

Take one.

OK, Pat. I want you to tell me about the first time that you came into a real concentration camp. What did you see and how did you feel?

Well, I saw people who are just desperately ill. I never saw such sick people in my life, and I just went limp really. I was disbelief. I just could not believe what I saw, and I stood there for a few minutes. And I waited around. I kept saying, am I going to be able to do this? I just don't know if I can do this or not. So I kind of stood by the door. Then I went in and started working, trying to take care of them.

Well, there other patients with very, very high fevers with typhus and tuberculosis. And they were so starved, we couldn't give him any medication. You couldn't use a hypo because there's no place.

Let's start again, and you tell me where you were at point, and that many of you were there, and how you approach the camp, and what you saw.

Well, we were in an evacuation hospital close by. I was in small hospital, it moved a lot. And this was probably one of the subcamps. We'd been to Rhine first, and then we moved around, moved on down south, and this was a subcamp. And so there were a few of us went over there because not all the nurses and doctors could go because somebody to take care of our patients at our hospital. So take a few each day and go over.

And it was it was just terrible. I couldn't believe it. Absolutely. And I stood there for a while. And some of the girls walked out, and I thought to myself, if I walk out, I will not get back in here. I've got to stay. I can't walk out, but they walked out, made a circle around and came back in. So I said, how am I going to be able to do this? I thought for a little while, I don't think I can do this. But then I got busy and started working.

How did it compare to what you had been doing?

Oh, no comparison at all.

Tell me, I've never been in one of those. I don't even know what you know you were saving men who were wounded, maybe. So tell me the contrast.

Oh, well, of course, our patients had the best of care. And they weren't neglected. And even though they're out in the field, we did everything we could for them. And we were kind to them, but here we go in this place where these people have been abused and didn't have medical care, didn't have anything. That was a real sharp contrast.

Well, we didn't have the best equipment. We had the best that we could have out in a field hospital, but they were fed and we took good care of them. And then go someplace where people had no care at all, nobody cared for them, no one was interested in them. And they were just lying on concrete, some of them, with temperatures of 108. And they hadn't been fed. They had some old wooden bowls about so big around with some soup in. And I noticed that particularly the patients were too weak to reach over and get it. That was only pretense that they made of feeding them.

And they were so thin. I couldn't pick any of them up, I tried to. But if I go to pick them up, I'd tear the skin. So we had to be very, very careful moving them out. The skin was just so terrible. So take about at least three people. One person take the head, one person take the legs, and very carefully lift them up and get them outside. When you get them outside of that place, we put up tents outside. We had cots and clean bedding, so we take them out there. Or if there was a hospital nearby, we'd go and take over that hospital and move them in there.

But for typhus, that was the main thing, there was no medication, it was just is supportive treatment and get fluids down and, well, they couldn't drink anything, so we had to feed him with medicine droppers. And we couldn't give him hypos because there was no place to stick them with no skin at all, no muscle, just skin and bone. There's no place to give him a hypo.

So it was-- I was just weak. I couldn't believe it happened. I couldn't, and then I was so afraid. I thought, what else are we going to run into? Is this going to go on? And then later on, I think we were all just infuriated and outraged at what had happened. Right in the beginning, we were so afraid. First, we didn't believe it.

How many-- what were the numbers like that you were confronted with? How many of you were there and how many people were you trying to help?

Oh, see, those that were able to be moved, now, they went to DP camps from the concentration camps. And if they were able to be moved, they hurried up move them over there. And I don't know what the DP camps were, whether they were buildings or, to me, it sounded like they were camps outdoors someplace. But nevertheless, they were much better than what they had. And so they moved those. Then those that were really too sick to move, we had to find a building or put a tent up outside.

