

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Erich Kulka
June 8, 1990
RG-50.030*0119**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Erich Kulka, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on June 8, 1990 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

ERICH KULKA

June 8, 1990

Q: Mr. Kulka, could you identify yourself? Give me your name, and where and when you were born, please.

A: I was born in...

Q: Your name, please.

A: My name is Erich Kulka. But my former name was Erich Schön, yes. I changed my name later--uh to honor my wife, Edie (ph) who was born Kulka--as I would not be of a German name after the war. So we chose with my son the name of... to honor my late uh wife, Kulka. Yes, in '46 I changed my name. Yes.

Q: You were born when?

A: I was born on the 18th of February, 1911.

Q: Where?

A: In Vsetín. Vsetín is the district town in Moravia, which is part of Czechoslovakia. I'm... When I'm born so it was a part of the Austria-Hungarian monarchy. And my parents also spoke German, uh mostly German. It was a little Czech, but so I am bilingual--Czech and German--but my schools only was first school was German, and other schools was Czech. Other schools - the high school and others - school was Czech.

Q: Tell me about your growing up in Vsetín. About your...

A: So I...we had...we were five uh siblings. Yes, I had two sisters and two brothers. We were five. My was, it was, my parents were observing Jews, not the...not too much (ph) rich Jews, yes. Conservative Jews, yes. There was a synagogue in this city of Vsetín, this town of Vsetín. There were about seventy families, Jewish families. They had a synagogue, a hazzan; and then we had... I got a Jewish education, a Bar Mitzvah, and so on. There was so and so, a small organization Hevet Lavan (ph) organization in this city, in this town. But later we, I...uh the trend was to assimilate. Yes, to assimilate in that you would be _____ into the Czech community, and my education and culture was mostly Czech. But I always...my parents observed. Yes, they had of course, a kosher and a shabbat but later it _____ that I visited _____ great uh festivities like uh, uh, Rosh HaShanah and uh Yom Kippur. And this I keeping very strictly. Yes. Yes. So I make it, my father was in the First World War; and he was uh invalid. When he came back, he was invalid from the 1st World War. And my uh...uh my...we...my father had a shop, and uh for the fabrication (ph) of liquors and food shop, yes. And my mother helped him; and it was a family enterprise which

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

2

we helped, all children are when they are little, in this. And I studied first the school in Vsetín the basic school, later the high school in the _____ town of Valasske Mezerici. It was about twenty kilometers, so I have to drive everyday with a train there. Yes. Later I have a commercial school, a special commercial school, and uh, school for, special school for wood industry. Yes. Yes. My profession was, I was educated as an expert, wood expert for lumber and this yes. And we had a family enterprise, a sawmill in this Novi Rozenkov near Vsetín and later in Vsetín. And I was occupied in this, it was my job there. And so I also made in woods, the manipulation of lumber and wood, yes, yes, this was also my, uh, my occupation and so I, it was on the Slovak-Moravian border, this. So when the occupation came, the German, so the Slovak stayed a so-called free, and many Czech officers when the Czech Army was dissolved after the German occupation, so they flew, they tried to escape to their Czech Army which were formed at the abroad in Poland, in Soviet Union, and in England. So and, they tried to, illegally, to cross the borders and one of the illegal possibilities was also this...this uh...uh border from Moravia and Slovakia, Novi Rozenkov area. It was just tightly under on the border. So and this I had the possibility to manipulate in the woods, and I knew this so, so some friends came to me and asked me I should take some people who were very engaged in this and so I brought them to the place that I knew they will be brought to, through their borders illegally.

Q: How did you that?

A: Now, look, I still had a car. And yes, and I could move with the car on this, uh this manipulations of this lumber, manipulations in the woods. And uh, so these people who were in, I had a paper that I am uh...that I authorize paper that I can move in this area. Also when the German came, immediately, so they were interested in factories running, yes. They get, they get lumber, they get uh materials. And so these people had also some legitimate information. They are buying the woods, and so I can, I cut with them through the woods. And uh, then I give them to other people who had, who can go across. And so it succeeded uh several times. But then one of these groups was caught from the Slovaks, on the Slovak border, and they were given to the Gestapo, and so also my name appeared in that and so I was involved and it was . . .

Q: What happened to you at that point?

A: So at that time, first, first I was uh, they arrested me in Vsetín. Yes, I remember, the 27th of June. June 1939, after three months of the occupation. And we were arrested in the local uh arrest of the Czech police and it was not at war. So we also were put the for trial for the Czech uh uh courts, yes. And uh, this still was, they must prove to you and so on and so. But nevertheless, the German took us away to the Spielberg barrack (ph) of the Gestapo prison and they in the first, it was I think it was in July, and when I came to this place, to this Gestapo place named Spielberg (ph), so the uh there were orders under the SS and they were very young SS men, and they tortured the people and in this one-half day I was tortured so much that in the whole five years later I didn't experience such a torturing like this. This half-

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

3

day review. Are you interested in the details?

Q: If you can.

A: So they put us on the wall, yes, what twenty, thirty uh prisoners. Before we were accepted through all these procedures, and the SS men came around and always they give us a kick, and once the SS man took my head and kick me against the wall. And then the blood came from the nose, yes. The SS man told, look the Jews, dirty Jews what did you _____. You are a swine. Lick. You also lick it, to lick the blood. I refused. I refused so he beat me. And I still refused. So he took another and told, look we will give you some sport, some training, yes and they took me in this cellar of the old fortress Spielberg (ph). There was some I don't know, uh, there was, anyway, when you are going up, stairs. And the stairs are creaking (ph) with mud and so, and one SS man stood up and the other SS man followed us underneath the stairs and he asked me I should like a snake, I should creep (ph), you know like a snake to these, on the stairs. And he beat me with this roll (ph) and so when I came to the top, so the SS man was at the top, he hit bucket of water, yes, and he took the water against me, so I gliched (ph) on this and so I make it two or three times, till I couldn't walk. Then they took me up to their room where they are making guards, and they gave me two bucket of water. I should uh I should keep them, and they was very heavy, and they took cigarettes and they make the cigaretttes extinguish on my breasts, yes, and so I cried and I, I fell and I lost my conscious. Yes. And soon and then they poured on me water like when they come to me they put me on a cot (ph) _____ a huge book (ph) of marmalade (ph) and they beat on this thing, on this thing, and it was a noise, a noise that I thought I will be crazy. And then I still left, uh, lost my conscious, and they still put water on me, and then they told me, now you dirty Jew, so you must wash yourself, you are dirty as a Jew. And so they dessimated me. I didn't know what happened with me. I was like , like a berifted (ph). And when I washed myself, and from the hairs it was dirty, with this, with this marmalade. So they told me now we will go to the reception. In the beginning they may have guards very exactly it was 39. What will you do when they are asking you what they you are black. I had some blue on my, yes, so I wouldn't, I didn't understand that. So they told me, you will say _____. If you are asked what did you fall, yes, did you fall, _____, repeat it. Then I came to this reception room, office, the SS men, and some prisoners and they took me there and they asked me for the card and then they asked me wherefore you have this black uh, this black spots. I told them, _____. So they laughed. _____. Then they take me to this, to the great prison cell that was about twenty, thirty prisoners, and they told me they they had some of them also had similar experience. And the next morning, we came for a doctor; yes, we should be checked up, and how we are healthy and so. And so we stand naked, and the nurse, which was a prisoner doctor, look at me, and he told me, look, you have here something, hernia, you know what is. But I had it never, so I didn't knew what it is. And he touched it here and it took uh pain. Yes. I told him what happened, how from you have it, and so I told him. And I told all, tell it to the doctor, yes. I have, I didn't undertstand what he mean. I came for a German doctor, yes, a young German doctor, and so I, you there, he told me, Jew, and so are you healthy and so. And I told yes, I had hernia.

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

4

"Where from you have it?" So I told the _____, , you know, the guards make me with a strong sport, yes, exercise. And he called_____. What, the guard. Call the guard. He was crying, he was very upset. Then they came, these two SS men that made with me this spot, you know, and he told, look, this Jew is complaining that you make this thing yesterday, this uh strong exercise, and he got this hernia And they go, what, believe this Jew and they give me a kick, they give me a slip, and I was lying on the, on the ground, they standing in front of me. And told, it seems that you didn't get, you didn't understand, it is, you hurt it already, you are lying, Jews always lie, and you hurt it already, and yes, I am the witness. And so they were standing in front of me and I saw them and the doctor was laughing with hands, and then so I saw what can I do. So he asked me what therefore, so I told yes, I was lying and so are the Jews. Otherwise they would bring me once. He told me look this, if you are released maybe you can bear it on your own cost, and so on. And so I, but at this time my wife, I could write yes her. And so I write her a letter and she had an advocate, and also the firm you know that I was occupied, where I was, I had a good position, they need an explanation, an explanation of how their deliveries (ph) were and so on, and they didn't prove that I am guilty. So they have no proof, only the uh telling this. So I was released for the operation. Yes, my wife and the, it came, this lawyer came and spoke with me also with this doctor. And the operation, and they released me in August under the condition that I am under supervision of uh Gestapo and then I came to this firm and I give explanation and I was operated. They operated me and after the operation I was from Vsetín, I was...I couldn't leave there. They... I could live only in the village, in the village near Vsetín about twenty kilometers where my wife also lived with me and I could work only as a worker--manual work, yes. And so I worked, and I must always...every week I must give a report to the Gendarmerie state police station that I am here where I was. But after a year, they came and arrested me. Yes. They arrested me. It's true. I still kept some connection with the underground.

Q: Talk about it.

A: Yes. But I still kept, I don't know, somebody had complained, but after a year they came to this, to my flat in this Novi Rozenkov, the village and they arrested me and I, and also my brother-in-law Milan Kulka. And then I went, I came to Dachau, as a preventive, a preventive custody. They told if I would be released I am a danger, I endanger the revolution, the peaceful revolution of the German and so, so it was only an excuse. And so, I was so-called a political prisoner. But I was still a Jew, yes. But it keep their rolls something, there was some political reasons, I still had the file at the court, yes, and they still, the court was interested where I am for the case, if it would be involved some more people who I was involved in this action, so they still would have contact for the prisoner, even if they were Jews who they arrested. It was the action of the political prison for political reason as opposed to the mass, mass deportations and so. So this is only that you see then I had a good training for this, all this. How it was, and also I had this connections, you know, also when I came to Dachau. There was also some people who were already there, and they had connections to the underground, yes, to the communists, and so and I always find these

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

5

connections. Yes, I could find always these, and this helped me a lot of this.

Q: Describe Dachau, please. And describe how you got these connections, what you did with them.

A: Oh yes. The connections helped me. So first, I was, the second time I was, before I came to Dachau, I was in the prison, Gestapo prison, in the Kavnitzovi Koleie (ph), in Brno, the capital of Moravia. Yes. Kaunitzovi Koleie (ph) means the communist college. It was a college for the students and they transformed it into a Gestapo prison. Yes. And we came this, there were mainly a communist uh, they try it, the whole communist net to developp and they told some Jews about it and Jews that we should have their service, of you know, to clean, and to get to this good food. Yes, under the supervision of the SS men. And so we also had also to clean and there many offices of the SS interrogation officers. And we have to clean in the morning this, and they had a radio there yes. So it was not there, so we listened to the radio what are the, the news, and so we have had what is the development in the war, yes in the beginning _____ - how it would development (ph). And we would have BBC yes. For instance, they also had BCC. And when in the morning, at 6 o'clock there was nobody in the office, yes, so we took and there was also a hospital in this, which the prisoners were brought in the hospital because they beat the prisoners and they were not in a stage to be interrogated so a prison hospital. How's that? And there was a doctor Primar Horn (ph) from Nihlava (ph), and I told him all these messages which we had from this radio, yes, and he was interested I should tell him always, we knew when the prisoners came, the new prisoners, so the SS men told you will take these prisoners to, to a cell and we brought them their food but it was always in the, we were guarded when we did by an SS man. Whenever, as we could, always a few words mentioned to this. And so, one . . .

