

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

KARESSA FOLDVARY

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Natalie Packel

Date: July 6, 1989

© 1998

Holocaust Oral History Archive

Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

This page left intentionally blank.

KF - Karessa Foldvary¹ [interviewee]

NP - Natalie Packel [interviewer]

Date: July 6, 1989

Tape one, side one:

NP: ...July the 6th, and it's Natalie Packel interviewing Kay Foldvary. Kay, when we first spoke, you said that you were one of forty nurses that, in your unit, could you, in your army unit. Could you please tell me where in Europe and in what unit you were serving before you arrived at the site of the concentration camp? Okay, now we can go ahead.

KF: When we first arrived in Europe, we were put, until our equipment came, we were put in different units. And I served with the 54th Field Hospital temporarily, until we got our equipment together. And then we, our unit all came together as the 116th Evacuation Hospital, in the 7th Army section of Europe.

NP: All right. Did you know of the existence of this particular camp that you would liberate before you arrived there? Had you any idea that it existed?

KF: No, because we arrived in Europe in November 6th of '44.

NP: I see.

KF: And we, it was a year before...

NP: I see.

KF: ...we arrived at Dachau.

NP: All right. So then you had no prior knowledge of the existence of any concentration camps?

KF: None whatever.

NP: I see. Before you arrived at the camp, had you heard anything at all about the mass murders of Jewish people in Europe?

KF: Only when you would hear sometimes some news reports of suspicion of things that were the reason the United States government got involved...

NP: I see.

KF: ...with the war. I think this was the determining factor, because they had inklings of things that were going on over there.

NP: And the information that you heard, was this from the army newspaper or the overseas radio?

KF: Mainly from reporters and so forth that were giving news. And it was vague but nothing was that, of my knowledge, that things were at the point that they were.

NP: All right. Kay, could you give us some information about where you were before you came to Dachau?

¹Nickname Kay, middle name Meitzke.

KF: Yes. After we collected our unit, and we served as a unit together, we were sent to Epinal, France in November, 24th. And we stayed there just two days and moved down to Sarrebourg, France the 26th of November of '44. And we remained there throughout the winter. And fortunately we were in buildings which had been a Catholic priest's home, or a Catholic monastery, I would say. And we stayed there until the 20th of March, taking care of GI wounded and we were very, very busy. And then the 20th of March of '45, we were sent to Dettwiller, France and remained there until the 28th. And then we went into tents and into fields, which were grass when we arrived, but by the time we left, perhaps a week later, it was mud from all the trafficking. But we set up camps and this was our first experience with tent living. We went into Bellheim, Germany the 28th of March in '45, until the 31st of March in '45. And the 1st of April of '45 we were sent to Dieburg, Germany and remained there until the 12th of April in '45. Now, this was constantly moving and taking down tents and putting them up, and we were under a great deal of pressure at this time because if we moved in the morning, by evening we were expected to have crucial tents, like our surgery and x-ray tents, set up, that we could start accepting patients.

NP: I see.

KF: On the 13th of April we were moved to Arnstein, Germany, and remained there just one day. Of course we didn't accept patients in that day. And then from there we went on to Rattelsdorf, Germany the 14th of April and remained there until the 25th of April. From the 25th of April in '45, we went to Ettringen, Germany and remained there until the 2nd of May of '45. At this time, our 7th Army headquarters had given us orders to move into Dachau concentration camp to take care of the many patients that were there and to clean, help clean up and help these people that were there. So on May 2nd we moved to Dachau.

NP: I see. To the best of your memory could you describe what you saw at the camp and what you felt at that time.

KF: Well, our enlisted personnel and some of our male officers had been there for two or three days to clean out a building that we could--again--move into buildings, which of course we were pleased about going back into buildings and not having to live in tents for a while. But the first thing that, as we came in the gate, and above the gate in German was writing, *Schaffen machen sie frei* [*Arbeit Macht Frei*], which means, "Work Makes You Free." But the thing that, the first thing that you noticed was the terrible odor as we came in, and it was the odor of spoiled meat is the closest I can relate to that. But of course then we went in. This was at the entrance of the camp you could already smell the odor.

NP: I see. From there, what were your duties? What were you to do?

KF: Well, as we arrived in the building and were assigned rooms and put our things in, the first thing our commanding officer wanted to have a meeting with all the nurses as we had arrived. And at the meeting, he said, "I don't want you girls to be going

around the camp, because the horrors in this camp are unbelievable.” And he said, “They are even very hard, difficult for the people, for the males that are here.” And he said, “I want you to stay near your quarters.” But just telling us to do that, like children, we, the enlisted men who we had been working with all these years, who were very fine young men said, “We have so much to show you girls,” and took us for a tour of the camp.

