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Pat Lynch interview, 2/8/94

PAT LYNCH: ...and so they were so starved, we couldn't give

them any medication. You couldn't use the hypo because

there was no place

[INTERRUPTION]

PAT LYNCH: We were in an evacuation hospital close by. I

was in a small hospital it moved a lot. And this was

probably one of the subcamps. We'd been to Rhine first and

then we moved around, moved on down south, and this was a

subcamp. There were a few of us who went over there,

because we couldn't, not all the nurses and doctors could go

because we had, somebody had to take care of our patients at

our hospital, so they'd take a few each day and go over and

it was just terrible. I couldn't believe it. Absolutely.

I stood there for a while, and some of the girls walked out,

and I thought to myself, if I walk out I'm not getting back

in here, I've got to stay. I can't walk out. They walked

out and made a circle around and came back in. So I [sighs]

oh, am I gonna be able to this, and I thought, for a little

while, I don't think I can do this, and then I got busy and

started in working.

SWB: How did it compare to what you had been doing.

PAT LYNCH: Oh, no comparison at all.

SWB: Tell me. I've never been in one of those... I don't

even know what, you were saving men who were wounded... so

tell me the contrast.

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PAT LYNCH: Oh, well, first, our patients had the best of

care, and they weren't neglected, I mean, even though we

were out in the field, we did everything we could for them,

and we were kind to them. But here we go in this place

where these people have been abused. And they didn't have

medical care, they didn't have anything. And it was a real

sharp contrast. While we didn't have the best of equipment,

we had the best that we could have out in the field

hospital. But they were fed and we took good care of them,

then we go someplace where people had no care at all, nobody

cared for them, no one was interested in them, and they were

just lying on concrete, some of them, with temperatures of

108. And they hadn't been fed. They had some wooden rolls

about so big around with some soup in, and I noticed that

particularly and the patients were too weak to reach over

and get it. That was the only pretense that they made of

feeding them. And uh, they were so thin. I couldn't pick

any of them up, I tried to, but if I really picked them up I

would tear the skin. So we had to be very very careful

moving them out. The skin was just so terrible. So it

would take, about, at least three people, one person take

the head, one person take the legs, and very carefully lift

them up and get them outside, go ahead and get them outside

of that place. We put up tents outside, we had cots and

clean bedding. So we'd take them out there. Or if there

was a hospital nearby, we'd go and take over that hospital

and move them in there. But, uh, we couldn't, for typhus,

that was the main thing, there was no medication, just

supportive treatment, and get fluids down them, well they

couldn't drink anything, so we had to feed them with

medicine droppers, and we couldn't give them hypos because

there was no place to stick them. There was no skin at all,

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no muscle, just skin and bone, there was no place to give

them a hypo. So, it was, I was just weak, I couldn't

believe it happened. And then I was so afraid, I thought,

what else are we gonna run into. Is this gonna go on? And

then, later on, I think we were all just infuriated, and

outraged at what had happened. But right in the beginning

we were so afraid, first we didn't believe it.

SWB: How many-- What were the numbers like, that you were

confronted with. How many of you were there and how many

people were you trying to help?

PAT LYNCH: Oh, see, those that were able to be moved, now

they went to DP camps from the concentration camps. And if

they were able to be moved, they hurried up and moved them

over there, and I don't know what the DP camps were, whether

they were buildings, or to me it sounded like they were

camps, outdoors someplace. But nevertheless, they were much

better than what they had. And so they moved those, and

those that were really too sick to move, we had to find a

building, or put a tent up outside. We had to get them out

of the camps, it was too dirty in there. And so we put

tents up, and we knew how to run a hospital under tents

because that's what we'd been doing. The evacuation

hospital that I was with was all tents. Even surgery. So

we knew how to run a hospital under tents. So we put the

up, put tents outside and got clean bedding for them, and

they were bathed, and took care of them there, until we

could move them someplace else. But mainly to get them out

of those buildings, they were just terrible. They were

infested with mites, and oh, just awful. If they didn't

have typhus, well they'd get it if they didn't get out.

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SWB: How did you guys protect yourselves?