Q. Back up a second. The doctor was part of the resistance?

A: Yes, yes. The doctor was part of the resistance, but he was also the prisoner doctor.

Q: He was a prisoner doctor?

A: A prisoner doctor, yes, but he was a part of that, and so once came a prisoner named Andrusek from Dachau, yes. From Dachau. And he was a very, he was very stout, looked very good, yes, and uh I was also we were for the disposition of SS men if they needed me to clean their boots and to clean something they need. And I have had when they, in the door, they ask him how that you are looking so well, to these prisoners. And he told, look, when I am, uh, I comprehend when I have, understand _____ the Furher's, so I am also look good for a prisoner. Yes, I am, I make a good _____. And when this, so I thought that this a spy yes, but when he came out so the SS officer told to the others, look, there is a prisoner - it is not so bad in Dachau. Look this prisoner should tell to the SS how he, it's good when they are pursuing the orders of the SS. And the name, I remember the name Andrusek and I told this name to this doctor who was in the resistance, and when he, it

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

6

was like he was electrified. Andrusek, look Andrusek must first come to the Revier uh, this hospital here before he is interrogated. It is very important for us. So he asked me that I should give him an ampoule (ph), you know, in the bread, when we were distributing the bread, and so I do and look we will get ample, take it. There is, uh, and I told him the name, and he got fever, yes, he got fever, so he was given to this, he was taken, they put on the doors that he is ill, and they measured him the fever and they took him to this hospital to the doctor who was in the resistance to the Horn. And they instructed him more what he should do, and so on yes. They instructed him before he was here. Yes, he came from Dachau, but he was involved in this communist net. So later, when he was a prisoner, I asked him how, what are you doing and he told, look, I am also in hospital in Dachau where so, I mean he was a prisoner, but he was a nurse in Dachau hospital, in the concentration camp, yes. And he was involved in these communist activities so they took him away and asked the Gestapo that they should have an interrogation and they should uh, they thought they will get from him more information about the net of the communists. And he told me, and in the time I already signed the _____ to Dachau, that means they gave me the _____ for Dachau, so I asked him what I should do when I came to Dachau. And he gave me address of the, some man, _____ who later became a Minister of Interior in the Czechoslovakia government. And he was a person in this, in this, and he was a scribe, you know, a clerk, as a prisoner he was in charge of this administrative work, in the, administrative, in this prison, in this prison hospital. And so when I came there so I told him and he was interested how _____ and so on and he gave me aid, what should I do when, when it came the transport. He told me, look, you will _____. Yes, will you, no. So in Dachau, the truth in my time when it was 1940, it was in the autumn 1940, so when we came in Dachau, all the Jews came out in this _____ company, penal squad, Jews, in the penal uh, uh, penal squad, there was a special penal barrack, uh, penalty...

Q: Oh, penalty.

A: ...a penalty company for Jews. All the Jews are marked in the penalty sign--a red uh...uh opposite of their...of their Jewish David Star. They got a...

Q: It was a badge?

A: A black badge, and they came to this penalty block. There were about two hundred Jews. Yes, and the penalty block was, there, it was a special, very cruel _____ block master (ph), a non-Jew, a communist. _____ But he was a sadist. He was already since 1935 in the camp, and they killed what you will hardly believe your, now with cleanliness (ph) in the, with tidiness, with cleanliness they killed the people.

Q: Explain.

A: I explain. The block was very nice, yes. There was about, there was divided in two parts, a

living room and a bedroom, yes. The living room had, the floors were lacked (ph), you know, lacquer. Yes. There were water closets, _____ and these uh, _____ tables, and the people, every man has a very small cart, yes, if he must get his raiments, yes, his clothes, and we had a nerostar (ph), fork, knife and spoon, and even if we eat in this block in the evening and the morning, so we must took all these three nerostar (ph) (utensils), yes, utensils, and in five minutes it must be clean and given back in this spint (ph). And they _____ was the service of the, who helped the block master (ph) they help, yes, they are prisoners. And if they found something tiny which not so advanced (ph), he got some penalty. Either he didn't get much food, or he must kneel (ph) or he has penalty work and so on. This is one. Secondly, there was the most _____. We were going in this room, this uh schlaf (ph) room, the night when we were. . No, there was a day room and a bed, night room. Yes, we had such _____ and so, yes, _____ yes, we get such a _____ and we must slept there with the . . and the beds were very nice. The blanket military is. But what was the, we couldn't even the cleanness was so that we couldn't enter the block in our shoes, boots or sandals. That was very, the shoe were, the boots were very different, very - we only could in the scarbats (ph) come, that the lacquered floor will not be spoiled, yes. And once, and before the block there are _____ and the shoes were put in, yes, and so everybody had put their shoes in, and when he was going from the block he was uh, took the boots outside of the block. And then in the midnight once, it, the stubnitz (ph) took their whistles and Juden _____, you make it dirty and now it will be made sport (ph). And they beat us and when we to the court, and the court was full of mud, and in the panic in the house, that nobody could took exactly his shoes from this _____, so some took uh wrong shoes, some didn't took any shoe, and now they make sport. Neither of these , you know, _____ different to, like a snake...now then, the _____ beat us. (The policemen beat you?) Yes, the prisoners, the prisoners beat us. (The prisoners beat you?) Yes, the prisoners were creatures (ph), yes, and the SS men looked, and once he come, look, back in the blocks. So back in the blocks, the _____ were dirty from this mud and the shoes we put in this, in this _____. And some we were dirty. So he took, you must make it clean, half an hour, all must be cleaned. And so we go in this washroom, and where the clothes and water was, yes, to make us clean, and also the, the _____, the uh floor, yes. But then they listed us and checked the, who was clean and can go in this, to sleep in his bed. And the blockeldest (ph) looked and counted (ph) and then if he noticed that there is some dirty on there still on the floor, up and to lick, lick, yes. And he (to lick it), to lick the dirt, you know, this. There is somebody would not, so he, he put him to the floor, he stayed him here with his foot, and he make it so long as he didn't comprehend and somewhere that, and _____ were brought to the _____ house, yes. So, by the cleanness they took us, they killed the people. And on the day we should work so the work was useless. We should put the stones from one heap to another. We should snow (ph) in our mountains from one heap to another. It was a chain. And the kapos beat us, yes. So always there were two, three killed or were wounded to brought to the infirmary, so this was the Dachau. And so, I was there about a half a year and I told it to the Skopsiva who was on this infirmary in this prison, this infirmary, and he told me look, you should, when there will be a first transport, you should, should ask that you should be sent

for a transport. And uh, there was a transport from Neuengamme, yes. And so we came to Neuengamme.

Q: Describe the trip, would you please?

A: Yes. So we were already, in Dachau we formed about a group of five friends from Czechoslovakia. The names you are interested. Yes, the names are Otto Kraus (ph), the former coauthor of my books; my brother-in-law, Milan Kulka-- brother of my wife, or first wife; and Ernst Schön--he was my far cousin from Verski Brod (ph); Aaron Rosenfeld (ph). That was that. And so we were four. This such a group, and I was five. And we always help each other, yes, in these different situations. And so we came to this camp, Hamburg Neuengamme. This was an _____. It was the out building camp, yes. They really needed very hard work. Yes. They didn't beat. If you could work, they let you early alive. But if you couldn't, so they put you in the hospital and either you cured or you died. Yes, so it was, but when we came to this camp there was opposite to Dachau. There was nothing there. We had no beds. We lie on this straw. There was no floor. The floor was only the mud, yes, the pressed mud, yes. And we lie on this straw and when we were going a commando, especially Jews, they were commando _____(ph) Elbe. It means it was a Elbe_____, a river, a huge river which was coming from Czechoslovakia to in the mountains of Bohemia, and it is is going to the sea in Hamburg. And there were several branches of this Elbe and one of these rivers were full of mud. Was made to be, to carry the boats, you know, to clean it. And so we were about command of more than thousand, mainly Jews, who were going every day, maybe two or three kilometers far from this Hamburg Neuengamme, from this camp, to the place where we make this, to clean this from mud, this Elbe canal, this channel. They would make a channel. They were building a huge fabrik [Ger: factory] of bricks. And they should, the bricks should be on the _____, on the waterway brought over. And there were different, first there were some canes (ph) your know, canes, some small ships, you know, when the barges brought the mud on this canes (ph) this small ship, small boat, yes. The boats are full of this mud, and we had, like in the ancient time, there were planks we had with the ships that brought this mud from the canes to the _____. Yes, they were very deep, the canes, these boats were deep. And on the open, the boats were, were planks, very strong planks, and their carts, and on these carts, this mud which we brought when the ship, when the shoals (ph), on the shoals, it was on two rivers, yes, we were only half standing in mud. And they brough with these carts, this uh mud to the shore, yes, and it was long, very long, and from this shore, there were make an elipse (ph), maybe of one kilometer, an elipse (ph) route with planks of about 30 centimeters, you know just about 50 centimeters, five centimeter high and 30 centimeters wide and it was make an elipse road. And on this elipse road, yes, they make, they put about three hundred, three hundred uh prisoners with carts, hand carts, yes. And when, when this mud was put on maybe 50 meters long and about 3 meters high, and they in running they were going and there must be loaded the full cart, all the prisoners loaded their cart, and they were going on this, on this road which were, the purpose of this was that there were gardens, and uh fields, and they make the fields should bring this very fruitful, uh fruitful mud of Elbe yes, they

should be more fruitful their gardens and their fields. They should be better food then.

Q: Was this mud from the Elbe that they had brought up?

A: Yes, brought it up. And it was in there riding, you must keep up this, the cart, yes. And running for another. And so it was, it was just a circle of death. Yes. Todes Runde (ph) And so the only, the only uh rest was when somebody couldn't and he collapsed. That you couldn't go, only you could keep the cart on this 30 centimeter wide plank road. So he collapsed. And when he collapsed, so the whole road collapsed, couldn't go. So the kappos came and they beat this man who collapsed. You will go or not go, and so maybe he make some two or three rounds and he collapse and there were every day twenty, thirty dead which we brought in the camp exhausted, yes, from this. So our group of five we survived in this way - that the _____ possibility of us if you could read the shower to give the road to the carts, to run the carts it was very exhausting, it was very hard that somebody could keep it without uh rest. So we always could uh changed. The kappos allowed that if somebody of our five, _____ un voluntarily he told I will give up my place in the shovel (ph) to this man with the cart. And so we could give it up. Do you understand?