We had to get them out of the camps, it was too dirty in there. And so we put tents up, and we knew how to run a hospital under tents because that's what we've been doing. See, the evacuation hospital and I was with was all tents, so even surgery, we knew how to run a hospital under tents. So we put tents outside and got clean bedding for them and they were bathed, and took care of them there until we could move them someplace else. But mainly, to get them out of those buildings that were just terrible. They were infested with mice, and, oh, it's awful. If they didn't have typhus, they'd get it if they didn't get out.

So how did you guys protect yourselves?

Oh, we had-- I'd had training in communicable diseases, that's what I did, and that's one reason they sent me there because I'd had some training in communicable diseases. We had DDT powder that we used. It was a thing looks like an old flint gun. They used to spray flies, had a canister and a pump on it. So we put the powder in, and then we'd stick it down our slacks and socks and underarms and did inside of our fatigues.

I don't know what we did about our hair, that's one thing I'm trying to figure out how did we-- must have dusted some kind of a cap and then put that on or, maybe, we had a-- we may have tied up with a cloth, dusted the cloth and tied our hair up, because if the mite had get on us, we'd get it, too. So that's about the only thing that we did that I remember, and try to get as much rest as we could because that wasn't very easy because we've been working 16 hours a day, but to keep well-rested.

Our food wasn't very good it. Was K rations and C rations and no fresh fruit, no milk, no fresh potatoes, no vegetables, everything was powdered. And I never had any fruit all the time I was there, no milk. But anyway, we managed to stay healthy. Where these people hadn't had anything to eat except bread crust and coffee grounds. And so our general health was good. The resistance was good, so that's probably would keep us from getting it.

Were things well-organized or was it pretty chaotic? And how did you see light at the end of the tunnel or did you ever?

I thought that when they got organized, it was pretty well-organized because all the leaders came forth among the people in the camps, the survivors, the leaders all came forth and helped out. See, we didn't get there first, American soldiers got there first, so the soldiers and the people in the camps started running the camps. And I thought they did pretty well. And then they recruited German people to do the laundry, to do the cooking, to clean, and do all sorts of things.

So pretty soon, things were going pretty well. It was a matter of just taking care of these desperately ill patients. Then, we started getting better supplies. Also, after we took over a tower, after the infantry tank, of course, got in there, they go to the burgermeister of the town, tell them what we needed. So we just said we need so many beds and so much clean linen. And we brought what we had, what we could spare from our hospital, but we did tell him what we want. And they hurry up and find it. So in that way, it wasn't too bad. It was primitive, but we got by, I'll say.

What was the attitude of the Germans that helped?

That helped us?

Yeah.

Oh, they hung on to us and hugged like they thought we were going to go away. I mean, just-- oh, the German people.

Yeah.

Oh, excuse me. Oh, they were very submissive for the most part. They were very cooperative. And the burgermeister would send whatever we wanted if he possibly could find it. Of course, I said with a German efficiency, go find it. Go get what we need. But no, as far as the survivors were concerned, they just hung on. Those who could, many of them were too weak. They couldn't lift their arms up. They hung on to us and grabbed our clothes for fear we're going to leave.

But, no, the people who came in to work, for the most part, were cooperative. They probably didn't want to be there. There was only one nurse that I didn't get along with. But one hospital we'd taken over and we'd taken the survivors in there. And she was a little abrupt. She was a good nurse, but a German nurse, but she was abrupt. And I'd hear her talking to the patients. She'd say, swallow that, drink that, kind of barking at them. And so I took her aside and told her she'd have to be more caring. I said, you can't talk to those people that way.

Well, she didn't like me very well. So every time she went by me, she'd give me a dirty look. But otherwise, I got along fine. There was another nurse there, her name was Margaret. And I got along fine with her. She was a little bit older. The people we had the trouble with were the Hitler Youth, the young ones. They were starting up again. And some of our officers and our men found them out in a cemetery starting up all over again marching around, Heil Hitler. So I don't know what they did. And I guess they called the MPs and told them to take them on home.

OK. We have to stop and reload.

OK.

Camera roll two, take two.