PAT LYNCH: Oh we had, I'd had training in communicable

diseases, that's what I did, and that's one reason they sent

me there. Because I'd had some training in communicable

diseases. We had DDT powder that we used, and it was in a

thing that looks like an old flint gun, you know, they used

to spray flies, we had a canister with a pump on it, so we

put the powder and then we would stick it down our slacks

and socks and under our arms, and get inside of our

fatigues. I don't know what we did about our hair. That's

one thing I've been trying to figure out how did we, we must

have dusted some kind of a cap, and then put that on, or

maybe we had a, we may have tied it up with a cloth, dusted

the cloth and then tied our hair up, because if the mite

would get on us, we'd get it too. So, that's about the only

thing that we did, that I remember, and try to get as much

rest as we could, of course that wasn't very easy because

we'd been working sixteen hours a day, but keep well rested.

Our food wasn't very good. It was K rations and C rations,

no fresh fruit, no milk. No fresh potatoes, no vegetables.

Everything was powdered. I never had any fruit all the time

I was there, no milk. But anyway we managed to stay

healthy. Where these people hadn't had anything to eat

except bread crusts and coffee grounds. Our general health

was good, our resistance was good, so that's probably what

kept us from getting it.

SWB: Were things well organized, or was it pretty chaotic,

and how did you see light at the end of the tunnel, or did

you ever?

PAT LYNCH: I thought that when they got organized, it was

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pretty well organized, because all the leaders came forth,

among the people in the camps, the survivors, the leaders

all came forth and helped out. See, we didn't get there

first, the American soldiers got there first, so the

soldiers and the people in the camps started running the

camps, and I thought they did pretty well. And then they

recruited German people to do the laundry, to do the

cooking, to clean, and do all sorts of things. So, pretty

soon it was, things were going pretty well. It was a matter

of just taking care of these desperately ill patients. And

then we started getting better supplies. Also, after we

took over a town, after the infantry or tank corps got in

there, they'd go to the burgermeister of the town and tell

him what we needed. So they just, said we need so many beds

and need so much clean linen, we brought what we had, what

we could spare from our hospital, but we did tell him what

we want, and they'd hurry up and find it. So, in that way,

it wasn't too bad. It was primitive, but we got by, I'll

say.

SWB: What was the attitude of the Germans that helped?

PAT LYNCH: They hung on to us and hugged us like they

thought we were gonna go away. Oh, the German people, oh

not this, excuse me, oh, they were very submissive for the

most part. They were very cooperative. And then the

burgermeister would send whatever we wanted, if he possibly

could find it, of course [???????] with the German

efficiency, go find it, get what we need. But as far as the

survivors were concerned, they just hung to us, those that

could, many of them were too weak, they couldn't lift their

arms up. They hung on to us and grabbed our clothes for

fear we're gonna leave. But, no, the people who came in to

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work, for the most part, were cooperative. They probably

didn't want to be there, but they, it was only one nurse

that I didn't get along with, at one hospital we had taken

over, and we had taken the survivors in there. And she was

a little abrupt. She's a good nurse, German nurse, but she

was abrupt, and she would, I'd hear her talking to the

patients, she'd say 'Swallow that,' 'Drink that,' kind of

barking at them so I took her aside and told her she'd have

to be more caring. I said, you can't talk to these peo-,

those people that way. Well, she didn't like me very well,

so every time she went by me she'd give me a dirty look.

Otherwise, I got along fine. There was another nurse there,

her name was Margaret, and I got along fine with her. She

was a little bit older. The people we had the trouble with

were the Hitler youth, the young ones. They were starting

up again. And some of our officers and our men found them

out in a cemetery, starting up all over again, marching

around, Heil Hitler, so, I don't know what they did, and I

guess they call the MP's and told them to take them on home.

[CAMERA RELOAD]

[CR#2 TAKE 2]

SWB: I want you to start again and tell me about the Hitler

Youth and tell me about the difference in the older German

people who had to help out and the younger ones.

PAT LYNCH: I think the older Germans, if they were telling

the truth, they told us that they didn't want to be Nazis

and they were afraid and they had to go along with him or

they'd have been killed. But the Hitler youth, they were

very bold, and I think they, I was really afraid of them.