NP: I see. Can you estimate how many prisoners there were and if any of them were alive, near death, or...?

KF: I should have prepared for this interview a little better, but to the best of my knowledge I think there were 12,000 in the compound hospital. Now you had the camp, and inside the camp was a fenced-in area with a moat of water around, where they, the prisoners lived. And inside that fenced in area was also a hospital, where patients were taken. There was an enormous typhus epidemic there, which was caused by the body louse. And it was, most of the patients that were in there were suffering from typhus and this was one thing that a team of doctors and some of the soldiers had gone in to triage these people, to see which ones we could save, and which ones would be unable--which ones were the sickest and still could be saved and the others were, had to take their turn for. We could not take them all out immediately.

NP: I see.

KF: We didn't have the facilities.

NP: So that the hospital and concentration camp were within one compound? They were next to each other?

KF: No. You had the camp.

NP: All right.

KF: And inside the camp was an area that was fenced-in where they lived, and inside that area, I didn't, we were not permitted to go in there.

NP: You, all right.

KF: Apparently there was a hospital inside this fenced in area...

NP: I see.

KF: ...that had I think 1200 patients in there. Now our unit for combat was a 1200, was 1100 capacity, of 40 nurses, 40 doctors, and 250 enlisted men. So, we, each nurse was in charge of one building. We had 11 buildings.

NP: I see. That is where you treated the sick.

KF: And this is when they brought them out of the hospital, compound hospital. They were covered with DDT powder. It looked like they had been just doused in a barrel of flour to us. And of course they, this was to kill the body louse. Nobody gave us the dangers of the DDT, but their main object was to kill the body lice. So then we accepted them and we had the cots set up and each nurse then was in charge of 110 patients.

NP: I see. Could you describe your feelings when you saw these people?

KF: The feelings were, of course we were so busy, and being busy was good. Because we could not let our emotions get away from us.

NP: Certainly.

KF: But they were [pause] bodies of bones with skin stretched over, and very, very emaciated, partly because of the life they had been living and their food rations and so forth, and as the war was progressing their food rations were worsened and, of course, typhus epidemic, they would lose a great deal of weight.

NP: Kay, do you know if this particular camp was set up only for Jewish people or were there prisoners of all nationalities?

KF: There were prisoners there of anyone who was against the Hitler regime.

NP: I see.

KF: We had American, there was one American major that I met who had been from Cicero, Illinois. His name was Major Gerard. And he had been in there. There were, I personally had met, there were twelve British flyers, because they had been found in civilian clothes. And anybody that was found in civilian clothes was taken as prisoner and put in concentration camps.

NP: Into the camps.

KF: They were not put in the regular POW camps, like other soldiers who were captured. These were put in. And anyone who had helped anyone to escape. There were Poles. There were from all countries there were prisoners there.

NP: I see. Mixed nationalities.

KF: Mixed nationalities. And apparently before we liberated the camp, they had uniforms. Some of them wore triangles. Now I cannot remember exactly what these emblems meant. Some who were considered gay or whatever had a certain emblem. Those that were political prisoners had another emblem. And those who had, were criminals, had another emblem. But by the time we got there, the people that were, had died or whatever, if their body was laying around, and these people that were still walking around, would rip off the emblem of that, what they wanted to put on, and put this on there. Sew on their own uniform. So we could not tell who was in there for what reason.

NP: Was the yellow star visible? You said a triangle was one of the emblems.

KF: I cannot remember the, we were so busy at that time...

NP: Certainly.

KF: Working twelve and fourteen hours a day, that many of these things, we just were so busy with our own, taking care of these patients. Now we used army cots and put blankets on them. And these people were so emaciated that we were trying to feed them food but they couldn't tolerate it. So we had to just then resort to liquids for the first few days, and trying to give them vitamins. Many, and a great many of them were very demented, because of the life they'd lived and their illnesses, and it was difficult. Now, having to give them vitamins and try to get them to be sure that they took them, we would just give them to them and then go on to the next one, when you have 110 patients. And it wasn't till we would go to straighten out their blanket or so forth we saw they didn't take

the vitamins. They had gotten so suspicious of anybody doing anything for them, because the Germans had used a lot of experimenting on them...

NP: I see.

