[0:00:00]

Robert Buckley: … New York. We're doing the interview of Hans Bluehs of Orchard Park, New York, who was born in Germany. And he's going to give us his life story as to where he was born in Europe. And he's one of Jehovah's Witnesses today but not at the time of the Hitler era. Hans, would you like to give us your name and address and what year you were born, please?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. My name is Hans Bleuhs. I live on 44 Woodhaven Road, Orchard Park, New York. And I came to this country in 1951.

Robert Buckley: Hans, would you like to show us on the map as to where in Europe you were born, evidently in the part of Europe that was controlled by Germany at one time?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah, I was born in Transylvania. And in 1941 we had to move back to Germany. And there we ended up in Munich.

Robert Buckley: OK. And what was the reason you were transferred back to Germany?

Hans Bluehs: Because we were German. My brother was trying to learn a trade as a machinist, and he couldn't because we were not citizens. And so my dad thought it would be the wisest thing to go back. Left the house. We couldn't sell it. And they told us if the Germans win the war, we could have our property back.

Robert Buckley: OK. Well, perhaps we can go into a few of your activities, though, when you were growing up. I noticed over here on the wall you have some things.

Hans Bluehs: ____ born is right here in the mountainous area of the Carpathian Mountains. And we certainly enjoyed our youth there. It's a nice, fruitful land. And one of our things even as young children was climbing mountains, probably about a 7,000-foot mountain but a low timberline and, of course, plenty of skiing during the wintertime.

Robert Buckley: OK, very good. OK, Hans. Well, perhaps we can sit down now, and we'll go into your background of you and your family.

Hans, would you like to give us just a little bit of your background now again as to your family, the name of your father and mother, the type of work your dad did, and the names of your brothers and sisters in order?

Hans Bluehs: My father's name was Andreas, and my mother's name was Anna. My dad was a carpenter and cabinet maker, and we were seven children. My oldest sister was Herta and then followed by my brother Otto, Helmut, and then myself, Hans. Then we had three sisters. The older one was Gerta, and the middle one was Emme, and the smallest one was Hildy.

Robert Buckley: What type of religious background did your family have?

Hans Bluehs: We were Evangelical Lutherans, of the Augsburg confession. But we were not really too involved in because mostly is Orthodox, Greek Orthodox religion in Romania.

Robert Buckley: And what type of a family life would you say you had at that period of time during the '30s when you were growing up?

Hans Bluehs: We had a pretty nice family life. We had built a brand-new house. In 1941 we had to leave. We couldn't sell; had to leave it behind. But we had fond memories. I still remember my great-grandfather, Hans Rimmer. And just two years ago we were out there, and we went to the house. The people let us in, and it was really a nice feeling.

But we were a happy family. We engaged in many family activities. Even though my dad had a tough upbringing, he was put in First World War as well as the Second World War. And so when we left in 1941, we traveled by train through Hungary into Vienna, Austria; changed trains from east to west—they have two rail stations—and from there took the train to Munich. And when we arrived there, my dad had to take a state job. So that's how he ended up in the Gestapo. It wasn't that he volunteered.

Robert Buckley: Oh, your father was part of the Gestapo. Now, what type of activity was he involved in as the Gestapo?

Hans Bluehs: All he did is really take people—those who were people that were captured—and they had to take them on work details and then bring them back. And so that was primarily his job although my dad was not a hateful man. I don't think he could hurt anybody. But he had to accept the job, and he worked there until the year the war ended.

[0:05:16]

Robert Buckley: As you were growing up – you were born in 1933?

Hans Bluehs: Thirty-one.

Robert Buckley: Thirty-one, rather? What did you hear in the home about Adolf Hitler among your family? Do you recall any of that?

Hans Bluehs: Yes. Well, my dad had bought a brand-new radio, Blaupunkt, and we heard all his speeches. And we were pretty enthusiastic about his endeavors. And, honestly, we – I would have to admit that we were pretty much of a Hitler family.

Robert Buckley: And you went on to relate that, of course, you were involved in the Hitler Youth Movement. Maybe you could tell us a little about that. But your other brothers, one of your brothers, went into the SS. Maybe give some of their background.

Hans Bluehs: Yes. Well, of course, once we landed in Munich, my dad was in the Gestapo. And in Germany when you reach the age of 10, you're automatically a part of the Hitler movement and you had –

Robert Buckley: Oh, is that right?

Hans Bluehs: Yes.

Robert Buckley: Well, what actually is the Hitler Youth Movement? Maybe you could tell us what you did or what the purpose of it was.

Hans Bluehs: Well, it's – the purpose of it is really a pretraining for army life. And you have the uniform, and the training is quite extensive. You start off. You're small and you're promoted. I guess my first promotion was a *hordenführer*. So I had a group of five people, and I make sure that they attend the meetings where they were scheduled.

