

-TITLE-EDWARD LEVANT  
-I\_DATE-DECEMBER 15, 1989  
-SOURCE-UNITED JEWISH FEDERATION HOLOCAUST CENTER PITTSBURGH  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-DURATION-51 MINUTES  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
Childhood - 1942

1:01:30 Dr. Edward Levant was born in June of 1915 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His parents came to the United States in 1910 - his father from Russia and his mother from what was then the Austria-Hungarian Empire. He had three living siblings, for two died early in his life. His father worked as a tailor and then in a cigar factory, there he met Edward's mother.

1:03:15 Edward's father spoke Russian and understood Polish. His family was Jewish, although they were not very religious - they rarely went to synagogue. He describes his father as non-political as well. In 1926 Edward's father became a citizen of the United States, and until 1927 the family lived in Ambler, PA.

1:05:05 Edward describes Ambler as a highly anti-Semitic area. They then moved back to Pittsburgh where his father gave up his business due to the Depression. After that the family relied on disability insurance as their primary source of income. Edward worked his way through college and dental school.

1:06:10 In 1939 Edward graduated from the University of Pittsburgh School of Dentistry and later worked as an intern in Rochester, N.Y. for one year. He then moved back to Pittsburgh where he enlisted in the army in August of 1942.

1942-1945

1:08:30 Edward felt it his duty to join the army, although he was not active in politics. He remarks that he was aware of Hitler and anti-Semitism well before 1939. He believes that the Jewish community was aware by the early 1930's. During this time period many German Jews migrated to the United States. He remembers that there was not much communication with them at school.

1:11:00 Because of imperfect eyesight Edward was placed on limited service in the army. He worked in the interior zone and was not exposed to combat situations. Edward never received basic training but was rather put to work immediately in the Dental Clinic.

1:13:03 Two years later Edward asked to be sent to Carlisle barracks near Harrisburg for a "basic training" program for medical personnel. His two month training there was virtually the same as that of a GI, only he didn't have to make his bed and ate in a decent facility.

1:14:40 Edward was then sent to Camp Ellis in Illinois, a quartermaster training center in which hospitals were being formed. From there Edward was to be sent overseas. He left Boston for Liverpool, England on the S.S. America. Approximately 15,000 troops were on board with about 16 hospitals for assignment.

1:15:20 Once in England Edward was sent to the Birmingham/Manchester area. He was there for 2 or 3 weeks to be quarantined. Edward received an individual order to leave his unit and to report to a replacement depot in England called Litchfield barracks. He then went to LeHarve, France, as an individual replacement where his unit (474th anti-automatic weapons self-propelled) landed on D-Day.

1:16:07 Edward then went to Verviers, Belgium via box car. The journey lasted five or six days. His unit had just penetrated into Germany. A German offensive occurred and his unit retreated into a small farming town called rete(ph) in Belgium.

1:17:22 This penetration and retreat took place in December of 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. The function of Edward's unit was to shoot low flying planes using tracer control (at that time we didn't have radar). After the German air force was knocked out his unit was used as infantry support. They guarded prisoners, road blocks and bridge-building engineers. Edward's unit was at Remagen bridge incident (he was on it before it fell). The Ludendorf bridge was a railroad bridge crossing the Rhine river, virtually every aircraft in the ETO was sent there.

1:18:32 The Germans had tried to blow up this bridge and had failed. Edward's unit had given an anti-aircraft support. After crossing the Rhine his unit came to Nordhausen, a small manufacturing town. The unit assembled a battalion first-aid station. All troops were required to go and observe a "factory" which existed in Nordhausen (p.1). Edward had never heard of Nordhausen before that day.

1:20:35 Edward describes the factory as a tunnel-like structure with trees growing over it. He never actually entered it, he was too afraid. On the outside leading into the tunnel were railroad cars used to load and unload rockets . (The original rockets with which they had tried to destroy England were built there). The tunnel was very large and camouflaged. Edward regrets not entering.

1:23:46 Edward's unit then came across a concentration camp called Dora. He never actually entered the camp per say, but saw the manufacturing facility and a large area of storage depots in which 800 to 1,000 people had been thrown. He has two photos of these hangers. Edward describes a series of bodies as far as the eye could see.

1:25:14 One inmate who was still alive spoke to Edward. Using his high school German Edward understood that former workers, those starved to death or sickly, were thrown into these pits, dead or alive. One of the sergeants refused to believe that the Germans had done this and insisted that it had been the Dutch. Edward did not think much of this individual.

1:26:47 The inmates, according to the survivor, were not buried, but merely tossed into the pit. The commanding officers of Edward's unit insisted that all the troops view the bodies in order to understand why they were fighting in Germany. Edward remarks that many people actually wondered why we were there.

1:28:10 Edward admits that he was not very emotionally involved when he viewed the bodies. He had never seen anything like that before. The general reaction of the American troops was not to say much. Edward remembers that this was the beginning of the end of the war.

1:29:50 Edward's commanding officer wanted German civilians to dig trenches in which the bodies could be buried, and so all the dead were eventually buried. He never actually met a Nazi while he was in Germany, or no one admitted it.

1:31:06 Edward claims that nobody in the town could have been unaware of the existence of the camp. He remembers experiencing open, latent anti-Semitism within the army. There were only four Jews in his unit, and according to Edward there was no lack of anti-Semitism.

1:34:54 Edward's unit moved every 4 to 5 days. As the mainline resistance advanced, the unit followed.

1:36:51 From Nordhausen the unit continued on to Mansfield which was 20 miles from Leipzig. This was as far as any Americans got. The unit remained there for 6 to 8 weeks where they met the Russians. In the winter of 1945 the army demobilized. The point-system went into effect, and men were discharged on the basis of points. Edward was changed to another unit.

1:38:26 Edward returned to the United States in December of 1945 as an independent replacement.

1945-present

1:40:09 Edward believes that information pertaining to the Holocaust is of extreme importance. He suggests that non-Jews who went through the camps receive publicity, for he believe, that in the mind's eye of most people the Holocaust is considered a "Jewish" problem.

1:40:09 Edward is reminded of a statement made by a Protestant leader in Germany. He remembers it as something like, "When the Nazis came and took away the Jews I didn't say anything. When they took away the communists I didn't say anything. When they took away the union workers I didn't say anything. But then they came for me...."

1:41:52 Edward believes that the most important task today is to emphasize that it can happen to anybody. There was a Holocaust in Cambodia four years ago, for example. It can happen anytime and anywhere. He views the German people with suspicion and considers reunification inevitable, but he does not assess whether it would be good or bad.

1:43:14 Edward is not married. He notices a certain amount of progress since 1945, but there is still a great deal of latent anti-Semitism in this country, although it is not as overt-as it once was. He believes that young people today should make an attempt to learn and emphasize history.

1:44:19 Edward believes that Israel is in a dangerous situation. According to him they will never solve the problem of religious animosity among Moslems, Christians and Jews. He predicts that Israel will end up like Ireland in the end.

1:46:58 Edward believes that the American Jewish community is doing a good job of educating the population about anti-Semitism. Affirmative action has helped, and the United States has made progress in combatting discrimination. However, according to Edward the United Nations is a laugh, worse, in fact, than the League of Nations.

1:50:53 Edward does not know whether or not his recorded experiences will help future generations.  
.END.