

John Pehle

BOBINE #320 A

WA PEHLE 38

Pehle walking in the wood

WA PEHLE 39

Pehle in the wood

WA PEHLE 40

Pehle walking down the hill and entering his home

WA PEHLE 41

repeated end of last take

WA PEHLE 42

Pehle standing near a bush

BOBINE 321

WA PEHLE 43

Q: John pehle, you were during the second world war assistant to Henry Morgenthau Jr. who was secretary of the Treasury, and you were personally the director of the Foreign Funds Control Division.

A: That is correct.

Q: ...Later on, in January 1944, you were appointed by the president Roosevelt, you were appointed the executive director of the War Refugee Board, which was a special agency created to help the Jews who were in danger of destruction in Europe or who were actually destroyed. Well, this seems to be a very strange story. How does one come from the Treasury and from the Foreign Funds Control Division to this very special task, and I know that it is a long story, but we have to try to...to go into it in order to explain how it happened.

A: Well, the WRB was established merely because of the Treasury Department, although the Treasury had no jurisdiction in refugee matters, which were entirely supposed to be handled by the State Department. But the Treasury Department, particularly the people in the Foreign Funds Control, came upon some facts with regard to the handling of refugee matters that were so shocking that they were brought by us to the attention of Secretary Morgenthau and he in turn went to President Roosevelt and brought these facts to the President

attention, and the result was the establishment by executive order of the WRB in January 1944.

Q: Yes, and what was the specific task of the WRB? I think that there was an order which established the board?

A: Yes.

Q: Could explain in few words.

A: Well, the most important thing about the WRB was that dramatically changed the policy of the US overnight. Before the board was established, nothing really was being done to help Jews who were being destroyed in Germany and occupied areas. With the establishment of the board it became the policy of the US to do whatever could be done, consistent with the war effort, to help people escape, to help private agencies who were operating in the area, to facilitate the transmissions of funds to areas such as Switzerland which could be the base of operations, to assist refugees coming over the border from France into Spain, All the things that seemed to have some possible effect of alleviating the conditions.

Q: Yes, you say that the policy of the government of US changed suddenly, overnight....

A: That's right.

Q: ...and took a.....a complete turn.

A: That's correct.

Q: Yes, and I think that we have to enter now into the details.

A: Well, the...the fact of the matter was....

Q: I mean I would like that the...the necessary things to start to talk about policy. What was till 1944, which was very late already during the war...

A: Yes, very late.

Q: ...very late in the war, What had been up till now the...let's say the policy of the government of the US?

A: I think the policy - to the extent that there was any policy - was to ignore what was going on in Europe, to interfere with the transmission of stories of what was going on to the Jewish agencies in the US, to deny licenses to people who wanted to transmit funds to rescue people, and generally not to take any affirmative action.

Q: Yes, and what were the governmental agencies who were specifically in charge of these questions, if there were any?

A: Well, the State Department had to do with all these questions really, they had to do with the granting of visas to people, trying to flee...flee occupied France, they participated for the US in intergovernmental conferences, such as the Bermuda Conference, where these matters were talked about but nothing ever happened. And...so it was really a...the problem of the State Department.

Q: This was the State Department. But...I think that there was at the time a big...a lot of pressure in order to change the policy...

A: There was pressure in Congress: Congressman Celler for example was very active in trying to get the State Department to act. There were people in the State Department, such as Sumner Welles, who showed some inclination to take advantage of opportunities of rescue, but other people seemed to be on those activities.

Q: Yes, if we enter into the details, let's take the visa policy.

A: Yes.

Q: ...What can you say about it?

A: Well, all I can say is that the...the consuls that we had in France made life very difficult for anybody who wanted to come to the US.

Q: In France only?

A: No, but...France was one place where this question came up very regularly. They took the position that these people might become dependents of the government if they came, despite the fact that there were Jewish agencies willing to guarantee that this would not happen, and who had the funds to back up the guarantee. There was a strict limitation on sticking within the quotas and very often the quotas weren't filled...

Q: Were NOT filled?

A: Were not filled. And so there was no real attempt made to facilitate entry of refugees, on the contrary very few reached our shores.

Q: Yes, and I think that there are very striking figures about the...about this question of the visa because <sup>as far as I</sup> king

know if one takes the immigration quotas since 1933...from 1933 till...let's say 1944, the amount of refugees that the US could and should have received goes up till one million and a half people....

A: Yes.

Q: Yes, and I think that the exact figures are about 500,000.

A: Very close to that, yes.

Q: You agree with that.

A: That is correct.

Q: Yes, and among these 500,000 I think that the Jews were even a minority.

A: that could be true too.

Q: Yes, and how do you explain this?

A: I don't know that I can.

Q: Try, please.

A: Well, this...the people who were handling visa matters and the policy of the Department - State Department - seemed to be such that instead of facilitating the entry of refugees, obstructions were thrown in their way. It's as simple as that.

Q: Yes, I think that we have the...we have some statements which exist in one of the drafts of this report which was forwarded to the President, and which led to the creation of the WRB, I think there are....I would like you to...to read this, for instance, about the...about the visa. Maybe you read this and you choose what you....Because there was a committee, a special committee that was appointed to...to deliver the visa. No, no, this is underlined.

A: This is what...this is what Congressman Dickstein stated in the House of Representatives in 1943. He stated: "There was no effort of any kind made to save from death many of the refugees who could have been saved during the time that transportation lines were available, and there was no obstacle to their admission to the US. But the destructive policy of our organs of government, particularly the State Department, who saw fit to hedge itself about with rules and regulations, instead of lifting rules and regulations, brought about a condition so that...that even existing immigration quotas were filled."

Q: Yes, and there is something else about the committee

BOBINE 319 A

WA Pehle 44

A: In 1943, as the facts of what was happening in Germany and Poland particularly became more known to the public, there was a good deal of attention given to this in Congress. For example, Congressman Dickstein stated in the House on December 15, in talking about the visas. He said: "There was no effort of any kind made to save from death many of the refugees who could have been saved during the time that transportation lines were available, and there was no obstacle to their admission to the US. But", says Congressman Dickstein, "the obstructive policy of our organs of government, particularly the State Department, which saw fit to hedge itself about with rules and regulations, instead of lifting rules and regulations, brought about a condition so that not even the existing Quotas were filled." Then Congressman Celler on the floor of the House said, "According to Earl G. Harrison, who was Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, not since 1862 have there been fewer aliens entering the country". He said, "the interdepartmental review committee, which reviews the applications for visa, are composed of one official from each of the following departments: War, Navy, FBI, State and Immigration. That committee has been *glorified* in its slowness and cold-bloodedness. It takes months and months to grant the visas, and then it usually applies to a corpse."

Q: It is a very strong statement.

A: Yes.

Q: And what were the reasons which were brought up by these people of the State Department in order...the main reason...in order not to grant the visa?

A: Well, as far as I know, one of the areas in which obstructions were raised was that these refugees might become a....a....public....dependent on the public for support, when they came in, to the US, despite the fact that various organizations

were willing to guarantee that these people would not become a....dependent on the US for support.

Q: They were ready to take care of them?

A: They were ready to make guarantees to this effect and to take care of the refugees.

Q: And didn't they...too talk about security reasons, saying that these people would be a security risk?

A: Yes...

Q: ...at a time of war?

A: That was one of the reasons and I have no doubt that the FBI probably felt that the Nazis would use refugees...recruit agents among refugees coming to the US.

Q: Yes, but I think it was Josiah Dubois, who was one of your assistants, who wrote in this report that it would have anyhow been possible to...even to put these people in camps for several weeks or months and to clear them afterwards.

A: Yes, they could have been screened.

Q: Yes, they could have been screened. This means the argument is....is rather weak, no?

A: Well, I...I think that while some people might have had real fears in this regard, I don't think that that was something that couldn't have been dealt with.

Q: Yes. No, but the fact that...the mere fact is that...do you agree with this<sup>people</sup> that these who were in charge of the problem in place of using & let's say the governmental machinery to help and <sup>to</sup> solve the question of the refugees, used this machinery <sup>moderate</sup> to block everything?

A: Well, I don't want to interpret people's motives, but the answer is that there were fewer people coming in at a time when there was the greatest need for people to find asylum in the US.

Q: Yes, because what is so striking and even shocking is that when one studies this...this period, it is the complete discrepancy between the...the emergency actions which were needed because each day counted and each day there were thousands of people who were murdered in the death camps, and the very slow and bureaucratic and red-tape

Q: which was...

