United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Manfred Gans
November 11, 2004
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a taped interview with Manfred Gans, conducted by Amy Reuben on November 11, 2004 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview 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.

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MANFRED GANS
November 11, 2004

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: This is a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans, conducted by Amy Reuben on November 11th, 2004, in Fort Lee, New Jersey. This is tape number one, side A. Mr. Gans, would you please start by telling me your full name, and where and when you were born?

Answer: Okay, my name is Manfred Gans. I was born in a little town in West Germany near the Dutch frontier, the name of that town is Borken, it's -- at the time it used to be called Borken in Westfarn -- in Westphalia. And I was born in there on the 27th of April, 1922. My father's family had lived in that town at least since 1610. The town records showed that his -- the fa -- his -- his mother's family, by the name of Windmiller, were allowed to live inside the walled city of that town in 1610, which was very exceptional, because Jews generally were not allowed within walled ci -- cities.

Q: Do you know why, perhaps, it --

A: No, I can -- can't remember why, exactly what the reason was why -- but -- why they were allowed to live there. But basically Jews had lived in that area, or in that town since sometime -- something like 1246. The exact history of the Jewish community has been reworked now, and is fully available in the -- in a group that has been formed in -- since 1988 in that town, who -- a small group of people who have occupied themselves with the history of the Jews. And they have fabulous documents about everything. So if you have to clear up something, this is where you can go, and anybody who wants to research the subject should go to these -- to these people.

Q: How large a Jewish community was there when you were living there?

A: There were -- about 25 Jewish families lived in the town itself. And there were Jewish families in every -- all the little villages around it. The town was a -- you know, was the county seat, and the -- all these other Jew -- little Jewish communities in the villages, some of them had their own synagogues, but none of them had schools. And -- so everybody had to come to -- to p -- all the Jewish children had to come to Borken for the Jewish schools. We -- oh, I had one towa -- want to mention one more thing which I -- this third thing is very important. So the Jews in a -- i-in effect, had lived in this town for 750 years. And though it was a free town, that means it was -- it was -- it had -- it was an independent town, which could make its own decisions, my father was the only Jew who was ever elected into the town council. There have been no Jews before that, and no Jews, of course, since that -- since itch -- there are no Jews living in the town now. Everybody emigrated, or perished in the Holocaust.

Q: Well tell me, if you would, tell me your father's name, and when was he part of this council, and maybe you could tell me a little bit more about him, and your mother?

A: Okay. My father's name was Maurice Gans. He was born in 1885, and he went to -- like a -- all the Jewish kids in na -- in -- in the town, he went into the Jewish school for the first four years of his schooling, which we can suppo -- suppose we can calculate when that was. And then, at the age of 10, he went into the high school, which actually was a larger, Catholic school. And he graduated from there at the age of, I think about 16. He did -- he did not finish up as a full matriculation because there -- there was certain stages. And from there on s -- from then he -- he went into the textile trade, and he was an apprentice in a wholesale textile ware -- company in Frankfurt, i-i-in -- in Germany. He -- when World War One broke out, he was a -- drafted into the German army. He was in Italy, and his unit was continuously short of food, and supplies, and he made it his business to go into the Italian towns and get provisions there. And coming back

from one of those expeditions, a -- a -- he was shot at by his own people, who hadn't recognized him, and as a result he lost a leg, and as a result of a big loss of blood, he lost a lung, and so he -- his whole like -- life from there on, he had only one leg, and one lung. He was extremely brave. He was lucky that he was sent to a Jewish home for recuperation in Switzerland because of having lost the lung. Of course the -- you know what -- the --the -- the -- he was treated as if he had tuberculosis, which he did not have, and there he got involved in founding a Jewish recuperation home. I think it was called Itania, which was Orthodox and had kosher food and all those -- those things. When he eventually returned to his hometown, he set up his own company, and my mother was his partner. Now, ma -- tell you a little bit about my mother, because she had a totally different background.

Q: Actually, and -- first tell me when he was elected to the town council, cause you said that was such an unusual occurrence.

A: Yeah, he was -- I think he was elected to the town council only in -- either in 1930 -- 1930 or '31. Then, of course when -- when the -- when the -- there were so many elections just before the Hitler period, and he of -- he was the chairman of the social democ -- democratic party in town. When the social democratic party was reduced to only one representative in the town council, I -- my father decided that his non-Jewish social democratic -- what trying to say?

Q: A colleague of his, or --

A: A colleague -- colleague should stay, rather than he. And so that he was out of it. Now, how did he get into this position that people voted for him? When he returned to the town, after World War One, and set up his own business, he also took a very active part in the league of war orphans, widows. And -- I'm trying to find a -- find a English wor -- when people who had been injured in the war, there was a -- a -- a league like that, and he beca -- soon became the head of

that league. He had his staff work on all the applications which were necessary so that these war orphans, war widows, and people who had -- war injured could apply to the various government offices for the support to which they were entitled. And he never charged anybody for all these services, and therefore he became very, very popular. His staff was -- his office staff, which was concerned, of course with wholesale textiles, was a-accustomed to service the members of the league of war orphans, widows, and people who had been injured in the war. Oh, I also started to tell about my mother's family, right? My mother's family lived in a little town called Falksen, which was near Hannover. And my grandfather, Maurice Frankel, had come from somewhere in the Brunswick area, Braunschweig at the time. He had set up his own business, and this is a town, he was a total free thinker, didn't believe in organized religion at all. But -- and his wife, my grandmother had the same attitude, but it doesn't mean that they were hiding the fact that they were Jews, they were not at all hiding, but they just didn't believe in organized religion. Their ideal were opera, and theater, German [indecipherable] you know, that sort of thing. In fact, one of the sisters of my grandfather was an actress in Hannover, and she was a paramour of the king of Hannover. She was very good looking. Even I remember her, though vaguely. And of course, I've seen pictures of her. So, it was totally different type of upbringing, but nevertheless my mother also had to go to Hebrew school two or three times a week, in -- this was a town called Springer, which was a -- probably only about four or five miles away. There -- you know, in those days of course there were plenty of trains. They went to and fro by train all the time. So she too had a smattering of Jewish education. And then when she finished elementary school, her parents sent her to a finishing school, to Belgium, a Jewish finishing school where essentially ladies learned to be good housewife, and as a result my mother was an outstanding cook, very much oriented towards the French cuisine, which she had learned in -- in Belgium. For a short

while, she actually worked, after the [indecipherable] she -- she was a -- a companion lady or whatever you call this, in the house of Rosensweig, was a German philosopher, Jewish philosopher who -- who -- usually his name is connected with Buber, who was in -- who was -- who was later on a professor in -- in Israel, at the [indecipherable] university. Of course, Franz Rosensweig was at that time already very sick. He had contact -- contract-tacted syphilis while he was in the German army in -- in Poland. And sa -- but he was an outstanding thinker, and ve- very famous in his interpretation of general philosophy and Judaism.