Q: Yes, so by changing with the _____ in the carts you _____

A: So, and so we could survive, yes. But later it was very hard and my brother-in-law, he collapsed and he came to the infirmary and he was, he caught the dysentary and he died. He died in September 1941, yes. Yes. And later I also get uh, poison, blood poison, from this dirty mud, and I had uh, _____, blood poison, so I still have a sign here. And they would amputate my leg. But still I have a connection with this, from this infirmary, of a nurse who was connected with the Skopsiva, knew him. And uh, I told him that going, he make me, he gave me something that a hole _____ which was put in this. It came out and I was cured. And then after somebody was cured, so he got as they needed to the working power, yes, so also to Jews they give a _____ to spare him a little. _____, it meant, it should be spared it should be _____ easier work. But for Jews the easier work that you must, uh beat the stones, to small pieces, to silt (ph), but, and in every weather, it is raining and not raining, it was for Jews. But, luckily, as my name was Erich Schön at the time, so they told that I am a German, so they give me the work for non-Jews from German. And it was the _____ you know, to repair the socks for SS men. It was a hugeh and so I got this work and in two months I could restore my health. And, but, and then it came, there came Ukrainians (ph) like in Poland, and so on, and this old guard ought to be changed. Yes, and _____ the Russians and _____ the prisoners of war and so. And so our group get the better work, yes. And I also can, yes I had to do with wood, so I told them, carpenter, so I could help by the building of a bunker and later I get the, they built a factory, they built near the camp they built a new camp. And they kept the market(ph) at _____ as a prisoners war camp. Yes. And there were the same barrack, and firms which were _____ in Hamburg brought their machinery inside and they used the prisoners that they work on the machinery that they make for uh the U-boats, you

know, under the boats. Some machinery. And for Jews it was not, Jews, only non-Jews. But later when they still needed us, and under the surveillance of _____ you know of _____, the military in Germany. But still we came, we were in the uh direction of the SS only by night, but on the day we were in this factory which was nearby. And the Germans, they were, they were interested in work, in really work. And so they couldn't beat us, yes. When they would have, and so I learned some skill in this. And later it came, I was there still till the end of October, it came an order from Himmler, you know, the boss of the SS, that all the Jews should be concentrated in Auschwitz, from all the camps. And so it come the order also to Neuengamme and so they have bought the Wehrmacht, not these five Jews, we have all five, they are specialists, I will not give them up, give them free, only when I get uh specialists _____ uh specialists which have the same qualifications as this, as we were. Yes. But he told it an order from Wermacht and so Litkmayer (ph) in charge of the SS men, SS men at Lagerfield (ph), he was very furious, but later he brought from Auschwitz five non-Jewish uh locksmiths or some that were in, and we were exchanged. He told, now you have uh, your some faharbeiter (ph), you experts in this, and he gave us free. And so we came to Auschwitz. We were five. Yes, we came to, in Auschwitz, they told us you are very important people and you will get built your own house in the east and so they brought us with a special train, with two SS men in guard, in the depart we were only five. (_____ in a special train ?). No. In a personal (ph) train. Look, first we got all our civilian clothes, my watch I got, and all we get, and we were still political prisoners so we didn't and then we have a code message with the resistance and so on, and _____ and they give us also food and a special SS man came and brought us in the department of this speed train. And so, he told us, and we believe it, look you are going to the east. There is a special uh, uh, a special _____ uh building for Jews, where they will live, and you are specialists, so you will have a very good life, and he showed us a uh, card _____ for the important of the transport of these special prisoners, it is necessary to use this speed train. And we were in the department, a special department, we have this un, _____ and there was an SS man with, and uh, uh, at the door, and the SS man ordered, the officer, not the officer felt we were surgeons (ph), and they were seated opposite us and they were nice to us and we believed him and told him, look we will be nice so if you promise me you will not make some attempts to escape so I will take off your handcuffs and so he brought us to Berlin and he gave us car fare and we came to an other train, and we came to Auschwitz. Five. In Auschwitz, if _____ the people, the prisoners from Auschwitz they talk to us. In Auschwitz _____, so they are killing the Jews by gas.

Q: When did you hear this?

A: It was in uh '42, in autumn, uh, I think in September. But I couldn't understand this. What _____. Yes. I couldn't imagine how they are killing the Jews by gas. But I experience something in Neuengamme. In Neuengamme, especially the Russian and the Ukranian who didn't understand any German, so when they were ill, so they came to the infirmary, when they were healthy, and they were warned. They should not go. But they, they, they believed yes, it is infirmary, it is very good. So when they have fever, very high fever, and they were

suspicious of typhoid, so they make them _____ with ink pen number here or here, and give them injection in the heart and they were immediately dead and they, the corpses they laid them in uh mortuary. This we knew, yes. That but otherwise in _____ - there were some numbered prisoners, with numbers and this we experienced. So when we came to this Auschwitz, so first, we felt the smell, and we told, ah, this is the soot from mines maybe, so what the rumor. And then they give us to another SS man, _____ then they beat us in _____ and we must, were running about _____ two or three, in the camp, Auschwitz main camp. And we, so hugh camp, with these hundreds and hundreds of lights of electric bulbs on this wire, on this barbed wire fences. It was night, yes when we came to this camp, to this Auschwitz, and uh, it was early of the hours after the, they put us in the cellar, yes, in the night where we slept. And in the even, in the morning, they came, they came, the Polish prisoners, to us and they wondered where from you came, only a group of five, who are you. And so they were interested in us. And so when they saw that we have all this stuff, they told, look, give me this stuff, and I will give it to camp. They will take it anyway from you and if you will give it to me I will give it to the camp and you will get some food. You will see how nice they will be to you. So mostly, and I have golden Omega watch, and they give also to me, and I had this Omega watch, give to somebody the watch, I will give it to _____ and you will get bread and so. So I didn't know what to do. They were very friendly. They were prisoners as we were but all prisoners in form. The next morning we are claiming (ph) to be accepted by SS, yes, to make _____ the _____ who we are and so. And there are SS men. And this prisoners, these Polish which were visiting us in this cellar, they were with him. They belonged to this squad, so-called Politische Sheiber (ph). They were helping to introduce to making to work, you know all these forms to fill out, who you are, what you are _____ and they were _____.

Q: They were collaborating with them?

A: No. They were in his command, and he was the boss of them. And so when I came to this, so he had the list also from uh _____ which were probably all the belongings which. And he wrote where have you got the watch. I told him I lost it. What, you lost it. And they gave me a slip. And so I saw this man who was, who was behind him uh took this watch from me and he make _____ so therefore I told. And when he slapped me, so I told him, look this man asked me for the watch, I give him. What _____. Yes on the order _____, yes, yes, he took. So he told something to the SS man. Maybe he will give it to him, and it was O.K. And so it was. And now we were stripped naked, I will remember how it was in the prisoners. This was my experience. And then, we had some, in Hamburg we could have got in one month about twenty marcs, yes, from how much from friends. There was a kantin (ph), marks, German mark.

Q: Where did you get them?

A: From, from my sister. At that time my wife still was in, in _____ Rozenkow and my sister-in-law was also there. We could write. From this camp we could write, yes.

Q: And you could get money by mail?

A: By mail, not directly. Jews couldn't. But there were non-Jews who had no money. So they wrote to their people, look, make contact with this and this, and my wife and sister-in-law gave the money to these non-Jews and they sent, and were delighted when they get forty marks, twenty, yes. And so these twenty marks I still spent, but I gave it to the _____. I pick it on my _____. And so others had it in their toothpaste. But they took all away, but this they didn't discover, that I have. And so I came the first of this group, for under the shower and there was a man who took my hand and tattooed a number. _____. Yes, this, and I took this number.

Q: O.K. Can you hold it right there? Can you bring the camera in to see the number.

A: Yes.

Q: Donny, tell me when you have it.

A: Yes, and so in this moment, I thought, it came that I will be killed injection, the final injection in my heart and I will be dead. As this I experience in Neuengamme, how they do it. Yes. And so, uh, no, it had nothing order came, also this number and so on and we came on a block in the Auschwitz main camp when we were uh, vetoed (ph) to these people, Polish people, look, you took from us away these things, and we are old prisoners, so you cannot handle us as we are so low in camp. And he told, what three years, there are seven years camp and in fourteen days they were away _____. Yes, they killed them. Yes. After seven years, the, you were three. So we came on the block when we were, ah, I forgot to tell you one thing. In this, Neuengamme in this factory where we worked for the, there was also Jew, a German Jew who was a black-yellow, it was asocial worker, asocial element. We were told that he was rassenshender (ph). He was arrested for to have connections with the Aryan women, yes. But he was arrested also since 1935 in the _____. He was very old hefling and he was in connection with the _____. The Germans who were in the prisons, they took him on the camp as _____ from the profession, criminal profession. They had green winkle, green triangle, yes. But this, the Germans, the SS used them to bring in the camp, and they had the great positions, blockältester, lagerältester. They were the bosses. They were prisoners, but the bosses, yes.

Q: Let's hold it there. We are going to change the tape and then we will pick up with the story.

A: Yes

TAPE #2

Q: sympathy

A: No. I am telling you that you, I didn't wrote it in the books so detailed, yes, but I now, when I make some lectures, so I know how the people ask for details, so therefore I will explain it to you. Many people ask me, how did you survive?

Q: That is the big question.

A: Yes, and this was this moment for survivors, yes, this Willie, this _____, this Willy Nahman (ph). It was a lot for us, yes, this Willy Nahman (ph).

Q: Alright, if you. Alright, why don't you hold on. Let's give them a minute to pipe in the air conditioning, and then they going to have to turn it off, because it shows on the camera, on the soundtrack. O.K. Say the name again on the tape, when we get to the tape a little slower.

A: O.K.

Q: O.K. The story from the man at Neuengamme , his name was?

A: His name was Willy Nahman. He was from I remember from Hamburg. He was uh, the age of 30, but he was arrested already, he was a German Jew, and he was arrested in 1945, first in Dachau and then in Neuengamme and then in Sachsenhausen. Sachsenhausen was another concentration camp. And he was connected with the groups of . .

Q: Oh, excuse me, you mean he was arrested in 1935?

A: 35, 1935, he was a German, yes. And he was arrested in a group of _____, it means the criminals, yes, in Hamburg. And they cooperated together. For them it was not important they were Jews or non-Jews. They get together, work extremely hard. And he was involved in this uh, activities of these criminals, and they were friends, very close friends, before and also in the camp. But then they divided the Jews, as Willy Nahman was a Jew and sent him to uh, to Neuengamme and later to Auschwitz. But as a prisoner, for this also, later these criminals from Hamburg, from Sachsenhausen, about thirty of these criminals, they had choose them, and brought them to Auschwitz, and make of them kappos and the blockelder. You know, the bosses of the, which helped. And so when we came on this block, and Willy Nahman with us, he was also, he took a number I know, 720777, yes 47, 47 was his number. He had, we were given the numbers, I still remember exactly. And so we, we were on this block and on this there block some new prisoners coming to the deportees from Belgium, I remember. And these were all prisoners. The blockältester told you will train these new prisoners in how they should mitseup, mitseup (ph), how they should keep the discipline in the camp. And you will get a little, a bit more of their soup for this trip (ph).