KF: ...and given them medication and things like this, that we found the vitamins underneath the blankets. So therefore, then we had to wait and be sure that they swallowed the pills before we went on to the next one.

NP: Were there any children in the camp?

KF: As I recall now, we had only male. Now I'm sure, outside the camp I understand there was another military hospital, that was, they were sending patients to. We did not get any women. We did not get any children. But in the enormous pile of bodies that had not been cremated, that were outside the crematorium, there were children, bodies of children as well as women, as you could see in the pile of bodies. Now where the children and the women were sent, I really don't know.

NP: All right. Let's see. The reactions of the prisoners to you. Well, you had just described that certainly one reaction was suspicion. Did any confide in you or just...

KF: Well, one thing, there was a great language barrier. Now I could understand some of the German, a small amount. But I could not understand any of the other languages. Now they would sometimes, we had, I think I had 15 Russians in my building. Some of the Russians could speak English, or German. And those that couldn't would, by interpretation, would reveal to us. But we used mainly sign language, because we could not really communicate too well with them.

NP: Did the experience of seeing these prisoners have any effect on your feeling about being part of the war and fighting Germany? You had described to me how it was so unbelievable.

KF: Well, we had, during war time, maybe a great deal of it is not propaganda, but it is, you developed a real hatred, which of course was not a good thing, but it is something that you cannot avoid. And we had been taking care of German prisoners, as we progressed, prior to coming to Dachau. And we gave them treatment. But our conversation with them was very limited and we gave them medication and treated them as a patient. Of course our main care was given to our own soldiers, but...

NP: Did, were there any German officers around, those that had been in charge of Dachau?

KF: Yes. As I told you, the camp had only been liberated a few days...

NP: Yes.

KF: A couple days before we went in there. And there were still SS troopers, which the camps were really run by SS troopers, not the *Wehrmacht*, which was the regular German Army. But they were taken care of by the SS. And the SS were very much the hated and feared part of the German Army. There were SS troopers, SS soldiers who, their bodies were there. We saw bodies with the dogs that they had used, in the camp, who had been shot. And these SS troopers had been shot.

NP: By whom?

KF: By the Americans liberating the camp. And it was, it was an awful sight to see, but we had to step over the bodies to get through to see. Because we were anxious to see really what the camp was like, in spite of the horrible odor.

NP: Certainly.

KF: But we [pause]...

NP: Would you like to take a little rest?

KF: Yeah, I think so. [tape off then on]

NP: You were saying...

KF: One day one of the nurses was feeding the patients from the cart that we, the food was brought up in, and was serving. And of course we had some of the displaced persons or prisoners who were up and around and would help us. So this was a big help. We put them to work, and they really did help us. But one of the nurses, or someone must have said something, but one of the patients got up and he took the handle from this big cart. And he struck one of the nurses with it. And right away the rest of the patients, of course, came to her defense. And one of the men said, "Oh, if that had happened before the Americans came in, he would be shot immediately." And this was things that...

NP: It was really a revelation.

KF: We had to be careful, because they were demanding. They didn't trust us. And of course those that were French said the French had really won the war. So you could see how their mind was so distorted. I was fortunate enough, I was in charge then for a period of, in charge of the penicillin team. And penicillin at that time had to be injected every three hours. We didn't have the long-lasting penicillin. It was still quite a new drug. And so I had patients coming to me for penicillin and I also went around and gave penicillin to those that the doctors felt needed it. I had one man who, his name was Hans Gercheff, from Holland. He had been with the Dutch underground and he had been a prisoner in Auschwitz. And coming from Ausch-, before the war ended, apparently the Germans were getting panicky and they were trying to put as many prisoners in just certain camps and then machine-gun them and do away with all of them. It was the most ruthless thing. But as Hans would come, he was a very intelligent man. He had been in Auschwitz for three years. And he had had no contact with his par-, with his family all this time, so he did not know if they were living or they were dead. They were in Holland. He was a very intelligent man, and when he would come, he was getting the penicillin shots because he had all the carbuncles on the back of his neck. But the American government was using him for information because they were making preparation for the trials, for the Nuremberg trials.

NP: The Nuremberg trials.