Q: And what's your -- what was your mother's name?

A: My mother's name was Else Frankel. E -- E-l-s-e Frankel. Now --

Q: And when was she born?

A: She was, I think, five years younger than my father, so she must have been what, 18 - 19, yes.

Q: Sol tell me a little bit about the home then, that they had for you, as you were growing up. Try to give me a picture of what the -- what that, you know, how your daily life was like at home, and of course, could you mention, you know, the siblings who -- who are your siblings.

Q: Okay. I only vaguely remember the house in which we lived during the -- during the first three years of my life. That house is not in existence any more now, but I know exactly where it was, it was near the railway station in Borken. And my parents just rented an apartment th-there. Now, my father was very successful in business, he was a -- always a financial genius. And -- and I think in the year 19 -- yeah, '35, just before my younger brother was born, he bought a very stately house, just outside the town of Borken, which had been built by a man who was the owner of a brick factory once, th-therefore they had -- they hadn't -- not spared any -- any expenses, any bricks, or anything like that. That house is still in existence now, and it's still an outstanding house, up to the -- up to the sis -- da -- this day. And it still has a lot of the features

which it had when we lived in it. At the time when my parents bought it, and it was not developed around it, gradually they, you know, they planted trees and bushes, and things like that. So we had two maids as servants, we had people looking after the vegetable gardens, and after the flower gardens. And above all, my father had a chauffeur, since he couldn't drive himself. He was always on the road for -- during the whole week. Usually he came back at night, sometimes he did not come back at night, but he usually came back at night and then went out again in the morning, into the rural district, to sell the specialty textiles to people who make custom clothing. So it -- it -- it -- i -- it wa-was certainly upper class. I think we had a higher standard of living than anything I have achieved since then, or my brothers have achieved since then. My older brother was called Karl, and he -- he was two years older than I. He's still alive now, he lives in Israel. Now he's called Gashom Kadar. He's changed his name during wor -- World War Two, when he was serving in a mixed Arab Jewish unit in the British army. And my younger brother, his name was Tayol, and when he went -- went -- went to Israel in 1950 -- let me see, he went to Israel in 1952. He too changed his name from Gans to Kadar. I have to excuse myself.

Q: Okay, if you could just continue to tell me about your life in your childhood home, and was it a very festive life with your family? Tell me a little bit about the sort of routines that you had, you know, as a family, and at home.

A: Well the routine obviously was we go to school every day. Until the age of 10, we went to the Jewish school, Jewish elementary school, where we learned both the secular subjects and the basic parts of the Jewish service, including the translation of the five books of Moses and things like that. So w-we had a systematic education in learning classical Hebrew. Then, at the age of 10, since our parents were well enough to do to -- they could send us to high school, we shifted

over to the high school. Now, th -- the routine at home was that we'd all be in school until about one o'clock and then came home and had the -- the main meal of the day. In the afternoon we were supposed to do our homework. Had some sort of other activities, we were essentially free. And the -- the -- yeah, the up -- of c-course it's -- is a -- home was essentially Orthodox. Not -- we wouldn't call this strictly Orthodox, call it like the modern Orthodox in the United States now here. And Friday evenings we would go to the service. After the service there would be a very festive meal. My -- my father would be home most of the time on s -- on Friday -- on the weekends. Saturday morning we would go to synagogue again. The synagogue would finish at about half past 10, 11 o'clock. We then would go home and have a very festive breakfast, and after that we were obligated to go and visit our grandmother, my father's mother, who was living in town. And at that time she was beginning to be about 75 - 80 years old. And we had to visit her every Saturday. And after that we'd go back to synagogue for the afternoon service, a -- which was at about one o'clock, and about two o'clock was the main meal, and in the evening at the end of the -- of the holiday, or Saturday, we would again go to synagogue and participated what's called the Havdalah service. So, it was a -- a life that revol-revolved largely around the Jewish religion. On Sunday we had to go to Sunday school, which was strictly devoted to Hebrew and Jewish history. The Jewish elementary school was a one room school with eight grades in it. Of course, we who -- whose parents were well off and could afford to send us to the high school only stayed in it for four years. But there were people -- Jewish kids in the school who -- whose parents could not afford to send them to high school, and who did all the eight grades in the -- in the one room school, this was a one room school. Which was very interesting because it -- it almost was like self education. There was only one teacher, and h-he would attend to all -- to everybody, set tasks for everybody. But when he taught history, or when he taught

something to somebody else, of course you could always listen in. And I think [indecipherable] that was very, very good for our development. That's in my -- in my days, the name of that first teacher we had, his name was Gunsberg, and he became an outstanding person in the [indecipherable] s-service, or [indecipherable] organization in Israel, when he finally em-emigrated to Israel, some time before World War Two.

Q: When you started the high school, tell me what age you were when you started the high school, and were your friends at the high school only Jewish, or did you have also non-Jewish friends?

A: We started high school at the age of te -- 10. Before the Hitler period, we mixed fairly freely. Not hundred percent te -- hundred percent freely, but fairly freely with everybody. And there was not much of a distinction made between Jews and -- and non-Jews, and you could communicate very easily with everybody else. In my case, of course, this only lasted for one year. And then in 1933, when I was 11 years old, Hitler came to power. But in the case of my older brother, this state of affairs had much -- lasted much longer. My cousin -- my oldest cousin, who was of -- the oldest amongst all of us who was at that time, he must have been already about 16 or 17, he had gone through that whole school, and of course had been totally integrated into the class in which he was. So th-tha -- there wa -- there was not much -- there was not much distinction made, but there -- there -- there was -- always was a certain amount of anti-Semitism. And the really wealthy families in town, non-Jewish wealthy families did not mix with Jews, basically. So there were certain --

Q: Did you remember feeling anti-Semitism in school before -- before Hitler came to power?

A: Oh yes, yes, oh yes. First of all, it was already 1932, the Nazi movement was already very active, and certain -- let's say parents of certain -- of children have -- were already very active

Nazis. And they already came out with some objections to Jews. It didn't -- it wasn't very serious, and we didn't take it very serious, and we also had -- always had already answers to everything. We always fought back.

