

Eight drawings – they show the truth without exaggeration

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(Handwritten original in German without a date)

St. Ottilien had been a huge field hospital since 1942. When American troops occupied it in May 1945 and transformed it into a DP hospital, I was allowed to continue my work as a trainer for exercise therapy in the hospital which I had practiced at the end of the war. The Americans brought Jewish survivors from different concentration camps. Completely stunned and horrified, we were confronted with the misery of these emaciated and deeply humiliated people. I tried to come to terms with my experiences by producing these drawings.

Morning roll call in Dachau

This drawing is the only scene which I didn't observe personally. Through my work in the hospital, I was **so** emotionally completely drawn into the general atmosphere of the camp (I was only 23 years old) that I produced this drawing. At the morning roll call, the prisoners were often forced to wait for hours until the SS guard appeared. All were extremely weak. It happened that somebody collapsed and fell out of the line—he was instantly shot. Three days before the American soldiers arrived in St. Ottilien, members of the SS were pushing three prisoners through the hospital grounds in the middle of the night. When one of them collapsed, he was instantly shot.

The last glass of water

I gave it to a dying man who lay on a primitive stretcher in the corridor of the school building. In the morning, people had found him dying close to his neighbor. In the beginning, some of the patients died every night. For the last six years, they had not received even one ounce of fat and were in need of a strict diet. But now, because of the general complete chaos, they received huge amounts of canned beef and butter from the well-meaning American soldiers. Others ate the green berries in the gardens of the monastery and neither the German doctors (who had been brought to prison camps) nor the Jewish people who were still healthy were quick enough to stop them.

The last shirt

When I arrived in my therapy room in the morning (I offered exercise therapy), my assistant had already started her work. I was expected by several patients who were already able to walk and who still wore their camp clothes. Everything was as usual, but there was a stretcher on the floor with a bearded old man who was dead. Somebody had hastily put a paper shirt on his chest. When I asked the waiting people to leave the room to show respect for the dead man, they refused at first: They had become totally used to the sight of dead people. When they had finally left, we dressed the dead man with his last shirt; this was made complicated because of *rigor mortis*. We waited until somebody could pick up the body.

Exercise therapy

These drawings show the individual steps of the treatment. The person in the drawing is a 17-year old Hungarian Jew who only survived the Buchenwald concentration camp because a guard had pity on him and hid him in a coal cellar. The boy suffered only from paratyphoid fever; otherwise he would have been killed like all the sick people. Since there was only a space of one meter between the piles of coal, he had to lie there for several weeks with his legs closely pressed to his body. As a consequence, he suffered

from a heavy contraction of his limbs which were completely stiff. I will never forget the touch of his dry, peeling skin which barely covered his bones. After some time, he could walk again and finally recovered completely.

The first Jewish religious service

took place in front of the school in St. Ottilien. Two rabbis stood on small platforms and had covered their shoulders with simple white sheets. Most patients were still not able to walk. So we brought them there on stretchers, in wheelchairs or equipped with crutches. Some of the monks who had returned, we from the medical staff and some local people observed the ceremony. Everyone became completely enthusiastic and was deeply affected on hearing the songs which had been forbidden during the years in the concentration camps and which, especially for Jews from Eastern Europe, are of such importance.

My therapy room on the first floor of the school (with view of the retreat house)

A patient with an amputated leg (his name was Tischler) learns to walk again under my guidance. Later I went with him to a shop which sold prostheses where he received a new artificial leg. He was often quite sad. This had nothing to do with his amputated leg—this is of no importance for somebody who had barely survived—but because of his family. Like many others, he was not able to receive any information about their fate.

The small Hebrew cemetery

It can still be found today close to the train station of St. Ottilien. In 1945, it was quickly laid out in the vicinity of the monastery cemetery. First one and then two mass graves received the bodies of those who died in the hospital and also those who had been killed during the American air raid on neighboring Kaufering. A tombstone in this cemetery with Hebrew and German letters marks the grave of a young man, a pale and intelligent Russian Jew, whom we found had hanged himself in 1946. He had not been able to come to terms with the humiliations he had suffered in the concentration camp.