And when we are train, this soldier blockr master (ph) came, you know, the boss who was _____ and he saw the Willy the Nahman, oh _____, you old friend, you are here, how are you, and he told, he uh booked (ph) him and kissed him and they were friends, and yes. And Willy go, look, this _____, look the Poles they are bad to us, they beat us, they, uh, they get the property from us, the Poles yes, the Polacks. They were all against the Poles. They were not very accepted from the Germans you know. And so he told no, look, so I will give you the best of beds, yes, do us and you will get food and so. And so, we were, that was the first step. And now we were on the second floor. You know there are three bunks all there. And we were on the third, and now we on the first row, and we saw how the stubnitz you know what is a stubnitz. These were the aids of the blockältester the prisoners who prepared the food, who they kept for cleanness, who punished, yes, who were very severe to the, and they were aid of the - there were about four or five these prisoners, stubnitz. It is the aids. They were prisoners, but were the aids of the blockältester and they did what he would. So we knew that always when they were prepared the food for them, so they cut a little of bread, they cut a little of margarine, they cut a little of marmalade, yes. And they give smaller portions to the, and what they make they organized for the blockältester vodka, spirits, liquers, and sausages and so. And they brought him, uh, he had his own uh room in the block, yes. And they brought him always, he got the full, a good supper and all. So they take care. And he didn't care what they are doing with these prisoners, if they gave them the full portions, you know, the full rations or not. And we saw it from the, although we knew this practice already from Neuengamme, and we were curious if they will also steal it for us, for our rations. And we, they manipulated it and they brought uh, you know, they have that butter toast they make, chips of the margarine which they stole, and they make this chips for the block master (ph) and they eat and they also give to the blockältester yes, the sausage. And we told them, and we saw they didn't stop before on the rations for us, they also kept. So we told them, look, it's not true. We are all heflings , and so we, you should not betray us. Yes. Oh, you are Jews. So they were very harsh to us, and very bad. And so, they give us a very hard work - we should take from the kitchen, you know, these kettles that are very heavy, and we should brought these kettles of soup to the block. Yes, it was very heavy, and we should get them a little soup more. And we saw how they are are handle and smuggle these spirits _____ and all these things and from the _____ we observed. And so when we were going to this uh and brought these very heavy trunks (ph), with these kettles yes, it was 200 liters, so once there was a lagerältester, you know, lagerältester , was the boss of the whole camp, the prisoner boss, and he also was a criminal and really was going and he was, he Willy let fall these trunks, and he _____ yes, and they meeted them, and they were friends, and he asked him, look what is, what is, how are you and so on. He told look these boys they are betraying us and they are cutting off this and this and this. He told this and there, when he told, and they are handling spirits. (Spirit is liquor.) Liquor. Oh, when he said liquor, what, liquor, where is it. Yes. (Laughter) And he came with two SS men on this, in this project (ph), and they have this liquor, two or three, and they really brouhgt them, and they took and they immediately they changed this stubnitz (ph) to the penalty company. This Polish. And we should be on there, on there, we were replaced. (You were replaced.) Yes, but this was the career (ph) but the blockältester didn't

like it also and the, we told him, look, we will get your food, your food-vodka or don't care. He shoot him. But that was break through in the Polish heirarchy, and the Poles are very angry. The other Poles, you know, very angry that we got such a protection from the lagerältester and so on. And so we were in danger. Our blockältester as well. So he told us, look, there is a camp in Birkenau, it is a nice camp, a new camp, and they are needing for slosher (ph) and you are blacksmiths, and so you are in _____ and this is a fantastic camp and there is lying, the money and gold (ph) and money and milk on the street. So he was, but he told the truth. And so we told no, what can we do. And he signed us for the Birkenau, all five. And one day there came an assessment at Birkenau, was about three kilometers, two miles away from Auschwitz. And we came, the SS men came for us and we was going on that card (ph) of assessment, and first time we saw what he meant. First the prisoners, female prisoners, their head was shaved and they looked awful. And when we saw the presence of the hats right, that we should not see them. But we saw them. We were shocked. When we saw the first time prisoners, the women prisoners there. In a, a, _____, you know, a situation that we never thought in such an illumining (ph), such a degree. And then we came to this camp and we saw there, there were on the side of the streets, there were great crocks, they were filled with milk, filled with meat, and uh _____ and some _____. So we saw it, what it is. And then we came to this camp, this Birkenau camp, that was full of mud, yes. There were lying corpses, yes, and we came to a block a nice wood block, and to a Polish blockältester who this is nice, very block, and we always thought transport came, and they were gassing people and so were there in Brzezinka (ph). There were nothing in this camp. At that time, _____ was no, there were bunkers for the uh camp people that was adapted from a farm house, these two bunkers, yes. Behind the camp in the woods, Brzezinka so called, Birken-wood (ph). It was about two miles behind the camp Birkenau. So in this Brzezinka, in forest, there were from the, there was a former village and the village the, the inhabitants of the village were pulled out, and two farm houses were adapted as gas chamber. Small farmhouses. I have the exactly plans if you will later, I will explain to you. In the death sector I will explain. And they make from these two farm houses gas chambers, yes. Two barracks where the people took off their belongings and then they were pulled to these gas chambers naked and they were poisoned there, yes, and from this they were pulled out by _____ commander and put in the graves, in the uh, mass graves. (Yes). Yes, in the mass graves. It was near and but nobody in the camp, and there was a special squad, special detail Sonderkommando, so called Sonderkommando, and they were in a special guarded block, yes. And nobody should uh, they should not inter_____ (ph) with other people from the camp. And I also was curious, transport came, and this organization and somebody had some vetment (ph), some clothes, organized from this, or some things, or something wearing from transport, where is transport. In Birkenau there it was a _____, a secret, yes, like a secret. But I was very curious, I always, it was, it took fourteen days or something. (What took fourteen days?) Fourteen days, you know, this situation that we couldn't discover what, how they are killing the people. Yes, it was, it was nobody could come there from the normal prison. It was uh fenced. Yes, and so. But always the signs were there yes, and there is rumors. And one day, I must tell you, when we came, so we told to this, there was prisoners, Polish prisoners, who

had division of the barrack where you should work, yes, so we came and told we are sloshers (ph), here, we are blacksmiths, _____. Where is your workshop you know, uh, where we can work (place to work), place to work. And they were laughing. What you are crazy, work, prisoners, huh, maybe in some future. So what are you from, from _____. So I told him blacksmiths before I was _____ blacksmith. But, so we have no such work now for blacksmiths. No work. And so we were on this block and uh, about one week, and uh, we was still not divided into detail you know, and once we were going on this uh, lagerstrassen (ph), lager road, and there was a kappo. He was the commander of one thousand prisoners who were maurers, uh learning how to lay the bricks uh and to make it work for building the huge, uh, _____ for the building of this huge crematorium for crematory which were at that time in building, had not been built. (This was '42.) Yes. (1942) '42, yes, in the autumn, yes. And so we got going on this street, and once it came such a very nice kappo, prisoner, yes, had vetment (ph) according to his measurement. Yes, yes, _____. And now the _____, told Willy, Willy, you are here, you are here. They were friends from this camp from the Hamburg, this criminal squad and then later in this Dachau and this Sachsenhausen, so they look at him, and so what are you doing here. So the Willy Nahman told him, yes, we are here, but the Polish they will not give us the work and so what you are slosher (ph). So he was going there, Wiland (ph), the kappo was going with us to this Polish uh clerks, these Polish prisoners who make the detail, who make the decision where you should work, yes, and he told, look, these all five, I need workers, specialists, they will, uh will take care for my, for my claim which they have some uh _____. You know, what the maurers had for the uh, what they need for we should sharpen. (Oh, to sharpen knives.) Sharpen knives, and these and this, I need all the five. And he took us five in his commando. (He saved your lives?) Yes. He was a mauer commando, a brick layers commando, and uh mauer, which are making the mortars you know, yes, this, so he was a great boss. He was a great commando. Nobody could resist him. He was boss. So yes, I took them, and so they did nothing, and O.K., so you are in his commando. And we were in his commando, and he was nice to us and he asked, he, uh, he learned us how to organize. So he sent us, we had some boxes with some tools, and he sent us where the civil worker worked, you know, the civil, civil worker. And opposite of the prisoners workers, the up building off the camp were many private firms which were contracted by the SS, and these private firms had so-called civil workers. (Civil workers?) Civil workers who were the experts in some food, in some, some experts in some disciplines, yes. To make roads and to build this and this. And this had a bunch from Gestapo and they were always guarded by an SS man and they could tend twenty prisoners, to their help, and auxiliary prisoners. Yes, but it was forbidden that they should not speak direct to the prisoners, only this guard, yes. And the guard always was, they only give orders what to do, but we should never speak with them. But nevertheless, this SS guard was corrupted from them and from kappos and they went after these people who were gassed in gas chambers so all their belongings were brought in a special magazines (ph), yes. And from these magazines the kappos took it and give it to the civil workers, and they brought eggs, they brought sausages, they brought yes, and this was their, for them . .

Q: Who brought the eggs and the sausage?

A: The civil workers. The civilians. You know, who was, they were in the camp, they were not so guarded, and they could get from the farmers and so on, and also money was there, yes. So this, the people who were gassed, they had much money and they were found. And the kappos came to this and they had an organization. They knew how to get on this, uh, this belongings, yes. And this, uh this, Winand (ph) he, for instance, he organized the Schnaps (ph), this liquor, yes, and he told, look, take this liquor in this uh our box (ph), that we have the tools and bring it to this and this kappo (ph). And we didn't know how dangerous this is. We didn't know what he send us. So we thought, and we were not caught at this time. So we were, yes, we were in his protection. And as I _____, so I have these twenty marks, you still remember, and we told him, so the kappo (ph) is so nice to us, yes, and we should give him a present. So we five, our group. So we decided, we did, Willie Nachtman and I, we would go to this Winand (ph), this kappo, he had his own room, and we came to him, and uh, he had very good supper with rootgaren (ph), with sausages, and this, this, and we told him, look, you are very nice to us, and we will give you present. And we brought him this, this, this twenty marks. And he laughed and he brought a bundle of _____ and he light his cigarette with this, cigarette. See. The shock from him was nothing. A bundle of, of . So he laughed. But he saw that we are _____, it's O.K., it's O.K., so I will, you can rely on me, and so. And so later, and later there was a need of slosher, there was a need of installers, tilers, of electricians, and so it came and built, and they make a maintenance squad, prisoners maintenance squad. And the uh sharführer (ph), an SS man, and he asked us to keep all technical installment in the camp in order. And so he always took a professional for every, and we worked then regularly. We had a, a workshop, and so we knew the organization, we had connections to the kappos, and so we observed what is it. So during this two years, this twenty-eight months exactly, so I could observe, and we were going from one camp to another. There were several camps in Birkenau. And we had a boomshk (ph), you know, a permit, that we are authorized to repair these pipes and this and this and this. And we always get from this sharführer (ph) a letter where we should go. By the time we could choose alone the work where we will go, and we brought him always something, what he would have, a gold or something, what will you bring. He knew, he used us to organize for him. From Kanada (ph), from sonderkommando so. And by this, we, we, the best _____, we had no hunger. We had so many to eat that we could support about twenty others, yes. And when we came in the kitchen, there were in every camp kitchen forty kettles of uh steam kettles, where it was cooked, the food for all these prisoners, and uh, they asked we should repair these kettles, and by the time we learned how to, in the beginning we didn't know nothing, but later we knew how to handle it, to repair and we always get some food for this repairing, from the SS men, from the accessory men, that they were, couldn't handle it and they needed it and so. And so we could organize food for other people and to help them. But then I saw what it was not possible that we could survive. I saw it was not possible. Why? That we were secret keeper. Yes. _____ like the sonderkommando. We see so much, so we got on the list of secret keepers. (Secret keepers?) Secret keepers, bearers (ph), ah, yes, you know, secret bearers (ph). And we knew, we should be killed, we should be shot, and there were some periods that they would exchange us. But the other ober____führer

(ph), he was interested first that the work is running and secondly that _____ organize the valuables which he always wanted valuables. (_____) Yes from this, from this also special. So he kept us. And so, that we, we, were in the ground (ph), and we were from _____ that we must give them all the reports. So what I observed every day I came to the ramp, I saw the selections exactly, yes.

