

## **Summary of Oral History: Irving Lisman**

**RG#: RG-50.759.0081**

**This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [05/2022]**

Irving Lisman was a 33-year-old PFC Ambulance Driver/ Medical Aid Man, assigned to the 121<sup>st</sup> Medical Battalion, 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, when he received the mission to proceed to the Dachau Concentration Camp. Irving had heard about concentration camps but had considered those as labor camps for dissidents of the Nazi regime, he was not prepared to see what actually existed. As he approached the camp, the smell of dead bodies and raw sewage was prominent. The gate was open and there were men in striped uniforms bent over, tending to the dead. Electrified barbed wire surrounded the camp, which allegedly contained 30,000 or so prisoners. Further on, well-fed 'Kapos' (prisoners who acted as guards and had cooperated with the Nazis) were seen being beaten by screaming prisoners, some had been shot. Irving did not intervene but drove on. There were about 40 barracks and an open area for roll calls. Further on were warehouses with piles of shoes and clothing. There were bodies laying in front of a Crematorium waiting to be burned. The dead and the living were all emaciated. Many were dying from typhus. There were no medical provisions and the doctors were also prisoners. At one end of the camp were railway tracks with freight cars, doors wide open and dead bodies of men, women and children prominently laying inside; not all in prison uniforms. At another location were dog kennels – all dogs had been killed, probably by prisoners. Near an Administrative Building, which contained doctor's uniforms and the Commandant's desk, there were clean barracks of the SS guards which contained sheets, pillow cases and blankets; also a well-equipped hospital.

Later in the day, a group of ambulances arrived and relieved the 121<sup>st</sup> Medical Battalion drivers. The 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division took over the administration of the camp. Irving and his unit departed Dachau in the afternoon. The town of Dachau was nearby and the smell would carry that far, but its inhabitants maintained that they did not know what was happening in the camp.

The war was soon over and Irving was committed to help the Displaced Persons (DP's) who were engaged in cleaning up the camp and burying the dead. The prisoners of various nations were assisted in returning to their respective countries. The Russian prisoners did not want to return but there was insistence that they had to do that. Only the Jews had no place to turn to and thus remained. President Truman was advised and angrily turned to General Mark Clark to help solve that problem. Local hotels were used to move them out of the Dachau Concentration Camp.

When Irving returned home, he did not talk about his experience in the camp. As a teacher, he never told his students, nor his own children about it. But he admitted that he did not like Germans and would not buy any German-made goods.