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After the war was over and we could ride around, maybe go,

we couldn't go anyplace before without an armed escort. And

of course the doctors weren't armed, we had to find somebody

if we wanted to go to another little town if we wanted to

visit a friend or something, we had to find an armed escort

to go with us, but I was always afraid of that Hitler youth

group, because I don't think they'd stop at anything. And

they were having a demonstrations at night, they'd find them

in cemeteries and places. And carrying on. They were

starting up again. And see they were about twelve years,

from twelve years on, so, I... they just call the MP's and

tell them to take them home, or what they did with them.

But our doctors found the few times, I'm a little scared of

them.

SWB: What about, were the German people surprised by, you

know you were shocked and didn't believe what you saw. What

about the Germans.

PAT LYNCH: Oh, they said that they didn't, now, now, they

say they didn't know that it was going on, but... They just

didn't say too much of anything. They just went about their

work. But I'm sure they knew what was going on, they were

probably in there helping. And the German citizens probably

were in there. I always thought they were probably in there

helping.

SWB: What about, did you, did the townspeople have to bury

some of the people, tell me in detail about that.

PAT LYNCH: Uh, the soldiers told them that they would have

to bury these people and give them a decent burial with the

star of David and all. I happened to be going through a

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little village one day and I saw these ladies carrying the

caskets. And they did look remorseful, with dark circles

under their eyes, and dressed in black, they looked pretty

sad. There weren't too many of them because, well, I

wouldn't say there weren't more than 30 or 40 that I saw,

walking along to the cemetery, carrying the caskets, but our

soldiers made them do that. They probably didn't want to,

but I think that's the only time I saw them look a little

bit remorseful.

SWB: Did you talk to some of the survivors that you helped?

Tell me what you remember of that.

PAT LYNCH: Oh, they just hang on to us and grab us, they

didn't want us to leave, and then they were going to the,

some that were going to the DP camps, I remember one group

going, and uh, we did all sorts of things for them that day,

I helped one man, or maybe several, their feet were just cut

up something terrible. They wore wooden shoes, so I

bandaged them all up and put socks on them, and all other

things. They had sore throatsand whatever and they went to

get in this, the truck or ambulances, and they were all

crying. Then I said, where you're going, they'll be nice to

you too. And, uh, they were so grateful. I'll never forget

they were saying auf wiedersehen, auf wiedersehen, crying as

they left. I said well they'll be real nice to you in the

camps, and if you get sick, if anything happens, if they

can't take care of you, they'll send you back to our

hospital which was 123rd evac. We'd be set up and they'll

bring you back there if anything happens and that's what

they did. See later on, this typhus, I thought the typhus

epidemic was pretty well under control towards summer and it

wasn't. And uh, we were back at our hospital and we had

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gotten into a permanent building by that time, because we

were generally in tents. And we were getting an awful lot

of people from the DP camps in, with typhus, and uh, I

thought by that time the epidemic was under control.

SWB: Tell me how you dealt with this personally. I mean,

did you feel guilt, you must have been a young women,

healthy and, tell me how you felt.

PAT LYNCH: I felt very guilty, because I thought, here I

am, well, why did we let this happen? Why didn't somebody

stop it, we all, you know, we should have put a stop to it

and nobody did, and then I felt like, here I am living over

in a tent, and I don't, and we, with the minimum, eating C

rations and K rations, but if I get sick, somebody's going

to take care of me, I'm gonna be treated nice. Where those

people were treated so terrible. And I felt guilty, here,

I'll always be taken care of, but look what's happened to

them, they're so disgraceful. We had a lot of guilt

feelings. Why did we survive, and... why are we treated so

well, and here these peopel have nothing, they're starving.

We certainly didn't have very much but we had a lot better

than what they had. And uh, I think the guilt was why in

the world did anyone let this happen. We just couldn't

believe it.

SWB: Did you pray?

PAT LYNCH: Oh, I guess. I'm still wearing my St. Jude

medal. I prayed all the time. St. Jude is my patron saint

and I said.. well I can pull it out.. well I said if I can

save some of these patients, I'll wear this St. Jude medal

and I'll still be alive, so here it is. I prayed all the

time, and I carried the St. Jude, St. Jude is the saint of

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hopeless cases in our church. And so I had the little card

and I carried that all the time. In fact I still have one

in my purse, it's a new one. The other one is all dog

eared. We all prayed.