KF: And as we, as he would come around, they gave him a motorcycle so he could get around faster and do more. So every three hours he came around for me to give him a shot of penicillin. So each time he came I had a list of questions that I wanted to ask him real quickly, because his time was so limited. And he told me about all the

experimenting that they were doing in the concentration camp, Auschwitz. Apparently Auschwitz was pretty much known as an experimental camp. And I said to him one day, I said, "Did you know how the war was progressing?" And he said, "Well, we had somewhere gotten a radio from somewhere." They put it under the floorboard in their, where they lived, and covered it up and then covered it with dirty laundry. And they would lie down on the floor and they would put this radio on because if they had been found out that they had this, they would have been shot. So he said, "Only three of us knew about this radio. And it was two English flyers and myself." And he said, "We would lay down on the floor and get news, because we decided that if the Russians were going to liberate Dachau, that we were going to make, try to make a run for it. Because we did not trust the Russians." And he said, "Ah, I don't understand you Americans. You are so trusting of people. Because," he said, "You, the Russians," he said, "they're no different than the Nazis. It's just that they're on the other side of the war now." But he said, "Their ways, their thinking, is very different from yours." But he said, "We decided if the Americans were going to get the closest..." It was quite a challenge who was going to get there first, because the Russians were coming from one angle and the Americans were coming from another; who was making the fastest progress. So he decided if the Americans were going to take over Dachau that they would stay. And this is how he told me, that they had some idea of what the war--but they had made a vow, the three of them had made a vow that they would not tell one other person, because, he said, "News and things went around the camp like you wouldn't believe," he said. "But if just the three of us knew, then we were encouraged with what was going to happen." But talking about Auschwitz, it seems like a few days, well, maybe not; maybe it was longer than that, they were bringing prisoners from Auschwitz to Dachau in these big boxcars. And he described to me how they traveled. They traveled one sitting in front of the other like this with your feet like this...

NP: Apart.

KF: And you sat like that. You sat like that for days. And you were on the train. You didn't know where you were going or where they were taking you or anything. You had no idea what, nobody told you anything. And then the cars, the trains would stop and go on a siding if they were to let German troops through or let some other vehicles go. So they would sit there maybe for hours. This is, and if the person died in front of you, that made no difference. As far as sanitary conditions, there were none. And these people traveled like this all the way to Dachau. Now I don't know how long it took or anything because as I said, my questions were short for Hans. And of course he was limited. But I wanted to get some real stories of what had gone on. Now these boxcars remained there, as I have shown pictures...

NP: Yes, I see.

KF: Of these boxcars.

NP: I see them.

KF: And one day I was walking from the building where I was working, up to the building where I was living. And as I was coming, and it was, oh, a good distance. But what I could see, there was a young prisoner standing in the doorway of this open boxcar. And it took me, oh, maybe five, ten minutes, for me to walk up close to the boxcar. Not that I went up close to them, but to my building, which the boxcars were near our building. He stood there in a definite catatonic state. Catatonic means you don't move a muscle. And I was afraid. I was fearful of what he might do if I went close, so I didn't. But this shows you the mental and the physical condition of these people. It wasn't only their physical state. It was their mental state. Because they...

NP: A total deterioration.

KF: A total deterioration, physically and mentally.

NP: Kay, the reaction of your fellow nurses, the physicians and everything that you worked for, their comments. Do you remember that?

KF: Well, I think we all had the same feeling. And as, one thing, when we took the tour of Dachau, the first day after we arrived, I was going to go into the crematorium, just to see what it was like. And I saw an American major come out the other side of the crematorium. And he was so pale. He was white. And I lost courage to go through the crematorium. But the pile of bodies were right on the side of the building, so you could not avoid seeing them. And so I didn't go in. But the doctors and the nurses, and our enlisted men, they were all shocked by what they saw, and they would not, could not believe it, that they actually saw it.

NP: It was really an unbelievable thing.

KF: But we were so busy, and as we worked, it was depressing. It was very depressing. And our doctors had said to us, "You're not going to be able to save everybody." You know, because we felt like we should. He said, "You know, you can't work yourself to death."

NP: Yes.

KF: You do what you can, do the best you can, and you'll sa-

Tape one, side two:

NP: This is side B of the interview with Kay Foldvary, on Thursday, July the 7th², 1989. In your own mind, Kay, how do you explain German decisions that led to the setting up of concentration camps?

KF: I'm sorry, could you repeat that again?

NP: Sure, sure, absolutely. How do you think the Germans came to do this, to set up the concentration camps? Do you have any feelings of what led to this?

KF: No, I have some insight into it. Germany was in a, apparently a serious depression, and the government and everything was really in chaos. Well, they had numerous leaders, who were, made promises they were going to do this, and they were going to do that. And they could not follow through. And then here comes Adolf Hitler, who was a very, well I call them rabble rousers. But nevertheless, I, in this country I was living in a small community in Ohio, which was years prior was predominantly German.