And then later on they promote you by your, you know, ability and eagerness. And it was quite – quite involved because we had – just like the Olympics, we had competitive sports that we did, from discus to hardball to jumping to running, all of those things. On a yearly basis, of course, you won medals just like they do in the Olympics.

And when we were in Munich and we marched through Munich, Munich South, for example, all the Hitler Youth Movement. You ought to see the windows fly open. It looked like Fifth Avenue, a ticker[tape] parade. All people looked out. We had our own instruments. We sang. We marched through the streets with our

flags. And so it was encouraging, that type of thing, and it was in with the time. And, of course, I was in there until the war ended in 1945.

Robert Buckley: You were saying too that the Hitler Youth Movement you learned how to help older people and things in the community and so on?

Hans Bluehs: Yes. They trained us. It was discipline, haircuts, clean. And you had to be very courteous. If some of the elderly people we saw carrying their groceries home, we offered to carry. We had to offer to carry it home for them. We're not allowed to receive any money even though they wanted to give it to you. We would not accept it. So it was good discipline, and that aspect seems good. So a lot of things seemed very good in the beginning. However, it turned out a little different when you then grow older and kind of see behind the scene.

Robert Buckley: Right. You were saying also that you even learned some of the military aspects.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. During our summer vacation from school, we always went out, lived in bivouac, in tents, and it was outside of Munich. There's a place called Münd Tagerseh, and we had a big parade field. And we had all our tents set up there, and then all our flags were in one area. And they had us stand guard there day and night to guard them. There we had regular training; five o'clock in the morning. I was a bugler at that time. You wake everybody up.

And Troop Münd is also a river there close to Munich called Isar. And the first thing is we had to put on our bathing suit and fall out. And we marched down to the river, and we had to jump in. And if you didn't jump in . . . . Now, we're cold. And sometimes there was even, you know, like dew on the grass. And we were all cold. But if you didn't jump in, they would take you by the hand and foot and throw you in. And it was kind of a fast-running river. Sometimes they had to jump in and get the individual out.

[0:10:00] And then when you came out, you dried up, put on your training suit, and then we had our daily dozen exercises. Then we went and had our breakfast.

Robert Buckley: Oh, I see. So it was actually preparing you for the military – regular German army.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. And, of course, during the day it was kind of rigorous training because we had shooting on a rifle range. We had, for

example, we had on a hillside, they took half of the crew. They put them up there, and they put a ribbon on your arm—it was your life band. And one half the crew was down below. And during the night – they wake you up at midnight – we had to go up and capture the hillside. And so, naturally, we fought – sometimes even drew some blood – but we tried to get that band because then he couldn't – he was out of commission.

Robert Buckley: I see.

Hans Bluehs: And so I remember walking, you know, a little 10-, 12-year-old boys. When you walked through there, through the woods at night, and everything is dark, no lights, and I tried to go up there unsuspected. You step on a stick that breaks, you know, and you're kind of scared really. But they were trying to break that, and as boys we really enjoyed it, too. And then after, you know, we came just back in time to pick up our school again.

Robert Buckley: Now, you were also saying that the rest of your family, your other brothers – one joined the SS. Maybe you could give us a little bit of that background?

Hans Bluehs: Well, yeah, he didn't join the SS. He – as a matter of fact when we left because he wanted to be a machinist. He worked in Munich and learned his trade as a machinist. And he even made the bells for the submarine. And as soon as he had finished his – even though they had tried to draft him before. But they did let him finish his trade. And as soon as he was done, they made his German papers. He was drafted and taken to the SS.

He had very rigorous training there too because they had like leather suits on, and they would have the gas masks on. They'd make them run. And, you know, they were so exhausted and even the skin kind of shaved from that leather suit, and they would fall down. They would just kick them, "Get up!" And that's how they toughened them up.

And he was on the Russian side around Swidwin, Gdański. And eventually, the war was over. He swam across the Elblag, tried to get to American side because he knew what – how the Russians treated those that they captured. Well, Americans claimed that their camps were overfilled, so they put him on _____and took him back on the other side. And he spent five years in Siberia.

Robert Buckley: As a result.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: Now during the war after 1942 when Hitler's armies went into Russia and that was the turning point when they began to lose, what was the feeling among and what was the talk in your town where you were being brought up? Was morale beginning to drop or the propaganda enough to overcome that or …

Hans Bluehs: Well, the morale didn't drop because Hitler right from beginning always says five minutes to 12, you know, that he would have the weaponry needed. And they felt pretty secure with that, pretty assured. However, my uncle that also was in the SS – my mother's brother, Eddy Froemer – they were surrounded in Cherkassy. And the army had already thrown their rifles away. The SS made them pick them up, and they acted just like the Russians from behind, says, "We're going to break through this castle." You know, they were surrounded.