Q: Back up a little bit. You said that saw the crematorium being built. Describe, can you talk about how it was built, and when, and when the first gassings started in the crematorium itself?

A: The crematoria were built up, yes, and they were ready I think in March, the first crematorium in March was put in operation. (March '42?) Yes. We cannot came to the crematoria when they were operating, but when they were not operating some pipes were leaking or something was necessary, an electrician also. So we came and the guard there, and the guard was very exacting. He couldn't speak with the people in this crematory, it was sonderkommando, but we saw, we saw the corpses. We saw not the - and this, you know, as I told you, this, this uh bunkers, these adapted crematories, stopped the work and the sonderkommando came, but not I must, I forgot to tell you one very important thing. How I came to contact this underground. So there still was, as I told you, a block when the sonderkommando was guarded, and there were about three hundred men, and they were under the guard always going to this Birkenau, to this woods, and they came back and they, it was prohibited to contact them. And when I was going with my uh, with my box and one of these blocks, sonderkommando, blockältester, the Jew, when I came nearer I saw that he was a Jew, and here S S, Slovak, you know, a very nationality, he had a sign. When you have this Jewish uh David Star. So you have inside the sign if you were Greek, G, if you were Czech - C, if you were Slovak, an S. So I saw Slovak, so I asked him that is my countryman. _____ What are you doing here, I asked him where from you are, and so. We were _____, we were friends. Even _____. And he told me this--I never forget: "We are Chevra Kaddisha." You know what is the Chevra Kaddisha.

Q: Yes. Explain it to the camera.

A: Yes. Chevra Kaddisha, so it is a saint [NB: sacred] burial society of Jews. So I didn't understand. I was shocked. And he told me, "Look. There...in the woods about two miles, there are some adapted gas chambers from the farm houses. And this sonderkommando is pulling out the corpses of the deported people who are in...the forced by the SS men. And after they are dead, so they are pulling their corpses from this _____. And they are burying them in the mass graves. Yes. But there are nearly 100,000 corpses in those graves, and uh the water is poisoned. Yes. And the water for the whole vicinity. And so it was decided to burn---not to bury, to burn. So now this sonderkommando was more...hundred more people; and they are digging out these graves, mass graves, and the decaying corpses they are lying them on their on their lorries--small wagons--narrow way, right. And they are putting them about 100 kilometer farther. And there, there is a piles on the...piles from the rails and they

are pouring them with the fluid; and with the fluid, with the shmatas--with the rags. And they are burning them [with] this. And this sonderkommando which you see, they are on the night shift." And he asked me if I can make a lock or something to repair for him. And so he told, but I would not believe it. I couldn't. And he told me (whispered), "You don't believe it." I couldn't believe. Look, I was three years in the camp at the time. "And look, so you will see it." And I didn't know. A few days, came an SS man for me to this kapo. He needs a schlosser [Ger: "locksmith, mechanic or fitter"], a blacksmith, to repair a bearing in this wagon. You know a bearing. And he took me and brought me there, and he stand nearby me when I make this metal (ph), this bearing house from this wagon which was broke. And I saw it. I saw how the Slovak sonderkommando, Slovak prisoners, uh buried...uh took...dugged out these open graves. And as they came, the corpses put on these wagons, and brought them back where they were. And from far, I saw also this white bunk house, bunkers--this farm house, where this...I saw it. So from this, moment I believe it. So how hard was it belief to other people, yes. Now, and so...and this, there was the first sonderkommando from Slovakia which came in April 1942, and they were took from these one thousand men, three hundred; and they brought...they used them for this sonderkommando. Yes, and there was the first sonderkommando. And short after, I think in December, they organized a mass escape. And somebody traited...was a traitor and who thought he will save his own life, and he told it to the SS men. And the whole sonderkommando was uh ...one day the whole sonderkommando, and they took them to Auschwitz I and they shot them and burned them.

Q: Tell me about the mass escape which was planned.

A: Yes, the mass escape of this sonderkommando was planned at that time was possible to escape, the fences were not so tight, Birkenau, it was in the middle of the woods and so on, and there were some escapes, yes, but you must see that people refused to work. But in the moment when they refused to work, or didn't work good, the _____ they shot, the SS men shot them, on the spot, yes. And uh this, and their blockältester (ph) this Rosin (ph) _____, and still he is living. You should hear him. Yes, I will give you that. This Rosin, Arnold Rosin (ph), he is the only one from this other commando who survived. Only first. Others, all were destroyed, yes. It is in my articles. How, it is interesting how he survived this.

Q: Tell how, describe the plan of the revolt, do you know?

A: I know, look, they tried that they will go, they will uh, they will go far behind the, the uh fenced, behind the area of the, there was no fence. Behind the area where the, the bunkers were yes. It was not fenced. There were SS men, the guards, they were surrounding them, yes. And they told, they were, they were uh, inbofond (ph). There were some guards they will kill and they will go to Slovakia. They organize some cars, yes, and an SS man was involved in this who was a Slovak SS man, yes, a Slovak. And uh, they believed him, and uh, there very exact uh details are not now, maybe there was once, but that, that, and the fact

that it was uh, told to SS men, yes, and the one who told it, yes, they killed him with an axe. This traitor, they killed him. They killed him, but it was too late.

Q: The Jews killed him?

A: Yes, the Jews killed him. The name isn't known at all, in the details. And so, and exactly four days or five days later came a new transport from Polish ghettos, and from this transport they took a new sonderkommando, about three hundred men, and from this survived several and I have very detailed uh testimonies of them, and so, and also from this Rosen (ph). From this Rosen (ph) I have this hugh, he escaped later from Auschwitz. Uh we know how he saved Europe, how he saved. Look, it was forbidden to get from this sonderkommando commando, to the other _____, to transport to another, nobody could go away from this other commando. But this Rosen (ph), he found a, bread, you know, a whole bread, and when he break this bread, inside in this bread was a golden chain and a gold watch, yes. Inside, from the deportees. Someone told it will save his life, so brought him this. And so he was on the block and he gave this a _____ to the blockältester, _____. (Say it again in English.) Yes, the blockältester was the boss of the block, normally a prisoner or _____. And the schreiber [**Ger:** scribe], the clerk, who was his aide, was also. And he corrupted, he gave these valuables, these forms to them and they asked him they should transfer him to another block. Even it, it was written, they did it by the way he is a ill and so on. Even so, and through the infirmary they got him in another block, you known, transmitted. SO he was not there, in this block. And so he saved his life, and he is still living, yes. Arnold Rosin (ph) is his name. So this I will, (let's come back to you), yes, so now you see, so I, how I make the first contact with this other commando with all these people. So I had a survey, how, what, how the barracks. And so I give it to underground and it was the central, was in Auschwitz I, but there was some prisoners, Shmuleski and so on who came in this Auschwitz I who was a tiler you know from the roof.

Q: O.K. Slow down and explain a little more about this whole underground network and your involvement.

A: Yes, so there was an underground of mainly, in the Polish camps, yes, the Polish, but non-Jews. And they central was in the Auschwitz I camp, in the main camp. And the head of this, this I didn't knew at that time, but how was it, Cirankiewicz (ph), later the Minister President of the Polish Republic, he was and he was at that time uh, uh nurse on the, he was prisoner, political prisoner, Polish prisoner, and he was a nurse on the prison uh infirmary. And he has some group, so-called camp group (ph) of Auschwitz, the fighting group of Auschwitz, but there was Austians, some French and some Poles. They didn't took a Jew inside, yes. They used the services of Jews but a Jew was not in there, yes. And one of these liaisons was David Shmuleski (ph). He was a Jew who was fighting in the Spanish, uh, against Franco (. . civil war). Later he was transported when they lost, so he was in France, to Drancy, and from Drancy came on transport to Auschwitz. And Shmuleski came with this, but he has also very many friends in this, uh, underground. Yes. They trusted him. And so he was a liaison

between Birkenau and Auschwitz I. And when he was a roofer, yes, on the roof, you know, the tar, and on the roof is the tar, they were putting roofs and the covered with the tar, you know, with the paper, you know with this. And for tar, it must be the store for tar was in Auschwitz I, in the main camp, and so from time to time he came to Auschwitz I. We came also from time for some material we needed, so we came to Auschwitz I, only as uh with a guarded with an SS man, but we had connections. And this uh Shmuleski (ph), make the connections with this main camp, and they, and so I gave this and he told, you should all observe and tell me and we will, the Polish uh prisoners have contact with the Polish government in London. They have contact through Armia Kraiova. We have note from Birkenau, but we, he told us, not names, but he, and this he, he knew much, but we knew the details, more details. So I told him the details and he gave it further to this uh, to this uh camp group at Auschwitz, this fighting group at Auschwitz. And they have the contact. But later we knew that they are guarding only their own interests. For Jews, they didn't care. So we then, later we find some Czech-Polish, some Czech civil workers, you know, who worked, but they were Czechs, yes, and the detail how it worked we have three. And they came from time to time, in three months they could go travel to their families to Czechlovakia. And even if they were guarded, they were civil workers, as I told you, at the civil enterprise which were, so one was a carpenter, one make roofs, and one was expert for the canalization, yes for the canalization, the _____ the channels (ph), and for water pipes and so. We make with them connections and so were were connected, and we also, we could stole plans, yes.

Q: How did you steal plans?

A: Somebody would not believe it. How it was possible. It's already, I can show you a letter from Polish museum I got now, a certification for it . . There was a so-called Baulaitung of Auschwitz, a construction office, a hugh construction office of SS, who made the planning and construction of their hugh camps and of the cremetoria, the gas chambers, yes, there was a hugh office, there were several hundred. But they also took some prisoners, some uh, qualified prisoners. So there was, for instance, an engineer, Vera Foltinf (ph). He was an architect, an engineer. So they took him to draw the plans, see, in the office. There was Bitterman, he was an engineer, so they took him and he was in the commando. He took there and in the office he drawed (ph) for the SS men. And so we persuaded him he should make a small copies of the plans. And he smuggled it out, and we gave it later to these civil workers, and it came to Prague, and the wife of Kraus, my friend who was non-Jewish, and he was, he had contact through the Swiss consulate in Prague. And so the plans went to the Swiss consulate, through this. An original of these plans are in The Death Factory, exactly the plans, yes. They were later when it was this, maybe you know this, when it was revived the Holocaust when the CIA make these pictures, you know, the Americans photographed Auschwitz, (right), you know this, exactly, but they told they didn't knew. They never bombed. Yes. And later, after many years, they make, they published it publically, the, all these pictures. There were seven raids on Auschwitz, and there is also written that _____ is make according to that factory, they ask that the plans are so exactly,

when you see it from, so you see the prints, the basement prints, exactly what we stole from this, from this factory. So it was, and so we had luck. We were lucky that uh, there were many people who paid with life this activity yes. But, and so, that I told you, I was conscious that I can not, it was not according to the human calculation that you would survive. Yes. Especially they guarded us. Yes. So I remember once I was going, it was in '44, in autumn, I was going through the uh, the gate. And always there was a guard. And I always must tell hälfling numeral this and this number are going there and there. And he mark the number where I am in the camp. Yes. That is in evidence. I was going, always without guard, in this guarded area. I could go without guard when I had this permission; and I told him the number--73,000. And there was already 400,000 tattooed. "So what, 73,000, __ (ph) __? Repeat!" I repeat. He jumped and go and look on my... "And how's that you are not dead? You should be dead. This is not possible!" So I told him, "Look, I have this...I am expert in this." "Oh, you should not be...you will not alive. You will not wait, Ivan. We have five, you will not wait alive Ivan. You cannot expect that, Ivan. We will save you, yes, the Russians, yes," he told. _____. Five minutes before and we, we will shot you said the SS man, very, very angry, yes. So, such an experience. So nevertheless, so uh, I was uh, _____ crematoria then when they come and

Q: Can't hear you. A little louder.