NP: I see.

KF: We had people living in Germany, or in this town, that were, still had family in Germany that they were corresponding with.

NP: I see.

KF: So we would question these people when we heard of these things that were going on in Germany, what was, how Germany was doing. And when they would write their family, their family would write them back honestly about things were really bad. And then when Adolf Hitler took over, he started doing things or promises he made which were not destroying the Jewish community or, I think, but just little promises, and he carried them out. And he was very, very forceful. So, at first they thought, "Hitler is our lifesaver. He is going to bring Germany back into prosperity." And then when things started changing, and these people were beginning to see a different side of Hitler, the people in this country would write to their family and ask them what, tell them what they had heard in the news and so forth, and ask them how things--and they would not answer their questions.

NP: Oh.

KF: They were afraid to answer their questions. So already Hitler was taking power. And they were afraid for their lives. And anybody who really opposed the government, there was no mercy shown. So they were very, very careful then as to, they just would ignore the questions. And that's the first inkling we knew that things were not going well and that he was really a dictator.

NP: Yes. After you left the camp, was there any official or unofficial meeting of your unit to discuss what you had experienced at the camp? Was there any debriefing or...

²The interviewer probably misspoke, Thursday was July 6th and this interview was conducted in one day.

KF: No, because as we left the camp, we were then, the unit was more or less broken up and gone to various other places until we went for, embarking to come back to the United States. And we were to come back on the unit, on how many points you had, on a point system--how long you had been, how many battle stars you had, and how much you had gotten involved with. And so our unit then was, and of course our main conversation was getting back home.

NP: I just didn't know whether they, you know, were questioning you here. You had mentioned, in preparation for the Nuremberg Trials, they were questioning prisoners, and I didn't know whether they were questioning medical help as well.

KF: They may have questioned some of the doctors. We had two German doctors, doctors that were educated in Germany in their medical profession but were American citizens...

NP: I see.

KF: ...and were in the American Army. So these two doctors, I'm sure, were a big help in, they had such control of the German language and so forth. Someone was telling me about, because there was a lot of interrogation going on. But, away from our medical unit, because we were too busy taking care of patients...

NP: Yes.

KF: ...to get involved with these things. And, but I understood that one of the soldiers, or SS troopers, perhaps, who survived it, can you stop yours now? [tape off then on]

NP: Yes?

KF: One of the SS troopers was being interrogated, I understand, and in the offices, and of course the American Army was doing the interrogating. This was not the medical profession that was, excuse me, doing the interrogating. But apparently this SS trooper was being interrogated and there were other, there were some of the prisoners there, a few, well-edu-, better educated and the prisoners that they felt they could rely on. Because there were all levels of integration in the camp. They were questioning this SS, and as he came up to the man who was questioning him, which I'm sure was an American officer, he had his hat on, and he clicked his heels. And one of the prisoners that was also there, went up to him and snatched that cap off his head. And they said, in seconds. So you could see the attitude and the hatred and, that they had.

NP: Certainly.

KF: But they said the SS troopers were the vicious and the real culprits of the German Army.

NP: Had you mentioned that when news reached the various countries, about the concentration camps, that they existed, and the horrors that existed behind them, did you mention that Charles de Gaulle came through?

KF: Yes. As we were there, we were there one month.

NP: Yes.

KF: And if you were not in the building and you were outside, you saw these cars of de Gaulle. You saw congressmen from United States and many government officials from United States coming over because, to view the situation.

NP: Yes.

KF: And one day I saw General de Gaulle, with some other French officers, coming to drive through and document things that were going on there. I understand it was almost every day we saw some celebrities or some government officials from somewhere coming through and we happened to see them. It was a common thing. And then I understand that the United States government had told the officials in this country if they wanted to go, they could go, but they had to pay their own...

NP: Their own way?

KF: Their own way. So then we saw less of them.

NP: I see. I see. The prisoners that you treated, did they then go on to other hospitals? Or do you know?

KF: No, the prisoners that we treated and survived, they were being sent back to their own country. And many of them did *not* want to go back to their own country. The Polish, from Poland, did not want to go back to Poland, because they said, "Take us back to United States with you." Because they said, "Poland is no longer what we knew as Poland." And they did not want to go back to their own country. They said, "What do we have to go back for? There's nothing there for us to go back to." That was a very sad thing. And we did, we felt, "Gee, I'd love to take them all." You know, and you can't. You just could not do it. You had to, it was a difficult time, but you had to remain your professional self...