They broke through, had a lot of casualties. And he got hit with a machine gun through his roof. He was driving. It was not his job, but he was driving a Red Cross truck to bring the wounded out. They shot right through the roof. A Russian plane hit him with a machine gun, pretty much shattered his bone in his arm, and he came home.

Of course, that's how we found out what happened in Russia. My brother was there as well in that area. And he said that when they – that winter where they really lost they would – for three days there was no sound, and they thought they were frozen out there. And the Germans tried to move again later just shot back, so they endured the hardship, the Russians. And that was really the turning point.

Robert Buckley: Of the war.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: Now when you were growing up in Munich, what did you hear about anti-Semitism? Did you hear anything about Jehovah's Witnesses at that time, the Bibelforscher as they were called, or the Gypsies, or Blacks? What was the propaganda in the schools? And what was the school system like?

[0:15:04]

Hans Bluehs: The school system was, you know, you really had to learn. It was tough. My teacher was in the SA and so we mostly in uniform. He was –

Robert Buckley: Now, would you like to explain that for us as to what the SA is?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. The *Arbeiters*, a working type of military. And he was right from the start with Hitler in Munich when Hitler was attacked, almost shot. Remember when they had that shootout? There was 19

Robert Buckley: Really?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah, there's 19 that got killed. And in front of that building there's two big, huge lions. Hitler was behind one. My teacher was behind the other one. So, of course, he knew our family all in the SS. My dad was in Gestapo, so he had great plans for us to move in that direction.

But then in 1943 Munich got heavily bombed. My mother was evacuated in the country about Kaltenberg, which is towards Landsberg am Lech. And I was in Munich and my school, Meistroff School. And we left for Schellenberg, which is right on the border between Austria and Bavaria. Matter of fact, right now there is – the border is right there in Schellenberg. And it's between Salzburg and Berchtesgaden. And the little photo that I show you later on shows the place we were in. It was like a hotel, and it was just our teacher and his wife and then our Hitler Youth leader. And we continued with our marching and training.

But for two years and as I knew that the war was going to come to an end because I had heard things from my dad. I knew from my uncles and my brother. I went AWOL. They went swimming. I took the train back to Munich. When I got to Munich, my dad and my brother worked there, and we were bombed out. We were in the kitchen. I had a cot set up.

Robert Buckley: So how old were you at this time in your life?

Hans Bluehs: Fourteen.

Robert Buckley: Fourteen years old.

Hans Bluehs: There was a crater right next down into the basement, and there was nothing above. And then the next day I left Munich and went out to where my mother lived in Kaltenberg. And then I spent the

rest of the time there. Still, I even led a little group out there in that little town Kaltenberg. From Munspek, we went. We got all our parts like, for example, the small *carabines*. They learned how to shoot. They had the march.

Robert Buckley: So you took over sort of their training.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. They wanted me to do training. And then just before the – and of course, they didn't like it. Those were more farm people. They didn't like it at all. And where my mother lived, she was the daughter of the guesthouse that was in the area. Her name was Anna. And I asked for a room where we could meet. And she says, "We can't have it because they don't have any soap." And I said, "Well, we get you that." But she didn't really like to give us it , but we were able to meet there and have our meetings and our –

Robert Buckley: So they didn't like the idea of you –

Hans Bluehs: The farmers didn't.

Robert Buckley: The farmers didn't – weren't interested in that aspect of training young boys and so on.

Hans Bluehs: No. And, plus, they pretty much were against us because we came from out of the city to the country, and they didn't really like that either. But they were made to put us up because of the heavy bombing. And then just before the war ended, I was in Fischhaus-Niehaus which is – they had Olympics there once. And we had the _____ Meistershoft, the ski from the Hitler Youth Movement, the skiing competition, and we were up there, and it was in the spring. And then shortly thereafter, I guess, May or so, the war was over.

Robert Buckley: Now, going back to your schoolteacher, he was a VSR.

Hans Bluehs: SR, yeah.

Robert Buckley: Now, what was his type of teaching? What did he try to indoctrinate into the young people in his classes about the Aryan race and so on, Jewish?

Hans Bluehs: History. History was always, you know, very strong. And, I guess, I personally liked history, yeah. And there were the accomplishments that was done on the Germans.

[0:20:00] He looked always very sharp in his uniform.

Robert Buckley: He even wore a uniform when he was teaching?

Hans Bluehs: Oh, yes. Yes. And then, of course, the teaching was that the Aryan race, that we are even like, you know, the national anthem says Deutschland, Deutschland _____. You never forgot. There was always held before you. And some of the things they had indicated, well, it showed that they really on the right track, that they would accomplish their aim. Of course, they faltered later on.