Q: What would you say?

A: Well, some of the [indecipherable] I remember somebody say to him -- said to me, you Goddamn Jew, you have a bend in your nose, you know, Jewish nose? And I said better -- I said it's much better than having a bird in your brain like you do. I said -- that's the German expression for -- for being a nut, is to have, you know -- so -- but it -- it more or less stopped there.

Q: Did you ever feel, you know, physically harassed, or --

A: Well now, are you talking about f -- before Hitler, or after Hitler?

Q: First before.

A: Before Hitler, I don't -- I don't think -- I personally had no encounters of physical harassment. Maybe it was just lucky, but I -- I don't think it was very common to have physical harassment before Hitler.

Q: Would you say -- can you tell me how large the overall town was, how many people lived there, and was it -- would you say it was pretty good relations in general between the Jewish community and non-Jews?

A: The town had 8,000 in habitants, and as I said before, there were about 25 Jewish families in it. The relationships were, I think, pretty good. There were, of course, very Jewish businesses, and there were certain people who were anti-Semitic, who were just avoided. You just didn't con-contact them. Of course, the -- the point of our town with 8,000 inhabitants is that everybody knows everybody. You couldn't hide. But by and large, I think it was a pretty peaceful life.

Q: Now before we get to the time when Hitler comes to power, can you give me just a very brief snapshot, the personalities of your family members; your mom, your -- your father, and your siblings. Just give me a sense of, you know, who they -- who they are, and -- and their personalities.

A: Well, my father was the -- was very, very respected by -- by us. He was our greatest friend, and w-we three sons had a extremely good relationship with him when he was home.

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number one, side B. If you could continue to tell me -- you were starting to tell me about your mother.

A: My mother, of course, had a hard job educating three sons, and no daughter. And she was -- could be quite volatile at times, and put on quite some scenes when we wouldn't go along with what she preached. And w-we could at times form a united front against her, and she would complain like hell to my father, who w-would get very upset about it, when he heard about it. But -- and I don't want to underestimate the fact that, of course, my mother was in the afternoon in -- in my father's business, and we were somewhat educated by the maids we had in the house, too. We had two maids, as I said before, and we had other se-servants, and that had some sort -- quite a bit of influence on us, too. Which I suppose is the usual experience of people who have grown up in -- in we-wealthy homes where there were servants. My older brother was -- he was very much the intellectual. He we -- he -- he was what you called a bookworm. And he -- he loved reading, and it came -- came -- c-came in very handy later on. I can go into the fine details afterwards. And my younger brother, he was outstandingly good looking. So -- and my mother

always said that I'm -- I was her only s -- d-daughter. I had to learn all the practical skills. I had to do all the stuff in the kitchen, helping and so on, so forth. My -- my older brother was shielded from that -- he was quite awkward, too, that's because he was so bookish. My younger brother, of course, was spoiled like hell because he was so good looking, and so I had to have all the practical skills to -- to help everybody. So those -- those were the personalities, and they somewhat remained that way all our lives, too.

Q: So tell me now about Hitler coming to power.

A: Well, of course it wasn't a -- it was not unexpected. There had been so many elections, and every election Germany was going further and further to the right. More and more people were voting for Hitler, or voting for the right wing parties, some of which were eventually merged into the Nazi party. Another thing, another point I have to point out why all this was not so unexpected. When we visited my grandparents in Falksen near Hannover, they lived in -- in a town that was largely Protestant. And that town was very radically in with the Nazi before Hitler. So already in -- before Hitler, before 1933, when we went visiting there, there were a lot of kids who didn't play with us because we were Jews. And they were already converted. So it's a -- a -- th-they -- this is where the indic -- these were the indications of things changing. This a -- well, I never forget the day Hitler came to power. We were having lunch, and we were listening to the radio, which was on because we listened to the one o'clock news. And the newscast came out, and then suddenly the announcer said, "And here is a little message, which has just fallen on my desk, the president of Germany, Hindenburg, has appointed Adolf Hitler as the chancellor of -- as the next chancellor of the German state." And I remember my mother was very, very shocked to hear this, and somehow we took it and said -- said well, that wa -- this was just one of the things we had to face. The full implication of it, well I suppose we didn't ful -- fully realize -- at

the time the kids didn't, but my mother obviously did. My father was not home. I can't remember whether he came home that night. But soon -- he certainly came home very soon after. Now -- things changed in school now very -- I would say very rapidly. There -- some of the cra -- o -- some of our classmates were keen to join the Hitler youth. There was no Hitler youth in our town, and every time they had a demonstration, they had to call out the high school, which included us, for all their -- their demonstration, and whatever they were celebrating at the time. Eventually my father got us out of there, we didn't have to attend those blasted ca -- wh-what -- what do they call it? It's called in German [indecipherable]. Had the torchlight parades and all that sort of things. We didn't have to go -- go along with that any more, but in the beginning we did, because the school just said everybody come tonight, there'll be a torchlight parade to celebrate this, that, and the other. And so we had to go.

Q: Now did you always feel and know that you were against this, even though you had to be there?

A: Oh yeah, definitely, we had absolutely no identity cris -- crisis. That, I think is the advantage of having grown up as a -- as an Orthodox Jew. My father's father had come from Holland to marry my -- marry my grandmother. And he had grown up with the Sephardic Jews in Holland, though he was not Sephardic himself. In fact they were from the part of Holland that borders on Germany. And -- but he -- he was -- he was very much aware of the Sephardic experience. And every time the word Spain was used, he spit. I didn't know him personally any more. He -- he died in 1917. He had a hernia [indecipherable] there was misop -- mis-operation, unfortunately. And -- but h -- so we were very, very much aware of the fact that expulsion, flight, and all that sort of things was part of the Jewish tradition. And there were two Jewish families living in town, who had come from either Poland or Russia, and who had been exposed to this whole

business of pogroms, and -- and ma -- Jewish persecution in the east. So again, everybody was Orthodox, so just was part again -- was accepted as being part and parcel of one's history. We had absolutely no identity crisis when all this came. People find that hard to believe, particularly I -- of course, later on in life, I came across a lot of Jews, who f -- German Jews, who were not brought up Orthodox, who had all sorts of clashes, including the -- the people who -- when someone was in the army, and people [indecipherable] working professionally, and who had -- who -- who were -- whose -- had terrific identity crisis of -- of -- wh-when hi -- Hitler came to power, and when they were excluded from the social life which they had practiced up to that time. But as I said -- of course, the other point was we couldn't socialize that well with other pe -- with non-Jews, even before Hitler, because we were kosher, and we couldn't eat in their homes. And so it was -- it would be very rare if any of them would come to our homes, and eat with us. As one of my schoolmates told me back in -- in the 1988 -- 1992, when I went back to -- to the ha -- we first went back to our hometown, this -- we -- homes were not that comfortable in those days, and we all were friends because we played on the street. So the -- the intimacy that one now can experience in being in each other's home, we had -- we did not have that in any case.