A: I am... Should I jump to that moment when the crematoria were destroyed and when the uprising was, or still you have some questions.

Q: No, go ahead, I think we're ready to, that's fine. If you're ready to go there, then we're ready to go there.

A: Now, look, first I want you to know about the selections. So, if you have the plans, so you see there are seven camps in Birkenau, yes, and in the middle before the deportment, there were the women's camp, and then the other, the section two, section five. There was built a ramp (ph), a huge three-chain ramp through...

Q: Three-level ramp?

A: No, no. It's called a passing. You know, uh three-rail... the three rail, from Auschwitz station to Birkenau, it was about three kilometer, and the trains came directly before near the cremetoria. And the ramp was between, it was a dead ramp, he told us. It was a three-rail, and like a huge ramp, and on this ramp came the trains. There were sometimes three, five trains, and on every train there came about three, four, five thousand people. And we saw that the squad of the SS doctors, and their Lagerführer, they were making the selection. Yes, they were making the selection. And we saw it, how they were making it. And I was going to the ramp. In the selection, in the process selection, I could go there. But I had these _____, I was sure they will not let me, now they will not take me in. And I was curious how they were making this, yes. So uh, first when I was going from one camp to the other

so, it was between these two camps and I had to wait and in the other camp, this was a women's camp, and I had to repair some kitchens there, or some kettles, so I had to wait by the guard. They had the guardstube [Ger: "guardroom"], the guard house, yes; an SS man always guarded it. But when the transport came, I had to wait. The SS man was very curious, and he also tried to organize something, yes, when there was some food or something valuable. So they always tried. So I have to wait 'til he had time to register my name. And so I observed. And this time, I... I experienced a very interesting and moving, moving sense. Yes. So the whole, I net (ph) this hundred selections, I saw many. And everybody tell you, "Mengele, Mengele." It's not true. Look, the Mengele, they didn't very often the selection. There were twenty-three doctors--twenty-three doctors--who had the service for selections at the ramp. And sometimes also was Mengele; but Mengele was eager to have the twins, and the people who were not normal. You know, they had the _____ of something distracted people--he was interested in this. So he didn't...he didn't trust also to the selectees...to his colleagues who selected, and he always watched. And so did his _____, "Are you twins? Are you not twins?," and so, yes. Or, "What you are of profession?" And they discovered some doctors like Nisly (ph), and he took the doctors and they make for him this uh, yes, this searches of the...of the twins. You know, post-mortem, you know, post-mortem protocol.

Q: Autopsy.

A: Autopsy. They make the protocols, sign it and send it to Berlin (cough), and so.

Q: Do you want some water?

A: So this I saw, I observed it uh consciously, I would know it and so what I knew so I gave to _____, to _____.

Q: You passed the information along to the underground?

A: Yes, but once... Maybe this would be also interesting for you, the Shmulenski (ph), which I told you was the liaison between Auschwitz. And he told, "Look, we need photograph. The world will not believe in our reports. We need photograph." They asked me we should photograph. So I need a photograph he told, Shmulenski (ph). So photograph, it was very hard to, not so hard to organize, but smuggle in the camera. As the people brought many photographs you know, for the parents, all the equipment, they brought the whole equipment for the dentist, for instance, all the people brought with them. And once it came that we were going to the ramp, myself and Kraus (ph), my friend, together, and he saw a carriage, a baby carriage there, after the Holland transport came. It was only the ramp was clean, and still there was a heap of this trunks and of this and so the Kanada kommando took it away to this storage to sort it and to take the valuables from this. You know Kanada, what it was.

Q: Explain Kanada for the tape.

A: Look. The Kanada, it was a special squad--a special detail, so-called averamudienst (ph) in German. Averamudienst (ph). It means that they should clean, they should help when the prisoners, deportees, came. So they had the service; and they always told to the prisoners, in their language, "Out of the wagons, and you should go left. All your luggage, they will bring it in the camp. You should not care." And so they have the task to quiet them a little, yes; and there was also a _____ I can't. And after their...they have to quiet them in their own language. And the SS men were also behind them _____. And after their transport were selected and put...put to...brought to the gas chambers, out of the camps who were working, who were able-bodied. So then it was a heap of trunks of all this, and they brought with a list to the Kanada camp, where there was thirty barracks where all the belongings of these deportees were sorted. Were sorted and checked. Many people uh, uh sewed in their raiments, in their shoes, in every possible hidings, _____, and all. And this were, and the guard sorted, and when they found something so they must give it away. If a prisoner tried to organize, to take something for himself, so if he was caught, he was shot on the spot. But nevertheless, this brut (ph), this business with the SS man also tried to get something but had access, and so used the prisoners who had access and so on, yes. It was very complicated. And this Kanada, the name Kanada came as it is a _____ in Kanadas, _____ very far. They are rich people and they have a good living. Kanada, it was known, it was a dream of a welfare society, yes. So they made the name "Kanada" as this kommando always had...always had bacon, had food, had decent... It was a good kommando. A good detail. But they were guarded. And when somebody...many of them were shot for when they were caught from organizing. It was organizing. And, told when somebody would. And so I will come to this camera, and the Kraus (ph) took this carriage, and brought it in the camp. And the in the carriage there was a small package. Look in the carriage. We have in our maintenace squad, there came SS men, they would have to repair whatever, a lamp (ph), but he couldn't take it by a normal way. So he gave to us in this squad and make also a carriage, some baby carriage. And so repair baby carriage. There was not a wheel, and so Kraus (ph) in the first moment told, yes, baby carriage would be good if there is SS man, we will have a repair, and so I have spare parts, but what we found in this package was food, and there was a camera. A spiegel (ph) camera, camera, spiegel (ph) camera. It means mirror camera yes. And so Shmuleski came, and we showed, look, oh, I cannot . . . It must be a _____. Otherwise I cannot photograph. _____, you know. So his plan was that he will go on the roof, yes, and carry the camera to the roof, and manage to exchange a _____ and through this and make the shots. This was his plan. So he would not have this camera. So he, and he seek. But we would destroy this camera, yes. It was very dangerous to have a camera. So we have a, _____ when the _____ is going to make a fire, and so we have this in our, our equipment. And then there was a friend of Shmulenski (ph) who work on the water barricades who worked with civilian workers on the water and he was engineer of wood, and he was in our squad, and he sometimes came and he had the contact with this Polish civilian workers. Yes. And he told, no look, we can get three, four hundred cigarettes for this, and I will take it and I will give it to civilian worker. So, he took it. He took it and he brought I think uh about hundred cigarettes and divided. But in two months, about, in two

months we were called, schlosser _____, locksmiths in the...they should come to the blockführerstube (ph) in the entrance to the camp, yes. And by the entrance to the camp, there were a guard from Gestapo, they had two clerks, which should observe what happened in the camp, yes. In this, there was the office of Gestapo detail, in this uh, in this guard, it was a guard house, and there was, and we should go, it was called schlosser _____. But it was nothing because they always asked for something, if there was in another camp. And the Kraus (ph), was going there, yes, my friend the Kraus(ph). And yes, they asked for him. And he came in about twenty minuetes back he was bloody, he was pale and uh, he told look Brazovsky (ph) is lying on the corridor, beaten to blant (ph). Yes, Brazovsky, who took once the camerA: And he told me also I couldn't keep, they beat me so I must confess. I couldn't keep, I must confes. So he didn't go in the office and he returned back. What should we do? We are all involved in this, yes. What should we do? And this was a, _____, a very desperate situation.

Q: Hold it, hold this. You're right at the point where they need to change tape. Let them change the tape and we will pickup

TAPE #3

Q: O.K. Are we rolling? O.K. Let's take it back to that moment where you saw Brazovsky (ph) on the floor and they came back to you and you knew you were in trouble.

A: So and Kraus (ph) came to us, what we should do. We, there was a fiend of us who was in charge of the station for repairing the teeth for SS men, yes. They came there. He was expert for this, he was an artist and a doctor for, dentist doctor. (He was a dentist.) And he told them he was a friend was _____ and uh, in the reserve (ph). His name is Alex Rosenstock (ph) and he told look, I will give you a morphine injection. You will not feel it if they will beat you. Yes. And they gave him a morphine injection and he proved it, and he stuck it in, and he didn't feel. And he was going.

Q: This is Kraus, going back?

A: Can't think what he was told the SS asked him. He was then back, he couldn't, he came in twenty minutes, half-hour back, laughing. Back. Just laughing. And he told the story. I came to this office and there were two SS men, Lachman (ph) and Boger (ph), I knew them. There was a table and on the table was the camera and they _____ whip. A whip, yes, and it was a pistol. And they asked me did you know the camera. Yes, I know. How did you get to this camera? So I told them the story, I found it a carriage and I brought this baby carriage and we found the camera and so. So why didn't you give up the camera to the SS men? Look, the camera, it's like a machine gun, a machine gun, yes, would you shot me. So we need some cigarettes, so we tried. So, and for what reason you would have this carriage. Ah, this carriage, look, some SS would have repaired some baby carriage, so I told him I will make him a good service, when I can repair, so he told it the guard. So let us know the name of the SS man who ordered, who have from you the repair of a baby carriage. The guard's name I don't remember. So you don't remember, so they give me a slap, they give me another slap. Now, you remember. I cannot. So they opened the door. Look, you will look like this, like Brazovsky, if you don't admit to whom you made the repair. So _____ he told, I never will uh, never will uh, no _____ I never will. You speak another language? No. I never will tell uh _____, I never will an SS man to denounce, no. I never will denounce an SS man. So they give him a kick hard. Yes. Nothing. This moment when he told I never will denounce an SS man, why all the SS men were involved in some way with the prisoners, and so when they saw, this is in all prisoners, and he, he will never, in this situation he will not denounce an SS man, so he is a good man. So they kicked him out, and he came back laughing. He told I was so quiet with this injection, so quiet that I didn't feel it, danger, nothing. I was very quiet like comrades to the SS. So, yes, also Brazovsky they let him in the _____, was in the infirmary, and also.

Q: That's quite a tale.

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

27

A: So, also this, such, this not the only case. There were another when we have a radio, and so. But this, I never will forget, this one when Kraus came back laughing after this and told this story. Yes. But later, they make the photographs, later. There are known, these photographs, these three or four photographs, and I discovered in the bathroom they were made and the stories about them, it's not true that Shmuleski made them. It's told Shmuleski told he made them but it's not true. I later discovered who, why.