PEHLE 45

A: By December 1943 the pressure for some action on the part of the government grew much more intense. In the Senate a resolution had been introduced, signed by twelve different senators and asking that plans be formulated to save the Jews of Europe from extinction. The resolution ended: "We have talked, we have sympathized, we expressed our horror, the time to act is now long past due."

Q: Yes, there is a striking fact too, that in all the reports and the statements...statements from the State Department that we have read and that we have at our disposal, when they handle with the problem of the refugees, and in such a case it was as a matter of fact specifically the Jews, they never dared to use specifically the word "Jewish", they always refused this. And there are even quotations of Breckinridge Long, who was the head of the European Division of the State Department, who said that in handling this problem of the refugees, one must not deal with people of a particular race or faith. And this is a very... this is very striking. They wanted in one way to draw the Jewish question in a much more general problem, and the Jews actually were the only one who were in danger of imminent death.

A: I don't know if they were the only ones, I think there were some Poles that were non-Jewish too...But the answer is that the basic problem had to do with the Jews and everybody knew it.

Q: Yes. Everybody knew it.

A: Of course.

Q: Yes. And...Well, let's now try to find how the Treasury, which was dealing mainly with financial problems - with money problems \* how the Treasury became involved in this story and when did it start, and in which circumstances.

A: Well, the story goes back to March of 1943. This was before the Treasury had any knowledge of what was going on as far as the State Department was concerned. In March of '43, the World Jewish Congress representative in London

sent word that the...that there was a possibility of rescuing Jews in Rumania, and they got...This was brought to the attention of Sumner Wells. (Sumner Wells was the Undersecretary of the State Department).

Q: Did they say how many Jews? could be rescued?

A: They said an ~~substantial~~ number at this point. And Sumner Welles sent cables to our legation in Switzerland, which was a key place because all the information as to what was going on filtered into Switzerland, and asked for more specific information. And then in April, a couple of months having gone by, the State Department received a cable from Bern, Switzerland, indicating how financial arrangements could be made to help rescue Rumanian Jews. And then the State Department then went back in May of 1943, and asked for clarification of the financial arrangements. Now, despite the fact that the Treasury was in charge of the financial controls....

Q: No money could be given without the permission of the Treasury?

A: No, it had to be...the Foreign Funds Control had to issue a license.

Q: This means - you?

A: That meant me, that meant our staff. And...but this was not brought to the Treasury's attention at that point at all. We didn't know that anybody was trying to send the funds, or that it was being held up. And finally, the State Department got in touch with the Treasury and we had a conference with the State Department on this matter.

Q: When was it?

A: This was in July of 1943.

Q: This means from March to July....

A: That's right.

Q: ...there is already a lot of time which passed.

A: The day after the conference we advised the State Department that we....

Q: Could you talk about the conference. Did you participate yourself in...

A: Yes, yes.

Q: ...this conference. You remember how the conference

went on?

A: Well, not precisely. I just remember we discussed the .....what was wanted, what was needed to...what kind should be issued. We said we'd consider whether the safe-guards were such that this would not result in foreign exchange going to the Germans.

Q: This was the concern?

A: It was a concern. And the Treasury up to that point had taken a rather absolute position, that there should be no communications direct or indirect with enemy territory. So we had been very rigid on this ground ourselves. But the day after the conference in the State Department, on July 16, we had resolved our problems and we told the State Department we are prepared to issue the license.

Q: Yes, but I think this must have been a real shock,--your agreement for the people of the State Department, because as far as the records are true, during this conference of July 15, in which you participated, there were people of the State Department, like Robert Borden Reams for instance, who threw real cold water on the... on the proposal, saying that one shouldn't make an agreement with the Germans before letting any Jew escape from Rumania, which was completely wrong.

A: Well, at any event, the Treasury Department decided to go ahead. That was on...July 16.

Q: This means you acted very quickly?

A: Yes, the next day. But the license wasn't issued. We're not going through all the delays that took place after that; The State Department had cabled to our Embassy... our legation in Bern, saying the Treasury wants to issue that license, and giving the legation the idea the State Department didn't think so much of this. And the legation came back and said we ought to consult with the British, and they consulted with the British, and the British raised objections to this, so there was just one month after the other of delay.

Q: Why was <sup>it</sup> the legation of the US in Bern who had to delay <sup>all</sup> with the British?

A: Well, because the US and the British had certain joint controls on communications with enemy property and enemy territory, and that procedure had been established earlier. But it was used here and the effect of it was to delay the issuance of the license much further.

Q: This means, after the Treasury gave his agreement, the State Department succeeded to delay for how many months?

A: That was the effect of it. - till December.

Q: From July till December?

A: That's right. And then it was only issued after Mr. Morgenthau had taken the matter up with Secretary Hull and made an appointment to see Secretary Hull. And then finally the State Department very hurriedly issued the license without even consulting us as to what the license would say.

Q: Suddenly they were in a hurry?

A: They were in a hurry at the very end, yes.

Q: Why?

A: Well, because they recognised that....there had been all this delay, and we had also uncovered a matter involving a cable that had been sent earlier to the Bern em...legation.

Q: Well, that means that the proposal for the rescue of the Jews in Rumania was made in March, and that from March till December, in spite of the fact that the Treasury gave their agreement as soon as they got some knowledge of the facts, this means that there was a delay of 9 months.

A: Really the Treasury issued to...indicated in July that we would do it and it was in December that the license was issued.

Q: Yes. And can you talk about the

WA PEHLE 47

plans de coupe sur Claude

BOBINE 323

WA PEHLE 46

A: Finally in January 1944, the Treasury got in the act - I say finally, because we recognised it was very late, late in the war and late in time to do anything about the extra

extermination of the Jews. The Treasury had encountered evidence that was so shocking, that they felt it had to be brought to the attention of the President, and this was done in January '44. And these are the facts which the Treasury brought up in Secretary Morgenthau's memorandum to President Roosevelt: basically the facts were that there was a real possibility in 1943 of rescuing a considerable number of Jews in Rumania. This had been uncovered by the World Jewish Congress and its representative in London sent a cable on March 13, 1943 to their opposites in the US and said that this possibility existed. The World Jewish Congress then got in touch with Sumner Welles who was Under-secretary of State, and he cabled our legation in Switzerland and requested them to get in touch with the World Jewish Congress and get the facts, which he.. ..which they did. On April 20, the State Department received a cable from Bern, relating to the proposed financial arrangements with connection with the ~~propose~~ ~~financial~~ of Jews from Rumania and France.

Q: In France, excuse me, these were mostly children who..

A: Yes.

Q: ...could be saved.

A: On April...following that April 20 cable, on May 25, State Department asked for further information about the financial arrangements. This hadn't been brought at all to the attention of the Treasury at that time, despite the fact that Treasury was responsible for licensing any transactions with Europe.

Q: Do you remember if the transaction <sup>involved</sup> ~~involved~~ a lot of money?

A: Oh, it would. Well, I don't remember, but I would assume a hundred thousand or so to start with. Then finally the State Department raised it with the Treasury on June 25, 1943, and we had a conference with the State Department on July 15, 1943. At that ~~conference about the State Department~~ ~~was quite negative~~ ~~conference in State Department~~ ~~was quite negative~~ ~~it worried about the possibility of funds falling~~

in the hands of the Germans, giving them foreign exchange. It felt that the arrangements for getting Rumanian Jews out had to be cleared with the Germans before any license was issued, and so forth. The Treasury was sort of put on the spot in this matter, because our general view had been: we didn't allow any transactions with enemy territory, however we went back and explored this very thoroughly in the Treasury and decided that we had...we could put safe-guards in the procedures so that no foreign exchange would come to the Germans. So the next day we advised the State Department that we were prepared to issue the license...

Q: The next day.

A: ...on July 16. Then from July 16 until December, some five months, nothing...no license was issued. And no license was issued because the State Department never was ready to say: go ahead. They sent a cable to the legation that said 'the Treasury Department thinks they're prepared to issue a license'. The legation in Bern then took it up with the British and the British. And one delay after another ensued. And only after Secretary Morgenthau had written to Secretary Hull and asked for a conference with Secretary of State Hull did the Treasury... the State Department issue hurriedly the license that was necessary, and of course then, it was too late.

Q: It was too late?

A: Well, it was pretty much too late. The opportunity, the situation had changed in Europe by that time, and was much more difficult to get people out. And the Rumanians were less free to do what they wanted to do.

Q: Yes, it was too late for the Jews of Rumania whatsoever.