Q: So did you start to experience more restrictions at school? And also who -- tell me a little bit about the composition of -- of the student body at school. I think you s-said in your memoirs mostly Catholic, but tell me a little bit about that.

A: Yeah. The -- of course the town was largely Catholic, and most of our classmates before Hitler belon -- belonged to a Catholic youth movement. That was the standard thing to do, for everybody to belong to the Catholic youth movement. That of course we -- we were already automatically excluded. We did not, at that time, have a Jewish youth movement to which we belonged, but we did later on. Now, all these -- of course, now the pressure became very strong

on all these members of the Catholic youth movement to change over to the Hitler youth, and most of them did, eventually. It took a little while for everybody to go along that line, but this is -- this is where they went, eventually. And our attitude to them was you are wrong and we are right. Well, it's a -- things came to a head on the first of April, 1933. Now, this was only what, three months after Hitler came to power? He come to power on the 13th of January, 1933. The -- they started this boycott movement against Jewish businesses. And it was a Saturday, and there were storm troopers in front of every Jewish business to make sure that people wouldn't buy at -- in Jewish shops. And w-we of course had to go to school on Saturday, we didn't write, we didn't ca-carry our satchel because we were Orthodox, but we had to go to school and listen to the school classes. And while we were in school, the -- one of the teachers -- of the most trusted teachers, [indecipherable] was trusted most, came and called us out, and he said -- he said to us, I remember there were four Jewish boys in my grade, "Look, you know what's happening to you. I think it'd be safer for you to go home now." So, when we went home, and well, you know, this -- this was the dramatic, the most dramatic change you can imagine. Course our parents were -- I won't say shocked, but they were stunned. And my father wasn't going to take it. So he immediately [indecipherable] the Shabbat was out, he got on the telephone to the headmaster of the school, and he says, "Hey, what's happening? I'm not going to send my children back to the school if you can't guarantee their safety." I am convinced that that headmaster then had to contact all the necessary party lines. I don't think there was a Gestapo in this town yet, at that time. I was very much aware of the Gestapo when it finally came, because of course, they -- they -- later on, at the outbreak of World War Two, they took over our house as Gestapo headquarters. But I'm sure he -- he couldn't give my father a direct answer, he had to square this away with all

the authorities. Anyhow, by Monday morning he told my father that all the Jewish students could come back to the high school, and they could guarantee their -- our safety.

Q: How did you feel personally? Were you getting worried, as -- as a youngster?

A: Not in the least. Not in the least for it. They were wrong, we were right.

Q: Do you want to take a short break?

A: Yeah, I have to get my medicine.

Q: Okay, if you want to continue telling me recollections of -- of this early period when the Nazis came.

A: So that was April first, and the next lightning bolt struck on May first. Of course May first is always celebrated in -- in Europe by all labor unions and people who have anything to do with labor, you know, which the Nazis thought they were -- were too. This was a big celebration. And of course there again, we had to have a -- a parade, and again, since there was no Hitler youth, so we -- we ha-had to collec -- come together again. There wasn't a big demonstration, but we suddenly -- one of the teachers came out with a swastika emblem, which showed that he'd been -- been a member of the Nazi party for quite awhile. I don't know whether it was true. There's a long history attached to this character. He was a dis -- teacher of mathematics, bio -- and particularly of biology, and he eventually was charged with teaching the signs of a racist, a subject -- new subject, which the -- the Nazis had thought out. Anyhow, on May first it turned out, he -- he came out with a swastika emblem on his coat, which showed that he had been a long time member of the Nazi party.

Q: And you -- you witnessed this yourself, this was --

A: Yes, yes, yes. I have a long history with this man, who of course now, by now he's dead. But he was an invalid. I can't remember from what any more, but he -- he -- he walked av -- one of

his legs wasn't functioning properly, so he was never called into the war, he stayed in the town through the whole war period, and as I said, I had quite a history with this character. Anyhow, now m-my older brother, who decided that we should not communicate with our classmates any more. We -- we shouldn't wait. He was -- my older brother was the sort of leader of the Jewish kids. My cousin, who as I said, who was about at that time was 16 - 17 years old. When he died last year he -- in New York. He was -- he -- he wasn't in school any more, anyhow, so my older brother became the leader of the Jewish children, and he decided that we're not going to wait until we're excluded, we're going to separate ourselves. So from that time on was -- we did not communicate with our schoolmates any more in -- in the -- in the a -- in the periods between lessons. Well -- we -- communication was absolutely at a -- at a minimum. You know, without any degree of intimacy between them and us. So, and this how I went to school for five years. My older brother, who left in 1935, who -- which was three years later, and went to, at that time, Palestine, Israel. And so he was out, and so other Jewish children were taken out of school and sent abroad, or didn't continue high school. Emigrated and gone [indecipherable]. So eventually, by the time -- by the time I left, there -- there were only very few Jews -- Jewish children left in the school, in the high school.

Q: Did you feel -- what about the Nuremberg laws? Did you and your family feel repercussions also?

A: Yeah, the Nuremberg laws as far as we were concerned meant that we couldn't have any non-Jewish maids any more. We then managed to get some maids whose nationality -- we-were Dutch by nationality, you know, it's in a -- in a fr-frontier area like that wasn't that difficult to find. But that was the na -- the major effect it had -- had on us. I am not aware of any other of these, you know, manifestation of the Nuremberg laws.

Q: What about your father's business?

A: My father reduced his business considerably, and he started -- he -- he concentrated all his efforts on getting cash out of Germany. And he set up a new business which sold vacuum cleaners, and irons, and you know, for -- for pressing clothing, things of that nature, because he saw a chance to do business of that nature, to get a lot of his money out of Germany, which of course, was illegal. There were schemes of that nature. I know my uncles had had schemes of that nature. My father's brothers who were -- all of them were doing very well financially. And -- and including my father's best friend, who became my father-in-law later on, he too had a scheme of this nature, and this is how people who had money managed to get some of their possessions out of the country, some of their cash out of the country. It's -- it's a complicated way of doing it. Might be interesting to investigate it some time, but I think it goes too far to talk about it in great detail here.

