

Summary of Oral History: Frank I. Lewis

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This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]

Summary-Frank Lewis was a 27-year-old Technical Sergeant, assigned to the 120th Evacuation Hospital, when his unit was ordered to assist in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. As the unit was entering the camp, Frank noticed emaciated naked men, staring through the wired fence. Upon entering, Frank saw that the prisoners were all emaciated, weighing about 60 lbs., infected with lice and suffering from typhus. There were only two prisoners who were still in normal shape, one was a 26-year-old Rumanian Jew who had arrived at Buchenwald only days ago and the other, a 15-year-old Jewish boy who had proven himself useful to the SS guards and had been fed by them and who now showed Frank around the camp. There was a barn which was empty at midday where prisoners spent the night on wooden racks, crowded, perhaps one inch apart, in three layers where feces could drop from the top to the bottom. There was a crematorium and at the entrance a pile of over 50 naked, emaciated bodies where Frank took a picture, which he 50 years later sent to his interviewer. The kitchen provided insight about the food served. It was a soup, composed of scraps left-over from the food served to the guards, mixed with rotten potatoes; that was the recurring meal for the day, designed to lead to starvation. The barracks contained prisoners who were dying and some already dead, only the strongest of them had a chance for survival.

The unit set up only temporary facilities to provide for patients, showering and cooking. Frank was assigned to administrative tasks and had no contact with the patients. He spent two weeks at the camp. After he returned home, he did not discuss his experience with his family or anyone else, until about 50 years later. He acknowledged that the camp was the worst experience for him in the war. He met a home-town rabbi and has worked with him in presenting a Holocaust program where he, as a Liberator, relates what he had experienced. He planned to attend, along with 65 others, a reunion of his unit to be held in Kansas City, the first one in 50 years.