SWB: Tell me again what you had to deal with medically with

these people. Describe it to me, thinking that I'm not a

nurse, how difficult it was to get an IV started, for

example...

PAT LYNCH: Well, starting IV's was almost impossible,

because here they were starving, and if you start shooting

fluid in, it would be just a little bit too much in the

heart and lungs, you know, start shooting all that in them,

here they... they hadn't, they couldn't even swallow, but we

started IV's very very carefully, and very slowly, but we

fed them with medicine droppers, and I tried to prop them

up, and if you give them a little piece of a cracker or

something, that wouldn't go down. And uh, they hadn't

swallowed anything for so long, but, I used to rup this way,

give them a little bit on a spoon, of a little fluid, and

then rub this way, and, and then finally get it, get them to

swallow it, but uh. They had big old bowls of, I don't know

what, some kind of soup, sitting around, like the pretense

of feeding them, big old wooden bowls and a big tablespoon.

Well they were too weak to reach over and pick up that

spoon, and they couldn't get it in their mouth anyway, cause

their mouth was just kind of set and drawn, and so they

couldn't have opened their mouth to eat whatever this, I

think it had been there about three days, it was just

terrible. But, they had this food sit, this soup or

whatever, under the pretense of having fed them. See most

of them weren't getting anything but, uh, um, old crust of

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bread every day. The people who were going out work got a

crust of bread and some coffee grounds, and they'd try and

save a little bit of bread for the next day. I don't know

how they worked.

SWB: Now, why don't you tell me about the one woman in

charge of the camp that you got to see that time.

PAT LYNCH: Oh, she was terrible, I'll never forget her.

They, I used to get her because of the people from the, see

the soldiers, the German soldiers in the camps and the

people that were running the camp, they knew that the

Americans were coming pretty soon. They were figured that

out. So they just took off to the villages. Well then the

survivors in the camp kind of took over and then when the

American soldiers got there, well between the American

soldiers and the survivors, they were running the camps.

But they got this woman and put her up on the third floor in

a cell. This was in Rhine. And that place was more like a

jail. It had catwalks and little tiny cells but they're

more like, they looked like animal cages to me. But they

had her up there, locked, and she was just terrible. Worst

looking thing I have ever seen. Mean, and so she would be

tried for war crimes of course. But they couldn't wait to

get us up there to see her. They said, don't you want to

see her, I said well I can't right now but before the day is

over I'll go up and see her. And the man who was in charge

there was from Holland. He knew nothing about his family,

he had daughters and his wife, but he said he had no idea

where they were. And he had kind of taken over and uh, he

spoke beautiful English, and uh, so he came around several

times that day I was working, and said, don't you want to go

upstairs, and I said, well, when I'm through I'll, I'm gonna

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go up and see her, that's for sure. Well I had nightmares

about her for a long time. I talked to other soldiers after

that, and one in particular, a fellow from our town, he just

died, but he had gone into Buchenwald and the nurses didn't

go in there, they said, I heard that they said it was just

so terrible they couldn't let us go in there. But he said,

the women in charge of the camps were worse than the men.

He'd been in several and been in some of the subcamps, and

he managed to see some of these women. He said they were

worse than the men. They were meaner. And oh she was mean

looking. Just terrible.

SWB: Did you see any survivors have reunions with other

people they knew or family members?

PAT LYNCH: Not really, I didn't um, they were having a hard

time finding their family members. So many of them had been

killed, and uh, I didn't, after they left there I didn't see

too much of them unless they got sick again, and then they

came back to our hospital that following summer. And they

came back with typhus, and tuberculosis, and oh any number

of things. We even had maternity cases where we set up a

maternity ward. Some of the people were pregnant when they

went to DP camps and then they brought them over to our

hospital to deliver the babies. And uh, so I got to see

them again. And spend more time with them, I wasn't so busy

then so I got to spend a little more time with them. There

were a lot of ladies in, they came in with typhus. One

beautiful gal, she was so pretty, she was a Jewish doctor,

and she had tuberculosis, oh she was a very young, just

beautiful, and I took care of her for a long time. There

was a ... later on they were giving streptomycin for

tuberculosis but we didn't have it then so it was just

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supportive treatment. But she was a nice lady.

