

Summary of Oral History: Dean E. Lindgren

RG#: RG-50.759.0080

This summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on 03/2022

Dean Lindgren was a US Army Private, assigned to the Company C, 55th Medical Battalion, when his unit was ordered to proceed to the Dachau Concentration Camp, arriving in the evening of May 3, 1945. Although he was cautioned that this was a terrible place, Dean did not expect what he saw when he inspected the camp the next morning; Describes a pile of naked corpses stacked up next to a crematorium and a small gas chamber on the other side. The stench was horrible. There were about nine box cars full of corpses awaiting processing. He saw hooks, 8 feet high, which had been used to hang prisoners and subject them to attacks by dogs, which were shot by the liberators; Recalls the conditions of the surviving prisoners, emaciated, many ready for death; Details condition of the camp shortly after liberation, corpses of people that had been shot, ditches used as mass graves; Lindgren talks about the US soldiers having to continue the job of burying corpses; Details the apparent haste that the guards had left under: cottages which had been used by the guards included food still on the tables and SS troops who had been caught were shot by the Infantry.

Lindgren relates his understanding of the history of the camp; It was the first concentration camp which had been founded in 1936, as a labor camp, organized for manufacturing and repairs; rifles were still being produced. It was intended for a capacity of 12,000 prisoners, but 33,000 had to be accommodated. By 1944, the killing started to get much worse. And it was believed that if the Infantry had been delayed another day, all the prisoners would have been shot; Recalls the peoples represented, Czechs, Romanians, Poles, Russian, French, Jews - many spoke some English so that communication was not a big problem. The prisoners were all men; there was a women's camp with about 5,000 inmates about 5 miles away. There were a few children in the 9-12 age group in Dachau.

Dean Lindgren describes the medical treatment applied to survivors and the reaction of the liberators, he was involved with patients to be X-rayed and his job was to hang signs with their names around their necks. Many had to be carried in, since they were too weak to walk. The prisoners had to be fed small meals for the first few days, so that they would not get sick, but there were no special rations

for them. At first the soldiers were furious at what they saw, yet after a few days they all settled into their routines. By June the camp had been cleaned up and the prisoners were being evacuated. Most were happy to return to their home country, but the Russian prisoners had to be forced into their trucks to return home, they were afraid to be shot upon arrival in Russia.

Dean had nightmares when he first got home but he adjusted well thereafter. He did not talk much about his experience for many years. Now, fifty years later, he would get furious when he heard people say that the killings did not happen, that there were no concentration camps. And he maintains firmly that he saw a gas chamber at Dachau, even though this was being disputed. He wants to be sure that the young people hear about this horror so that history will not be repeated.