NP: Certainly.

KF: Just to be able to cope with these things. Because at one time when we first moved into the concentration camp we had to be careful if anybody drank a, perhaps there was a ration or a, we were able to get Coca-Cola or whatever. And the American troops perhaps would throw the empty can or whatever in the trash. Well, the prisoners were going through that to see if they could get a few drops of whatever...

NP: Oh.

KF: They could get out of it, you know. It was just, it was just a sad thing. So they had to be very careful what they even put in the trash cans. Because the prisoners-- and then, of course, there was a lot of thievery going on. These people had been denied so much for so long that we had to protect everything so, because they stole everything in sight. If you didn't keep it, you know, locked up or on guard, because as I said, they were very demented many of them.

NP: And it was the only way they knew how to survive, these.

KF: Well this is it. This is it. So we were tolerant and very patient with them, because they certainly deserved that. Your heart ached for these people, but you just had to do, to take care of them medically and help as many survive as you could.

NP: Where did you go from there, Kay, after Dachau? Did you remain in Europe for a while?

KF: Yes. After Dachau [pause] I got, oh the last week that I was in Dachau, I was given what they would call rest and recuperation. This was our first chance, when, the time we'd been over there, that we had had any, any time off, any relief. And I got to spend seven days on the French Riviera, which was wonderful.

NP: A much needed rest.

KF: And my unit was still at Dachau. And it was to help us, I guess, keep our sanity.

NP: Yes, certainly.

KF: And so they would let two nurses at a time go. Well, when I came back, then we got the word the 7th Army was then moving us. I think we then went to Limburg, Germany. And I think I was transferred then into another unit...

NP: I see.

KF: Into Limburg, Germany. And I think it was 114th Evacuation Hospital. And they were set up in a school for priests and nuns. And that was an interesting short-term there. But then when we got ready to embark to come back to the United States they were nice enough to send us back as a unit, of the 116th Evacuation Hospital. But the people, the German people, you got varied reactions, depending on the area that you were in. Now I understand Limburg, Germany was a very hostile, and we were very careful who we even hardly spoke to.

NP: Hostile to the Americans?

KF: The Americans. And I understand, they were telling us that when the American troops or the American prisoners, those that were taken prisoner by the Germans, were marched through Germany, the people in Limburg stoned them. And this was before the war had ended. And, but as always, you always found some that were willing to do anything. They said, "Can we do some laundry for you? Can we do anything?" And of course, you could get your laundry done. There was ration of soap. If we gave them a bar of soap, this was after the war, they would do your laundry. They would do anything. If you gave them a pack of cigarettes, and of course I didn't smoke so I could use my cigarettes to get my laundry done. And there were people that, you know, and you did get to talk to a few who were on the side of the Americans. But you were, you got to be very suspicious of anybody. And of course this was our indoctrination in the military that you just...

NP: You had to keep your distance.

KF: You keep your distance, and you just didn't trust people that you didn't...

NP: Really know.

KF: That were from another country. And until you found out that you could.

NP: If we might back up a little bit, a thought comes to my mind. The prisoners that you treated in Dachau...

KF: Yes?

NP: Did they speak, and they were men, all men?

KF: Yes, at one time they were all men.

NP: Did they speak, well, did they speak of wives? Of children? Of any family?

KF: Some of them did. Some of them knew that their families had been killed.

But the SS troopers had segregated so many, their husbands from their wives, they had no idea where their wives were. They had no idea where their family was. We in this country have no idea now devastating a war is. It isn't only the killing, but it's the uprooting of the family. It's, your whole life is changed. And when I came back to this country and people say, "Do you think we'll have another war?" And that's all you needed for someone to make a remark like that to you, your stomach churned.

NP: Certainly. Certainly.

KF: They had no idea.

NP: The devastation.

KF: It isn't only, it's the black market. It's the whole destruction of the whole world.

NP: What people are reduced to because...

KF: Yes.

NP: ...of this terrible war. Did anybody have anything with them? Any pictures? Anything at all? Any remnant of their former life?

KF: No, because they had been stripped. When they were put in concentration camps, they were just stripped of the gold in their teeth. They were stripped of all, any jewelry. They were stripped of any clothing they had. As you will see in one of these pictures--piles of body of clothing that were just put off for trash. And they were stripped of everything and just given a uniform and that's what they had to wear.