Q: Do you -- do you know at least where, in general, he was sending the money?

A: Yeah, to -- largely to Holland. And he -- he went to Holland very frequently. He had a cousin in Winterswijk who cooperated with him. And I don't know all the details about it -- it -- but there -- there always was some money available for us. He bought a house in -- in Israel in the early stage, when he -- he went on a trip to Israel, I think in -- first time in 1936, or 1937, and you know my -- of course my older brother was there, and he obviously had to pay for the school, my brother went to Ben Shemen together with all the -- a lot of the famous leaders of -- o-of -- a lot of the men who became the famous leaders later on in Israel.

Q: Tell me --

A: Including -- in -- and amongst these -- his classmates were people like Rabin and Dayan. So he -- so, as I said, money was available from -- for him to attend these schools.

Q: Tell me what were -- what were the conversations like within your family, and at home? What were you talking about now? Your father's business was changing, the changes at school. What -- what kind of conversations at home?

A: Interesting question. Was a -- what were we -- what were we talking about? Well, I don't think the subjects changed that dr-drastically. My parents were still very much interested in literature, talking about s-sub -- subjects of culture. And they -- they did occasionally discuss what we should and should not do, and what we should and should not say in public. And -- and if you had to be cautious and all that. At a very early stage of 1933, of course they came and -- the police and the storm troopers came into our house, and they went through my father's library, but they weren't -- weren't enough educated to even find the books that -- that were of dubious background. So my mother, too, had no -- absolutely no fear of these people. So I call them a bunch of drunkards who -- who belong to a club of dr-dr-drunkards, meaning the storm troopers. And I'm sure they -- my parents are not afraid of them and nothing close to -- very radically happened. But my father was in the -- interesting point, my father was in the town council. He had advocated that the high school for girls, which only had 50 students in it, should be combined with the high school of boys. Now, of course, in a Catholic town that was out of the question. My father had always based this on the huge expense the 50 student school was for the town to support, and they said there should -- there should be a combination of that. Well would you believe that within two months after the Nazis came to power, they combined the two schools? My father was away, I think in Hannover at the time, and my mother -- I remember my mother telling him on the telephone that this has happened, but of course she didn't say it direct because the telephones were probably listened to. But she said -- she used some Jewish

expression to -- to make him aware of that this was -- was happening. Finally his scheme was being translated into reality. So from one day to the other we had girls in the class.

Q: Now, was your -- was your life a-aside from not interacting with non-Jewish students at school, were there other things about your daily life that really changed, or was it largely the same as -- as before?

A: It was largely the same as before, except that [indecipherable] we cou -- we couldn't show our faces any more at sports events, you know? You know, these sort of sports events that are organized, what shall we say, by kids themselves. There was a certain amount of exclusion there, and that it got worse. But there were -- there were classes to teach aircraft design in the afternoon, which I participated in and I'm sure we were allowed to participate in. So it's -- i-it didn't change too drastically, except now, the other thing was of course that now we had a different teacher, who was very, very keen to -- to st -- to teach much about -- we had a different teacher -- teacher of the Jewish elementary school, and he was very, very keen that we should go into much -- to greater depths in -- in Hebrew. And eventually we went to Hebrew classes. Now, I'm talking about modern Hebrew speaking classes, every -- every day, except Friday. Every afternoon we had Hebrew classes. So that -- that was a radical change. And of course it did us a lot of good, and -- because go -- got us much into greater depths into Hebrew. This teacher, who also later on was -- became the headmaster of the Mizrachi high school in Tel Aviv, he started the -- also the [indecipherable] movement to which we then belonged, and so then it was sort of a little bit of a organization which was -- through which we met other Jewish kids from other towns occasionally, and so we were -- became the members of the Mizrachi. Now it's a national religious party, but it wasn't as radical as that in those days. The youth movement, and we were part of that.

Q: So this was still in Borken, and was this a Zionist group?

A: Yes, yes, yes, it was a Zionist -- Zionist group. That must have started round about 1934 or so, because my older brother was still in town when we started it, and he became one of the motivators of it. And as I said before, he left in ’35, I think, to go to Israel. So that -- that was another connection which we had --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number two, side A.

A: My mother's sister had gone to the Jewish agricultural school near Hannover, as -- when she had finished elementary school. And there she met the man whom she eventually married, Alex Mo. And who was one of the teachers in the school. And both my uncle, Alex Mo, and my aunt, spend all their lives until they emigrated from Germany, being in charge of agricultural training schools for Jews. Now, in 1932, I think it was, I spent a summer in the school which they ran at the time, which was near Berlin, it was called Gutwinkle, and we somewhat participated a little bit in the work they did, and ma -- we were rewarded for it. But then, in 1933, they took over a very large, what we called a hashavah camp, a cultural training camp for Jews who were changing professionally to agriculture. [indecipherable]. And I spent almost every summer there, until I left Germany. And this of course, it was a fantastic influence on all our lives. We -- we loved the ti -- to go there. Since my uncle was in charge, we had, of course, a lot of privileges. One of them was that we did a lot of horseback riding, and s-systematically learned horseback riding from one -- one of the teachers who was there, non-Jewish, who had been in the German army cavalry. My uncle himself, who rode around all the time, supervised the work that was being done in the fields by these trainees, who were changing from all sorts of profession over into agriculture. And to a child this was an absolutely i -- ideal way of -- of living. We -- I have interest stories of the -- of the life we led there, and it was a -- a [indecipherable] connected with the work and play, and it was a terrific experience. And I had -- it's of -- very much set the atmosphere, both for my brothers and for myself, as to wh-where we wanted to go professionally, eve-eventually. Some --

Q: How did it -- how did it establish your direction?

A: Well, my uncle thought well, of -- you know, he -- he put -- put us into whatever we wanted to do, and was -- wherever we could be used. We -- in the morning we always worked, and he soon found out that I was very, very handy, so he assigned me to the repair shop which they had there. And that sort of set me on my -- on my aim to become an engineer for repairing -- for agricultural machinery. I played around already at that time a little bit with the idea of becoming a chemical engineer, but it was -- there was -- everybody said you can't do that without doing it full time. And I always felt that I would never have the money to go to a full time university. So, there -- that was, of course, my idea, and I've already mentioned, my older brother went to an eke -- went to Israel, went to Ben Shemen, which was the agricultural school in -- in Israel. So that set his life, too. And my younger brother, he -- when he finished school in -- in England, eventually he also took up -- there was a -- a job in -- in agriculture, and stayed in that field all his life. He later on became a specialist of fertilizers and things of that nature. So all our directions were set by this agricultural experience, which we had in the training schools run by our uncle and a-aunt.