But he was a follower of Hitler. And he portrayed that image. Even in his teaching, those points always came up where the Germans stand high. And like in any country, I guess, most of the things that are not very favorable, they're kind of swept under the rug so only the good things were. And that, of course, the young people relished that.

Robert Buckley: Right. Now, what was the attitude toward Jewish people? Or did you run across any Jehovah's Witnesses at that time, the Bibelforscher? Did you have any contact with that at all or the Gypsies?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. Well, in Germany I never really saw a lot of Gypsies. They were more around like for example Romania. But in Germany, Jewish people were really hated. There were individual people that kind of felt for them. But as a whole, they were looked down upon. And because of, you know, the propaganda, on every wall there was, you know, an image and it says, “Psst, the enemy is listening.” So anybody who’s not a German is an enemy, obviously.

And as far as Jehovah's Witnesses, I know of the Bibelforscher and I heard of them. But I never talked to one, never met one before or even after the war.

Robert Buckley: After the war even, huh? Now, you were saying before that you saw one time firsthand when a plane was coming in. There was a troop transport. Not troops, they were transporting people to the concentration camps …

Hans Bluehs: Yes.

Robert Buckley: … which could you tell us what happened there?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. During the time while I was with my mother …

Robert Buckley: Now, when was that, 1944?

Hans Bluehs: Let's see. Yes, it must be 1944. It was – my mother was in Kaltenberg. And in Schwabhausen—that's on the railway that goes from Hemsbach to Im Buchwald to Munich—we saw people with the concentration garb on, the striped suits, you know, digging on the railway, repairing them. And they were mostly on work details. And they were very skinny, so it showed that they suffered a lot. They didn't feed them.

But one day I was observing how there was a railroad car, a railroad train filled with people from a concentration camp, and they were going towards Munich. And, of course, outside of Munich is Dachau. Now, we never knew anything about Dachau. We knew the name, but we never knew what goes on inside. It was pretty secret.

Robert Buckley: Is that right? Interesting but go ahead.

Hans Bluehs: And so on that train—it was a passenger train. And in the back they had a flat car with antiaircraft artillery. And we had a – and we constantly had bombing and the English Spitfires would just swoop over the towns real low and everybody shooting at them. And I was observing how the train came in. It was in Schwabhausen as the name called. It was a town. And there's two big mass graves with a concrete wall around it and a courtyard where you have benches where you can sit. And on a headstone is written in Hebrew letters. And I had some pictures, but I think my brother has them. But I saw the Spitfire when the artillery opened fire on them. They flew past. They turned around and came back and just mowed them with machine guns, the whole train.

Robert Buckley: And the Germans were shooting . . the inmates or the prisoners.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. The Spitfire, the English Spitfire, see, when they shot at the planes. They turned around, came back and just really attacked that train. They didn't know what's in there and they just … of course, they knew the artillery came from there and they were trying to get after them, but they just shot everything. So a lot of the – I'd say most of them got out of the train, were underneath the train.

[0:25:00] And they ran across the short pasture, tried to enter the woods. It was all mostly pines. And some succeeded, but a lot of them got killed. I understand there's about 250 in each grave right there. But we saw a lot of those Jewish people. For example, when the army retreated, they left motorcycles, trucks, everything sit there. Now,

we were interested in tools so we – and when we found them, they usually were Jewish concentration people that were sitting inside, and we asked them to step out. And we just took the tools out, put the seat back, and they went back in. And there were quite a few scattered throughout those woods.

But when the Americans came in and the war was over, I remember how they brought me in town. We had a small grocery store there. And they opened – asked for the store to be opened up. And they let those individuals from the concentrations camp go in and help themselves. And one of the things they desired the most was they had those one-pound block margarine. They opened it up and had such a desire and, of course, that was detrimental to them. The next day they carried them out.

Robert Buckley: Dead?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: The body couldn't take it.

Hans Bluehs: Couldn't take it, no. Because I remember when my brother came back from Russia, he was just loaded with water. And we had to feed him with just a little milk and dry bread and slowly bring him, bring him back. But he was just loaded up and they shaved their . . . but his whole body was swollen up with water.

Robert Buckley: Is that right? Now, what happened to him when he was out there that he got that way? Was it the fact that no food or proper nutrition?

Hans Bluehs: Well, the food they got is they had ration. They get so much bread a day, and then they had usually cabbage cooked in water, and that's what they get. And although just to survive, I must say, there must be a lot of good vitamins and stuff in cabbage.

Robert Buckley: In cabbage, yes. Now, you had some pictures here, Hans, if you could show me here. First of all, I want to go to the older ones, not to the ones after you came to the United States.

Hans Bluehs: That's the one where the graves are.

Robert Buckley: Yeah, OK. Let me just – if you could hold them up a little bit here. OK, that's in Dachau?