NP: So they were totally in limbo.

KF: They had, one of the books that I have read, that gave such a good picture of concentration life is Corrie ten Boom's³. She has written several books. But when she was lecturing in this country, my son got to meet her.

NP: Oh!

KF: And he told me that he had met her. And I said, "Well, if you see her again, you tell her that I was aware of the horrible things of the concentration camp." She was a Holland Dutch woman, whose family had been, she lost her family because of, they had protected the Jewish families. They had an underground in their home for Jewish people coming through. And her book is well worth reading. She has written several books, and I haven't read them all.

NP: Their, her last name?

³*The Hiding Place*, originally published 1971.

KF: Corrie ten Boom. Do you want to turn your tape off and I'm going to go get her book.

NP: All right, except that I do have a couple of questions, unless you're tired.

KF: No. I'm fine.

NP: Well, these were prepared by Phil Solomon, who, too, was a liberator in one of the army units. And one of the questions was, did you examine all of the survivors in the camps or only those who came forward with complaints? But then, of course, you have explained the triage situation.

KF: Right. So they were sent to us.

NP: Yes. I think that about covers it. I had asked you about were you involved with the evacuation of the patients.

KF: No.

NP: No. Just in the treatment. Kay, you mentioned to me about why you thought it was important to do this interview. And you mentioned something about those that say, "This never happened," the experience that you've just described.

KF: Yes, our younger generation, part of it is many people who had been victims of the concentration camps have tried to put this out of their mind and live a new life. And our, it's too painful for them to talk about. And I really got quite perturbed when I heard someone say that they thought these concentration camp stories were a lot of propaganda. It made me decide that I wanted to do something to make people realize it was *not* a lot of propaganda. It actually happened. And the younger generation, I think, should be made aware of what can happen and many, and I presume, this could happen, that there were German people over there that did not realize that this was going on. As in this country, very often we hear news by television or radio or particularly television, of things that are happening in this country. Had we not had the television, we did not know these things were going on. And I'm sure this happened. Now that we have the television perhaps some things are not the best, but at least we're getting news of what's going on. At that time they had radio. They didn't have television. And the German people were kept in the dark as much as possible. They were given what propaganda the government wanted them to have. And a few people, the German people that I did question about this, they actually were perturbed. Now when, I happened to be in my room when the government, the United States government had talked to the farmers that lived in the area...

NP: Yes.

KF: And had them come with their wagons and horses, and load these bodies. And what they did was went out the front gate. And as they were going out the front gate, I was in my room. And I took a picture of, I happened to have a camera in my room. I took a picture and I counted. There were sixteen wagonloads going out the gate. What they did was march them through the city of München. We call it Munich, but actually the Germans called it München.

NP: München.

KF: To show the people what had gone on. Because many of them refused to believe it. And they wanted the people to really see what was going on. Now there were many beautiful, expensive homes outside the camps, where the SS troopers lived. And München was a beautiful city, from what I understand. I only got in there one day. It was a modern city. We were amazed at all the electric appliances and all the beautiful things that, where the troopers lived. But the average German peasant was not aware of, I'm not saying they were not, that, they may, many were aware, but were afraid to speak up.

NP: These farmers that they gathered to bring their wagons and so forth, they were, they surrounded Dachau. They were in the neighboring farms.

KF: That's where they got them. Now, these farmers were very reluctant, and they did not want to come in and do it, because they were afraid of getting typhus. And, but when the American government said, "You do it..."

NP: They did it. Do you think they knew?

KF: Well there again, I said...

NP: Yeah.

KF: Some may have known and were afraid to speak up. And I'm sure perhaps there were some that they may have known some of it. But to what extent?

NP: Yeah.

KF: And, like the average person, what can you do? It's just like one person speaking out. Unless you have authority and so forth, and really had someone backing you, just one little voice...

NP: Did you ever meet anybody from the underground, anybody that was...

KF: Well, Hans Gertzug. Hans.

NP: Okay, Hans. Besides Hans? But he...

KF: No.

NP: He was very much in...

KF: I never had, I really didn't get a chance to talk to Major Gerard too much. And as I say, we were so busy at the time, we didn't get to sit down and talk to these people like we would like to have.

NP: Of course. Of course.

KF: And they were busy. The United States government was keeping them busy, helping them to accumulate information for the Nuremberg Trials.

NP: Certainly, that was their first priority.