SWB: Okay, we just ran out.

[CAMERA RELOAD]

[CR#3]

SWB: ...at the time when the small group of you went into

the subcamp of Dachau, and tell me what a typical day was

like. Start in the morning and just go...

PAT LYNCH: Start in the morning, first of all you try to,

get, many of the patients were dead, and of course, they

were removing them, you know, right away, and we'd try to

get the sickest ones first, get them cleaned up and get them

outside, get them out of bed. And take care of them. And

if there's any way that they had any flesh at all under the

skin, we'd inject water, they call it hyperdemoclasis,

sometimes in the shoulder there'd be a little fatty tissue

there, muscle, then we'd inject some water into them because

they were all dehydrated. And uh, trying to feed them, and

uh, did I tell you about the men, those people whose feet

were so terribly bad, they were all but up, they wore wooden

shoes and no stockings, well there were a lot of people

whose feet were just terrible, so we took care of those.

And uh, oh, and bandaged them up and put A&D ointment or

whatever I could find on them, and little two by four

bandages, and get clean socks on them, and uh. But taking

care of these patients who hadn't, were starving, and had

typhus. There wasn't any specific medication for typhus so

we'd just use supportive treatment. We concocted some kind

of, all we had was powdered milk and some uh a can of

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vegetables, and so the fellows in the mess hall would try to

make some real, oh some kind of soup. They'd put the

vegetables in the powdered milk and they'd try to feed them

that. But if we'd get water down them, and uh, get the

temperature down, that was the important thing. Cause there

was nothing specific for typhus at that time.

SWB: How could they be alive with a temperature that high?

PAT LYNCH: I don't know, I don't know how they... sometimes

they were just on concrete floor, you just go in there and

find them lying on the concrete. I don't know how they

survived. Well, many didn't, of course. But some we were

able to help.

SWB: Do you know about the, um, the overeating and people

dying from overeating when the camps were open, did you see

any?

PAT LYNCH: I heard about it, the GI's, of course the GI's

always had a candy bar someplace and they want to be kind,

and these people who were up and around but hadn't had much

to eat but they were still able to walk around, they were

working, well they gave them candy bars and they got very

sick. They just couldn't handle the sugar. I had just

heard about after I went over two years ago, how they gave

them candy bars, and it just about killed them.

SWB: When you're starved like that, as a nurse, what is the

description, the scientific description of what happens to

your body when you don't, when you're starved like that.

PAT LYNCH: Oh, they just can't possibly eat anything, it

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just won't go down, everything's, you know, if they haven't

eaten anything or swallowed anything, you just can't handle

it, and the skin dries up, the dehydration, and uh, just all

sorts of complications from starvation. The eyes were all

sunken in, and uh, terribly thin, just skin and bones. But

you try and get them to eat, it was just terrible. You know

they just could not swallow things. So we used the medicine

droppers, little by little they started to improve, but the

skin gets so terrible, no nutrition, the skin is terrible,

and break out in rashes, and then, they said, you know, you

couldn't lift them up because if I'd go like so, I'd tear

their skin. It was in such terrible condition. But they

were about as close to dead as anyone could be.

SWB: Tell me about a small incident that you remember,

maybe an individual incident with somebody who touched you

in some way. Did you have any personal incidents?

PAT LYNCH: Oh yeah, they would grab onto us like they

though we were going to leave. One man was, I had taken

care of and he was going to the DP camp. He was able to

walk around, he'd been working, but oh his had lesions all

over him and his feet was so bad, and his, he cried when he

left, he was saying auf wiedersehen, auf wiedersehen, and I

said, well they'll be nice to you when you get over there,

and you'll get along fine. He didn't want to leave, he

thought he'd rather stay there with the American nurses. I

said well if you get real sick they'll send you back to our

hospital anyway. I hadn't been to the DP camp but I said I

know that they'll be nice to you. You'll get food and

you'll get treated well, but he was leaving and crying. It

was sad.

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SWB: Now let's jump forward to when people came in from the

DP camps, and you even had maternity cases. Do you remember

seeing any instance, were the people joyous, were they

totally different than they had been before?