Hans Bluehs: No. This is outside of Munich in Schwabhausen where those Spitfires would shoot at those trains, and they erected two graves there.

Robert Buckley: OK and then what's the other one now, the other picture you have?

Hans Bluehs: The other picture is where I was stationed where the school and our leader from the Hitler Youth Movement in Schellenberg. That was the building.

Robert Buckley: Oh, yes. OK. Now, what did the American troops do to the young people that had been in the Hitler Youth Movement?

Hans Bluehs: The American troops?

Robert Buckley: Yeah. How did they treat them or how did they treat the young people?

Hans Bluehs: We really had no problems. Matter of fact, I remember when they came in and first it was the Moroccans with their round head and the tassel hanging out. And then a lot of kind of really the first time we saw Black people.

Robert Buckley: Black people, first time?

Hans Bluehs: And we thought they were like night fighters. That's what we called them. But we went right up to them and they were more interested not in the civilians but into finding people that were hiding, army people, because they left all their belongings. That's why so many lost their limbs because they left their grenades and bazookas, ammunition—everything just laying where they slept in the barns.

Robert Buckley: This was the Vermot?

Hans Bluehs: The Vermot, yeah. And, you know we used to run with them. They said, "Get away!" because when you went to someone that they were trying to capture, we always ran with them, so they were pretty easygoing. And we had a castle, called *schloss*, in Kaltenberg. There was a *schloss*, which means "castle." And the downstairs was a brewery that they converted into. And so they pretty much made that a headquarters. It was elevated. And we used to go up there and we'd play baseball, catch with them, you know.

Robert Buckley: With the Americans? OK.

Hans Bluehs: So I befriended them real easy.

Robert Buckley: That's right and so the Hitler Youth Movement didn't have any animosity toward the Americans? The war was over?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. I think it had a lot to do once Hitler lost and, of course, he killed himself. That pretty much pulled the rug from under you.

Robert Buckley: So you figure you might as well get along with the victors.

Hans Bluehs: That's right.

Robert Buckley: OK. Maybe we can stop for just a minute.

[0:30:00] Now that the war ended, what happened to your family, first of all? Were they all brought back together finally? Anyone die in the war?

Hans Bluehs: My dad spent two years in a prison camp because somebody turned him in that he was in the Gestapo. And after two years, he was found not guilty and so …

Robert Buckley: Because of the fact that he had to take the job.

Hans Bluehs: He had to take the job.

Robert Buckley: Yeah. It wasn't that he –

Hans Bluehs: Of course, he was not involved in killing, you know, or having to do with the concentration like Dachau. But it took two years and then he came back and we were united. And he continued working his trade, and I learned my trade at Mercedes-Benz. I was automobile mechanic. And then my older brother came back in 1950 from spending five years in Siberia. And so he learned his, you know, worked in his trade as a machinist. And we were united as a family, lived together.

But in – I worked – after I finished by training at Mercedes-Benz, I wanted to specialize on diesel. And I worked in Munich for the diesel clinic for a year. In fact, I worked day and night. It was so much work. The guy couldn't even pay me. Even when I was ready to leave, I said give money that he owed me. But I decided . . . everything was torn down, bombed out, and I just didn't see a future.

And I went to American consulate and asked if I can go to the United States. And it usually takes you a couple of years. It took me three months from the day I started. Ford Motor sponsored me. And when I came to New York, there was a representative that wanted to know where I wanted to work—anyplace where there's a Ford plant. He said, "Buffalo?" I said, "Buffalo sounds as good as anything." I didn't know where it was at. I didn't know anything about the layout of the country, and so I ended [up] in Buffalo.

That was in 1951, October, and I worked for them for a year and a half. And then I went back and worked in my trade. I worked for Worthington because they made big stationary diesel engines: compressors, steamers, expanders to extract the gases out of the air. And then in 19 –

Robert Buckley: Now, you were saying now when you did leave the country, what did they make you sign?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. When I left the country –

Robert Buckley: In Germany.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. When I left the country, again, you had to have a sponsor. But when I came to New York in the harbor, even before we pulled into the harbor, we stopped outside. I saw the Statue of Liberty. We were still out in the water. And the government representative came on board. They made us sign a statement that the government has the right to draft us after six months. We didn't know that before.

Robert Buckley: Now, what did you think about that? After seeing what went on in Europe. Germany lost the war, the aftermath of war. Now you come to America …

Hans Bluehs: Yeah, it was a little discouraging because even in Germany they had propaganda movies that showed, for example, the Germans were used to sing and march. And they says, "Don't march. Walk." So then I came over here. Now they wanted me to stop walking, marching again.

Robert Buckley: So in other words, back in Germany they want you to get out of this Germanic attitude of music and marching and military.

