

This is tape two, side A, and we were talking about when you first walked into the Dachau camp and some of thoughts--

It was--

--that you had.

--it was no, no, never in my life have I seen anything like that. And as a physician, you see ugly things in life. And somehow you are used to that because that's your profession. But I cannot really talk. Where is-- where are the pictures?

What did the others, American soldiers say? What did you talk about?

They were all outraged. They were outraged. First of all, as I mentioned to you before, we already came from a camp of a prisoner-of-war camp which was so horrendous so awful that it was really-- we couldn't have been more outraged about what happening. And then we went to Dachau. And it was just as bad or maybe worse.

But when you show-- for instance, we went to the-- to liberated the American section, well, they might have had a, let's say, a barrack, let's say like that living room. And you know, if you would see floor, wooden floor here.

Planks.

I mean, well, they were wooden floor about three or four sizes. And then they, people who were sick, sick, badly-wounded people were just thrown into these areas possibly to die. So we saw ugly things before we went to Dachau. And they were all upset. And they were upset. And it was absolutely unreal.

Were there nurses there also with you?

[? Beg your pardon? ?]

Were there nurses with you?

No. No. No. No.

There were no nurses.

The company had just male personnel. No, no, It was a combat team, combat unit. We were not armed because medical units are not armed.

What did some of the-- do you remember what some of the survivors said to you? Did any of them have the strength to talk to you?

I don't think we talked about it too much.

Did you talk to the survivors?

Oh, yes.

What kind of things did they say to you? Do you remember?

I don't remember too much. They were very, very happy to see us, of course. But I went, as a matter of fact, to-- they had what they call maybe the headquarters of the camp.

And the Germans were very meticulous to write down the names of the peoples, supposedly at least that they had long books with names of the thing. And I just went through the names, thinking that maybe I come across somebody I

know. Never did.

And in that one corner was a very, very forlorn Gypsy. And I think it was a Hungarian Gypsy, as a matter of fact. At least he spoke a type of a Hungarian that the Gypsies do. And he was telling me that he feels awful. He said all the Gypsies were killed. I said, well, how come you weren't? He was a master forger. And he was kept alive because he could forge anything anew.

There were-- I don't have too much recollection. There were a lot of people who were milling around and moving around, feeling the fact that they are free. But there were an awful lot of bitter people there. And an awful lot of people were looking for relatives or children. Mothers were frantically looking for children. And then and--

So these were men, women, and children prisoners?

They were man, woman, and I didn't see any children. But there were man and woman and young people, young women, too, in compounds. But I think we were pretty much numb. Maybe if you see these pictures, you will understand what I'm talking about.

How long did you stay there?

We were-- the unit, the medical and surgical technicians stayed there. I don't know where they were [?bound?]-- place. But they stayed there. But we were just coming back and forth.

And how many days did you do that?

Maybe for about a week or so. We got orders to move down to Innsbruck. The war was still on in certain part. Because I think that the 23rd Division-- was it the 23rd Division? But anyway, the American division in Innsbruck or the outskirts of Innsbruck was quite badly hurt. And we went down there to give them assistance. And that wasn't so far for many, you know.

When you would go back at night to where you were staying--

No, we would go there. And we might have spend nights occasionally. But I doubt. I don't remember.

Yeah. Were you able to sleep at night after being there during the day?

I don't know whether I-- I don't know where we were billeted.

Was it difficult to sleep at night?

No. You mean at Dachau? I don't think I slept in Dachau.

No, no, no, when you-- in the evening after you left the camp and you would go back to where you were staying, was it difficult?

I don't believe-- I don't believe so. I think that we needed all the sleep, what we can get. We did not-- we learned how to sleep on the-- in a pup tent on the mountaintop.

Were you dressed specially? Did you wear anything--

No.

--over your uniform? Were they concerned about infection?

No, no, we were in uniform.

Yeah, but you didn't have any special protective clothing because of infection?

No. You don't. We weren't that spoiled, that giving any protective clothes. I do know that we had very nice parkas, aviation parkas, everybody there.

Did you handle, did you physically handle the survivors?

I had people who came to the-- to our [? sick hole ?] and take care of.

