

Summary of Oral History: Ernest Lorge

RG#: RG-50.031.0043

This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on 04/2022

Rabbi Ernest Lorge b.Mainz 5/26/1916, left Germany to US 1936; Rabbinical studies; after ordination, joined the U.S. Army 69th Infantry Division; Spring 1945, first American chaplain to meet Russian Army (Torgau, Germany); in nearby town, first experiences with survivors, young women from Auschwitz, one seemingly in trance from learning husband had been shot at Buchenwald; Liberated survivors were traveling behind the Red Army advance and Lorge learned about the communications system that existed between camps; Rabbi Lorge details survivors' reports (included Hungarian survivors); He recalls the different treatment of camp survivors by different units of the Red Army ie Moscow and Leningrad Red Army units tended to be more kind to survivors, evicting Germans from homes, installing survivors to assist recovery but other units from other places such as Ukraine were reported to have mistreated survivors and raped women; Lorge spent three weeks crossing the Elbe river between American and Russian zones, obtaining and distributing supplies to survivors including matzah; holding first service in DP camp, weeping heard during kaddish; continued to hold services for survivors; flew the Jewish Chaplain flag on his Jeep in Germany, survivors were so glad to see it that they were grabbing for bits of the cloth; after a few weeks, Lorge was no longer able to travel freely between the Russian and American zones; discusses Jews crossing from the Russian zone to the American zone and the Yalta agreement going into effect which resulted in the border to the American zone being shifted westward; working with the military government to earmark traincars through Leipzig for Jews who were well enough to transport, others were too weak to walk; visiting hospitals, including Grimma, Germany, which was full of displaced persons who did not want to live under Soviet rule; with cooperation of U.S. Army quartermasters, acquired two trucks to evacuate the Grimma hospital to a hospital in Bavaria, General Patton's area; recollection of a non-Jewish clerk's moving speech empathetic to survivors' plight; Reports survivor stories, the sadism of Nazi camp guards; but included some exceptions such as a Birkenau officer's dropping food for inmates; admiration of survivors who maintained their religious faith in the camp and kept track of the Jewish calendar "conscientious attempt to observe Passover" but starvation endured; Soft resistance of maintaining the Jewish faith in the camps; Resistance of Jewish partisans escaping into the woods; post-war reluctance to share their stories; discussion on survivor's tests faith through the Holocaust; staying another year after liberation to assist the Jewish community under British authority and the Joint Distribution Committee, visiting Paris to obtain supplies; Criticisms of the JDC, then discussions of the different groups involved in relief including USNRRA; Staying in Hesse to procure homes and schools for survivors, including finding a publishing house to start a Jewish newspaper; smuggling survivors across borders to eventually resettle in Palestine; holding regular religious services including 1945 Rosh Hashanah for 2000 in Hesse; visiting Buchenwald, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen; Jewish Chaplain Nadich on disagreement between allied leadership on different treatment of displaced persons based on ethnicity; recalls his return to his hometown; postwar lectures on the Holocaust and visiting postwar camp museums; Relates a story meeting a Lutheran minister that had been in Dachau for anti-war remarks, who felt guilt for allowing Jews to be treated worse than other prisoners.