

RG-50.759.0072

Summary

Loren Knutson was a 23-year-old Private First Class, assigned to B Battery, 609th Field Artillery of the 14th Regimental Combat Team, when his unit came upon an unidentified concentration camp. The camp was relatively isolated, but in the open, near a small town which was still pretty much intact. It was surrounded by barbed wire fencing, with quite a number of buildings inside, but it became immediately obvious as to what it was. The gate had been knocked down, probably a half hour before, by combat troops. There were people in the yard and when they realized that the soldiers were not going to harm them, more came out and tried to communicate. They were wearing the striped uniform with heads shaved and some sort of footwear. There were quite a number of children among them but most prisoners seemed to be between the ages of 40 and 50 – it was hard to tell since they were all emaciated. There were men and women and sometimes you could not tell them apart. They all were hungry and the soldiers gave them some food, but the food made them sick and some may have died from eating. Looking in the buildings he could see over-filled quarters, with about 100 people cramped into narrow, dark bunks stacked on top of each other. The smell was terrible. The whole place was indescribable, complete degradation, one could not believe what one was seeing and it made one sick. Loren was only there for about three hours. He wandered around the camp and everything looked the same; but he never entered the Administrative buildings nor the crematorium.

Before coming to the camp, the unit had come to a rail siding. There were quite a few railcars and when the doors were opened, there were many people in the cars, men and women, some stumbled out, some were sitting and others were lying dead. An old man fell on his knees in front of Loren and kissed his shoes. There was not much the unit could do or help, since they had to move on.

After the war, Loren had a difficult time adjusting. He had nightmares for years and at times broke out in a cold sweat; he really wanted to forget all about it. Even at the time of his interview, almost 50 years later, he still found it difficult to talk about it. The camp was his worst experience in the war.