I want you to start again and tell me about the Hitler Youth, and tell me about the difference in the older German people who had to help out and the younger ones.

I think the older Germans, if they were telling the truth, they told us that they didn't want to be Nazis, and they were afraid and they had to go along with him or they'd been killed. But the Hitler Youth, they're very bold. And I think if-- I was really afraid of them. After the war was over and we could ride around-- we couldn't go any place before without an armed escort. And of course, the doctors weren't armed, we had to find somebody. If we wanted to go to another little town to visit a friend or something, we had to find an armed escort to go with us.

But I was always afraid of that Hitler Youth group, because I don't think they'd stop at anything. And they were having their demonstrations at night. They'd find them in cemeteries and places and caring on. They were starting up again. See, they're about 12 years, from 12 years on. So they just call the MPs and tell them take them home or I don't know what they did with them. But our doctors found them a few times, and were a little scared of them.

What about were the German people surprised by-- you were shocked and didn't believe what you saw. What about the Germans?

Oh, they said that they didn't-- now, they say they didn't know that was going on. They just didn't say too much of anything. They just went about the work. I'm sure they knew what was going on. They were probably in there helping. And the German citizens probably were in there. I always thought they were probably in there helping.

What about, did the townspeople have to bury some of the people who-- tell me in detail about that.

The soldiers told them that they would have to bury these people and give them a decent burial with the Star of David and all. So I happened to be going through a little village one day, and I saw these ladies carrying the caskets and they did look remorseful. The dark circles under their eyes, and they were dressed in black, and they look pretty sad. There weren't too many of them because, well, I would say there weren't more than 30 or 40 that I saw walking along to the cemetery carrying the caskets. But our soldiers made them do that. They probably didn't want to, but I think that's the only time I saw them look a little bit remorseful.

Did you talk to some of the survivors that you helped? Tell me what you remember of that.

Oh, they'd just hang on to us and grab us, they didn't want us to leave. And then some that were going to DP camps. I remember one group going, and we did all sorts of things for them that day. I helped one man or maybe several. Their feet were just cut up something terrible. They wore wooden shoes, so I bandaged them all up and put socks on them. And, oh, other things. They had sore throats and whatever, and they went to get in this truck or ambulances. And they were all crying.

And I said, well, where you're going, they'll be nice to you, too. And they were so grateful. And I'll never forget, they were saying, auf wiedersehen, auf wiedersehen, crying as they left. And I said, well, they'll be real nice to you in the camps. And if you get sick, anything happens, if they can't take care of you, they'll send you back to our hospital which was the 123rd Evac. We'd be set up, and they'll bring you back there if anything happens. And that's what they did.

See, later on, this typhus, I thought the typhus epidemic was pretty well under control towards summer, and it wasn't. And we were back at our hospital, and we had gotten into a permanent building by that time because we were generally in tents. And we were getting an awful lot of people from the DP camps in with typhus. And I thought, by that time, the epidemic was under control.

Tell me how you dealt with this personally. I mean, did you feel guilt? You must have been a young woman, healthy. Tell me how you felt.

Oh, I felt very guilty because I thought here I am. Well, why did we let this happen? Why didn't somebody stop it? We should have put a stop to it, and nobody did. And then, I felt, well, here I'm living over in a tent with the minimum, eating C rations and K rations, but if I get sick, someone is going to take care of me. I'm going to be treated nice. Where those people were treated so terrible. And I felt guilty to hear I'll always be taken care of, and look what's happened to them. It was so disgraceful.

We had a lot of guilt feelings. Why did we survive? Why are we treated so well? And here, these people have nothing, they're starving. We certainly didn't have very much, but we had a lot of parents what they had. And I think the guilt was why in the world did anyone let this happen. We just couldn't believe it.

Did you pray?