A: One reason the State Department might have hurriedly issued the license when Mr. Morgenthau was going over to see Mr. Hull, was that we had uncovered some rather shocking information to this effect: our legation in Bern had been sending information to the US for various Jewish organizations. Some of this information had to do with what was happening in Germany and the extermination of the Jews...

Q: And in Poland?

A: What?

Q: And in Poland.

A: And in Poland, yes. And finally a cable was sent to the legation saying: please do not send any more information of this nature to the US, except in exceptional circumstances. We were able through friends in the State Department to bring out that this cable had been sent. And we asked for a copy of the cable. We knew the number of it and the date of it, and we asked for a copy of it. And when we got the cable, it didn't contain this instruction but it just contained other material that was in the cable. So it was deliberately withheld from us and Mr. Morgenthau was prepared to take this up with Secretary Hull, which he did.

Q: Yes, I think we should enter into the details of the cable because if we don't enter into the details it will be difficult to...to understand. Tu coup la.

BOBINE #24

WA PEHLE 48

A: One reason the State Department was on the defensive in the matter of licensing the transaction involving the Rumanian Jews, and in the end hurriedly issued the license was because of a cable that later became rather famous. I am reading now from a memorandum which was sent by the general counsellor of the Treasury, Randolph Paul, to the Secretary of the Treasury, which outlines the circumstance under which this cable was sent. "On October 5, 1942, Sumner Welles, as Acting Secretary of State, sent a cable to Minister Harrison (our Minister in Bern), saying that reports had been received by the World Jewish Congress of thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe being slaughtered, and asked that the... <sup>our Minister</sup> ~~our Minister~~ contact the Jewish organizations and see what information could be received... <sup>was available</sup>. The State Department received several cables in reply to this. The most significant was a cable on January 21, 1943, number 482. It relayed a message which was stated to be for the information of Undersecretary of State, Mr. Welles and to be transmitted to Rabbi Stephen Wise, if the Under-

secretary should so determine. This message described a horrible situation concerning the plight of Jews in Europe. It reported mass-executions of Jews in Poland, according to one source six thousand Jews were being killed daily. The Jews were required before execution to strip themselves of all their clothing, which was sent to Germany. The remaining Jews in Poland were confined to ghettos. In Germany deportations were continuing, many Jews were in hiding. There had been many cases of suicide. Jews were being deprived of rationed food stuffs. No Jews would be left in Prag or Berlin by the end of March. And in Rumania 130,000 Jews were deported to Transnistria, about 60,000 had already died, and the remaining 70,000 were starving. Sumner Welles then on his own initiative furnished this information to Rabbi Wise and it was then circulated among the various Jewish organizations and became public. That was done on February 9, 1943. (the information was furnished to Rabbi Wise). On February 10, the next day, a significant cable was sent back to the legation in Switzerland. It read....

Q: By who?

A: By...it was sent by the State Department. It was signed with Welles' name, but this is the way the State Department does things. The cable read: "Your 482, January 21. (meaning it was referring to the report of the extermination which just referred to)- and the cable went on) in the future we would suggest you do not accept reports submitted to you to be transmitted to private persons in the US unless such action is advisable because of extraordinary circumstances. Such private messages circumvent neutral countries' censorship and that by sending them we risk the possibility that steps would necessarily taken by the neutral countries to curtail or forbid our means of communication for confidential official matters." Now read in the light of the reference to your 482, January 21, this cable makes it clear that the people in the

State Department were saying 'don't send any more messages over about what is happening to the Jews. It was quite clear. We were advised by...

Q: It's very strange, because the cable was sent at the request of the Acting Secretary of S....

A: That's right.

Q: As...as a matter of fact.

A: But...I didn't quite understand.

Q: I mean the....the cable which forwarded the information was sent at the request...

A: That's right.

Q: ...of Sumner Welles.

A: That's right. ~~But~~ nevertheless, it was used as a vehicle for saying 'don't send any more information over that goes to private agencies', though the cable had said 'ser it to Rabbi Wise if you think it is advisable'. At any event, we did discover that the cable had been sent and we asked for a copy of it.

Q: Excuse me, a further point:....

A: Yes.

Q: ...why didn't they want that the Jewish organizations get the....get the information?

A: Well, your look....you're asking for people's motives. I suppose that this information necessarily would cause greater pressure to be brought on the State Department to do something and cause hysteria. They felt it was inadvisable in any event.

Q: This was a pressure for action.

A: Yes, of course. And immediately emergency meetings were held ~~and~~ New-York, and people were getting in touch with thier congressmen and asking for....

Q: The famous rally of Madison Square Gardens...

A: That's right.

Q: was....

A: ...A direct result of this information being available. We then asked for a copy of this cable, and we were advised that it was a departmental communication, it was strictly a political communication which had nothing to

do with economical affairs, had only a limited distribution within the department, and it...a copy could not be furnished.

Q: But excuse me, why did you ask for the copy of this cable?

A: Because we wanted to verify that the State Department was shutting off information as to what was happening in Europe.

Q: You had some hint of this?

A: Oh, yes. We had a copy of cable, but we wanted....we were told what the cable said, but we wanted a copy of it. Finally, the Secretary in a meeting with Secretary Hull asked Breckinridge Long for this cable...or asked Hull for it in the presence of Breckinridge Long....

Q: Breckinridge Long was....what was exactly the function of Breckinridge....

A: He was in charge of European Affairs in the Department of State. Shortly thereafter, Breckinridge Long sent to the Secretary a paraphrase of this cable. However, the cable as paraphrased didn't refer at all to the previous cable which made it clear that what they were dealing with was information as to atrocities in Europe, and therefore we were misled by this reference not being included, but we got this information from friends in the State Department, so we knew that they had intentionally misled us.

Q: Yes, this means that there were...there are two different things: one is concealment of information...

A: Repression of...

Q: Exactly. Repression of information is a better word....

A: And the other is misleading us and failing to...to give us a copy of the cable that was accurate, and without that reference in there it could have been a completely innocuous cable. But I think that it was this circumstance - that they had done this - that enabled the Secretary to go to the President and say: they're concealing what's happening, what they are misleading us, and something drastic has to be done.

Q: Yes, this is the real origin of the....of the creation

of the WRB.

A: Yes it is, yes, it is.

Q: Well, alors, can we enter now into the...into the details.  
I mean, Morgenthau who was secretary of the Treasury reported directly to Roose...to President Roosevelt.

A: That's correct. He wrote him a very strong memorandum and we had a meeting with Roosevelt and reviewed the matter.

Q: You participated yourself....

A: Yes.

Q: ...in this meeting?

A: Yes. The Secretary Morgenthau, and Mr. Debois and myself.

Q: Do you...do you remember how the meeting went on?

A: Well, I can just remember that the Secretary...the President was very interested in this and could see that this was an important thing that had to be looked at, taken care of, and I would assume that he recognized the political implications too, <sup>because</sup> as the State Department was found taking these actions which the American public would not agree <sup>with</sup> to.

Q: Yes, and could you read the beginning of the report of... of this report?

(mumbling on the tape as pages are being turned.)

A: Yes, Morgenthau's memorandum to the President said: ~~None~~ One of the greatest crimes in History, the slaughter of the Jews...Jewish people in Europe is continuing unevaded. This government has for a long time maintained that ~~this~~ policy is to work out programmes to save those Jews and other persecuted minorities of Europe who could be saved. You are probably not as familiar as I with the utter failure of certain officials in our State Department who are charged with actually carrying out this policy - to take any effective action to prevent the extermination of the Jews in German controlled Europe. The State Department officials have failed to take any positive steps reasonably calculated to save any of these people. They have used devices such as setting up intergovernmental organizations to survey the whole refugee problem and calling conferences, such as the Bermuda conference, to explore the whole refugee problem, making appear that

positive action could be expected. In fact, nothing has been accomplished."

Q: Yes, but what is a little bit has....change.

BOBINE 325

WA Pehle 49

Q: Do you think that without your...personal actions, the action of Morgenthau, the action of the Treasury Department, do you think that the WRB would have been in any case established?

A: Well, this is hard to tell, but if any such action hadn't been taken, it would obviously have taken even later than the WRB...establishment took place. And it was already very late in the war. Otherwise I can't read as to...it's clear that the Treasury was the impetus by which the Board was established. Whether some other action went along to have the same effect at some later date, I have no way of knowing.

Q: Yes. And could you try to explain what happened psychologically with a man <sup>like</sup> Morgenthau. Because he was obviously an assimilated Jew, and how did he become so much involved in the plight of the European Jewry?