Hans Bluehs: And so, you know, if I wouldn't have signed that statement, they would've take[n] me back. So I signed it and it was almost to the

day two years I was drafted. It was October 1953 to 1955 and of course –

Robert Buckley: Now, how did you feel about going into the American military, the military that beat, so to speak, that beat the Deutschland?

Hans Bluehs: Well, that kind of made you think because, you know, what we were trained originally with. And all of the sudden, you have to completely saddle over. But I began to put some things together; said regardless of who it is, it seems to be the same thing. Follow suit because most countries draft. Most countries try to fight wars. Not for the same reason; others try to just, you know, try to defend themselves where Germany was trying to take over the world. And so the training. Once I went in the basic training 8 weeks, and then I went 12 weeks in the machine shop in Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

[0:35:00]

Robert Buckley: Where was your basic at?

Hans Bluehs: Basic was in Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Robert Buckley: OK and then from there you went to?

Hans Bluehs: Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. And I had a 12-week machine shop training there. And here though I was an automobile mechanic, you'd think they would put you in the motor pool. But after the aptitude test, that's where they send me.

Robert Buckley: That's the military.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. And then when I finished that, I was assigned to the ordnance department at Fort Meade near Baltimore for a short time. And then I was transferred to the 579 Signal Corps. I was their backup man. I had my own shop then with all the machines and the lathe, the milling machine, the shaper. And in case of combat, I would be the backup man, I would fix the equipment.

In the meantime, we didn't have to go in a battle somewhere. I worked in a second army field maintenance job where I ran all the machines.

Robert Buckley: So that was during the Korean War then?

Hans Bluehs: Yes, just towards the end of the Korean War.

Robert Buckley: You said you had a couple pictures here.

Hans Bluehs: Well, yeah, this was when we were drafted and in basic training.

Robert Buckley: Oh, yes. OK. Which one is you? Do you recognize yourself there?

Hans Bluehs: Yes. I'm the third one right here.

Robert Buckley: OK. And that other picture was what?

Hans Bluehs: And the other picture is after that I went to a non-commission[ed officer] leadership school. And then I was sent to Pittsburgh to defend the city of Pittsburgh. We tracked all incoming-outgoing planes, sometimes night mission, 24 hours a day for a whole week. And I was corporal of the guard. We lived in Mount Oliver and so I spent seven months – the last seven months there.

Robert Buckley: Now, after all your exposure to what went on Germany, now you come to this new land, America. You end up joining the military. Now you made one other change in your life—a big change.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah and, you know, because of looking back now and see what has transpired, gain more experience, you got a little older. And so I was really thinking about the future because I was already married, and my wife was pregnant. And after I came out in October, my oldest son was born December 23, 1955. And so, naturally, you think about those things—your responsibilities.

And my wife and my sister knew another German girl, Maria, that apparently somebody made some return visits on in Germany, but she was not a Witness. And that's how we got introduced to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: You mean somebody was calling on them in Germany?

Hans Bluehs: Yes, and then she came over here. And then she was telling – what she had learned she was telling my wife and my sister, and they really enjoyed it. So when I came home, they were trying to tell me about it, and I was willing to discuss things with anybody and everybody, and I could easily throw them off. But then my sister says, "I'm going to bring you a fellow here next time you come and let him talk to you," and it was Mark Harding. He had lost an arm on the New York Central, and he was one of the elders in Orchard Park. Of course, we didn't call them "elders" then. But he

came over and gave me a talk. And he opened up a book. This was a blue book and it was *The Divine Plan of Ages*.

Robert Buckley: With one arm.

Hans Bluehs: With one arm. There was the pyramid and all the timetables and I tell you I really didn't get anything out of there, but it was meaningful to him. So after he was done, my sister asked him to stay and have lunch with us and he did. And so she also asked him to say a prayer over the meal, and that's what really touched my heart. When he said that prayer, I knew it was coming from his heart. It was not something written down or something, you know, that you constantly say the same prayer. And that's really what touched me so then –

Robert Buckley: Well, what was the beliefs of the Witnesses that attracted you so much–other than just the prayer—in view of the fact of your military background, the Hitler Youth, what you saw in Germany, the spirit of nationalism?

[0:40:00] What was it that made you really want to make a big change because the Witnesses are conscientious objectors?

Hans Bluehs: Because here's an organization I think for the most part is, the big change is that they want to accomplish the same thing on a worldwide basis: to be united, to be peaceful, to get along with one another, and that really impressed me. Rather than doing by war and forcing people, here it was through a loving act.

Robert Buckley: You mean so instead of having this attitude of one race superior to another?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. That quickly diminished because, you know, we saw what happened to the race. They didn't have all the answers. There was a lot of problems. And so that quickly diminished, and now we look to something that is really substantial. And so as I showed interest, he asked me to take a book along that was called *The Truth Will Set You Free.* Now, that title kind of impressed me, and I took it along.