Yes.

Yeah. But the very sick one were in no position to go anywhere.

Yeah.

They were on a cot dying.

But you had no restrictions on handling these people?

Oh, no. No. No. But it was an abnormal situation.

So after the week was over, then you continued on, you said?

I don't-- we continue what? I'm sorry.

Well, I was asking you where you continued on. But before I do that, was there a chaplain with you?

Yeah.

And what was his reaction to this?

Well, he was a very kind sorted man. And my god, he brought more food to them every time we went. I don't know where he was able to get all of these food from. He was getting food and clothing or whatever he could.

He did help on his own way, not medically but as a human being who was very much affected by what he saw, even more so than I. Because he was not a physician. He does not see. Well, he saw the war, you know?

But that's right. [? Dunson ?] came back from the Russian with the troops. So they were-- he was with them for a year before I was. He's 91. Just a couple of days ago, I talked to him. And I think that he's quite feeble, though. It's awful.

I told him I'm going to send him some pictures where I see him and I are together. And we were very close. He was-- we were very close for a very good reason. We were the oldest members of the group. You know, most of the people were young draftees.

You were 35.

I was 35. He was 41. So we were the old men of the group. And he's a wonderful man. As matter of fact, [?Tibor?], he went to the-- well, anyway, that's a long story. Now, what do you do with these pictures?

Oh, we'll talk about that later.

You don't want to talk to now? I'm all talked out.

Well, let's just finish up. And so you left Dachau. And where did you go?

Innsbruck.

And then?

We were in Innsbruck where they had an awful lot of liberated people, displaced people, were slave laborers and so on. There were oodles and oodles of people who tried to find a place where they can eat or live. Hospitals were jam packed with the people. And--

And what were your duties there?

The unit was sent there because of, as I mentioned, they had casualties that they were helping. But I was-- I got a special assignment. When they found out that I spoke Hungarian, Italian, and German, they asked me to join an investigating team which was investigating the Neurological Institute of Innsbruck, where those people who are also they are not German, Germans who were suspected with anti-- German or anti-Nazi sympathies were sent to the institution for a medical checkup. And they were examined, and they discharged.

And every one of them, the people that we investigated, within a month died with different ailments and conditions. And they were very anxious to get the multilingual physician to investigate what they put. And I was there maybe about six weeks or eight weeks with this team, intelligent group. And maybe we thought that we came to some kind of a understanding.

And then I was transferred to the Pacific. But I never get to the Pacific because the war ended eventually. But we went-- we were-- the war was over by then, the 8th of May. And we went to Augsburg, Germany, where they retrained us and refurnished us for the Pacific campaign. And we were there several weeks.

And then we went to Arles where we were for several weeks. But fortunately, the war ended in the Pacific. And while my unit was sent back and they rerouted, I was flown back from Orly field, Paris.

Six months later.

Beg your pardon?

Six months later.

Six months later?

You were trying to find your family.

Well, you had talked about going to find your family.

I didn't find them [?my family?].

Right.

But that's right, they transferred them sooner back to the States. And I was detached from the unit and assigned to, oh, different places. I remember I was in Marseilles. How did I get to Marseilles?

My classification in the army was 3108, which is obstetrician. And at that time, when the war in Europe was over and they were all sending troops to the Pacific, a great many nurses and a great many WACs, a great many female personnel who already had enough of the European war got pregnant. And one place I had the job to establish whether they were pregnant or not so they could be sent home and discharged from the army. People were getting pregnant to get out of the army.

That was in Marseilles. In Marseilles, I also had a whole group of people who came down with venereal diseases. And that was the first time we used penicillin because penicillin was not permitted-- was not used by the civilian population. The army used it. We gave them an injection of penicillin every three hours for six days. And by golly, that cure them. They never again get another venereal disease.

But we had to put them into jails or restricted areas because they wanted to escape. It was a painful experience, every three hours, day and night, for six weeks. That's a high price to pay for a venereal that disease. Anyway that was-- You know what the trouble is, that so many of these things are a little bit hazy.

It's 50 years.

Especially when nothing important happened there, important at the time. But--

When did you come back to the United States?