A: Well, he had on his staff a...a number of gentile lawyers...

Q: As you?

A: I was one. And they got interested in this matter and brought it to his attention very forcibly. And his conscience was such that he recognized he had to act.

Q: It is the only thing you can say?

A: It seems to me that says it.

Q: Yes. But....because what is remarkable in the report he sent to...to the President is that he talks specifically and very strongly about the Jewish problems, and he is not afraid to....

A: no, he faced up to the issue very...in a very strong and....forceful way, and he used his own relationship with the President, which was a very close one, to get the

Board established.

Q: Yes, and he acted as a Jew.

A: He acted as a member of the cabinet of the US...

Q: Yes.

A: ...I...don't want to interpret as...what he did in any way other than the facts that we talked about.

Q: Yes. What were the...actually the powers of the RWRB?

A: Well, the Board...the executive order establishing the Board was written in the Treasury Department, and the importance of it was, as I said, it changed the policy of the US...

Q: overnight.

A: ...It stated the policy of the US in rather forceful way. In first place, it recited that he was issuing this order as President of the US and commander in chief of the arm and Navy. He established the Board in his own Executive Office. And...

Q: This means inside the Treasury...the building of the Treasury.

A: It was in...well, we were physically located in the building of the Treasury, but the office officially was part of the Executive office of the President, not part of the Treasury Department. He put on the Board the top cabinet people who concern the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Treasury. And then he charged the Board with carrying out this policy. And the policy, he said, "it is the policy of this Government to take all measures within its powers to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death, and otherwise to offer these victims all possible relief and assistance, consistent with the successful prosecution of the war." And then he went on to...in the executive order, to direct the State, Treasury and War departments to be of assistance to the Board, he arranged for funds to be available, to it, he directed them to cooperate with the private organizations and to facilitate their operations.....

Q:

Q: Why the Board was called the War, War Refugee Board, when it is known that Morgenthau in his report to Roosevelt deals specifically with the Jews? And when he talks himself about....

A: Well, we weren't excluding non-Jewish refugees from help...

Q: I understand...

A:.....And we made that clear in the Board's operation. There were Catholic organization who were obviously not directing their activity primarily to Jewish relief. There were other religious organizations who cooperated with the Board. So it had a broader...

Q: scope.

A: ...scope?

Q: Yes, but it was done...it was created specifically for the Jews, could we say this?

A: I,...I didn't understand.

Q: No, I say, but can we say that the Board in spite of this was created specifically for....

A: I think it was recognized that this was the major problem we were dealing with.

Q: yes.

A: yes.

Q: And what were your...because it seems that you had a...a formal power, very strong, as a matter of fact..

A: Yes.

Q: ...but what were the ways of implementing...

A: That was...

Q: your action.

A: That was left to the WRB and really to the staff of the WRB to do their best with.

Q: Yes, and what were the first steps you....

A: Well, one of the first things we recognized we had to was to get representatives of the Board abroad. And we sent people to Turkey, to Spain, to London, to Sweden, to....work in the field, to facilitate the private organizations who were already in the field.

Q: But this people were mostly members of the Treasury?

A: Yes, mostly, not entirely.

Q: But mostly.

A: Well, some of them were: The representative in London was, our representative in Spain was, Sweden. Not Ira Hirschman who went to Turkey, not Roswell McClelland, who went to Switzerland.

Q: He was already. I have seen in the order which established the Board it is said that the Board will have to report very often and very regularly to the President. Was this actually done?

A: Well, we didn't make reports to the President and very often we went to the President when there was some action we wanted him to take or to approve. One of the things that the executive order established was that the Board's representatives abroad would have diplomatic status. This was something the State Department didn't like to give, and didn't like to give to non-State Department people, but it helped our operations a great deal.

Q: Yes, and about the...the first step you took, because as a matter of fact, as you said, it was already very late in the war, already almost five millions Jews had been killed, and it was very difficult, as a matter of fact, to do something practically in order to rescue the Jews who were still in the hands of the Germans. How did you face this...this problem?

A: Well, one of the things we thought was very important was that the Germans know of this new policy of the US.

Q: Yes.

A: And we felt it was important that the significant countries fighting Germany, made it clear that Germans who can...who involved themselves in murdering Jews would be punished after the war. And this, we felt, would be much more effective now because the war was reaching a stage where Germans could see they were going to lose, and therefore they had to face the problem of what was going to happen after the war. And when they...

Q: But the...the Stel...Satellites...

A: Yes, the Satellites too.

A: So we thought it was very important to get an unequivocal declaration of warning beamed to all the enemy territory.

Q: This was the first step...

A: one of the early steps that we took, yes.

Q: Yes, and was this declaration made?

A: There was a declaration. We had an argument with the British about this. The British took the position that such a declaration would not be effective pointing out that there had been declarations in the past and that they didn't seem to have slowed down the...the annihilation of the Jews. We countered that by saying we felt that a declaration at the time when Germany could see it might loose the war was an entirely different matter.

Q: Yes, the first declaration was made in December 1942.

A: Yes, then the British imposing this, reported to our ambassador in the United Kingdom, Ambassador Winant, and he reported back that the

Q:ardon.

BOBINE 326

WA PEHLE 50

A: Early in the operations of the WRB, they were confronted with the British attitude about the whole problem of rescuing Jews from Germany and occupied territory. This came about because Undersecretary Stettinius, who had shown himself to me to be quite favorable to our operations, referred to the Board for comment a message he had gotten from the British commenting negatively on the proposal that a new warning to the Germans be issued. We replied to Mr. Stettinius and in our reply we stated: "The statement by the British that the 1942 declaration seemed to indicate to the Germans means whereby they could distress and embarrass the allies is not fully understood. So long that any government participating in such a declaration is determined to do all in its power to prevent the murder of the Jews, and this

facts is made clear, it is not...we do not see how any such statement could embarrass such government. On the other hand, (and I am reading from our memorandum to Mr Stettinius) if the position of such government is that expressed by certain British officials <sup>to</sup> ~~in~~ our Embassy in London in December, see cable 8717 from Winant - December 15, in simple terms that they were apparently willing to accept the probable death of thousands of Jews in enemy territory because of "the difficulties of ~~disposing~~ <sup>disposing</sup> of any considerable number of Jews, should they be rescued", and if this attitude is known to the Germans by virtue of the actions if not the words of such government, then the contention that a declaration might embarrass such government has some significance."

Q: Yes, a...a very great significance as a matter of fact. Clearly this means that they...they would have been embarrassed if Hitler would have...if the Nazi would have released the Jews.

A: This says that certain British officials had expressed this view to Ambassador Winant.

Q: But it is the...they didn't stop to follow the same line, as a matter of fact. Because I have here a statement, of an aide-memo, a memorandum that the British sent to the US in March 43, before the Bermuda conference, where they say almost the same things. And this was almost one year before. They say: "There is a possibility that the Germans or their satellites may change over from the policy of extermination to one of extrusion (this means expelling) and aim as they did before the war, at embarrassing other countries by flooding them with alien immigrants." It is...it is exactly the same. And...do you know that the Jews who were in the hands of the Germans, the Jewish leaders in Poland, in Slovakia and....when they could send a message, requested always the same thing: they wanted a declaration specifying that the bombings which could be made over the German cities should be explained to the Germans as retaliatory bombings, specifically for the murder of the Jews.

A: Without attempting to explain the British position,

the one particularly the one you have just quoted from the aide-memoire to plan the Bermuda conference, it is true, I believe, that if Hitler had said: if they US will accept all the GermansJews, I'll send them over there, there would have been a great deal of embarassment.

Q: Yes.

A: Yes.

Q: There would have been....No doubt. But this is a very difficult question.

A: It is. And the position of the US in that sort of thing has...has changed drastically since the WRB days. We have admitted hundreds of thousands of Cubans, we are admitting hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, we admitted a lot of Hungarian freedom fighters after the Hungarian revolt. Mexicans are coming over our border, many even illegally; but there is very little attempts being made, in a concerted way, to do anything about the immigration. So there has been a change.

Q: Today you mean?

A: Yes.

Q: You think that the policy today is much more liberal.

A: Oh, yes, there is no doubt. The Cuban thing, for example. There was very little disturbance in the US, that hundreds of thousands of Cubans are coming in, very little. They have...they have done well in the US, and I think it's been a very satisfactory experience.

Q: Yes, I understand what you mean. I am not sure that this are...

A: completely comparable? maybe not. maybe not.

