

-TITLE- GEORGES BELTRAMI
-I_DATE- JULY 5, 1988
-SOURCE- CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY- FAIR
-IMAGE_QUALITY- GOOD
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES- FRENCH AND ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

4:50 - I was born on June 14, 1920 in Marseilles. My father was French; so was my mother, my grandmother, my grandfather... My name is Ivan because during World War I my father was saved by a man called Ivan.

5:30 - I have one brother. He's older than I am; he's 70 years old.

5:50 - My father was the chairman of the French Medical School in Marseilles. My mother stayed at home.

5:95 - We were comfortable financially.

6:00 - When I was growing up I knew some Jewish families at school. I was furious because I saw anti-Semitism at the school. From when I was very young, I did everything I could to defend my Jewish friends from anti-Semitism.

6:85 - I don't know where this feeling came from; it was just a feeling that I wanted justice.

7:05 - We were Catholic. I have the certificate from my great-grandmother's wedding, in 1939, in the Catholic Church here in Marseilles.

7:40 - My father also had Jewish friends: doctors at the medical school.

7:70 - I went to the medical university. My Brother did too, and my uncle, and my father.

8:00 - My mother was very strong. She also hid Jews during the war, in her house. I even consider that she was more courageous than we were, because she helped people on the second floor of a house while the ground floor was occupied by German soldiers.

8:90 - My father did this also with my mother, in the same villa.

9:20 - My mother always helped others. She took care of poor people, unhappy people.

9:50 - My father was very patriotic. When my brother was in Buchenwald for 18 months, and everyone congratulated him, my father said, "Don't congratulate him -- it was his duty." That tells how my father was.

10:30 - I am the retired chairman of maxillofacial surgery.

10:65 - I'm more like my father than my mother. For us, my father was the boss. I didn't say "daddy"; I said "father." I said, "Hello, boss." He was a very important professor --very strong.

11:10 - My mother considered him the boss, too: the chief of the family.

11:25 - He was strict, but we always admired him.

11:45 - We had to be home for dinner, the bed made, the room perfect... He wanted us to do very well at school. My mother felt the same way.

11:95 - I'm married for the second time. My son is old, my daughter is 40. I have five grandchildren -- 19, 15, 14, 12, and 5 years old. My wife's daughter was here before.

12:50 - My first wife and I divorced.

12:70 - I first learned what the Germans were doing in 1933 -- Kristallnacht.

13:00 - I also knew people in Spain who told me about what the Germans did there during the Spanish Civil War, all the atrocities.

13:50 - (He mentions the bombing of Guernica) People said it was the Germans' testing ground for the future war. 1375 - I was 15 years old then. I participated in demonstrations against Germany. I couldn't do much, because my father said my studies came first.

14:20 - In 1939 I volunteered with the French Aviation, but we never flew.

14:65 - I continued my studies at that time.

14:90 - I knew all along what Hitler was doing to the Jews. German Jews, who were fleeing to France, told us what was happening in Germany.

15:30 - Petain created an unofficial army for young people, and I was forced to join that. (He shows photos in an album.)

16:05 - I began to come to the defense of the Jews because this army, which was started by Petain, was very anti-Semitic.

16:50 - I knew immediately that Petain was bad.

16:60 - In 1941 I began to help Jews.

16:75 - For example, there was a Jewish boy who was supposed to go to prison, just because he was Jewish. So I said he was sick, and he went to the infirmary instead.

17:45 - Jewish friends came to me for help. I hid many in this apartment, right here. In 1942 the Germans were rounding up Jews to deport them. One day, the whole house was surrounded by Germans while two Jews were here. I hid them; I'll show you where. (The camera doesn't follow.)

18:50 - I was married in 1944. This apartment belonged to my grandmother. I used to stay here often.

18:75 - I began to hide people in January, 1943. My grandmother was living with my father then, at his seaside villa.

19:10 - Our family was never political. We were patriotic, but not political. We're anti-communist, of course, and anti-Nazi.

19:45 - I was part of the Resistance from September 1942. I was the liaison agent in the underground forces. I transmitted messages from one Resistance center to another. They called it the "mailboxes."

20:45 - When my brother was caught by the Gestapo, they tortured him in a prison near here. At this point I was an intern. I healed Resistance members and Jews who were prisoners there. I tried to prolong their illnesses to gain time. If the Germans had known that I was the brother of, one of the prisoners, it would have been very bad for me.

21:00 - The Germans did not suspect me. They arrested my brother because he was the chief of another Resistance network.

21:35 - I didn't know my brother was in the Resistance, and my brother didn't know that I was. My parents didn't know, either. When my parents found out that my brother had been arrested, that's when they first knew.