And what I read in there—and then the first thing I got to read was about Abraham, that he had a son by a concubine. I said, "Wait a minute. That doesn't sound like a God of man." Because I was thinking of marriage. You have one wife. I didn't understand what happened back there with concubines. And so I wrote my sister, "You ask Mark to explain this." And she saw Mark at a meeting so

she asked Mark to – I want some information on this. He said, "You tell Hans to look it up himself. He knows enough about the Bible." So that's how it started. So when I left the army in 1955 –

Robert Buckley: So that was when you were still in the military you started this discussion.

Hans Bluehs: Oh, yeah. I took the book with me.

Robert Buckley: OK.

Hans Bluehs: And I remember even going in the dayroom. There was a Bible, and I was trying to read the Bible but make sure nobody sees me. There was some kind of a feeling. I don't know why that is, and I think a lot of people have that type of feeling. And here's such an encouraging – such an important book and we seem to kind of …

Robert Buckley: Shy away from it or are ashamed to read in front of other people.

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. And then when I came out of the army, then I stayed with my sister for a while. She had a book study at that time.

Robert Buckley: And what do you mean by "book study"?

Hans Bluehs: A Bible study where Jehovah's Witness[es] try to teach her the Bible.

Robert Buckley: Oh, I see.

Hans Bluehs: And so we just sit in. We found it very intriguing. And Wally Wilson, who is the individual—he was the assistant congregation servant in Orchard Park. And we really prepared. When I first started, I would read the paragraph and read the question. I couldn't find the answer. But we kept at it, and we went to the meetings right away. Came Sunday, we went to the meeting and out in service as well.

Robert Buckley: What do you mean by "service"?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. Well, he invited us. He says, "Would you like to go out in service with me?" And so I had him explain it to me, too. He says, "Yeah, you know, we want to share with others what we have learned. And so we go from house to house and tell people. And if they're interested, we even place literature with them where they can read on their own the *Watchtower* and the *Awake!* magazine."

And I thought that would be good, and I went out and went out to work with him.

And if I had to work on Saturday morning, for example, I'd come home from work and I'd call him up. "Wally, let's go out and do some street work." He probably went out in the morning, but he wouldn't say no. And so we studied about three chapters in *This Means Everlasting Life* book. And then both my sister and Wally, they moved to Florida and that was it. So then we learned with studying with other people, helping them to learn the truth.

Robert Buckley: So now you changed your whole attitude and thinking about war, going to war to fight. And what is your attitude today about war, taking sides politically during a time of war?

Hans Bluehs: I think the big difference is that Hitler's teaching, the Hitler movement and from then on, was to harden your heart, really bear things and to be tough where the truth has much different effect. It kind of softens the heart. You look at an individual as an individual, the same creation from God. And it doesn't make a difference whether an individual is born on the other side of the river, or on the other side of the ocean. We're all basically related. And so that teaching about a Jew or a Polish individual or a

[0:45:00] Russian because the people basically, the common people, they get along with everybody, and that was really nice to see. And that accomplishes a lot more because it's not forced. It's not by force that it's driven into them but by encouragement, by teaching of principles and laws and adhering to them.

Robert Buckley: Would it be possible now maybe perhaps we could meet your wife and we'll do that? OK, why don't we that? Introduce your wife, please?

Hans Bluehs: Yes. This is my wife Gretl. And she has a similar experience. She was born just on the border between Austria and Hungary on the Hungarian side. And she had to flee because of the Russians coming in, and maybe you could tell that.

Gretl Bluehs: Well, it was shortly before the war was over. We had the German army came in, and the Russians came in.

Robert Buckley: Came in where? Where were you born?

Gretl Bluehs: Oh, sorry.

Robert Buckley: That's all right.

Gretl Bluehs: In Hungary in Rábafüzes.

Robert Buckley: In a German community you said?

Gretl Bluehs: It was in a German community, yes. And shortly before the war was over, I would think it was around January-February when the German soldiers came in and they – we had to leave because they took our home as a shelter while the Russians came from the other side. So from there we had to flee, so we were actually in the war, right in the middle of it.

Robert Buckley: Right in the middle of it. Now, you were saying that you saw some of the persecution of the Jewish people?

Gretl Bluehs: Yeah. That was before when Hitler marched into Hungary. Just about a year after that, they rounded up all the Jews. And it was really sad because we had very close friends. They were very dear to us. So he took all the Jews, put the men, put them in the barracks and the children and the mothers together. And only once a week they were allowed to go to the city. And they had to have a big yellow star on the left just so that they were identified. But nobody was able to talk to them or greet them.

Robert Buckley: Now, why was there a German community in Hungary? Give us a little bit of the background. What was the reason there were so many Germans there?

Gretl Bluehs: Well, before World War I, our section, that part of Hungary, belonged to Austria. And after the war, somehow we just fell to the Hungarian government.