Q: Yes. And if...if I ask you what were the achievements of the Board. I mean, we will talk specifically tomorrow but did the Board basically succeed in its tasks, what would you answer?

A: The Board...the Board succeeded in one task, and that was to change the policy of the US government. And that was done very quickly. Right after the Board was established, under Secretary Stettinius, called me and asked me to come to his office and asked me what the

State Department could do to be helpful. And I said, the State Department could be very helpful once they understood what the new policy was. And so he said...asked me to be in his office the next morning at 9:30, and I came and he had all the Division heads, the operating heads there and he told them that the policy of the State Department was to cooperate a hundred per cent with the WRB and he went around the room and said 'do you understand this, do you understand it, do you understand it'. This was a powerful thing. Nothing like this had ever been done that I ever heard of. But it told the people at the operating level that there had been a change. And there had been.

Q: Yes, and they didn't try anymore to....

A: Oh, I wouldn't say that. We...We did have to laze in difficulty but...they knew we could go to Mr. Stettin and straighten them up, and they were minimized that way.

Q: Yes, well, this represents a big change whatsoever.

A: Yes. Now the accomplishments of the Board lie in all

Q sorts of different ways. One was to give the private agencies a feeling they had claimant for them in the government. Somebody that would come and fight their battles for them. And the most important private agency was called the Joint, the Joint Distribution Committee, and the head of that was a man called Moses Levitt. Moses Levitt who came to me immediately and said I just changed his life completely, because instead of dealing with everybody in the state....in the Government he now had somebody who would take his side. And we were able to facilitate the operations of the Joint Distribution Committee by transmitting funds, by licensing, by sending messages into that they could never get through, by supporting their activities across the border. That is one of the things that changed right away.

Q: And what were the others?

A: Well, there was a matter of false passports. The Latin

American consuls, many of them, in Switzerland, had been issuing passports the people had paid for. These were people who had never been in Latin America, who didn't speak Spanish, and these passports really were invalid. The Germans rounded up a lot of refugees who had these passports and put them in a special camp in France.

Q: Vittel.

A: At Vittel, and started to enquire whether these passports were valid. And of course if they weren't, they would be shipped out. We heard about this, and we got the State Department to send a message to every embassy we had in Latin America, instructing them to strongly urge the government not to deny these passports' validity while the war was going on. And we saved by that by that method...none of these countries turned these passports down while the war was going on, so these people were preserved because of that.

Q: Yes.

A: But that was the sort of thing possible to do.

Q: This means the things which were possible to do it was a very...a very small scale.

A: That's right. It was a small scale and it was late.

Q: And you were conscious of this?

A: Oh yes. Oh yes. We were very conscious of this.

Q: Did you have the....because you were a special agency created for special tasks, with special powers, did you have in the daily <sup>thinner</sup> life of the Board the feeling of...of emergency, that every....

A: Oh yes. Oh yes. The staff of the Board was very dedicated and very absorbed in their job

BOBINE 327

WA PEHLE 51

Q: One of the most difficult things to understand is really what does it mean to be...to be informed. When one lives here, in Washington or in New-York, what is the meaning of Treblinka, what is the meaning of the extermination, what is the meaning of Auschwitz, what does it mean to know - I mean, does it penetrate the consciousness of

the people? And I have the feeling that in many cases it didn't - at all. Even if they knew.

A: I had a funny experience preparing for this interview.

Obviously I know what happened, but nevertheless it has been a shock to me to go over it again, to see people's attitudes. Some of this material we're dealing with, is so shocking that people put it out of their minds, or disbelieve it.

Q: Disbelieve it?

A: I had a very peculiar experience in the ~~WRB~~ <sup>accounts</sup>. When we first got the two eye-witness ~~accounts~~ <sup>accounts</sup> of people that were in Auschwitz and had escaped and who were able...who were able to say definitely what was happening, where it was happening, in what way it was happening in a very convincing way, and Board seized upon this because general statements that Jews were being killed, people would reject or not take seriously, they would...they would try to avoid believing it. But now we had the eye-witness accounts. So we put out a press release, or ~~release~~ <sup>stat</sup> for a week after it was out, before it would be printed. And we sent it out. And I had a call from Elmer Davis, Elmer Davis was a fine journalist, he ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> head of the government's Information Office - the Office of War Information - an excellent person, and he asked me to withdraw this press release and to call it back. And I said, there was no possibility of doing that, and he said, well, I'd like you to come down to see me and to talk to my staff. I went and talked to them. And to a man they said it should be withdrawn, not because it wasn't true, but that no one would believe it, and everyone would say: this is another Belgian atrocity story of World War I, some of which turned out not to be true. And therefore other releases by the government would...would be discounted too. Well, we didn't call it back, it's needless to say, but the fact that he felt this way, had a real lesson to me, That people reject believing in such awful things.

Q: Yes. As a matter of fact, one of these two witnesses is a protagonist of this film.

A: Really?

Q: Yes, we met him last week in New-York. All right, now I ask you something else, about the State Department, about the motivations of people like Long, like Reams, I can give their names, like Dubrow. Do you think they were motivated by real and actual anti-Semitism?

A: I don't like to ascribe motives to people, but I think that most non-Jews, and some Jews, are anti-Semitic to some extent.

Q: Oh, they are.

A: And I have become conscious of this myself and I've been conscious of the fact that the fact that you're Jewish doesn't mean you are free from prejudice. I had an interesting experience in this regard at a golf-club. Golf clubs are noted for their prejudices, and....of one sort or another. And a long time ago, three of my friends and I decided to play golf together every weekend, and we soon found that the public courses were too crowded, and we wanted to join a country club. But two of them were Jewish, and none of the regular country clubs would accept Jewish members. So we joined a country club that was primarily Jewish, and it worked out fine. And we played there ever since, although the two Jewish members have since died, but the two gentile members are still there. About six years ago, the question came up of black people wanting to join the country club, and the question was whether this country club would admit a black member. And it was a very difficult thing. They felt this was their club, why should they admit black members and so forth, but finally they were convinced that any group of people who had been treated as the Jews have been treated, couldn't in good conscience discriminate against blacks, and so we have black members in there. They are the most courteous, they are the best golfers, and they are very welcome, and they are...it is a complete success. But it was overcome by people recognizing that saying 'no' would be showing prejudice which had been shown against them.

Q: Yes, interesting story. tu reste gros sur lui, j'espere que tu etait

Q: Don't move. And you play golf every week? It's possible to film you playing golf?

A: Oh no, no, it's...you could show me raking leaves, but not playing golf.

Q: Why not? this would be very good.

A: No.

Q: Anyhow, a Jewish club, Jewish golf.  
Okay?

WA PEHLE 52 MUET

plans de coupe sur Pehle et sur Claude.

BOBINE 328

WA PEHLE 53

Q: The deportations of the Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz started roughly around the 15th of May, 1944. Between the 15th of May, 1944 and the beginning of July about 400,000 Hungarian Jews perished in Auschwitz, were gassed. And what is absolutely remarkable about this is that Germany and, if and the whole world knew that Germany had already lost the war and the world knew exactly too, what was the meaning of these deportations and everybody knew that Auschwitz was a killing centre, and that the deportations meant sure death for 95% of the people who were shipped there. One of the most urgent and dramatic requests, which was made at the time by the Jewish organizations and the Jewish leaders who were caught in the hands of the Nazi - I mean the Jews from Hungaria, the Jews from Slovakia, and this request was dispatched in the Western world through different underground channels, but it went rather fast, was the request for the bombing of the railroads leading to Auschwitz, of the bridges, and even the bombing of the killing centre itself, of the murder installations, I mean the crematorium, the whole...the whole system of killing. I think that the first request was made after two Slovakian Jews succeeded to escape from Auschwitz and delivered for the first time a full

extensive and complete report about Auschwitz. They explained what Auschwitz was, and they even drew a map of Auschwitz, a plan of Auschwitz. Well, we will not enter into the details of the dispatching, but the WRB was informed for the first time in April about the preparation which was made by the railroad authorities, Slovakian, Hungarian and German, about the shipment of the Jews....of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz, and the war(?) knew...got a specific request in June by a letter of Jacob Rosenheim who was the president of the Jewish religious orthodox organization in New-York, where they ask to the Board specifically to intervene for the bombing of Auschwitz. And I think that the letter was sent to the Secretary of War S....

R: Stimson.

Q: to Morgenthau, who was the Secretary of the Treasury, to Cordell Hull who was Secretary of State, and this of course, because you were the acting director of the War Refugee Board came into hands. Can you explain what what happened at the time.