Q: And this is when you're a teenager, right?

A: Yeah.

Q: And what about your Bar Mitzvah during this time of your life?

A: Well, Bar Mitzvah to us was not a big deal really, because we knew so much Hebrew, and learned so much. And my older brother was Bar Mitzvahed in 1933, yeah '33, that's right. And at the time -- at the time my -- my mother's father had just died. So my parents didn't -- for that reason, and also because the Hitler business, did not want to make a huge Bar Mitzvah for him. But, you know, he had a f -- it was a very nice Bar Mitzvah and all that sort of thing. Very

luxurious, but it was kept relatively small. You know, we had a huge family because my -- my grandmother had five boys and five girls. And we al -- and they all married, and they all had kids, you know, so th -- wa -- it was somewh -- somewhat resented by all these relatives that they -- they weren't -- the invitations were relatively kept to a small [indecipherable]. Now, by the time I was Bar Mitzvahed in 1930 -- it's 22 and 13 is 35, right? Yes, that's right. '33 to thir -- yeah, '35. By the time I was Bar Mitzvahed in 1935, w -- we had a really huge Bar Mitzvah, with all the trimmings on it, and of course people coming to our town, they had to be fed three times on a s -- Saturday, you know? On Friday nights, on Saturday morning, and s -- then somehow again something -- something again in the afternoon. We were expected to do the whole Torah reading for that day, of sh -- was no -- no difficulty to me at all. And we were expected to do the whole reading from the prophets, the Haftorah readings for the day. Again, no -- no -- no particular -- wa -- and we were expected to make a speech. And I made a f -- apparently made a speech which upset my parents very much, because I -- politically it was unwise.

Q: Why is that?

A: Well, yeah, I think I started off by saying we are being accused of -- of such and such, and such and such things now, and I'll teach you that this is totally against our laws, and that we couldn't be like this. And so it's a so -- so anyhow --

Q: So your -- your speech actually had to do with the political climate and the times?

A: Yes, yes. But you know, the speech was made at home, not in the synagogue. And the servants of course that were around, were non-Jews, who served the meals, so -- I don't think that my parents had e -- invited any non-Jews -- non-Jewish friends to any of these occasions.

Q: What were your favorite Jewish holidays growing up?

A: Oh, I would say Pesach, Passover. Best food. You know, cause of my mother, being such a fabulous cook, all these things were -- were -- were on a -- on a scale that wer -- was gour -- real gourmet eating. I mean, even the -- you know, that we -- we of course did not eat meat on the nine days before Tisha B'Av. But it was wonderful, the stuff my mother cooked was just out of this world. No meat in it, and this being summer, you know, you have all the fruits you want. And she made the most fantastic fruit soups, and vegetable soups tha -- vegetable dishes, anything you could think of. And this way it was no hardship at all. The only hardship was that we also couldn't go swimming in those -- in those nine days. And in the summer, you know? So we were waiting for Tisha B'Av to be gon -- be gone so we could go back to the s -- to the swim baths, you know, go swimming.

Q: That reminds me of something you wrote in your memoirs about the pool in -- in the community. Can you tell me about that during this time period?

A: Yeah, actually it's a -- the -- the -- the pool was not forbidden to us, except for certain times. They had to, you know, there was sort of a mixture between Catholic and Nazi. They had periods [indecipherable] was women only, and -- where women were allowed. Those periods we did not -- we were not allowed to go into the swimming pool, the town swimming pool. But then they also had periods when the -- the pool was open to men only, and those periods -- in those periods we could still sneak in and take a swim. So we had to be carefully attuned to what could and what could not be done.

Q: Was there any rule at all that said that Jews could not swim in that pool?

A: Yeah, not -- not -- not -- not complete exclusion. The exclusion was only for the periods when women were allowed, or mixed swimming was allowed. So we managed to ge -- to gets -- to sneak in still.

Q: Were there any other places in town where you weren't actually allowed?

A: They -- the -- the -- you know, there was only one movie house in town, and that put up a sign fairly soon saying we don't want any Jews, Juden [indecipherable]. And when that sign went up, my parents would not allow us to go in any more because this is -- you know, that -- that was that.

Q: So it's not like you tried, you just decided not to go?

A: We decided that -- not to go, yeah. I think if you could have sneaked in, nobody would have objected very much.

Q: And what about any recollections of Nazis in -- in your town, did you ever have any encounters yourself?

A: Oh yeah. Violent, too. I mean, it started to get dangerous to -- to walk in the -- i -- you know, in the very beautiful woods around that town. You know, on Saturday afternoon we would go for a walk, and sha -- would want to play, and there were certain guys who -- who it was dangerous to meet. And they were beating us up and God knows what. That's -- we had to be very, very careful.

Q: Did this actually happen to you, or mostly to others?

A: Yeah, yes, yes, yes. Once a guy hit me in the face with a burning rubber -- rubber what do you call it, a rubber stick, and I, you know, I had an injury from it for quite awhile. And there was another, you know, usually it was just beating up, or stones being thrown, and things of that nature. You just had -- had to be very, very careful. And you just -- nothing you could do. You had to recognize that there was superior force on the other side. You don't stand and fight superior force. You just have to flee from it, go into an area where gro -- you have enough grown-ups who would interfere with what these kids were doing.

Q: So now tell me about what -- what happened -- what leads up to you going to England.

A: Actually, my parents wanted to get me into a Jewish high school in Berlin in 1938. On -- on one of the many trips to this farm, that training farm which my uncle and aunt -- aunt were in charge of, I had to -- come to know two of these schools. They had to -- they had come to visit the farm, and I was there. I got very, very friendly with some of the teachers, and some of the kids. And as a matter of fact I went to one of the schools, and well, for a day or two in Berlin, and listened in, and from -- and then my parents said in 1938, that I should leave the school in our hometown and go to one of those schools. And it was decided that since all these schools are very far advanced in teaching English, I will need enough English to ca -- catch up with the other me-members of the school.

Q: What languages did you know already at this point?