KF: So we saw them only occasionally. And then of course in conversation, short conversations, we got a little bit of this. But apparently there was a lot of underground. And I understand just before the American government liberated the camp, a French general was cremated, was gassed and cremated in the--apparently he was trying to...

NP: Be part of the underground and...

KF: Be part of the underground. We didn't get the details on it, but...

NP: Was there something, I don't know whether it was Dr. Eichner or was it you, had mentioned something about one of the German, one of the SS, that he was taken out and shot. A German officer?

KF: Well, there were many, many German officers, their bodies were there.

NP: Right.

KF: They had been shot.

NP: I thought this was something that you had witnessed...

KF: Oh.

NP: At one time.

KF: One thing that, an American reporter, who was a woman, and of course reporters were aggressive people...

NP: Yes.

KF: Had wanted a story. And I understand this was perhaps the day or so before we arrived. Our commanding officer told us this, that they had found the Assistant *Kommandant* of the camp and some of the guards of the camp had captured them. And what they did was, they were, wanted to belittle them in front of all the prisoners. So American prisoners were marching them with their hands up behind their heads, through the compound, which was a fenced-in area where the prisoners lived. And they had just marched them in for a very short distance. And it was just a number of three or four of them that, and of course the American prisoners were marching them. And the prisoners that were in the compound at the time actually overpowered the prisoners and tore them limb from limb. And what could the American military do but just, they certainly couldn't shoot the prisoners. So they just had to turn their backs. Then an American woman was going to go in to get an interview and get a story. When she saw what had happened, she changed her mind. Now when we went in there, these men had not seen a woman in a long time. They had not seen an American woman, many of them, ever. And of course we were well-nourished. We were not, we were in fatigues. We were not dressed as women, but they were...

NP: It was undeniable...

KF: All eyes.

NP: That you were women.

KF: Yes. And of course, our enlisted men, we did not go on our own. We went with protection of our enlisted men, who would protect us if the prisoners did get out of hand. And of course there were enough American soldiers around at that time that we had no fear. And of course at that time when we first went through it, we didn't realize, I don't think, that these people were as demented, some of them, as they were. Because all they did was just stare at us. And they did not release all the prisoners out of the gate, out of the fenced-in area, when they captured the camp.

NP: I see.

KF: Because it would have been chaos to have just opened the gates and let everybody out. This way, the American government, or the American soldiers, could keep control of the situation. Had they opened up the fenced-in area and let everybody out, they would have lost control of everything and not been able to document anything or whatever. So it had to have been, it had to be done systematically.

NP: Yes.

KF: And of course they warned us about these things, you know. And we didn't have any casualties. One of the nurses did contract a hepatitis from...

NP: The blood, I guess, or a needle or whatever?

KF: No.

NP: No?

KF: It might have been just the atmosphere or whatever. But fortunately we were in good health, and we had enough resistance that we had no problems.

NP: You were very fortunate.

KF: But we did, we had a very fine group of doctors and nurses that worked all well together. And the cooperation was very good.

NP: Well, what you've done is just incredible, the care that you took, and so that no one can say this didn't happen, as you had remarked to me...

KF: That's true.

NP: That your children will know, will have this tape, and future generations will have your testimony. And that beautiful little grandchild there will know what a heroine really their grandmother is.

KF: Well, this is, I want to document this, because in future generations for my grandchildren, and anyone else's, that it will be preserved. Because I think any of these things that happened to any of these countries- [tape ends]

Tape two, side one:

NP: What comes to mind is that you've been a nurse before you were at Dachau and you had treated ill people. Was this like anything else you had ever experienced, the feeling of treating these people?

KF: Well, it was so different. It was so different. And we were so stunned actually by what we saw and not being able to communicate with these people too well, we were able to communicate some, but it was very different and our nursing techniques of course you always have those. But we had, we didn't have time to only do the absolutely necessary for everyone. And to cope with people that were not only physically ill but they were also mentally ill and they were all grouped together so you didn't, you couldn't segregate those that were demented from those that were clear mentally, and all the cots and everything were very close together and it was just a very, very different way of treating people. Because we did try to keep some records, but our recordkeeping for the medical care was not as extensive as we would have with the soldiers or with civilian personnel.

NP: Alright, well again, I thank you, your testimony is really something that will be heard by future generations and we thank you and we hope that you will come and visit the Archive and see more of what we have been doing. I know that you said that your daughter is interested and hopefully she will come along, too. And thank you again.

KF: Well, I'm looking forward to then.

[Tape two, side one ended; end of interview]