A: When this was first raised with us in June 1944, the staff of the Board was very sceptical about this. We anticipated that militarily this would be a very difficult project. We felt that railroad lines are very readily repaired and that if you go in and bomb a railroad line, the experience had been: Within a few days they can put it back together again. Nevertheless we did call this to the attention of the War Department but with some hesitancy because when the WRB was established, it was made clear that we were to take every action that could be taken consistent with the War effort. And we had some real doubts as to whether bombers should be diverted from pursuing the war for this purpose.

Q: Yes, there are several points which I would like you to make clear. You say that the railroads can be easily repaired, this is true....

A: That was our understanding.

Q: Yes, this is true, but precisely the Jews who requested the bombing of the railroads, I think for instance about the Rabbi of Nitra, about Weissmandel, knew this very well, and he asked for a - let's say - constant bombing of the railroads. And he asked to for the bombing not of the...for the bombing ~~of~~ the railroads near the concentration points from where the Jews were shipped, you know. This is one point. The second thing...you say that this bombing could have divert from the general war effort, but it was very dramatic situation...

A: Yes, it was. And know there is a great deal of interest in this field and in this question. Recently, some time ago, when I went to McGill University in Canada to talk on the anniversary of the Holocaust, many of the questions that I got after my statement had to do with the bombing. There is a lot of feeling apparently; that much that should have been done in this area was not done. I can only try to reconstruct our feeling at the time. And as non-military people we were hesitant to press the war Department to send bombers which would otherwise be used to bomb German cities to...for this purpose. We were concerned about the reaction of American people, if troops had been drafted into the army to fight this war died in this sort of expedition. That was our feeling at the time. This

Q: ~~This means that Auschwitz and the railroads leading to Auschwitz~~ <sup>means that Auschwitz and the railroads leading to Auschwitz</sup>, let's say the whole question, this was not considered at the time as a military target.

A: Ah....apparently not, apparently not considered a military target. Later on, I understand, that Auschwitz was bombed, but not to...not at that point.

Q: No, the death installations, the death camp itself was never bombed, what was bombed were the...

A: factories.

Q: ...factories near, in August and in September, twice, and these were the Buna plant factories,....

A: The IG Farben.

Q: b...belonging to the IG Farben and this means that any how Auschwitz was within the range of the...of the bombers.

A: Well, as you know, after some time had passed and more people took the position that not only should the rail-lines be bombed, but that the crematoria themselves should be bombed. We went into this matter further with and with much soul searching, because we were very concerned that going in we would kill a number of Jews who were there, and...and our mission is not to do this we felt that the Germans could use this as a propaganda thing. But nevertheless, the time came where we felt the situation was so desperate that we should ask the war department to do it, and we did.

Q: Yes, but I think it is interesting to follow the.... to follow the documents and to show how for instance you, in your case, your own opinion changed...

A: It did, it did.

Q: ...during the time. And there is this other point, you say that it was a big concern - the idea to kill Jews but anyhow, they were doomed, the Jews who were in Auschwitz.

A: Yes, that's true, that's true, and we knew that, but nevertheless we were hesitant to do it. Now, there was some division in the staff of the WRB on this, and Dr. Akzin particularly urged that we go ahead. But most of the people felt that this was an area that we shouldn't get into.

Q: Yes.

A: This was on the staff of the Board, this is not a position that was taken by Mr. Stimson or Mr. Hull, or Mr. Morgenthau, this was the staff of the Board itself.

Q: Yes, but after you received the first request for the bombing, this was in June, you went to meet the Assistant Secretary of War, John McCloy, and you expressed yourself your doubts about the bombing, and what was his position?

A: He said that they would consider it, but when they came back, they said it was not feasible.

Q: And what was the reason...the reasons he gave?

A: The reasons he gave was that the light bombers that they had available couldn't...wouldn't be effective against such a target, and the heavy bombers that would be sent from the United Kingdom couldn't

BOBINE 329

WA PEHLE 54

Q: After receiving the first request for the...for the bombing, this was in the second half of June, you went to meet...you went personally to meet Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, and you expressed your own doubts, but you left him to... to explore the matter, And what was not only the answer of McCloy, but in your opinion what was the...the deep feeling of McCloy about the whole affair?

A: McCloy was Secretary Stimson's immediate assistant, and his time and energy and attention was on the war. And although he acted as Stimson's representative on the WRB, his main concern obviously was the war and all its problems. And therefore it was very difficult to get him to focus on anything else.

Q: Yes, and...because the position of McCloy never changed.

...

A: No.

Q: ...he was always against this.

A: He was against it, he felt it wasn't feasible. He thought it would be using military personnel for...for something other than pursuing the war.

Q: Yes, and your own position - did your own position from month to month, did your position change?

A: Yes, it did. Our first impression was that we shouldn't even request the War Department to look into this. We should disadvise them. Later we took the position: 'yes, we'd like the war department to see whether this could be done' At the same time we said that we weren't

prepared to recommend it, we were just exploring it in effect....

Q: What is striking when one reads the documents of the WRB, is that yourself, your personal position, that you were very hesitant.

A: Very what?

Q: Hesitant. That you hesitated, you....

A: Yes, we were. We were. Maybe from now looking back, we shouldn't have been, but we were. We were quite hesitant until in November we came to the position that we had to recommend this, and that it should be done. And not only should the rail-lines be bombed, but the crematoria should be bombed too...

Q: And what...

A: ...and we wrote a strong letter.1.

Q: Yes, I would like to know, why did your position change?

A: The emergency, the...maybe we felt more confident in our own ability to take this position, maybe it was partly because of the pressure that had been brought upon us, I can't reconstruct that.

Q: Yes, but there is a tragic irony in one way, when you say emergency, because in November, when...

A: Of course.

Q: ...you recommended the bombings, as a matter of fact the...the gassing didn't take place any more in Auschwitz, it was almost finished.

A: Maybe.

Q: There is this gap in the...

A: Yes. In any event...

Q: Yes, but I ask you precisely, what was the origin of the changing of your...

A: I have given you the best explanation I can of this.

Q: Yes.

A: ...and I...it's not possible to go back this many years and to say: this is how I felt and this is why I changed my mind.

Q: No, but my question is not a polemic question, it's because I have read...I have read your...your letter of

November 8, to McCloy, and it is a very impressive and strong letter...

A: Yes, but you ask why didn't...in effect, why wasn't that position taken earlier, and I have tried to explain to you, as best I can, the development of our thinking. Now it may very well be that it's tragic that we didn't take this position in the first place, but that is a fact.

Q: Yes, could you read the excerpts of this...of this letter?

A: Well, on November 8, 1944, I wrote to Mr. McCloy, Assistant Secretary of War: "I send you herewith copies of two eye-witness descriptions of the notorious German concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz and Birkenau in Upper Silesia, which I have just received from the Board's special representative in Bern, Switzerland, Roswell McClelland."

Q: This is - I cut you off now because it's tragic the whole story, - because these two people, these two Slovakian Jews escaped from Auschwitz the 7th of April...

A: Yes.

Q: ...they reached Slovakia on the 21 of April, they immediately delivered the famous report and the map. And what is tragic that the full report, which struck you very much obviously, reached you only in November.

A: Yes.

Q: Up till now, you had only very dry excerpts.

A: Well, I would put it in a different way, I would say that once we had come to this conclusion, we used whatever material was available to...to argue with the War Department.

Q: which conclusion? the bombing you mean?

A: Yes, yes. And...it wasn't just the fact that we...that these reports came late, it was the fact that our...our conclusion came only at this time that we should do it.

Q: Ah yes, this is your conclusion?

A: That's right.

Q: ...which came late.

A: I say; "No report of Nazi atrocities received at the Board has quite caught the gruesome brutality of what is taking place in these camps of horror, as have these sober, factual accounts of conditions in Auschwitz and Birkenau. I earnestly hope that you will read these reports." then we go on to say: "The destruction of large numbers of people apparently is not a simple process. The Germans have been forced to devote considerable technological ingenuity and administrative know-how in order to carry out murder on a mass production basis, as the attached reports will testify. If the elaborate murder installations of Birkenau were destroyed, it seems clear that the Germans could not reconstruct them...reconstruct them for some time. Until now, despite pressure from many sources, I have been hesitant to urge the destruction of these camps by direct military action. But I am convinced that the point has now been reached where such action is justifiable, if it is deemed feasible by competent military authorities." And then I go on to suggest that it has military implications too..

