

Tibor Vince
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Abstract

Tibor Vance was born in Budapest, Hungary, on March 13, 1910, where he grew up in a military compound as his father was Career Army. After graduating gymnasium and receiving a teaching certificate, he enrolled in the Sorbonne Medical School but soon obtained a scholarship to attend the University of Torino Medical College. Upon graduation he worked at the University of Milan Medical School and while attempting to visit his mother in Hungary, he was forced into the Army. He obtained a 2-week pass to return to Italy where his patient, the Cuban Consul, assisted his entering Cuba. From there he went to New York and worked as a physician while awaiting citizenship. Upon receiving it, he also was eligible for an Army commission. In March 1944 he married and in the Fall went to the European war zone where he used his medical skills and encountered the Dachau concentration camp. He returned home in 1946 and only recently has viewed his photographs of Dachau.

Part II starts when Tibor enters Dachau concentration camp and is horrified at seeing the piles of dead bodies. He meets the survivors, sees some at sick call, and gets friendly with the chaplain. After a short time investigating the Neurological Institute of Innsbruck, the war ends, and Tibor gets retrained at Augsburg, Germany, for the Pacific. Then he is assigned as an obstetrician and treats venereal disease in Marseille before returning to the United States in the fall of 1945. He gets some short assignments before being discharged in 1946. Then he opens an obstetrics practice in Queens, NY, with his wife as his nurse. They had three sons, the youngest recorded some of Tibor's experiences and initiated this interview. For the first time, Tibor is looking at his wartime photographs.

00:00 Dr. Tibor Vince was born in Budapest, Hungary, on March 13, 1910 to his parents, ? and William Vince and an elder brother. His father was in the career army in Vienna when he met Tibor's mother and got married in 1902. His parents were transferred to Budapest where his brother was born. Tibor remembered his father wearing a long sword when he walked with him. His father did not serve in the military in-between wars, but with the onset of World War I, he reentered the service. His mother was born in the northern part of Hungary. His father was a farmer, and he had eight sisters. His mother, Leure Quastler, died when his he was four years old. The youngest child was four months old and the oldest was married and lived in Vienna so she, (Tante Maria?) brought up the younger siblings. His father remarried and had ten more children.

- 05:00 They lived in a house in the military compound in Budapest which had a hospital and an artillery station. After four years of elementary school, he attended eight years of gymnasium where he studied German and Latin for eight years and French and Greek for four years. School was held every day except Sunday and lasted all day until 5 P.M. They spoke German at home and Hungarian with others as he was born under the Hungarian monarchy. His father spoke three languages (German, Hungarian, and Slav) so was assigned to the military tribunal. They lived in the sixth district of Budapest, on the outskirts of the city. In English the area would be called, "Land of Angels." Tibor attended an all-boys public school and was skilled in soccer, skiing, and ice skating. Later he chose to go to Torino, Italy, where there was skiing as there was little available in Hungary. He read a lot as there was no TV or radio. When he was a teenager of about 14 or 15, he made his first radio receiver. He studied by kerosene lamp as there was no electricity.
- 10:00 By graduating from a classical gymnasium curriculum, one can become a math or language teacher, an engineer or a physician. He had little time after school for activities or groups except for soccer, and he played the piano since age eight or nine. He had a close family. The four youngest sisters who grew up in Vienna lived in the same area of Vienna. Tibor has many nephews and cousins. His brother was eight years older and his father had five siblings. The oldest cousin was a physician, and Tibor was the youngest cousin. The area which was most populated did not have a high school so it was unusual that Tibor attended one. He found it tough attending school 10 to 12 hours a day but upon graduation, one automatically became an officer and gentlemen. Due to his graduation, he wore a special insignia when in the Army. It was compulsory to enter service at age 18 and remain until age 65. He did not have any religious training in school or church, nor did he attend religious services. He felt he had a happy family.
- 15:00 After graduating high school, he attended a Teacher's College to obtain a teaching certificate. He had two close friends, one a painter and the other a journalist. In 1929 the three moved to Paris and lived together. Tibor enrolled in the Sorbonne Medical School as he felt he had no talent in art or writing. His oldest cousin, Victor, a physician, was his role model. When his artist friend had a girlfriend move in, Tibor moved out and decided to go to Italy to ski. He succeeded in obtaining a scholarship whereby he would only have to pay half the medical tuition. At the time of Mussolini, foreigners were encouraged to go to Italy to study. Tibor's father supported his medical studies, but Tibor tried to be independent. He went to Torino for seven years, which he enjoyed. After studying six years, he had six months hospital experience and then took the State board. He went to Sienna, a town 100 miles away, for the exam so there would be no favoritism on the exam. Six of the students went with him. Tibor was a good student and in the top 10% so obtained a good job in infectious diseases for three years.