Q: Who made them?

A: It made, a Polish, a Greek officer, a young Greek officer. Who later tried to escape and were killed. Uh, I puzzled the place where from it was done. Shmulevski told it was done from the roof, yes, and he told him but he wouldn't _____. And so, but when I was in Yad Vashem working, and so I showed these photographs to a photographer who was there and he asked me how it was done. I told him from the roof. It is not possible, the angle is not possible from the roof, it is not possible. And yes, he was true. And later I know how it was from the frame, we found the frame of the gas chamber in the crematorium number four, there from it was done. Yes, so this is the story.

Q: Interesting. Let's go back to you, go back to Erich Kulka. What happened after that camera incident?

A: After the camera incident, nothing. Nothing. With this moment when he told if I _____ the SS man, it was forgotten - no medal, nothing.

Q: O.K. What did you do, you were involved with the underground at that point and kind of with a commando, what kinds of things were you involved in?

A: Look, always...every man who survived long time and held the position...look, it was the surviving. It was possible to survive for eight or three, four, five percent of people to survive. Who--people, prisoners--who had a luck to get the job which the SS men needed. This were the doctors, the nurses, and all kinds of artisans--tilers, and so on. They needed them. Therefore, first they had a better possibility to move. They had the possibility to eat, yes, to organize food; and they had always some connections. Sometimes the connections were very dangerous. The SS men shoot the people and so on. When they feel they are in danger, yes. So you were never very sure of this. So connections, I _____ in Kanada. And so, in the Kanada ...look, the Kanada...the details. Kanada was very, uh very severely watched, yes; if they are organizing, if they came to the camp, they were always checked. And so, in spite the SS men knew that they are organizing and in spite they always are interested that they should organize for them, yes. So it was so.

Q: Be specific. You are talking about bribes and the cheating...

A: Yes, now. So look, the Kanada had this special camp. It was E...Camp E... I forget. G camp.

I can show you on the plan. In this camp, there were about thirty barracks, like prisoner barracks. And in these barracks were sorted all the belongs which the...the...which were taken off from the deportees. Yes. And in these barracks, when they came, they was sonderkommando. The prisoners, they must go and take off all their uh _____. And in another barrack, they got another uh suits, clothes. So...and when they returned they must...they must make also in one barrack, and then another. So they could not keep, or very hard to keep, something in their raiments. The same was with the SS men, the SS men who observed; they came to the Gestapo, they came to make SS _____, shower, and in an elegant way. And also must keep their...their suits. They get other suits; and through the Gestapo...through the bathroom, yes. So also they could keep. So who could keep. Sometimes they managed. But the...the artisans, for instance, we were called to repair electrician, or to repair a pipe or repair something. I remember an SS man asked when we should organize for him a fur, yes. Organize it a fur. A real fur, yes. A nice fur for his wife. So when we came to this, when we have some work in Kanada, we knew that we would come there. So there the floor was...there was no planks, nothing. It was mud, on the...such...packed. Yes.

Q: Oh, O.K. Packed dirt.

A: Yes. Packed dirt, yes. And so we contacted these from Kanada, the prisoners which were in a neighboring camp. And he promised he will dig in in the floor something what we were interested, some ring or brilliant--something small. And we had in our uh boxes, _____, water crane (ph), uh, water pipe. Yes, this...what is water running, what is that?

Q: The water closets, they're for the pipes.

A: For the pipes. No, when the water is running?

Q: Faucet.

A: Faucet. And in the middle of this faucet is such a hat (ph) you know, if you can dismantle it. So you can in the middle of this such a hat (ph). And this we operated out, and there we put this contraband, you know. And we screwed it very tightly. And so...we were going, so we checked this and this. But he didn't find. And so, I wanted to how...how they traded (ph) the SS men with us. So before we came from our camp, it was the camp _____ to the camp _____, we had to pass three different guards, guard barracks, yes. And so when we came from one camp, so the SS men told, "Look, what you bring? I know the rings or watch or something."

Q: The SS men knew about this?

A: Sure. You in Kanada, so you bring this and this. They knew. And he found another SS man, and told, "Look, this uh blacksmiths, they will bring some valuables. If you will find them,

you can have it." So...so we were going through this. And the SS men [said], "You have something." "No. We have nothing." So we tried and _____ and they didn't find. And this SS man, when we came on the camp to this SS man who offered this: "So where have you...?" "Uh, be patient. We will bring it to you." So we came to our...our maintenance barrack squad, into shop, of the squad, and the _____. And for our eyes he was a good ring or something. He phoned to another SS man, before me, _____ you fool, how did you check these people. They brought it. Yes, so if, he asked how it's our secret. So this is the way, but we were sure, if he would find this prisoners who make this organization, gold or something very valuable, he would give him slip and he would sew in pocket. He would not _____. But even if he would find a letter, even so innocent letter from a wife to a man at another camp, immediately he would take a notice to a Gestapo office, and they would brought you and murder you and kill you. Just, even make a case, a great case of a spy. And I don't know what. But _____ they never make it _____, the SS men.

Q: They would put it in their pocket.

A: Yes, they were very eager to get some value from this. And this I knew. Yes. So this was, but it was dangerous, but it happened sometimes, this. So this I explain you, the Kanada.

Q: Take us down to the liberation and what happened.

A: Look, the liberation, so it was, you don't understand. I will tell you also that my wife and my eleven-year son came to Auschwitz. They were in Theresienstadt when I was already long time in Auschwitz. Normally, the deportees were always selected and the wives with children were put in the gas chambers. It was normal. But the first time into us, in September 1943, it came from Theresienstadt a transport of Czech prisoners. And no of them were selected and all were put in a special camp, so-called a Czech "family camp." In Birkenau it was a camp. And nobody was allowed to go from the camp, and nobody was allowed to go in. It was isolated. The people were not shaved their hair. They didn't work opposite...outside the camp. They get the better food. And there were rumors that they will be exchanged for German prisoners. Yes. And they believe it, believe it all. They had special rights, special conditions. And there was in my wife and our family, and my son also. So I also...yes. But we couldn't believe for the first time they took the transport to Birkenau. And the reason for this was that there were rumors that from Theresienstadt, who was proclaimed as special and prominent uh ghetto, yes, that the people were deported to the east and killed. There were rumors. So that they would uh block these rumors. And these people who came to Theresienstadt from the camp, they must write every month a letter to Theresienstadt or to other. And they wrote a letter and could ask for to send them a package of food; and they got the food from Portugal, from France, from Switzerland, yes. And they wrote letters to Theresienstadt, where their relatives or friends were. But the address to avoid any connection with Auschwitz; so they wrote the address: "Arbeitslager Birkenau." This [means] "working camp Birkenau." "Bei Neu Bieru_"--it's near Neu Bieru_. It was about nine kilometers far. There was a post office there, you could find it on the map. "Lagerstrasse"

and number--it is a street, a camp street; this house number, and this and this. So they avoid any... And so they came to [NB: from] Theresienstadt, a new camp, a working camp it's all. There were some...in the text we tried to mark it in hiding the letter that there is a camp of that, and we need some people that were already dead. But they couldn't understand it. But after half a year, they had decided the whole camp to annihilate. They put them all in the gas chambers, yes. And in this camp also was my son and my wife, and also in this transport. And by...it was in the records, my son at the time he was in infection block in this camp. And in this infection block were already about twenty prisoners from Mengele with the twins who make these experiments, yes. And my son, he was...he called a "pocket schwartze"--black pockets--you know...

Q: Black lungs.

A: ...this un infection, _____, this cough, it was infection. And he was put on this infection block with some others. And the people, they would not believe. If we knew it, or the underground, or on the seventh of September, or seventh March, we got message from family, from women's camp, there was a secretary, a prisoner, who had some phone call from an officer that they should prepare _____. Look, it means that they should prepare the killing of this whole camp from, the family camp. And we warned them, they would not believe it, they told it's not possible. Eichmann was there three months ago and they educated children, they had a school for children, they was interested in education. They could not believe it. But why believe and they ask me if we should. I came there only on my occupation as a plumber, to repair these kettles.

Q: So you saw your wife.

A: Yes. So with this they didn't knew it, that I have the wife, the SS men, in the camp. But through this...my profession, I could contact my wife and my son. And I arranged, she asked me, when she believed. Helga believed. And there were so many tricks what the SS men made they shouldn't believe that they believe more the SS men than they did us. Yes, I wrote it all, this. And I succeed, managed with a doctor that he gave to my wife injection and he was as some signs of typhoid fever and they took them one, one night before the liquidation of the camp, to this block, to this infirmary, epidemic block 32. And this they couldn't took. Only this best, there were some _____ so they didn't took this block. So they survived. Unbelievable, yes. I wrote this many, many times. I just wrote I will, maybe I forgot to give it to you, the first time after fifty years, thirty years, I wrote the story about my escape and survival, my son in a special about seventy pages. I will send it to you. So this is the family camp. It was liquidated in one night. It was under commando. They tried to make a _____, yes, to burn the blocks, it was straw and wood with some fuel, you know, in this lighters, in this fuel, when you have the lighters for cigarette, there is a fuels, some small fuel, ampules (ph), and this we delivered to them from Kanada, many, much, but they didn't believe and they didn't make it, an uprising. So that much details. So, this was the very strong thing. But now, will this sonderkommando, the uprising of this sonderkommando,

USHMM Archives RG-50.030*0119

31

maybe, and then the escape.

Q: Talk about you know and your escape from the train and your escape from Auschwitz.

A: Yes. So this sonderkommando, I give you a story. The escape. So now it came to the evacuation. We didn't believe and once it was in January, on the second of November, the gassing was stopped. I remember it very good. There was a transport from Slovakia and they was, there were no, they came all to camp, none came to the selection, none came to the gas chambers. And then, they ordered the dismantling and destroying of the gas chambers. Yes, yes.

Q: This is November 1944.

A: 1944. And before, also, there were a huge transport from Hungary. And it was the top of the destruction, they twenty thousand a day, during this Hungarian transport. And this sonderkommando brought about nine hundred people. And they liquidated two hundred and two hundred and for the liquidation. They other three hundred, these sonderkommando knew it and from the despair they made uprising and they killed three SS men, they wounded twelve, but four hundred and fifty were killed and they burned as the crematorium number four was put in fire and was put out of operation.

Q: You said four of us. You were part of this?

A: What I told for us. No. Look, I was not in this sonderkommando.

Q: No, I didn't think you were. That's why I . .

