

-TITLE-JAMES PRIEST
-I_DATE-SEPTEMBER 20, 1989
-SOURCE-UNITED JEWISH FEDERATION HOLOCAUST CENTER
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-37 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-Summary from videotaped interview given by Jack Gordon. All information from interviewee, without correction.
-CONTENTS-
3:45 James Priest was born in Steubenville, Ohio on August 16, 1920. He is from a Catholic family in which he has one sister. He was nineteen when the German's invaded Poland and was drafted into the United States army in 1942. He was sent to Fort Benning Georgia, where he was trained. His training took him to other camps in the U.S. until his battalion was sent to Scotland on July 1, 1944.

7:45 Mr. Priest was in a medical Detachment during the time he spent in Europe. This detachment was in Wales during D-Day preparations. One August 13, 1944 his unit landed on Utah Beach, France among many other U.S. troops.

10:25 Mr. Priest's job was to drive an ambulance. He was never informed about the enemy, nor were the others in his battalion. The captain of his battalion was a Jewish man by the name of Major General Terry Allen. Priest was in the one hundred and fourth infantry division of the First Army when they came upon the camp at Nordhausen.

14:00 The movements of his battalion to this point were from Utah beach, through France to the Ruhr Valley, and finally arrived on April 13, 1945 in Nordhausen. Neither Mr. Priest, nor his fellow officers were informed of what they might discover in Germany, (e.g. the camps).

15:50 Mr. Priest doubts that anyone even knew of the existence of the camps, because the battalion was a hybrid of people from many different units. Jacob Danish, the head of the battalion at this point, had never discussed the Nazis and their actions, with his men. Mr. priest believes that Mr. Danish, if he is still living, would have an incredible amount of information on German activities during the war. Mr. Danish is from New York. Mr. Priest also recommends locating David Kenny, from Yonkers, N.Y. should Captain Danish be deceased. Mr. Kenny is the man who drove Captain Danish throughout the war.

18:25 When the battalion went into the camp at Nordhausen, they were confronted with harsh conditions. The barracks were deplorable and Mr. Priest maintains that there was no way of recognizing the nationalities of the men in the camp. Mr. Priest's eyes have been infected since he went into the barracks at Nordhausen due to the unhealthy conditions. The U.S. troops turned the camp over to the military government in Nordhausen.

19:12 Contrary to the belief of the interviewer, Mr. Priest does not believe that General Patton had been through Nordhausen. In fact, there were at least five German SS men still there upon Priest's battalion's arrival who were then picked up by U.S. forces.

20:18 Priest was a member at this time of the 114th infantry regiment. They were to be part of a task force when they entered the camp. They treated as many sick as they could, yet due to their limited supplies, were not prepared to care for most of the camp's prisoners. He is not sure how many Jews were in the camp.

22:55 Within the camp there were bodies stretched out in the barracks, two levels high. Mr. Priest was sure of the nationality of the prisoners. He heard a lecture given by a Polish priest who had been in Dachau that within that camp. There were at least 4,000 Catholic priests among Jews, Russians and others.

23:56 Mr. Priest clearly states that if he had been told to go into another camp, he would have refused. He also discusses deserted mental hospitals he ran across in France. He believes that this is an issue to be looked into, as there must have been many other helpless people within mental hospitals in Europe during the war.

24:50 When asked to try to identify the prisoners in the camp, Priest says they must have been Polish, Jewish Italian and French. He contradicts himself with respect to the fact that he says he thinks about Nordhausen a lot, yet he did not think about it until he heard the Polish priest speak.

25:53 Mr. Priest returned to the United States during a major demobilization period in December, 1945. When asked again about General Patton's presence at Nordhausen, Priest states that Mike Denova of the Heavy Ordnance Company, Third Army, does not remember ever going to Nordhausen, and his movements were the same as General Patton's.

27:43 Mr. Priest had not changed his views on genocide or of the human race due to his experience in World War II. He merely was "told to go," and is not "holding any grudges." Upon his return to the states, Mr. Priest worked for a steel company in Ohio. He has not returned to Europe, although he would like to. His unit has had only one reunion, and that was in 1949. He has seen no one since.

29:53 Mr. Priest was put in the medical detachment because he worked in a funeral home before the war. He speaks of his meeting with an embalmer in Europe who was sent to Germany to work in grave registration. He is currently looking to locate this man. Mr. Priest believes that officers were embalmed. (The interviewer disagrees.) The grave registration groups would go through towns and claim American bodies. Priest's own battalion would have to pass the bodies lying in the streets with the knowledge that someone else would come pick them up.

31:35 The battalion Priest was a member who would periodically receive updates from General Patton discussing how well things were going for the Allies. Priest compares this to Vietnam, as in both instances the U.S. troops were not trained with respect to how they should react to being prisoners of war, or other atrocities they may come across. Mr. Priest has a book in his possession which discusses his battalion's movement. Upon exiting Nordhausen it states that "proper authorities took over." The American G.I. 's had no understanding of what was occurring within the camps unless they came in direct contact with them.

32:50 Mr. Priest recognizes the language barrier between the U.S. soldiers and the displaced persons they encountered. There was no way of learning about the camps from people they could not understand. He states when his detachment entered the camp at Nordhausen, they went about their business in a "professional" manner. He does believe however, that an outsider would have either fainted or become ill. His detachment was there for one night, and then moved on.

35:01

Mr. Priest reads statistics of displaced persons, including 31 French, 99 Italians, 124 Polish, 212 Russians, 4 British and 4387 unaccounted for. This count was taken on May 2, 1954 of displaced persons. Mr. Priest shows much regret, and the interviewer will attempt to locate Jacob Danish.
.END.