- 20:00 Tibor attended the University of Torino where he knew one student from Hungary who helped him. He learned Italian in a few months and was able to take exams in Italian. The classes were small as the entire university had an enrollment of 150 students. At that time one could transfer between universities in Italy as some were easier than others. Tibor lived in the hospital for three years where he took care of patients. Part of the Infectious Disease Hospital had a TB sanitarium and some who came to work there came down with TB and died. He was given room and board, a small stipend, and free laundry service. The nuns tried to fatten him up. From there, Tibor went to the University Medical School of Milan as an instructor in medicine. He joined up with Antonio Spinelli, an instructor of surgery, and they opened up a Medical Research Library as their stipend was low, and the library was helpful in diagnosing venereal diseases. One of Tibor's venereal disease patients was a Cuban consul who was instrumental in getting him to Cuba. Tibor wanted to get out of Europe after his visit to his mother. In July 1938, when the train reached the Hungarian border, Tibor's passport was taken away from him. He had been away from Hungary for eight years and having his passport taken was unexpected. He was forced to join the First Regiment of border guards. This was the time of Sudetenland changes.
- 25:00 Tibor spent four months in the Infantry with vigorous training. His business partner succeeded in getting him a leave of two weeks to complete his research. Tibor returned to Italy, never to return to Hungary, and obtained a pass to Cuba via the consul. Tibor loved Italy and did not want to step back 100 years and live in Hungary. Although he was not aware of Hitler's activities, he knew that war was imminent and wanted to leave Europe. He got to Cuba and obtained a position as hematology instructor at the University Hospital near Havana. He and five friends were on their way to Australia on September 1, 1939, when war broke out. As a Hungarian (ally of Germany) citizen and illegal alien of Cuba, Tibor was unable to obtain a visa to Australia. His friends met a chemist from New York who sponsored them to come to New York. Four of his friends made it to Australia, and he and his friend Louie went to New York.
- 30:00 He only had a passport with restrictions in Cuba but obtained another passport in New York. (Side B) The Consul in Havana had given him a statement to enter the U.S. when the quota opened up. Since few from Hungary were able to leave, Tibor soon entered under the Hungarian quota. He went to Florida and took a bus to New York. The person sitting next to him on the bus spoke Spanish and informed him that his sister who lived in Sheepshead Bay would rent him a room. When Tibor reached Times Square, he took a taxi to Brooklyn not knowing the cost. First none of the taxi drivers understood any of the languages that Tibor spoke. Then one driver drove him for free.
- 35:00 Since leaving Hungary, Tibor had no communication with his parents. His brother joined him in his trip to Cuba as he hoped to get out of the war and bring over his wife and daughter. He was unable to bring his family out, so he returned to Hungary. While

living in Sheepshead Bay, Tibor studied English at the YMCA near Central Park. In six months he became proficient in English and secured an internship in obstetrics at the Evangelical Deaconess Hospital on Chauncey Street. Soon he was drafted into the U.S. Army as an illegal immigrant, but the hospital got him an extension until they obtained a replacement. After the internship, he worked for a year in obstetrics at Queens County Hospital where he worked 24 hours on and 24 hours off for \$130 a month. At the same time, he earned \$300 a month working for someone he met. When he became a citizen in January 1944 and was given a commission in the U.S. Army. He met his wife, a nurse, and they got married on March 9, 1944, and he entered the Army in May.