Oh, I guess. I'm still wearing my St. Jude medal. I prayed all the time. St. Jude is my Patron Saint, and if I can pull it out. I said, if I can save some of these patients, I'll wear the St. Jude medal the rest of my life. So here it is. Oh, I prayed all the time. And I carry the St. Jude-- St. Jude is the saint of hopeless cases in our church. And so I had the little card, and I carried that all the time. In fact, I still have one in my purse. It's a new one. The other one is all dogeared. We all prayed.

Tell me again about what you had to deal with medically with these people? Describe it to me, thinking that I'm not a nurse, how difficult it was to get an IV started, for example.

Well, starting IVs was almost impossible because, here, they were starving and if you start shooting fluid in would be just a little bit too much in the heart and lungs, start shooting all that in. They couldn't even swallow. But we started IVs very, very carefully and very slowly, but we fed them with medicine droppers. And then I'd try to prop them up, and if

you give them a little piece of a cracker or something, that wouldn't go down. They hadn't swallowed anything for so long, but I used to rub this way, give them a little bit on a spoon, a little fluid. And then rub this way and finally get them to swallow it.

But they had big old bowls of, I don't know what, some kind of soup sitting around. Like, the pretense of feeding them, big old wooden bowls and a big tablespoon. Well, they were too weak to reach over and pick up that spoon. And they couldn't get it in their mouth anyway because the mouth was just kind of set and drawn. And so they couldn't have opened their mouth to eat whatever this-- I think had been there about three days, it was just terrible.

But they had this food sitting there, this soup or whatever under the pretense of having fed them. See, most of them weren't getting anything but a little crust of bread every day. The people were going out to work got a crust of bread and some coffee grounds. And they try and save a little bit of bread for the next day. I don't know how they worked.

Now, why don't you tell me about the one woman in charge of the camp that you got to see that time.

Oh, she was terrible. I'll never forget her. They managed to get her because most of the people from the-- see, the soldiers, the German soldiers in the camps and people running the camp, they knew that the Americans were coming pretty soon. They figured that out. So they just took off to the villages. Well, then the survivors in the camp kind of took over. And then when the American soldiers got there, well, between the American soldiers and the survivors, they were running the camps.

But they got this woman and put her up on the third floor in a cell. This was in Rhine. And that place was more like a jail. It had catwalks and little tiny cells, but they're more like-- they look like animal cages to me. But they had her up there locked up, and she was just terrible. Worst looking thing I've ever seen. Mean, and so she would be tried for war crimes, of course. But they couldn't wait to get us up there and see her.

They said, don't you want to see her? I said, well, I can't right now. But before the day is over, I'll go up and see her. And the man who is in charge there was from Holland. He knew nothing about his family. Had daughters and his wife and he said he had no idea where they were. He had kind of taken over, and he spoke beautiful English. And so he came around several times that day I was working and said, don't you want to go upstairs? And I said, well, when I'm through, I'm going to go up and see her, that's for sure.

I had nightmares about her for a long time. I talked to other soldiers after that. One particular fellow from our town, he just died. But he had gone into Buchenwald. The nurses didn't go in there. I heard that they said it was just so terrible, they couldn't let us go in there. But he said the women in charge of the camps were worse than the men. He'd been in several and been some of the subcamps. And he managed to see some of these women. He said they were worse than the men. They were meaner. And she was mean looking, just terrible.

Did you see any survivors have reunions with other people they knew or family members?

Not really. They were having a hard time finding their family members. So many of them had been killed. And after they left there, I didn't see too much of them unless they got sick again. Then they came back to our hospital that following summer. And they came back with typhus and tuberculosis and, oh, any number of things. We even had maternity cases, and we set up a maternity ward. Some of the people were pregnant when they went to DP camps, and then they brought them over to our hospital to deliver the babies. And so I got to see them again.

And spend more time with them. I wasn't so busy then, so I got to spend a little more time with them. There were a lot of ladies that came in with typhus. One beautiful gal, she was so pretty. She was a Jewish doctor, and she had tuberculosis. No, she was very young, just beautiful. And I took care of her for a long time. There wasn't much-- later on, they were giving streptomycin for tuberculosis, but we didn't have it then so it was just supportive treatment.