Robert Buckley: OK so that's how that German community happened to be there.

Gretl Bluehs: Yeah.

Robert Buckley: Did you hear anything at that time once the Germans took over against maybe the Bibelforscher or the Gypsies or other groups?

Gretl Bluehs: No. We never heard of anyone. Only – there was only one man in our little town. And he was known that he was communicating with America with an organization that we didn't – he wasn't known as a Bibelforscher or as a Bible Student but he talked about it. He taught about the Kingdom, and he said that there's better times coming. So he was kind of an outcast; people thought he was

crazy. Although my father thought he was a good man. But nobody wanted to associate with him. That's the only one. And then later when we were deported from Hungary to Germany after the war –

Robert Buckley: Oh, you were deported?

Gretl Bluehs: Yeah, after the war. Because we were Germans, the Hungarian kind of shift us out. So the same man that we didn't know that he was a Bible Student happened also to be deported in the next town in Germany. And when he was buried, he was buried by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: So he was one of the Bibelforscher?

Gretl Bluehs: Yes, he was.

Robert Buckley: And now, well, why weren't the people interested in the Bible? Weren't they Catholic probably?

Gretl Bluehs: They were mostly Catholic. The little town that we lived in were, I would say, 90 percent was Catholic.

Robert Buckley: And were they very supportive of Hitler when he came in?

Gretl Bluehs: The majority, including my family.

Robert Buckley: Now, how did you and Hans happen to meet, if I may ask?

Gretl Bluehs: Well, we met in Germany because when we were deported, we were deported to Germany, Bavaria. And our two little towns were just close to each other, so we met each other at the dance hall.

Robert Buckley: Ahh. Well, you wouldn't by chance have a picture when you first got married? Would you happen to have a picture of that? Maybe we could show it?

Gretl Bluehs: I think we do, yes.

Robert Buckley: A picture of what now?

Gretl Bluehs: This is of our wedding picture.

Robert Buckley: OK and when was that?

Gretl Bluehs: It was in 1954, April 10th.

[0:50:00]

Robert Buckley: And was that in the United States or in Germany?

Gretl Bluehs: Yes, it was here. It was right here in Lackawanna.

Robert Buckley: OK, very good. Now do you have another picture there you wanted to show us?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. This is our children and Hans's wife, our daughter-in-law.

Robert Buckley: Can you hold it this way a little bit more? Yeah, that's better. OK so the light's not reflecting on it. Thank you. Now, who is that again, please?

Hans Bluehs: This is my – Hans's wife, my daughter-in-law by the name of Julie. They live in Atlanta. And Hans is my oldest son. Then comes Anita, my daughter, and the youngest is Karl.

Robert Buckley: Now, as you take a look back at life and what you folks have gone through, what do you think about life – OK, you can put the picture down now – and all your experiences in life as to what you went through in Germany, as to what you saw now as one of Jehovah's Witnesses?

Hans Bluehs: I think it really taught us a vital lesson. For example, the hatred, being perhaps superior to someone else is really devastating. And now that we have learned the Bible truth and have God's feeling on the matter that you don't judge a person by his looks or where he's from but by the heart condition is what counts. And we have the evidence now. We look at in our congregation of some 90 publishers, we have individuals that come from China. We have individuals that are from Poland. Others are Black. Others are German. And then many that I hear are also descended from the various countries, and what a happy family that makes.

Matter of fact, we appreciate it so much and felt that we had wasted so much time on the hating side of it. I took an early retirement—I was 57—because we wanted to tell people and help them to learn the Bible principles and laws how life can be much happier instead of having this hatred with other nations to really look upon this as being one family.

It kind of hurts even when you hear right here in the United States when they have to say, well, Italian-Americans or African-Americans. We're all of the same people, God's creation. And

when we look to the world around us, we see the variety in spring and summer the variety of flowers. What would it be if we only had one flower? Say, for example, it would be dark or white? But the variety makes it so interesting, and that's what we appreciate about the organization with Jehovah's Witnesses.

Robert Buckley: Well, Mr. and Mrs. Bluehs, on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I'd like to thank the both of you and Hans, in particular, for sharing your background and experience before you became one of Jehovah's Witnesses as to what went on in Germany. And there's one last picture I'd like take, talking about flowers and that. And maybe you can point out as to what this is on your wall up here?

Hans Bluehs: Yeah. This is the edelweiss that grows up in the mountains. And those are cultured ones that I grew in my garden. But they're always high in the mountains. They're a protected flower now. And the reason they grew so high because the seed is so small. And even if you grow a cultured one, you have to put the seed in the freezer for three days so that the shell cracks. Otherwise, it never germinates.

Robert Buckley: OK. Well, once again, on behalf of the Holocaust –

[End of Audio]