40:00 He barely knew what was happening in Europe in 1941 and 1942 though he remembered when Pearl Harbor got bombed as a nurse ran in and told him. He felt the radio and newspaper gave little commentary about the war in Europe. Tibor worked at least 38 hours a week, and though he was concerned about his family in Hungary, he learned nothing about them until after the war. His family had some information about him. When he was stationed at Innsbruck, Austria, he requested to go to Hungary, and the Russians stopped him at the border. They informed him that he would require special permission from the Russian legation in Paris. When he arrived at a hotel in Paris, he met a group of Hungarians going to Hungary to establish a legation and gave them \$100 to deliver to his parents. Later his mother told Tibor that a large car came to their home and with the help of an interpreter were given the \$100 which they lived on for several months. Tibor had no special feeling when he became a US citizen but was surprised to get it so quickly. It was quick because the Army needed a physician who spoke several languages and was skillful at skiing.

45:00 They planned to send him to a special unit in Northern Hungary but he never got that particular job. He married Priscilla Margareta Ward who was very beautiful. When he got his commission, Tibor reported to the Carlyle Barracks in Pennsylvania for 5½ weeks of infantry training and then assigned to a general hospital in Charleston, South Carolina, where he treated wounded from the Pacific. The patients had an ailment that insects could transmit so required the high altitude of the Black Mountains. From there he was transferred to Columbia, South Carolina, and was to go overseas with the 8th Division. Extraction of some teeth was botched so he was placed in the 892nd Medical Clearing Company. He was in the first of their three companies which helped the wounded before being assigned to a hospital. He went to Europe in fall of 1944 and returned two years later when it was his second wedding anniversary.

50:00 He arrived in Le Havre in Northern France and was awarded two battle stars for the Rhineland Campaign and the Central European Campaign. His unit got heavy casualties and he was assigned to the 7th Army, the fast moving Patton Division to Munich, Germany, which he reached in April 1945. From there he was assigned to Kaiserslautern, a German hospital with hundreds of allied POW patients. He felt it was a

cruel place where the commanding officer handed over to him 900 Russians overseen by one Yugoslav and Americans wounded at the Battle of the Bulge. The Commanding officer toasted daily those who died and was later convicted. The 3rd Army Headquarters sent Tibor to Dachau, Germany. He thought it strange that he never met a German who knew about Nazis or concentration camps. It seemed to him that people during wartime only knew what was happening within five miles from their residence. There were two platoons in his company which included 19 enlisted men, 10 medical, 2 dental, and a chaplain; this was a large number of officers in a small unit to get more patients treated. His platoon was sent into the camp to help out as there were many liberated prisoners dying of typhus.

55:00 He went by jeep to Dachau, and the rest went in ambulances. Upon arrival in Dachau, he saw mountains of dead people. There had been rumors, but now he was an eyewitness and took many photographs so others would know the truth. Tibor established a clinic to care for the ambulatory but there were many prisoners all over the camp. There were many medical units at the camp, but they were overwhelmed. His small unit mostly vaccinated against typhus, took care of the dying, spoke to a few prisoners and tried to prevent them from eating too much as it made them sick. He remained awhile as there were so many patients for sick call. They tried to make the camp a livable place. Even two or three weeks later, 100 people a day were dying.

60:00 Since he was a physician, Tibor had difficulty accepting the fact that so many people were murdered. For 50 years he could not look at his photographs but recently he gave some to his son and said it was time to view them and learn what he did during the war. He enlarged some of the photos and it made them appear even uglier. He wondered how people found out about Dachau. The story was that a combat team was outraged upon arrival so had SS guards line up and gunned them down. Many people were disturbed.

