Americans, some spoke English. The few German civilians around Stalag 7A I had contact with farmers from the nearby area. They shrugged their shoulders, it was war, they didn't know the extent of what was going on. They thought the prisoners were homeless wanderers.

52:00 They did not want to know. They wanted to deny. They felt a real German problem with how to detain wanderers. At Mauthausen, the rich dairy farmers denied it.

53:00 They said the camp was for undesirable and criminals, no knowledge of the Jews there. They tried to look away, denied the crematoriums. They behaved as if we weren't there. If we tried to communicate, they were cordial, but evasive.

54:00 They were happy to provide food, etc., almost patronizing. I know that some of the farmers were given prisoners to work on the farms - slave labor. The prisoners wanted to be farm slaves; it was a great opportunity because they had food. There were one or two prisoners on each farm.

55:00 Hard to believe that they did not know. They benefitted from the labor.