When they started sending patients back to our hospital, say, through the summer of '45, we were getting the Russians and the survivors from the camps. We got a lot of Russian children.

OK. Let's start first at the time when the small group of you went into the subcamp of Dachau, and tell me what a typical day was like. Start in the morning.

Start the morning. First of all, you try to get many of the patients were dead. And of course, they were removing them right away. And we'd try to get the sickest ones first and get them cleaned up and get them outside, get them on a bed and take care of them. And if there's any way that they had any flesh at all under the skin, we inject water. Yeah, they call it hypodermoclysis. Sometimes, in the shoulder, there would be a little fatty tissue, their muscle. And we'd inject some water into them because they're all dehydrated. And trying to feed them.

And did I tell you about the minute those people whose feet were so terribly bad, they're all cut up. They were wooden shoes and no stockings. Well, there were a lot of people whose feet were just terrible, so we took care of those. And I'd bandage them up, put A&D ointment or whatever I could find on them and little two by four bandages. And get clean socks on them.

But taking care of these patients who were starving and had typhus, there wasn't a specific medication for typhus. We just use supportive treatment. We concocted some kind of-- all we had was powdered milk and some canned vegetables. And so the fellas in the mess hall would try to make some kind of soup. They put the vegetables in the powdered milk, and we would try to feed them that. But if we get water down them and get the temperature down, that was the important thing because there was nothing specific for typhus at that time.

How could they be alive with the temperature that high?

Oh, I don't know. I don't know how they stayed around. Sometimes, they were just on concrete floor. You just go in there and find them lying on the concrete. I don't know how they survived. Well, many didn't, of course. But some we were able to help.

Do you know about the overeating and people dying from overeating when the camps were open? Did you see any?

I heard about it. The GIs, of course, the GIs always had a candy bar someplace and they want to be kind. And these people who are up and around but hadn't had much to eat, but they were still able to walk around, they were working. Well, they gave them candy bars and they got very sick. They just couldn't handle the sugar. I had just heard about that after I went over two years ago how they gave him candy bars and it just about killed them.

When you're starved like that, as a nurse, what is the description, the scientific description of what happens to your body when you're starved like that?

Oh, they just can't possibly eat anything. It just won't go down. If they haven't eaten anything or swallow anything, you just can't handle it. And the skin dries up, dehydration. And, oh, just all sorts of complications from starvation. Their eyes were all sunken in, and terribly thin, just skin and bones. But to try and get them to eat, it was just terrible. They just could not swallow things. So we used the medicine droppers, little by little they started to improve.

But the skin gets so terrible. No nutrition, the skin is terrible, and they break out in rashes. And then, as I said, you couldn't lift them up because if I go like so, I'd tear their skin. it was in such a terrible condition. But they were about as close to dead as anyone could be.

Tell me about a small incident that you remember, maybe an individual incident with somebody who touched you in some way. Did you have any personal incidents?

Oh. yeah. They would grab on to us like they thought we were going to leave. And one man I had taken care of, and he was going to DP camp. He was able to walk around, he'd been working. But he had lesions all over him, and his feet were so bad. And he cried when he left. He was saying auf wiedersehen, auf wiedersehen. And I said, well, they'll be nice to you when you get over there, and you'll get along fine. He didn't want to leave. He thought he'd rather stay there with the American nurses.

I said, if you get real sick, they'll send you back to our hospital anyway. I hadn't been to the DP camp, but I said I know they'll be nice to you. You'll get food, and you'll get treated well. But he was leaving and crying, it was sad.

Now, let's jump forward to when people came in from the DP camps, and you even had maternity cases. Do you remember seeing any-- were the people joyous? Where they were totally different than they had been before?