Q: This means that what struck you when you got the full report was the...let's say the mass production of the killing.

A: Yes, oh, yes.

Q: It was like a factory....

A: That's right.

Q: ... that if the crematorium would be destroyed, it would be very difficult for the Germans to kill. As a matter of fact, what is interesting is that the...I have seen the escapee of Auschwitz, Vrba, and he will be in this film, and he says...he says that according to him, the destruction of the crematorium was not so important, because the Germans were in such a hurry to kill at the time that the crematorium couldn't fulfill...fulfill - there were too many people to be killed, and they had to kill them in big pits, at the time, you know.

But why do you write to McCloy that you 'earnestly hope' that he will read the report?

A: Because we hoped that it would have a...strong emotional effect on him.

Q: But were you sure that he would read it?

A: We asked him to read it. Were we sure he would read it? I would assume he would, yes.

Q: Did he?

A: I don't know.

Q: You think he did?

A: I assume so.

Q: Yes?

A: So we recommended that this be considered and that not only the crematoria be bombed, but the factories adjoining the crematoria be bombed too.

Q: And what was the answer of McCloy to this letter?

A: That was November 8th, and on November 18 we obtained a negative reply from Mr. McCloy. He refers to our letter, he said that the operation staff of the War Department has given careful consideration to your suggestion that the bombing of these camps be undertaken. The following points were brought up: 1. positive destruction of these camps would necessitate precision bombing employing heavy or medium bombardment or attack by low flying or dive bombing aircrafts, preferably the latter. The target is beyond the maximum range of medium bombardment, dive bombers or fighter bombers located in the United Kingdom, France or Italy. Use of heavy bombardment from the United Kingdom Bases would necessitate a hazardous round trip flight, unescorted, of approximately 2,000 miles over enemy territory." 2

Q: Yes, but what is interesting is that this letter is from the 18 of November, '44, and there were already two bombings of the factory plants of IG Farben in Auschwitz, in August and September. This means that it's not beyond the range of the...of the heavy

bombers. It was not.  
A: You are talking about bombing from the United Kingdom?

or from Italy?

Q: Italy.

A: From Italy?

Q: The Fifteenth Air Force, it was completely within the range of the Fifteenth Air Force.

A: That's what I understand now. He didn't know that at that time. In any event, the War Department said it was not feasible. "Based on the above as well as on the most uncertain if not dangerous effect such a bombing would have on the objective to be attained, the war Department found it should not, at least for the present, undertake these operations".

Q: Did he say that he has read the report in this letter?

A: No, it doesn't say that and the enclosure is the report, which looks like it came back..

Q: He sent you back the report, yes. I tell you frankly what I think. Because I have seen McCloy and I am not sure he...he has read the report.

BOBINE 330

WA PEHLE 55

Q: I think that one of the...not one, but that the basic idea was to concentrate everything on the war effort, and which led to the idea that rescue of the people couldn't be possible only through the victory, that everything had to be done in order to...to get complete victory and that afterwards the people would be saved. But it had proven to be untrue, as a matter of fact, because the victory was...happened, and there was never a doubt, let's say starting in '42, about the issue. But in what regards the destruction of the Jews, it was too late for them.

A: That's true. To me that...the idea that everything is subordinate to the war effort is most illustrated by the idea of unconditional surrender. This is something that I think President Roosevelt first initiated as our policy, and Churchill and Stalin agreed. There would be no deals, and we would fight until Germany

unconditionally surrendered. In retrospect, one could conclude that not making any deals of any kind, continued the war for a long time, or at least for some time, and that during...

Q: You mean that the fact that they refused to make any deal, any compromise prolonged...

A: ...prolongated the war. When we got to Japan, we did make arrangements. We agreed that the Emperor continue for example. In Germany however, we took the position that we had to have unconditional surrender. If it did prolong the war, and I believe it did, that means that a lot of people died during the last months of the war because we took this position. But it's very similar to the position of everything is subordinate to the war effort, nothing else should be looked at.

Q: What do you mean when you say a lot of people died during the last months...

A: I mean, soldiers died, my brother died in France rather late in the war and no one knows whether the war would have ended sooner, if we were willing to negotiate.

Q: Yes, I understand. ~~Why~~ ~~perhaps~~ ~~this~~..one could say that this strengthened too the...let's say the unity of the Germans. They remained united till the end.

A: That's right.

Q: Yes, but I think that this ideology of rescue through victory was a good argument too for the people who were opposed, because there were, to any form of rescue.

A: I don't say to any form of rescue, you're now talking about ~~going~~ military troops and equipment to rescue. these people weren't necessarily saying that private organizations shouldn't continue their operations, that money shouldn't be sent in. We're talking now about whether troops in uniform and airplanes should be used for this purpose.

Q: Yes, but you think that this could lead us to the... again to the negotiations with the Germans, a propos the Hungarian Jews.

A: Right.

Q: And what is your position on this: let's say, the mission of Joel Brand, the exchange of goods against material (?) for the German war effort, and later on the dealing with...with money.

A: Well, as the war wore on, there were various plans made coming out of Switzerland generally, rumours that we could save people by negotiating with the Germans.

Q: To buy people.

A: What?

Q: To buy people.

A: To buy people, to provide the Germans with trucks, being not a military vehicle, but which they needed for military operations. The WRB was very cautious about this, particularly since the Russians were known to be very suspicious of the Western powers having any negotiations with the Germans. And...but we felt that by having the negotiations indirectly, through people in Switzerland we could delay, we could play for time. And that's what we did. We had negotiations going on both for trucks and for money after the war, in an effort to gain time.

Q: Yes, these were the Saly Mayer-Becher...

A: Yes, Saly Mayer was a...a prominent Jewish merchant in Switzerland, very devoted to anything that could be done in this area, and he was intermediary for some of these negotiations.

Q: But why - I would like to understand - because the German Germans wanted to negotiate with the major Jewish organizations and through them with -let's say - the Allied powers, and you never permitted that Saly Mayer could be introduced to them as representative of let's say, of the...of the American organization, of...even the WRB, but as the head of the Jewish Swiss Community.

A: Yes. This is part of the hesitancy we had in this whole field of...not doing something that the Russians would feel that they were being undercut.

Q: And what is striking in these negotiations is that Saly Mayer...the hands of Saly Mayer were tied.

A: To some extent I am sure they were, just like...I just as there were no large amounts of money that changed

chands, they were always talking about blocked funds, to be paid after the war.

Q: The funds were always blocked?

A: That's right.

Q: The money was never....

A: That's right. That...that nobody was willing to pay top German officials money that could be used against us in the war.

Q: But what do you think, because it is a very difficult question, do you think...what was the reason, or the reasons, for this offer of the Germans? Do you think that they were serious? What did they want to achieve? Because it has always been one trend of the Nazi policy to...to negotiate the Jews for money. They started this in 1939, with the famous Rublee-Schacht ...discussions. And it went on. It went on in Slovakia with Weissmandel, in 1942, and afterwards in 1944 for the Jews of Hungary, the Brand mission. What was the.. Do you think the Nazi were serious?

A: I think that towards the end, there were individuals near the top of the Nazi hierarchy, who were looking for their own skins and trying to preserve something for after the war.

Q: You think this is the main reason?

A: Yes, yes, oh yes.

Q: Yes, it is probably true. The famous letter of Himmler to his masseur, to Kersten, which is very astonishing. This means that you don't think that there would have been a real possibility of rescuing people through the money bargaining?

A: No, I don't think so.

Q: You think it was doomed to failure?

A: Well, it might had some delaying effect. You see, it may have had....to the extent that you encourage people near the top of the Nazi hierarchy that they might get some benefit after the war, it might slow them down.

Q: Nobody, here, in this country, took this...nobody in charge of the problem took this seriously, this offer

A: I don't think so.

Q: This is...it is very difficult to answer. I think it's an open question.

A: Perhaps, yes.

Q: Now, about the ways the Board acted or tried to act. what were the institutions or the personalities that you tried to involve in the achievements of the Board? For instance, what did you do with the Red Cross? International Red Cross, I mean.

A: My recollection is that we never got a great deal of assistance from the International Red Cross. They...pretty well stayed away from this problem.

Q: Why?

A: Now you're asking people's motives and I don't know

Q: Not people, it's institution.

A: Institutions....I don't know.

Q: We know that at the beginning they said that they were dealing mostly with the war prisoners, and not with the civil internees, that this was a quest of internal policy in which they couldn't be involved. But I know that you...you appealed rather frantically

BOBINE 331

WAPehle 56

Q: Did the WRB try to....pardon.