A: We had been -- we had, apart from Hebrew, of course, which we did not learn in public school, our education was Latin. We -- we -- ever since we were 10 years old, every day we learned -- had at least one or two hours of Latin. Latin was the foundation of our -- of our knowledge. Now, I learned some English, I learned some French, but certainly not -- not to a very high degree. Anyhow, my parents wanted to send me to England for the summer, and -- to learn English, and then I -- I would come back to -- to -- to Germany. But while I was in England, my parents wrote saying that they have talked with other people, and they've come to the conclusion that it's not wise for me to go back to Germany. And they said what would you do if we were tell you, you just stay where you are. So --

Q: And what did you feel about that?

A: Wonderful. I was free. I had -- I had made friends, again thr -- through my relatives with other f-family where the gentleman was very active in the Jewish agency, Adler Rudell. And I went to

them, and I told them that -- what my parents had written, and -- and what should I do? And we decided that the thing to do was, since my means were limited, was to go to an intensive tutorial college, and try and do metric, you know, high school cer -- equivalent to a high school certificate, in that fashion. And I -- I loved the idea to do this.

Q: Now tell me when is this, how old are you, and what kind of major experience is this for you at this time, because you're pretty young.

A: Yeah. This was 1938, so I was 16 years old, and -- I liked the idea of trying to make it in about four or five months, to try and get -- get a equivalent of a high school certificate, and then go and start working. Since I knew exactly what I wanted to do, I would get myself a job, and I would go on and learning in -- in evening classes. I didn't have any doubts as to what to do, and I like -- as I said, I like the idea to be on my own. Now my parents did come over occasionally, my father or my mother, or both of them, during all this time when I first came to England, and -- until the outbreak of the war. They -- on and off there, they were in England.

Q: Was it easy for you to leave, and also for them to travel like that?

A: It was very easy for me to leave, because we all had been living so close to the frontier, we all had passes to cross the frontier. It took a long while to get a passport wh-which could take me past the frontier areas of Holland. But we -- we -- we all passports at the time. One more thing, already at that age, I had learned to drive the car. My father wanted me to do that in case we suddenly had to get out in the middle of the night. So by the age of 16, and of course t-totally illegal, I knew how to drive a car already. And I -- I left home on a Friday afternoon, Friday morning, I crossed the frontier, went to my c -- my father took me to his cousin, I stayed there for the weekend, and on Sunday I traveled on to Hoek van Holland, took the night boat over to

England, and arrangements had been made by my parents for me to live temporarily with a family, a very nice family in -- in London.

Q: So when you were preparing to leave, were you thinking a lot about the escalating events in Germany? Is this what you and your parents talked about a lot? Is this also -- was this on your mind a great deal?

A: Yes, yes, in my mi -- we came to the con -- conclusion that things were really getting worse and worse, and that it wasn't worthwhile to take the risk of sticking around. So -- and since I was out of the country anyhow, my parents felt that I should stay out, because as I said before, my older brother had been in -- in -- in Israel since 1935, so it wa -- it wasn't such a big sh -- idea for me to get out, too.

Q: But your parents and your younger brother did stay in your hometown?

A: Yes. My father somehow just couldn't make -- give himself the push to cut off everything. He saw more and more chances to get at least some of his money out, and he was going to stick it out to the -- to the end and get the maximum amount, you know, of course that probably was the wrong decision to make. My younger brother also stayed at home. My parents were rather reluctant to let him go because he was not independent yet, and so he stayed until after Kristallnacht.

Q: So tell me about what you knew while you were now in London, what you knew about events, things going on like Kristallnacht. What -- what did you hear, and what did you know about what was happening back in Germany?

A: Well, it's a -- you know, this became wu -- practically headline news in the British papers, when this Kristallnacht happened, and some of the papers tried to say that this was spontaneous, you know, and other papers, like the new scr -- new [indecipherable] liberal paper, they said no,

this is organized. I discussed -- discussed it with my friends, the Adler Rudell, and he said, “No, this was organized by the state, there was nothing spontaneous about that.” This was an assertion of power, a first sign, and if you had no doubts about it, where all this was going to -- to -- to lead. The fact that so many people had been put into prison, some in concentration camp, and so on, so forth, I mean I don’t think that anybody, at least I didn’t have any doubts this was the beginning of an absolute disaster. So --

Q: Were you worried about your family, your parents, and your brother?

A: No, I don’t think I was worried about my parents because I knew that they could always get out when they wanted to get out, and this is what they intended to do. And -- and that they had enough means to -- to -- to get out when they wanted to do. So from -- personally we didn’t -- I didn’t feel this was a -- was to -- go -- going to be so critical. But you know, the [indecipherable] the stateless Jews [indecipherable] family in our town, people who had come from Poland, and never -- never become citizens, and you know, they were picked up, and shipped away, and put at the border of Poland and -- and -- and Germany. That time we were very much aware of what was happening to them. You should -- you know, the Poles didn’t want to let them in, and the Germans wouldn’t have them. And, you know, these were families whom we knew. [indecipherable] 35 families in a town, of course you know everybody.

Q: Did you have a feeling once you’re in London that you may never return to your hometown, or what was your sense at that time?

A: Absolutely. Already when I left Germany I knew I would never -- never return. And I was -- I -- I was convinced that this German experiment would last for ages and ages and we would never be allowed to return. I never mentioned that this was all going to be over and done with in -- in what was it? ’38? Fa -- ’45? That’s seven years, right? We got back to Germany in ’45. It’s

incredible. It's incredible, except that it didn't seem so incredible after Munich, you know. After Munich we knew that war was coming, and -- and that Hitler would go too far. So -- but befo -- but when I left, I thought I will never see the place again.

Q: How did that make you feel, had -- did you feel an attachment to Germany?

A: Yes, I -- I did, you know. I -- after all, we had traveled a lot in Germany, we had been in various children's camps, things of that nature, and I -- I -- I loved the beautiful landscapes, the beautiful woods and all. [indecipherable] very much trave -- traveled along the Rhine. Was a beautiful area, by -- into -- by train, and so we were very much aware of what the place looked like, and definitely had -- definitely had a certain attachment to it. Felt very bad about never being able to see it again.

Q: So tell me a little bit about your life in -- in London, and are you following the news very carefully? Is this something that you really were, you know, closely following, about these developments? Just tell me about this phase of your life before the war actually starts.