In the fall of '45.

And then just--

Then I was assigned to Fort Devens, Fort Devens. And after Fort Devens was closed, I was at Camp Campbell, Kentucky, when they found out that I had too many points to be kept in the army. So I sit there for a month to be discharged. And they sent me back to Fort Dix. And I was discharged.

Discharged. And then you settled where after the war?

After the war, I settled in Queens Village--

In New York.

--where I open up an office.

What kind of practice did you have?

I did a general practice emphasizing in those days obstetrics. And of course, we were very happy to get whatever we could. We lived in a home, small home with an office. And my wife was the nurse.

And we were-- I had a-- my son was born April the 3rd. And I did not know he was born until May.

What year was this?

In '45-- I was still overseas. As a matter of fact, I saw him close when he was almost a year old. But I was in Innsbruck when I found out that Paul was born.

So you have one son?

I-- then a couple of years later, I had another son. And a couple of years later, I had another son. And then we didn't have any sons after that. So one was born in '45. One was born in '47. And the '49, the young fellow who was born in '49 is responsible for this interview.

And your sons names are Paul and--

Paul, Steven, and Clinton.

Mhm.

Clinton is the-- Clinton was my wife's-- my father-in-law's name. Paul was my brother's name, Paul William. And Steven Ward--

We just liked the name Steven.

Just Steven Ward.

Ward was my maiden name.

Before we end, I just wanted to ask you just a few more questions. Do you still think about your experience that you went through?

I tried to forget it as much as I could. And I did not look at these pictures for many, many years. And this last week, ever since this episode-- I gave these pictures to my son. And when he called me up that you are going to come out, I ask him to return it to me. And I got it yesterday. And I haven't been able to take my eye off.

And today I went over there and had enlarged so I can see better. As I said, my eyesight ain't so good.

Are there any sounds or any smells or anything that still stay with you after all these years, that remind you?

Well, it was a very interesting situation. In spite of the fact that there were so many people dead, it was not too-- well, of course, it was cold. You would expect a great deal of dead smell for miles away. And for some reason or other, we were only amazed that we saw so many dead ones, dead people there. And they did not had the smell of the dead.

My explanation was that the inmates were so starved, skin and bone, that they didn't have enough flesh and fat to have these odors of normally you find with people who are lying around for a day or-- they couldn't have possibly cleaned them up more than-- it took a long time, quite awhile to just to dispose of the dead body. I don't even know how they disposed of them.

Do you think this experience changed you in any way?

In what way?

Do you feel that--

I was a nice guy before, and I am a nice guy after.

Do you feel that your age was a help to you?

I don't think that I gave too much--

In coping with what you saw?

--thing. I was very, very perturbed when I was a doctor. I was two places where I was perturbed, at Heppenheim, where I saw the prisoner-of-war hospital, emotionally very much affected. And Dachau was a very, very disturbing experience. Somehow you couldn't understand how anything like that one could have happened. And if it did happen, why did it happen?

You know, somehow you started to question God's way. How can God permit these things? Of course, that was not the question that I asked the chaplain because he would have had an answer. But he was just as disturbed as I was. It was a disturbing experience.

Did it make you more religious or less religious seeing what you saw?

I don't think-- I think that less religious, not more. Never-- may I just not talk anymore?

Is there any message that you want to leave to your children or grandchildren before we end, anything special?

I did leave all my messages. I wrote a little, a few pages already two or three years ago in which I pretty much thought about my life.

Wonderful.

And as I told you that my youngest son, who is responsible for all of these interviews, he-- we used to go on long walks. And he had a tape recorder and taped what we were talking about. And one of these days, he threatened me that he is going to put it-- write it up for-- he felt quite strongly that my life should have-- should be known to my children or grandchildren. Did I say anything too much? I don't--

Have you ever been back to Germany since the war?

No, ma'am. Not only I didn't go back, I wouldn't go back.

Why wouldn't you go back?

Possibly would bring back ugly memories, and I just-- I never thought I would dislike anything as much as I do. I just don't want anything to do with Germany. I never, never, ever bought a German product since. I just wouldn't buy it. She then said buy German car. I would never do it.

