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Summary

Irene Zieske was a 30-year-old 2nd Lieutenant nurse, assigned to the 28th Field Hospital, attached to the 3rd Armored Division, 3rd Army as the war ended in Europe. Irene did not have an easy time during the war; she lived mainly on K-rations, froze without sheets and adequate blankets, without bathrooms, just one canteen of water per day, washed in her helmet and showered only once every 3 weeks, with the unit constantly on the move. She had heard a little about concentration camps but got to know more when concentration camp survivors were referred for treatment from the Mauthausen Concentration camp to her Field Hospital, then located at an Air Force Base in Austria. There were men, women and children who arrived for interim care, until their evacuation to the Munich Evacuation Hospital or, if well enough, on flights to former home locations. The concentration camp victims were not all Jewish, there were many others from various European countries; they all had numbers tattooed on their arms and their heads were shaved, but they were no longer in their striped prison uniforms. All the adults were emaciated, just skin and bones; many could not survive and despite care, died in the hospital. The children seemed in better shape; there were many, they were 9 and 10 years old and they received personal care, some received food items from Irene's own packages. Irene had the advantage of speaking German and interpreted quite a lot in support of care. However, most of the adult victims were too sick and too weak to talk. Irene could not believe that such cruelty could happen and others in her unit shared those feelings.

After the war Irene was happy to get some good food again. She was not psychologically wounded but she retained her sympathy for holocaust victims. She continued working overseas in Italy and Germany as a nurse for a number of years. The Germans she met all denied knowing anything about what went on in concentration camps, but Irene did not believe them. She had been offered work at a hospice but declined; she had seen enough of dying. She did not feel that the hard work of nurses during the war was ever properly recognized and she was thankful to have this interview 50 years after the war.