65:00

Part II

00:00 This part starts out with Tibor's arrival at Dachau and his horror at seeing the dead bodies and the dying. Though a physician used to seeing the dead, he had never seen anything this bad. The other American soldiers were outraged. This was even worse than seeing the wounded thrown on wooden floors at the POW camp. He arrived with no nurses, just male personnel. Though they were a combat unit, they were not armed. The survivors were happy to see them. He went to the headquarters where there were books listing the names of the prisoners. He met a Hungarian gypsy who was upset that all the other gypsies were killed but he was saved being a master forger. The survivors were mostly

young men and women. Some of the women were looking for their children. He felt numb. Tibor went daily to the camp for a week.

- 05:00 The war was still on. Then he was assigned to help the badly hurt Americans in Innsbruck. He wore his uniform and no protective garment against germs from the prisoners. Ambulatory survivors came to sick call. The chaplain was very kind and found food and clothing for the survivors. The chaplain is now 91 and feeble. At the time, Tibor being 35 and the Chaplain 41, they were the oldest and became close. In Innsbruck he saw many liberated slave laborers searching for food and a place to live as the hospital was jammed.
- 10:00 Although his unit was sent because of the casualties, he spoke Italian, German and Hungarians so was asked to investigate the Neurological Institute of Innsbruck. Those suspected of anti-Nazi sympathy were sent there and died a month after being discharged. The war ended, and Tibor was transferred to the Pacific. First he went to Augsburg, Germany, and retrained for the Pacific and then went to Arles. The others were transferred to the States and he was assigned to Marseilles to confirm that the nurses were pregnant. Many of them tried to get pregnant to get discharged. He also treated soldiers with venereal disease by giving them an injection of penicillin every three hours for six days. They wanted to escape from the unpleasant treatment so were placed in jail or restricted areas. About six months later in the fall of 1945, he was flown home from Orly, Paris. Then he was assigned to Ft. Devons Hospital and when it was closed, was sent to Camp Campbell in Kentucky.
- 15:00 The Army realized that Tibor had too many points, and he was sent to Ft. Dix to get discharged. Next Tibor opened a general obstetrics office in Queens, NY. His office was in his home, and his wife was his nurse. His son had been born while he was overseas, on April 3, 1945, and Tibor had two more sons in 1947 and 1949. Their names are Paul after his brother, Steven and Clinton named for his father-in-law. He tried to forget his wartime experiences and did not look at his pictures. He gave them to his son and just got them back yesterday, and now he cannot stop looking at them. He saw so many dead people in Dachau, but there was no odor, perhaps due to the cold or their lack of flesh. It took a long time to dispose of the dead. Tibor was disturbed both at the POW hospital and at Dachau and does not understand how or why the Holocaust happened.
- 20:00 He feels he might be less religious now. He wrote a few pages about his life for his grandchildren. His youngest son is responsible for this interview. He took time to record Tibor's life when they took a long walk and wrote it up so that Tibor's children and grandchildren would know about him. Tibor would not return to Germany as it would bring back ugly memories. He never buys German products such as a car. He has resentment toward the Germans from his time there. He does not feel that way about the Japanese although they committed terrible things. He's happy his wife is not German.

Tibor walked around Dachau and saw people feeling free again. They were elated, stunned and could not eat enough. He was surprised when he spoke German to Germans, Italian to Italians and Hungarian to Hungarians but they knew nothing about the concentration camp. He could not understand that. When he saw crematoriums he knew what they were because of the bodies outside; also saw bodies outside the gas chambers. There was a rumor that Polish priests built the crematoriums and were later killed. He read this in a missionary book about Poland. Maybe the Poles did not build the crematoriums, but whoever did was destroyed. Tibor felt that must be true as people did not know about it.

25:00 A Hungarian said the saddest thing is that the nicest people died and the people who survived were not always the nicest people. The Hungarian said he killed some Capos. Tibor said the American soldiers did not talk about their experiences. There were thousands of people at Dachau. Tibor does not believe the experience affected him as a physician. He just desires to forget about it and not talk about it.

28:00