WA PEHLE 57

Q: Did the WRB try to engage the Vatican and the Pope more actively as they...they did before in the....

A: My recollection is that we did try to get the Pope to issue warnings, but that we never were very successful in getting any strong action in this regard.

Q: Yes, how did you try to get it?

A: I think we had a meeting with the Apostolic Delegate here, and we also tried to get unofficial representation which the US government had in Rome at one point...

Q: Tittman.

A: Tittman, yes. But we never got much encouragement.

Q: Yes. What kind of statement did they deliver, if any

A: I can't recall, except that I didn't think it was very effective.

Q: Yes. And, now another question which is connected with what you have said already, that if a great number of Jews would have been rescued, it would have been very difficult to take them and to give them an asylum, This - you know the famous quotation of Lord Moyne about the Hungarian Jews, the Brand mission, When he met Brand and Brand said: I come (and we don't discuss now whether it was real or not, because as you say, one cannot know But Brand said to Lord Moyne: I can free from the Nazi grip one million Jews. We can save one million Jews. And Lord Moyne answered: What shall I do with one million Jews? which was a cynical answer, but a political one, because it... it poses the problem, as a matter of fact. And I think that there was a similar problem, here, with the resettlement areas - where to put them if there had been any rescue?

A: Basically the WRB took the attitude that we would worry about that when and if we could get people out, but our concentration was going to be on getting people out. Now we did talk to various Latin American countries about the willingness to accept refugees, but the weakness of our position was that the US wasn't taking in any refugees to speak of. And so we pressed for at least a token entry into the US without visas, without compliance with the immigration laws, of a token number. And we did bring in several hundred people into an abandoned army camp at Oswego, N.Y. This was with considerable difficulty and lot of people didn't like it.

Q: Why?

A: Well, the labour unions weren't too happy about additional people coming into the US to take jobs....

Q: How many were they, the people?

A: This was just a token amount of several hundred. Other people for their own reasons didn't want the immigration laws broken down, but we did it, and ultimately those

people were admitted to the US as residents.

Q: But they came from where?

A: From Europe.

Q: But, I mean, were they people who were actually saved by the....rescued by this proposal or were t...were they already saved?

A: They were already...they were already saved, but..

Q: They were not in danger?

A: No, but it was important, we felt, and I feel, for the US to show that it too would take in people above the ordinary immigration amounts. And that's why we did it.

Q: This was what was called the Free Ports?

A: Yes, it was...someone invented the theory, which makes a lot of sense, that if we can have a free port for goods, in which you brought goods into the US but they weren't regarded as being in the US and therefore they didn't pay duty and they could remain in the free port, that that could be applied to refugees too. Actually I think that these people a matter of fact came from North Africa.

A: Maybe, that could be.

Q: Originally they came from Europe, they were already in North Africa....

A: Yes.

Q: ...and they found that the climate of N.Y. state was very cold.

A: Oh, no, it's a very cold and unpleasant place to live in.

Q: Yes. Tu coups....On va reprendre

QA PEHLE 58

Q: What do you think of this argument, which I find myself rather strong, which was brought up by the advocates of the...of rescue, they said that the.. there were in the US about 150,000 German prisoners of war which had been shipped from Britain. And then say - and this was said already in the Bermuda

Conference by the only Jewish observer, George Backer from the Joint, during the discussions he said: but please, if there would be much more prisoners of war, you would find places to keep them, at least for the duration of the war. And how is it possible that you cannot decide that you would accept Jewish refugees?

A: I think that that goes back to what we have already been discussing, The prisoners of war that were brought in from England, were brought to alleviate the problem that the British had. They were fighting and were having a very difficult time. This was directly connected with the war effort. The War Department just brought them in, no question of this. People had different feelings about refugees than they had about prisoners of war, However, ironical that now seems.

Q: Now another question: what is...what was at the time your feeling towards the Jews, I mean towards....there were many Jewish organizations which were rather not united....

A: No.

Q: ...fighting among themselves, and what did you think of this?

A: Well, to the extent that we...we'd get conflicting advice from them, it was a little disconcerting. On the whole though, we found that working with the JDC, The Joint Distribution Committee, worked out very well. They were professionals, they were less emotional they weren't interested in Zionism in particular....

Q: They were not?

A: No. They were just interested in rescuing people. They had money and they had experienced people and they were...they fitted into our operations very well.

Q: And what do you think...what did you think of Zionists at the time?

A: We didn't have any particular feeling about Zionism.

Q: Yes, but the fact that they....

A: The fact that there was no hope and place for Jews to go, obviously complicated the whole situation a

great deal.

Q: Yes, but we know that Zionists were advocating mostly Palestine.

A: Oh Yes.

Q: This was....there are people who reproach them that they...if the Jews couldn't have saved Palestine, they were not ~~ant~~much interested in the...in the saving

A: I...I never felt that way.

Q: coup....alors toune. No, no, I just look at you.

BOBINE 332

WA PEHLE 59

Q: But you had a lot of...of dealings with the very religious Jews, with the rabbis, with the orthodox?

A: Yes, this was a revelation to me, because I'd never been exposed to this before. I remember particularly Rabbi Almanowitz, who made very many visits to my office, always unannounced.

Q: He was the head of the Vaad Hahazalah.

A: Yes.

Q: ...the religious rescue organization.

A: He was a very emotional man, with a long beard, and he would come to my office, and pull his beard and cry.

Q: Cry?

A: Cried, oh yes. This was very hard to take, and he used to pester secretary Morgenthau and wait in his office, in the outer office, to see the secretary. And he pressed very hard. He had particular interest as I recall, in a group of orthodox rabbis who escaped from Poland, crossed China...crossed Russia and into China, and were in Shanghai. And he wanted them brought to the US, and perpetuate orthodoxy. And we had other things that we felt were more pressing, but he didn't understand that.

Q: He didn't?

A: No.

Q: And why did he cry?

A: He cried because nothing was being accomplished and he felt his world was crumbling.

Q: His world?

A: That's my explanation.

Q: And did he meet Morgenthau too?

A: Oh yes, sure. But largely he dealt with me.

Q: Yes. But, I mean, these people were extremely active, no?

A: Oh yes, yes, they pressed very hard for anything that could be done, and they had a lot of ideas of what might be done, some of them unreal, but we dealt with them as best we could.

Q: What kind of ideas?

A: Well, they...they wanted to send money through Switzerland to rescue individual people that were named in a cable, And so much for rescuing this family and so much for rescuing that family. And we said: no, you couldn't do that.

Q: Why?

A: Because we thought that rescue had to be done...in general, by who ever was available to be rescued, not by how much could be sent for each one...

Q: Yes. But wh....no, it's very interesting because this is...this was their way of...of thinking. They wanted to rescue sp....

A: Rabbis.

Q: Rabbis....

A: Yes, rabbis and their families, particularly, yes.

Q: This was...this was really their main concern, that they didn't want to rescue anybody who...?

A: Now you're asking me to read their minds. I can only tell you that their emphasis seemed to be in rescuing rabbis and their families.

Q: Yes.

A: not...that statement may be even unfair to them. But they did...they did have a real interest in this.

Q: Why do you say that they....they were unreal ideas?

A: Well, it's like the idea that was put to the War Department in which it was proposed - this was by the World Jewish Congress...

Q: They were not religious, this one.

A: No, I know...this....I am not aiming this at the religious end, I am talking about some unreal suggestions; one of them was that the Soviet Government be approached with the request that it should dispatch groups of paratroopers to seize the buildings of the crematoria, to annihilate the squads of murderers and free the unfortunate inmates. And that the Polish government be requested and instruct the Polish underground to attack these and similar camps to destroy the instruments of death.

Q: But why do say that it is unreal?

A: Well, in the first place the Soviet government was not involved in rescuing Jews, it was involved primarily in defending their own land, and there were millions of Russians being killed by the Germans and there was never any interest they had in the activities of the WRB for quite understandable reasons.

Q: They were absolutely uninterested in the WRB?

A: That's right.

Q: you had no communications with them?

A: Not that I re....as I recall, ambassador Herman told me not to bother to take this up with the Russians, because they were completely preoccupied by their own problems. Similarly the Polish underground I don't think was this effective in...in doing the things that the Polish underground would normally try to do, and ask them to attack these camps was out of the question too.

Q: That was not the...

A: not real.

Q: ...not the concern of the Polish underground. Wait a minute.

WA 60 plan muet.