

Summary of Oral History: John Kleinmann

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This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer

John Kleinmann was a 21-year-old Private First Class assigned to the 3rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron when his unit unexpectedly came across the Emmersee Concentration Camp in Austria near the end of World War II. The camp was located in a heavily wooded area, a few miles away from a small town. The unit stayed at the camp for just an hour and its reconnaissance mission forced it to leave. John could only provide sketchy information in view of the short duration. An Infantry unit had liberated the camp and upon his units arrival all the guards had left. There were but a couple hundred prisoners in striped prison uniforms in the yard who may have been happy about the liberation but who seemed quite afraid of the Americans. Near the entrance he saw naked corpses of starved men stacked on wagons. He never had a chance to enter any of the buildings. He understood that there were 1,600 political prisoners in the camp but he never got to talk to any of them. He also understood that the camp had a crematorium but he never got to see it.

John had experienced a lot of combat and had trouble adjusting after he came home. He did not discuss his experiences with anyone. He had a lot of pictures of the concentration camp taken by one of his fellow soldiers and had shared those with his interviewer.