21:80 - Some of the people who were working for the Resistance also worked for the French police, so we knew when there would be roundups. Unfortunately, most of our work consisted (only) of warning Jews when they would be arrested.

22:35 - Unfortunately, many Jews didn't understand what these roundups meant. They just thought they'd be in camps for a while --so many refused to leave, even though they'd been warned. They had no idea what was waiting for them.

22:70 - There were many German Jews in the Camp des Milles. We were able to save some of those Jews from being deported.

23:35 - Even the German Jews didn't believe what would happen. No one imagined the horror of what would happen.

23:60 - The Camp des Milles was located in Aix-en-Provence, 30 km from Marseilles.

23:75 - It was an old factory where roofing material was manufactured.

23:85 - The factory was a very old building. I couldn't tell you exactly how many Jews were there at any time. A German girl is writing a thesis on the Jews in Marseilles. (He gives her name to the interviewers.) She might know more about this.

24:20 - It wasn't very well guarded. As soon as the Germans occupied the Free Zone, they were deported.

24:50 - The only people who knew what I was doing were the people I had to contact.

24:65 - It wasn't difficult to keep this secret, because we knew that the fewer people knew, the better it was. If you were tortured, it was better if you didn't know much. Even my brother, who was tortured for 18 days -- he had broken ribs, had six different fractures in his arms, and had his temple broken -- never said anything during his torture.

25:35 - After my brother's arrest on May 23, 1943, I stopped all Resistance activity for a while.

25:50 - This was a rule in the Resistance, because the Germans asked my brother, "What does your brother do?" He said I'm in medicine, I go out with girls, I have nothing to do with the Resistance. Since the Germans would be watching me closely, I stopped all activity for a while.

25:90 - Then I became a commando of the underground forces. I specialized in the executions of the Militia and the Gestapo. It was because of me that the escape of the Resistance from the Salvador [?] Hospital next door was able to take place.

26:45 - It was very satisfying -- a joy -- to get rid of the Militia, the collaborators. I killed people myself, and I don't regret it.

26:70 - Especially because of my brother. When the Gestapo took him to the hospital, they threw him on the floor and I saw that his back was all bruises. You couldn't see anything that wasn't bruises. After that I had no pity any more for the Gestapo.

27:00 - I was chief of a commando of the Resistance.

27:15 - I was in charge of Spaniards who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. (He shows photos, and a document authorizing him to be out at night.)

28:20 - (Period of bad video and audio.)

28:60 - Five days before debarquement [?], seven prisoners escaped from the Salvador Hospital. (He shows a newspaper article describing the escape.) I'm the one who gave the instructions, gave them the map of the hospital, and gave them German disguises to go in and get out the prisoners. At that time my brother was in Buchenwald. He was there from the beginning of 1944 to 21 April 1945.

29:30 - He was liberated by the U.S. Army with General Patton. While he was at Buchenwald, my brother was in a wagon of people about to be burned in 24 hours, because they were all believed to be dead. A friend of his saw that he was still alive, and took him to the infirmary. For some reason the SS let him live. Now my brother is still wounded. He's considered a war wounded -- a mutilé de guerre.

29:85 - I'll give you a paper with the whole story.

29:95 - Even though my brother was in bad shape at Buchenwald, he helped all his friends there. To me it seems interesting that you're interested in all this, because it all seems so simple ... so natural.

30:20 - When I was at Yad Vashem in the Garden of the Righteous, I asked myself and M. Pardié [?] whether I really deserved the honor I was getting. Dr. Pardié answered that all those who come to plant their tree say the same thing.

30:45 - (Malka Drucker, the interviewer, says that she and Gay Block have met over 50 of "Les Justes" and all say the same thing. She asks him to explain what made him different from the many who did not act as he did.)

30:95 - I consider that 80% of the French people are cowards. France was the only country in Europe who wanted an armistice with Hitler.

They were afraid. And all the French collaborated [M. Beltrami is visibly angry at this point] -- in the beginning, 80% were collaborators, and in the end -- when they saw that Germany was going to lose -- they were all resisters.

31:45 - In the beginning, when people knew we were against Petain, they would walk across the street to avoid us. They wouldn't shake my hand. At the end, when it was clear that Germany was going to lose, everyone wanted to shake our hands and be very friendly. It was a shame.

31:65 - [Why were you different from other people?] -- I don't think I was different. But I do perceive life differently than other people. In the Yom Kippur War, I immediately went to Israel and worked at the Hadassah Hospital to replace doctors who were elsewhere. And now, if there should ever be another war, the hospital has my name and will call me.

32:45 - [Drucker comments, "You're very rare] -- No. It's normal. My struggle now is the struggle for Israel. It's the realization of God's will. For 2,000 years these people said, "Next year in Jerusalem," and never had it. And they went through terrible persecution. And now they have it. Now it's time to defend Israel. And that's why I'm anti-Arab -- to the death. I'm against the French government, whether they're left or right, because they led a political stance that was against Israel. The only nations that defend Israel are the United States and South Africa.

