

Time-coded Notes for Oral history Interview with Dr. Charles Froug 1986

Tape 1
April - May, 1945

1:01:15

Dr. Froug was a General Surgeon with an Evacuation Hospital during the War. During the last week of April, 1945, he was stationed in the city of Rosenheim, where the unit was overwhelmed by the odor in the air. The residents of the city claimed that it came from a factory, 6 or 7 kilometers away, which produced fertilizer for the farm area. As a physician, Dr. Froug knew the unmistakable odor to be otherwise.

1:03:42

While Dr. Froug and 3 enlisted men searched for the source of the odor, they found an area surrounded by barbed wire. As they drove in the open gates, they saw hundreds of gaunt, emaciated people, weighing no more than 70 pounds, in what appeared to be pajamas. They soon learned that these were prison clothes for the inmates of Dachau. The majority of the prisoners were Jewish, but there were a number of political prisoners (Lutheran and Catholic clergy members who would not support Hitler). Dr. Froug was able to converse with the prisoners in Yiddish to find out what had taken place and to explain that they would be helped now. The survivors were in tears as they kissed his hands and feet.

1:05:21

As they surveyed the camp, they found 500-700 bodies lined up against the fence like cordwood. Closer to the crematoria, the odor of burnt flesh became unbearable. Nearly 200-300 bodies were burnt in the last week. Dr. Froug recognized the unforgettable odor from his days in Hospital Emergency Rooms. They also found 8-10 bodies hanging on hooks, used for dead patients. The Germans would shear all of the hair off the body, then beat it with a club across the mouth to retrieve any remaining gold, before burning the body.

1:06:03

At the crematoria they found 15 ovens, some of them still burning. The bones were still being charred. The odor was impossible to tolerate. Dr. Froug realized that none of this information had gotten out. He was there only because he smelled the odor, recognized it as burning flesh and had to see what it was.

1:08:13

Dr. Froug and the enlisted men returned to Rosenheim that night. The next day, Friday, the Commanding Officer sent men and food to Dachau. Dr. Froug and the other Jewish members of the unit, about 18 doctors, accompanied them to say the Kaddish prayer for the dead, who could not yet be buried because of the Sabbath. Sunday morning, 8,000 people were marched from the city to dig a large, single grave, 200 by 50 by 10 feet. They were made to carry the bodies and lay them in the trench. Finally, the bodies were covered with earth. Dr. Froug said that they had no way of knowing who was Jewish, Catholic or Lutheran, but they thought the Jewish star, made by one of the enlisted men to put over the grave, would be acceptable to all.

1:09:49

The commanding officer had the mayor of Rosenheim arrested and interrogated. Despite his claims that he was never a Nazi, during the examination, they found the SS marks tattooed by his left arm pit. Although the rest of the city claimed to know only about the "fertilizer factory" not the camp at Dachau, Dr. Froug is sure, in thinking back, that most of the people knew but could not, would not say anything.

1:10:54

During his discussion, that first day, with a 16 or 17 year old boy who survived, Dr. Froug learned the fate of the Nazi's and the camp guards. The officers and enlisted men fled 2 days earlier, because they knew the Americans were coming. "These emaciated, starved people killed most of the [unarmed] guards just by tearing them apart by their hands and teeth." Dr. Froug and the enlisted men saw a number of the mutilated bodies.

1:14:23

On the 5th day, they were transferred to Lake Kimze (ph), near the town of Traunchstein (ph). They took over a large German military hospital. German soldiers were given the same priority as Americans - depending on the urgency of their wound. The 8th or 9th day they moved to a town called Hoff (ph), in Southern Germany, across from the Czech town of Plzeň. During the next week, as they waited for the Armistice, they saw the Russians take Eastern Germany and Berlin, while the American troops watched and waited. Dr. Froug remembers being frustrated and not understanding the politics of caving in to Stalin.

1:15:58

Dr. Froug described how much angrier they were after finding Dachau, since they had no knowledge of any of the camps beforehand. Although key government officials, including Roosevelt, Morgenthau and Justices Frankfurter and Cordoza had concrete knowledge of the camps, the media had none. The only information the troops had came through the administration controlled magazine, "YANK."