A: No. We observed this, and I heard it, how, and I believed in the beginning that it was useless, the powder, this _____ this powder for this, the crash of this when the roof collapsed, when the roof collapsed was so strong that it looked like explosion. But later it turned out it was not, and it is written, this article which I will give you. But now, this destruction. So the crematoria, this one crematorium was put out of operations on the 7th of October 1944, from sonderkommando. They proved that it was possible to destroy with own hands and force the killing facilities. But only the destruct (ph) group at Auschwitz, the fighting group of Auschwitz. They promise them help, and they never get help. In the last moment they refused, the Polish. And they told later, it was in a document, they told that we will dare to make an uprising only in the moment when we are in the such stage, endangered as the Jews. Until that moment, the Polish, the non-Jews were not put to the gas chambers from the transport, only when they were ill and. So later, three times they traied, they didn't keep their vow, they didn't help. So, there was one crematoria was destroyed by prisoners. The two other crematorias, the SS men, they exploded them. But there still are traces in Auchwitz, yes, you have the gas chambers, and the dismantling rooms, you can see them exactly. And they make a hugh dismantling commando, mainly for women, and they cleaned the bricks,

one brick after another, and they put it on the wagons in a very nice manner. Like the German are accustomed. And we, the schlossers, the plumbers, the artists, the commando, this Steimitz, Oberscharführer who were in charge of commando, he asked that we should dismantle this ventilaters, the pieces of the furnaces (ph) and we dismantled it and it was put in conserve with vaseline and put in tight paper nice and put in the wagons. And I asked this Steimitz, I asked him had Herr Oberscharführer, where did you get it. I was good with him, he asked sometimes what will you bring me, so I asked him, the Jews are already anihilated, and war will be finished. What will you do with this equipment? And he told me this. I will tell in German, original. I never forget it.

. I will translate it for you. "Look, Jew," he told me, "our Führer has a secret weapon. Now it will come over Europe. And then will come the downfall of the Poles and Czechs, and we will finish them quicker than the Jews." So it was on the 26th of December, 1944. I never will forget this moment. Yes. This Steimitz. I later found him...when I identified an SS man, I found him in the SS hospital in Zelek (ph) in Hamburg. So this is the...now the escape, yes. So it...one day, three or four days, it came ordered that they should burn all the documents which were in the blocks, you know--the cards, the names, the list, it was burned. The officers disappeared, the SS officers. There were only the surgeons, and these law officers. And on the 18th of November it was ordered evacuation. So there were still about in, about 50 or 60,000 prisoners in there all, the Auschwitz camps. There were many...39 camps, 39. And we... So I was Birkenau, was about 16,000, yes. First we tried...we had...we organized a nice uh clothes, civilian clothes. And the prisoners want to only for them, and good boots. And so we tried, we would wait when the Russian came, it was before. So we digged near our workshop a hole, and we tried that we will hide, make a hidden entrance. O.K., we tried; we are three or four. But then when the SS men make these empty...the camps, so they came with bloodhounds there. And if they found somebody they shot him on the spot. So we...we... So it is not possible; so we came to this transport. There was about one thousand, always one thousand prisoners, under the guard of these SS men, and we make three days march 'til we came to the station Loslau (ph). And if somebody couldn't go, and was behind, so behind was a special shooting commando, they shot him. And I think about half of the prisoners, still they came from our bach (ph) to Loslau to the station where they put us in open coal trucks. Open coal trucks. They put about more than one hundred in there. We were like sardines. We can only stand, yes. And during the trip, the train was going to Austria, to Mauthausen, through different uh ways. And uh many...there was snow. It was bitter cold and with high snow. And the Poles, the Polish prisoners, they jumped from the train. Yes, from train. It was an open train, but the SS men had a platform on the back, a platform. They had the two wagons, two person wagons, on the platform from planks; and they had lights, reflectors, and they had machine guns...in curves..many poles jumped in curves and so we came to Austria. The train came through my native land of Czechoslovakia, in the city Ostrava--which I knew very good, coal mines and so on. I known it's not far from my home. So there was a situation that I, the detail I will give you brochure, there was a situation where it was possible to escape, yes The train stopped there, and they make on the sideline a train, yes, it was not free then. And they make a rumor

there, the Germans, that the train is bearing the Germans who were bombed from the Allies, and they are telling them they are putting them to death. They would not tell that they are prisoners. And in Ostrava you have, there are some over-the-train bridges, and uh, the population told that there are Germans and they mobilized some Red _____, you know, Red Cross, the charity. And this charity came with two kettles of coffee or something and would help to their own countrymen as they are told that are bombed out, the Germans. And when the prisoners, so these kettles, so they try to jump, and the SS men make a barrier and would not allow the contact that when these charity men, _____ and this, and so when the guard came nearer and nearer, and we also jumped with my son, he was eleven years old, from this, and once I saw there is no SS men. They shrank (ph) together, but they, they prohibit, should prohibit the contact between these prisoners, they would that the prisoners should go back to the, the tracks and they should not make contact with these charity men with these kettles. And when I saw there is nobody, so I run away. It was midnight. There was shooting and so I, I didn't care. We were going, and running and running with my son and so we put off this prisoners' clothes and underneath we have a good civil organized from Kanada, and so it was night, it was curfew, and we, we saw a pit and in this pit there was this colony of miners. Yes, the miner, the miners. And we saw this small, small...

Q: You saw what? I'm sorry.

A: Uh, we saw some small houses. Yes, family houses of miners, and in so was a very light, a very small light...of light. It was...you know. And I dared to knock on the door. There came, and...a woman, and I asked her if we can get some help. And I spoke with the dialect of this country; and my son was there. So he let us inside, and he was a widow and had two sons. They were preparing for a shift to miner to make. So if they believed or not, I don't know; but they asked, I told we were working in Germany, yes, workers. And also my very dear wife, I told my wife was sealed off and we couldn't take her, and _____ is my child, and I will take him to the grandparents which are not far from here, Zarjwa (ph). I knew the whole vicinity, yes. So they were nice to us. We could wash and so. And they, I asked how the train is going there and there, and they gave me a very good advice. But at the time there was mobilized the, the, men, they were digging anti-tank, uh, anti-tank uh graves for...

Q: Did you see them?

A: Yes. And every manpower is very needed. So, and before on the, in the railway station, they were full of pick axes and shovels, so I took a pick axe and shovel and I am going with this train who is going to the Valasske Mezerici village, yes. And I, this was the city, Valasske Mezerici, where I studied.

Q: What is the name of the town?

A: Valasske Mezerici.

Q: O.K.

A: I studied there my high school. So I thought maybe...maybe I will get there. And I came to this city, to this town, yes, so I saw, I have no even idea if I would make this digging, so I need a proof that I am a citizen, and so I have nothing. So I phoned to my friend, to Vsetín, my native, native uh city, where I was native, and before the war I was in connection as I told you to this, to transmit, to help this crossing of the borders, and this man who was enterprise man, and he was also involved in this. But I didn't knew if he was caught or not caught, but nevertheless I knew him. And I checked in the phone book and still his firm was there, yes. So I phoned. And he answered. I told him the slogan, yavor, yavor (ph), was the slogan, yes.

Q: Slogan. O.K.

A: Yes, but he, yavor (ph), yes, but he recognized me on my voice. And he [said], "Erich, you are here? Where are you?" "So in Mezerici (ph)." "I will come on the next train." And he came. With the next train, he gave us money, he gave us these cards for food, yes, rations, cards and he brought _____ with a hiding place, yes, it was a hiding place in mountains. He had some connections. We must, we changed twice or something, but there we survived, also with my son, and I, on this hiding, I started to write on this book, The Death Factory (ph), which was published in '46 in Prague and later translated in many languages, and so on. This was the first book on Auschwitz, with the plan. I started. But later, my friend, Otto Kraus (ph), who also ...who came with this transport to another camp and survived, so we were returned to Auschwitz, to Birkenau. We'd hidden some documents there, digged in, so we found, we gave it to the court, to the Polish court, to the Narodny Nationale (ph) Tribunal (ph). And we were first witness in this court, _____, against this Höss and against forty others, as witnesses. And so from this, we made The Death Factory. And it was the first book...no, later, later. So we survived. So look, so I can give you some bibliography where I wrote most of this.

Q: Hold the bibliography for a little bit. We've got a little time. Tell me, take, I know, I'm interested in two things for the tape.

A: Yes.

Q: One is, could you tell me about Poland after the war? And the second was the trial itself.

A: Oh, Czechoslovakia after the war. O.K. I lived twenty years after the Communist [takeover]. I was persecuted then later in Czechoslovakia, therefore I escaped. When you must know that in '68 I was in danger, when the Prague Spring. Was, you know, the Prague Spring. So I was involved in the Jewish community to educate some Jewish people. They told it is a Zionish conspiracy; and I was...a warrant was against me. I was in danger to be arrested, so I escaped. To Vienna. And I get help from Wiesenthal, in Vienna, from my friend.

Q: Did you work with Wiesenthal at that point?

A: Yes, yes. I worked three hours, uh three months in his office. He was a good friend of mine 'til now. And he helped me a lot to come over my family; and after then, my family was... Once I escaped alone, my family didn't know about it. Yes. My wife was _____. She was in on the land in the holy days; and I was in Prague, yes. So I had no time to...to... So I escaped. And later, with the help also of Wiesenthal, I...I recover all my family. And now all my family is in Israel. All of them in Israel.

Q: This is your second wife? What happened to your first wife?

A: As I told you, with this un...when this was the evacuation, the liquidation of the Czech family camp, yes. So first they were saved, they were in this epidemic block, which was _____. But then it was a second...there came a second transport with the same purpose; and after _____ they should also go to be liquidated. Then in the last moment, they decided they will...they will make a selection, that they needed the manpower, yes. And they selected the people who were without, women in the...without children. And so I persuaded my wife she tell she is without. She had this son; but I promised I will save him. I didn't know how, but nevertheless it succeeded later. But all these who were selected were later put on a transport to Stutthof camp, and there my wife died in Germany in 1945 on typhoid. And this, my second wife, is my sister-in-law. Yes, with her two children from Milan who died in this Hamburg Neuengamme, as I told you, he died there. So she had two children from him. And I married her, and we make a new...and I have a new...a son from this marriage, yes. Both sons are in Israel. The oldest son is a professor of the history at Hebrew University. And the second son is in the Tel Aviv University of Aesthetics. He is lecturing in aesthetics. So...

Q: Can you show us the pictures? You brought very valuable drawings of Auschwitz and plans. And tell us what's behind that.

A: Yes, I will show it to you. So, look, this is the plan, very well planned, of the situation plans of the working and this area of the concentration camp, Auschwitz I.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: Yes.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: The second is a copy of original plan which we organized from the Bal_____, from the construction office in Auschwitz. And this, as you see, there is a sign of SS man stamp, and is written "Lager Plan." You will read it on this.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: And it is, as you see, this is a copy in '44 from the Bal_____, a construction SS office which we got through our friend, _____ who was engineer and who was drawing as a prisoner there. Yes. And this is, you can see there is a lager plan _____ Auschwitz. This is from Birkenau. They called it _____, never an original concentration camp, yes. And you have this sign, here is the sign of the prisoner who draw it with the number and all. And this is the original plan of their huge Birkenau anihilation camp, which was not even realized. It was not built up the whole; only part of it. And the part what was built up is exactly in The Death Factory. There is exact point on the day before the evacuation, how far it was. That's enough?

Q: Yes.

A: And the other things I think you can copy. No?

Q: The other things we'll copy.

A: I will try to get something, but you can copy this one. Yes, this was important. Let's see, you can... Herman Wouk--you know him--so he send me congratulations to my book. I worked with him very close, Herman Wouk. You can copy. So I think the other things you can copy, they are not so...not so important. But these two are very important. So I think I told you all which you _____. So, I think it's all now.

Q: Yes.

A: You need more.

Q: Yes, that's all, and thank you very much.

A: So you will have, so we can be in contact. I will give you my address and you can write me. Ah this, I will give you this brochure about the uprising, and all this which you can copy.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

A: Yes. So it's enough. How long we were?

Q: It's almost three hours.