33:20 - [What have you learned from the war years?] -- (He pauses for a long while with a blank expression...) -- It's a mixture. On one extreme were people who were very weak, and others who were very brave. Some who collaborated, and some who resisted.

33:70 - M. Bernard, the man who testified for the records at Yad Vashem, recently died. I helped him during the war. When I show you the paper it will have all the details. I knew Jean Bernard from the time I was working in Petain's army. He was persecuted because he was Jewish. I got him into the infirmary so he wouldn't have to go to Jail. I took him into my house here, and hid him and fed him. He was one of the two men who were hidden here when the Gestapo surrounded the house.

34:60 - It's impossible to say how many lives I saved, because I saved some people who were later taken by the Germans.

34:75 - I couldn't only take care of Jews. Saving Jews was something that was great, but not useful to the war. I was also doing other things.

35:20 - For example, when I helped the Resistance to arrange the escape from the hospital, I wasn't helping Jews.

35:70 - The primary work was to defeat the Germans. That was first.

35:80 - Yad Vashem recognized me in 1984. It was a surprise. I attended a conference before that, and told the story of my family. M. Grimaldi said, "Hello, you're a 'Righteous of the Nation'. I said, "No." He said, "Oh, you're not? I'll make inquiries for you."

36:15 - [Have you had any contact with the people you helped after the war?] -- Yes. M. Bernard died last month. Also, I've remained friends with a doctor I saved -- the other one who was hidden at that time when the Gestapo surrounded the house.

36:85 - [After the war, how have you helped?] -- In 1973 I helped to create the France-Israel Association of Marseilles -- to help Israel, to combat the P.L.O. [Palestine Liberation Organization], to have conferences. I organized a conference which was attended by M. Rosen, the ambassador from Israel to France. A professor on the medical school faculty also attended.

37:55 - I visited Yad Vashem when I went to Israel, but I never thought that I would one day be named Righteous.

37:70 - The vice president of the association is a parachutist, and every year he parachutes down to the Negev. The Israeli army is much criticized by French television. I call television the Office of French Treason!

38:30 - [Is the war always a part of your consciousness?] --No; I never talk about it. My brother never does, either. Never, never, never. This is why I'm surprised you're asking all this. I want to be discreet, I guess. I don't know. The French people don't care; they aren't interested in it. The young people are beginning to become interested. My grandson is interested.

38:75 - [Interviewer wonders why it took so long for him to be declared a 'Righteous'] -- Because it wasn't organized. People didn't know about this. That's why I wanted to start this organization between France and Yad Vashem -- so they would be able to find these people. I work with M. Simon in Paris, who is in charge of getting the files, the witnessing.

39:75 - [What do you think children should know about this time?] -- They should know everything, because this generation of mine didn't act properly. There's nothing to be proud about what France did. My brother received the highest decoration. He's Canadian now. His oldest son is Canadian, and his other son is Australian, because they're disgusted with France.

40:35 - If I hadn't been a professor, I would have stayed on when I went to Pittsburgh, because I was disgusted with France also.

40:55 - My brother lives half the time in France, and half in Canada.

40:60 - My children live in Marseilles. One boy is 43, and one girl is 40. He is a director in a factory where they make the essence of perfume for various companies. My daughter is a dentist.

41:05 - [Would your children have acted the same way you did?] -- No. They don't have the same opinions. This doesn't concern them; we don't talk about what I did. They know what I've done.

41:25 - They're proud of what I did. (He shows pictures of his brother, and of other people, and of the tree planted in Israel.) My brother was too involved in Resistance work to save Jews.

41:55 - My mother died before I was honored at Yad Vashem. (Shows

a picture of him lighting the flame at Yad Vashem.)

41:70 - (Shows a picture of his son with his tree at Yad Vashem.)
He went to Yad Vashem after the ceremony.

41:95 - (Shows pictures from the ceremony.)

42:05 - (Shows pictures of M. Grimaldi and of other 'Righteous Gentiles,' pictures of his daughter and her family, and pictures of other relatives.)

42:30 - (Shows a picture of the dean of Hadassah University, and newspaper articles published at the time of his award.

42:50 - My children know about all that I did and they're proud of it, but they don't talk about it.

42:70 - I've been to Israel seven times in five years. (Shows more pictures.)

43:65 - (He shows a book he wrote for athletes. The book describes the benefits of eating bread.)

43:85 - (He looks for more pictures, and he and the translator discuss nutrition.)

44:70 - (Drucker films the hiding place. It seems to be under some small structure on a part of a flat roof.)
.END.