PAT LYNCH: Well, not too joyous. But they were looking

better, they had started to eat, and they looked much

better. And uh, they were glad to see us, they were glad to

come into our hospital, and uh, I thought that they looked

much better, they looked like they'd been eating and put on

a little bit of weight. Well I remember going back to

Rhine, the first camp I was in, and we put patients, I think

there must have been a staff room where the soldiers lived,

or, I don't know, a dining room or, we put a lot of them

down there and set up a hospital. And went I went back two

or there months later they looked so much different, you

wouldn't believe it. They had changed a lot. By that time,

they were eating and their color was good, and they were

laughing, and, they were too sick to be out of bed, they'd

had, had typhus and they were much too sick, but, they

looked much different.

SWB: So you saw a huge change in those months between March

and say August.

PAT LYNCH: Oh yeah, definitely.

SWB: Tell me about that. How did it make you feel?

PAT LYNCH: Oh it made me feel marvelous, it was so

rewarding. It was the most rewarding thing I've ever done.

We did, you know we were able to do something for those

people. And uh, one regret that I have that I didn't, I was

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just so busy I couldn't stop and talk to them sometimes if I

could just, stopped and held their hand or asked them a name

or something, but we were just going so fast we didn't have

time to talk to them. I always think about I wish I knew

who some of them were. And, but I do, think about that a

lot. And I wish I'd spent just a little more time but I

didn't, I couldn't.

SWB: How long hours did you work?

PAT LYNCH: Oh, we weren't supposed to work more than

sixteen, but, or twelve, but I think that was about the

limit. We had a pretty strict rule on that. Because if,

our chief nurse said if we got sick, well then we'd be no

value to her, we'd just, be, more or less of a burden on

her, so she expect, she wanted us to sleep eight hours in

24, not to just stay on duty 24 hours a day but sometimes we

stayed longer than that. That's the only thing I was ever

reprimanded for. She came around one morning and said how,

she goes to me and says, how come. And I said I just can't

leave, it was too much work to do. And she says well you'll

have to leave, she says I'll stay here, and I said, well I

haven't charted things, I've got to get these things

charted, the patients have a little envelope with a card on

them, and we put, it wasn't a chart like in the hospital, we

just jotted down when they'd had penicillin and morphine and

whatever. And she says, well I'll take care of that. But

you have got to go. So that's the only time I was ever

reprimanded for anything. Staying on duty too long. Nobody

wanted to go, actually, that was hard. They didn't, if

there was work to do they didn't want to leave, under stress

people always work much harder. And uh, they didn't want to

go off duty, they could see too many things to be done.

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SWB: So you got up at dawn, and...

PAT LYNCH: Generally, we were up at six and uh, had

breakfast and were on duty at seven, and uh, we worked from

seven to seven, and the night nurse would come from seven

and work till seven the next morning. But there were many

times that we, we couldn't possibly leave at seven at night

because there was too much to be done. Or we'd have a load

of new patients come in, a lot of casualties, a lot of

surgery. So we just had to stay there. But the rule was

sixteen hours, and we were supposed to quit.

SWB: Okay, I hear a jet, let's cut. I think I've done...

[CUT]

PAT LYNCH: ... and uh, that's about all I know about it. I

think there's probably some more specific treatment now, but

at that time there wasn't much that we could do for them.

Just supportive treatment. This high fever, sevre headache,

and sometimes rash. And of course they couldn't eat, they'd

starved them anyway, but when we got there it was terribly

hard for them to eat. And many of them died. That was the

main cause of death in the camps. That and tuberculosis.

Cause the mites got started, got in there and, they were

just all over. They slept on old, like, burlap bags stuffed

with straw. So you can imagine that was full of the bugs.

And uh, there just wasn't much chance. The children died of

it.

SWB: Did you see children?

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PAT LYNCH: I saw a few. Not as many, people have asked me

that, I didn't see too many children. I saw them at Rhine

because they were doing the test there, a, for a diagnose, a

diagnostic test for typhus. And there were children around

there and I remember one of our doctors was playing with the

children, ...this little girl and say, pat her on the head

and say, have you had the brump test today, and, they were

using the brump test to diagnose it. And I saw quite a few

children there. And I don't know if they had come in or

they'd brought them in from someplace or if they were,

hospitalized there in another building. But they were

around.

SWB: Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. END

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