Well, not to joyous, but they were looking better. They started to eat, and they looked much better. And well, they were glad to see us. They were glad to come into our hospital. And I thought that they looked much better. They looked like they'd been eating and put out a little bit of weight. I remember going back to Rhine, the first camp I was in, and we would put patients-- I think there must have been a staff room where the soldiers lived or dining room. We put a lot of them down there and set up a hospital.

And when I went back two or three months later, they look so much different. You wouldn't believe it. They had changed a lot. By that time, they were eating and their color was good, and they were laughing. And they were too sick to be out of bed. They had typhus, they were much too sick, but they looked much different.

So you saw a huge change in those months between March and, say, August.

Oh, yeah, definitely.

Tell me about that. How did it make you feel?

Oh, it made me feel marvelous. It was so rewarding. It was the most rewarding thing I've ever done. That we were able to do something for those people. Then one regret that I had that I didn't-- I was just so busy I couldn't stop and talk to them sometimes. If I could just stopped and held their hand or asked them their name or something, but we were just going so fast, we didn't have time to talk to them. I always think about it, I wish I knew who some of them were. But I do think about that a lot. And I wish they'd spent just a little more time, but I couldn't.

How long hours did you work?

Oh, we weren't supposed to work more than 16 or 12. But I think that was about the limit. We had a pretty strict rule on that because if our chief nurse said if we get sick, well, then we'd be no value to her. And we'd just be more or less of a burden on her. So she expects you, one, just to sleep eight hours in 24, not to just stay on duty 24 hours a day. But sometimes, we stayed longer than that. That's the only thing I was ever reprimanded for.

She came around one morning and said, she looked at me and said, how come? And I said, I just can't leave, there's too much work to do. And she's, well, you'll have to leave. She said, I'll stay here. And I said, well, I haven't charted things. I've got to get these things charted. The patients had a little envelope with the card on them. It wasn't a chart like in the hospital. We just jotted down when they'd had penicillin and morphine and whatever.

And she said, well, I'll take care of that, but you have got to go. So that's the only time I was ever reprimanded for anything. Staying on duty too long. Nobody wanted to go, actually, that was hard. There's work to do, they didn't want to leave. Under stress, people always work much harder. And they didn't want to go off duty. They could see too many things to be done.

So you got up at dawn?

Generally, we were up at 6:00 and had breakfast. We're on duty at 7:00. And worked from 7:00 to 7:00. Then the night nurse would come from 7:00 and work till seven the next morning. But there were many times that we couldn't possibly leave at 7:00 at night because there was too much to be done or we'd have a load of new patients come in, a lot of casualties, a lot of surgery. So we just had to stay there. But the rule was 16 hours and we were supposed to quit.

Clip four.

OK, now we just have a minute, and I want you to tell me what typhus is.

Well, it's a disease that's caused by a mite. And it's almost always fatal. And it affects most all body systems. They get terribly high fever and headache. I can't tell you much, there's no specific treatment for it. Then, it was just supportive treatment. But it's little mite that bites them, and they get the disease. And that's about all I know about it. I think there's probably some more specific treatment now, but at that time, there wasn't much that we could do for them, just supportive treatment.

This high fever, severe headache, and sometimes rash. And of course, they couldn't eat. They'd started them anyway. But when we got there, it was terribly hard for them to eat. And many of them died. That was the main cause of death in the camps, that and tuberculosis. Because these mites got started and got in there, and they were just all over. They slept on old, like, burlap bags stuffed with straw. So you can imagine that was just full of the bugs. And there just wasn't much chance. The children died of it.

Did you see children?

I saw a few. Not as many. People have asked me that. I didn't see too many children. I saw them at Rhine because they were doing the test there for a diagnostic test for typhus, and there were children around there. And I remember one of our doctors was playing with the children. Went up to this little girl and say, pat her on the head and say, have you had test today? And they were using the bump test to diagnose it. And I saw quite a few children there. And I don't know if they had come in or they brought them in from someplace or if they were hospitalized there in another building, but they were around.