

Karl Mann
Oral History Transcript

Historian: Something I've read in a lot of books, not just about Dachau but other camps too, was that before you could see the camps, you could smell them.

Karl Mann: Yeah, we could not. I did not. I don't remember. Let's put it this way: I don't remember anything, and I don't remember anybody saying anything about smelling anything. No. Yeah, the concentration camps. Apparently, Dachau was not as much of an extermination camp as some of the other concentration camps. It apparently—I get the feeling, from what I've read, that different concentration camps were used for different purposes in different ways.

And so I'm not even sure, to what extent prisoners were exterminated at Dachau. We did not—by that I mean, we did not, as we walked through the concentration camp itself, including what appeared to be a gas chamber—it looked like a big shower room—that we did not see any dead bodies or anything of that sort.

And so we did not... See, that doesn't mean that people were not killed in the concentration camp. It's just what we saw. But the railroad cars that we saw before we came to the concentration camp itself, the railroad cars cut us off and then, kind of gave us an initial impression that never left us.

And later on, seeing the camp being so big that we, even with [US Army Lieutenant Colonel Felix] Sparks going through the camp and taking a look, we didn't see everything. We didn't—it was a limited tour of the camp, and we therefore really didn't see that much of the camp. But what we did see was mostly, of course, was the enclosure of where the prisoners were.

And we only saw the prisoners through the barbed wire fence and, and so the, I would say, the main happenings as far as Sparks was concerned that day was what happened at the coal yard, and the hassle with General [Henning] Linden, those were the two... There were a lot of things, I guess, that were going on that we ourselves did not observe.

Historian: What would you want to tell somebody now that you won't be able to tell them in 40, 50 years or so? About Dachau, about what it was, and its importance, what would you say?

Karl Mann: To me, Dachau, the Dachau concentration camp, was a major example of man's inhumanity to man. You know, you hear about these things, you look at the paper, you look at a magazine, even a movie or a TV program. And you are exposed to some of these incidents in world history. But you can't really appreciate how terrible some of these things are until you've been exposed to them directly.

And to my way of thinking, the worst thing about all of this is that, unfortunately, Dachau is not the only place, but there are so many places in the world where people have been treated this badly. And, at places ... that are major examples of, as I said, man's inhumanity to man.

How to prevent this is something for future generations to be concerned about. I guess we did not eradicate these things from happening. They happened during the Nazi years, and they've happened since then. And the hope is that someday, maybe future generations can deal with them more effectively and eliminate them for all the years to come.

So it's a tragic, tragic situation when people treat each other in this [way]. But from my perspective, the impact was the greatest because when you're right there and you're exposed to it, it has an impact that you never forget. And I guess that's about all that I can say about it.