It just a resentment that possibly generated at the time when I was in Germany. And you just-- well, I'm not a vindictive person, but I just don't-- I just wouldn't feel free with it.

I don't have the same feeling about Japanese, possibly because I never been in Japan. And I'm quite sure they were people who are-- wouldn't do anything with Japan, looking through the atrocities that they've committed. It's just one of those things I would not. I'm happy that my wife is not of German origin.

[LAUGHS]

When you were in Dachau, did you walk around the camp at all?

Oh, yes, quite a bit.

And--

Quite a bit.

You saw other parts of the camp? What other parts of--

I saw quite a bit of the--

What did you see?

People who were trying to feel what-- how it is to be free again. A great many of them were absolutely elated, just-- and stunned. And they couldn't eat, you know. And obviously. They were starved. They were starved to death.

And they were just-- there were just people walking around. They were numb, just little informations. They were not in a position or could be in a position to-- they were very happy to see the Americans. And they were surprised when I

talked Hungarian to the Hungarians and German to the Germans and Italian to the Italians, because they were all different things there.

What other structures did you see?

Structures?

What other buildings or structures did you--

We saw the-- I have a picture of the crematorium. And--

Did you know what that was, those were, when you saw them?

We know the crematorium, of course. There were bodies outside, just as much as everybody is outside the places where they get the little gas. What I did not believe, one of the story was, what I did not understand, how come that people did not know what was going on? I still don't know.

But one of them said that there are very few people knew about the crematoriums, if they knew it at all. According to the-- God bless you.

Thank you.

According to the information at that time was, which I did not believe to be true, was that the crematorium was built by Polish priests. And every one of them was killed so they would not spread the rumors. Now that was a rumor which stayed with me for all these many years until about two or three years after we have been here, I read Michener's book on Poland. Did you read that?

And Michener book on Poland mentions that episode, that the crematorium was built by Polish priest. And I said I never heard that one before. And I would find it very difficult to comprehend. I don't know who built it. But whoever built the crematorium I'm sure were destroyed because nobody knew that crematorium sure existed there. Nobody knew.

And I don't know why they didn't know it. They must have known what the activity was there. Already people were so lethargic at the time when we get there anyway that they gave up fighting. I don't understand.

We are talking about unnatural times and people who lived an unnatural life. One little old man who was telling me, and I think in Hungarian, telling me that, you know what the biggest, the saddest thing is? I said, well, it's too many things.

He said, the saddest thing is that the very nice people did not survive. They just died. And people who survived, so many of them survived by on mere guts or whatever it is. And they are not the nicest people. The nicest people died. And some of these survivors might not be so nice.

As a matter of fact, he said, you know that we killed some of these kapos? Kapos were people who were in charge of a group of people, [INAUDIBLE]. Some of them were killed by their own people, if it is true. And then I don't believe-- don't have any doubt that that was true. That was a true story. Anyway, too many things happened.

Were the-- your other soldiers, the other American soldiers you were with at the time in Dachau, were you-- were they a support to you and you a support to them at this time?

Actually, we were pretty much-- I don't think we talked too much about except we were-- we all agreed that it's awful and terrible. But I don't think that anybody really talked about it.

And when you left, did your superiors ask you about the experience?

I was never questioned about it. There were thousands of people there yet. It was not a small camp. It was a huge camp.



And it was a totally abnormal atmosphere, that people were just about surviving. That was not the time that they could philosophy or-- they were just very likely guilty, that they felt guilty that they were the one who survived and that so many of the people who should have survived died.

Do you think what--

Am I explaining myself?

Yes. Yes. Do you think what you went through affected you as a doctor later on in life.

I never thought of it. I think that I am-- I think that-- I don't think that any of-- I wanted to forget the war as fast as I could. And I did a pretty good job on it until very, very recently, with this. I haven't talked about it so much ever.

Well, thank you for talking about it.

I'm all talked out.

Yes. Thank you.

Now, what do you want--

This concludes the interview of Dr. Tibor Vince. It took place on March 11, 1996, in Bethesda, Maryland. It was conducted by Gail Schwartz.