1:16:23

During his first week home, Dr. Froug spoke to the B'nai B'rith about his experiences. Most of the people there had not been in the army, or overseas. "They could not believe that man's inhumanity to man could have happened without somebody knowing about it and they didn't."

1:17:22

He relates the fate of the 800 people saved at Dachau. They were transported in U.S. trucks to a kacerne (ph), a German camp for enlisted men, with blankets and food. What the Evacuation unit did not have they requisitioned from the quartermaster corps. Once the survivors were settled, the Red Cross and UNRA were notified. They came with more food and supplies. From there the people were transported through Austria to another camp in Trieste. They were the first group of survivors put on a boat to Israel.

Tape 2

2:00:28

Chatter about logistics of interview and taping.

2:01:05

During the first day at Dachau, Dr. Froug spoke to a few inmate, but most could not stop crying. They were so grateful to know that they would be saved and live that they could not talk. They didn't know where the records were kept. The Commandant's office was searched, but they couldn't find any records.

2:01:41

When they brought food the next day, most of the survivors gorged themselves. Those who did grew very ill because their bodies could not handle the American's food. The Red Cross brought nutritionists to deal with these special dietary problems.

2:02:40

Dr. Froug describes a man in the kacerne who was cutting a pair pants out of his blanket. Before the war this man was a tailor. Dr. Froug notes that even at this time of his life, he was already thinking about a new life for himself. Thus, the man wanted to make a pair of trousers, rather than wear the prison garb.

2:03:40

Of the inmates able to talk that first day, none had been at the camp for more than 5 or 6 months. The whole story came out later. As political prisoners, they did not have to work, only walk. Despite the plentiful farmland surrounding the area, they were given almost no food. Their usual meal was a thin potato soup with a crust of bread - for breakfast and dinner. No lunch. They had not seen meat for months.

2:05:04

In the inmates' buildings were row on row of wooden bunks, 4 high. They had only straw, no sheets, no pillowcases, no blankets. When a prisoner died, he was dragged out by other prisoners or the kapos, prisoners that the Germans appointed as guards, put on a wheelbarrow and laid out by the fence. They would then bring in fresh hay and a new prisoner. The only heating unit for each room of 200 people were pot-bellied stoves. Dr. Froug says, "You just can't forget."

2:05:35

Most of the prisoners died from starvation as the primary cause; typhus the secondary cause. The terrible vomiting and diarrhea further explains the emaciated condition of the survivors.

2:06:42

The crematoria ovens were used for everyone. The ratio was at least 30 or 40 Jews to 1 non-Jewish prisoner. There were no women, only older men and young boys - 15 or 16 years old. The young boys survived the starvation better than the older men. Dr. Froug references the pictures at Yad Vashem and their validity, emphasizing that he never saw an inmate over 70 pounds.

2:08:13

The young soldiers who liberated Dachau were all very upset because they had never seen anything

like this. They had no knowledge of genocide. Dr. Froug and the other Jews tried to explain Hitler's plans for Judenrein. At that point they had no knowledge of the battle of Warsaw. He suggests contacting Mr. Zuberberg (ph) in Columbus, Ohio for graphic descriptions of the uprising.

2:09:32

His memories dim a bit, but are as vivid as the day they occurred every time a new documentary, like "Shoah" appears on television. He can still smell the same odor he smelled more than 42 years ago. He feels that it should be talked about in every family, Jewish or Gentile, as the modern day Haggadah. It should never, never be forgotten. The world should never be allowed to forget.

2:11:36

Dr. Froug discusses Barbi's trial and his attorney's reference to French cruelty to the Algerians. Dr. Froug's comment, "As if you could equate the loss of 40,000 Algerians to 6 million Jews." He also discounts Barbi's claim that he was just following orders. He understood the killing of 40 American soldiers to be encompassed in the scope of military orders. He considers taking innocent people whose only guilt was being born a Jew and putting them to death inconceivable and immoral. "And that's what they were."

2:13:00

The remaining time was spent with the interviewer rephrasing her questions for the camera.