Q: Well, first off, as I said, when I came to London, I was living with a wonderful family, with the Jacobs, who were the [indecipherable] Mr. Jacobs, he'd been an officer in a Jewish brigade in World War One, and of course, knowing a lot about Zionist history, all this makes a little sense to me. His wife was from a Jewish family that had settled originally in -- in Scotland, she spoke quite a good ger -- German, and sh-she was [indecipherable] woman, very hard working. They had one daughter, about my age, and also living with them was a nephew who was an orphan, and who went to business every day. And also a distant relative, a girl from -- a Polish Jewish girl apparently from very well-to-do parents. She spent every afternoon in the movies. She was a total movie addict, this girl. So -- so it was a big household, and actually we only ate together on -- again, on Friday nights, and Saturday lunch time. The -- the house was located right be --

within one or two blocks of the [indecipherable] synagogue, which was a big synagogue, and that's where Mr. Jacobs belonged. And -- and I concentrated on learning English, very much helped by Mrs. Jacobs, who had no hesitation to correct me, telling me what to do. And ever since I love reading newspapers, and the Jacobs, since they were liberals, you know, with a [indecipherable], course the newspaper was a news chronicle, and I u-used to translate newspaper articles and then learn them by heart, and this is how I si -- taught myself English, to a large extent, very much helped, as I said, by Mrs. Jacobs, as I was there. Was a wonderful time I had there. Was a little bit expensive, and so I couldn't stay there any length of time, but while it lasted it was -- was very nice.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Beginning Tape Two, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number two, side B.

A: Well, one incident that actually I think is worthwhile recording is one day Mr. Jacobs went to the library, and he said, "Do you want anything from the library?" And I said "Yes, get me "Mein Kampf," Hitler's "Mein Kampf" in German." Of course, while I was in Germany, I would never do them the honor of reading this, but I felt I had to read it, and I'm very, very grateful that I did read it at the time when I -- whe -- because it made it so clear, totally clear as to what was going to happen, from reading that book. And this -- all this -- the propaganda methods, the way to achieve their aim. This business of expanding Germany into the eastern [indecipherable] and sh -- chasing all Slavic nations behind the euro -- and all this was all -- the all -- all set out there, you know? It -- i-it was shus -- it was oka -- I don't know why I did it, but I did read "Mein Kampf" in German while I was there. Then occasionally we went to the movies, Mr. Jacobs took

me to the movies, which was, of course, in English. And that -- that was a good experience too. And generally ha-have a wonderful time. Eventually, when my parents say cha -- that I should stay, I realized I couldn't stay with the Jacobs because it was far too expensive, and I had to go and look for cheaper accommodation. An -- but -- but of course, by that time my English had improved a lot, too. I had made up my mind to go to the tutorial college in Euston -- it -- is it Euston? It is near -- I know it's near Bushhaus in -- it's -- it's Euston, which is spelled E-u-s-t-o-n. And so I made the arrangements to find a new home, or new digs with se -- with those factors in mind of having to go to -- to the tutorial college every day, a-and obviously I still wanted to be near a synagogue and all that, and I had to live kosher. So that's -- determined where I settled.

Q: What were the signs of -- of the war now -- now encroaching, coming?

A: Well, the signs were the demands which Germany made on Czechoslovakia. There was the gathering of the party -- I can't remember any more where it was, where they -- where they celebrated the presence of the S-Sudeten German people, and their demands for incorporating the Sudeten area into Germany became very, very loud and forceful, and it was quite obvious what they wanted to do. They wanted to annex the Sudetenland. And this led to the Munich gathering, which -- in which France and Germany agreed -- France and England agreed that Hitler could go into -- could annex the Sudetenland without France and England going to war. Well, of course, Hitler signs a piece of paper saying that this would be his last demand, and it will be peace in our time. That's the famous peace in our time. And Chamberlain came home to England, he says peace in our time, the memo in his hand, and I remember next Saturday, next Shabbat in synagogue -- I still went to the [indecipherable] synagogue, Mr. Jacob saying, "I don't like this whole thing." And of course, there was the famous speech by Churchill in Parliament, where he

told Chamberlain y- you had to -- you had to choose between dishonor and war, you chose dishonor, that's why you're going to have war.

Q: Was this -- was this a difficult time for you to --

A: No, no, it's a -- you know, it no -- it became -- it -- it just said it was all inevitable. This is all -- what's going to happen and so there was nothing we could do about it, and we just had to fit ourselves into this -- into this -- into this situation. Before the Munich agreement, a lot of people had left London, including my landlady and her daughters, [indecipherable] and I was sort of asked to look after myself, which I didn't mind at all. And they -- they returned after the Munich agreement had been signed, and it was pretty sure that a war would not break out immediately. People we -- were divided. They ca -- people who were conservatives, conservative Jews, I mean, you know, this conservative party of England. There were a lot of those in a rich community like Goldaskreen, and they took the attitude Chamberlain did the right thing. We have not got the means to go to war at the moment. He s -- fo-fought for time. The people who were liberal like Mr. Jacobs said it was a dishonor which we shouldn't have gone in for. And the people who were lesstich labor, they -- they had been such you Jews, they had been such pacifists, that they -- they -- they wouldn't hear about -- about any requirements such as having a draft and mobilizing, and any of those things. They -- they couldn't get used to this idea [indecipherable]. And, as I said, I was very much influenced by the views of people like Mr. Jacobs, who were liberals, who -- who thought this was a --a dishonor. So we've faced reality, as best as we could. And -- and of course the pressure on -- on the German Jews which -- other Jews became larger, until more and more refugees coming into England, and a lot of -- and the difficulty of getting jobs for people, and getting a way of finding money to live on became larger and larger, but the British Jewish community was a [indecipherable] and an extremely well

organized, largely by volunteers. They had money available, and they -- I think they, in my opinion they took care of this refugee program in an excellent -- in a wonderful way, in spite of the fact of course, obviously everybody finished up living at a standard of living which was far, far below the sort of standard of living they had experienced in -- in Germany.

Q: Was life difficult for you as a refugee in London, or did they also make it easier for you?

A: Well, you know, the point was that I had enough money to live on. All I had to look after was t -- to do, was to work and work and work and try and get this high school simetric in four months, which I didn't succeed to do eventually, but nevertheless, that effort [indecipherable] was the only thing I -- I was going for. It's -- I -- I did not have to share in a lot of the hardships which other people were exposed to, because after all, my father could send me some money -- carefully, you know, didn't squander it in any way, lived very simple. But it gave me certain pride to -- to live in a frugal way. And as I said, my aim was to -- was concentrated on qualifying for the high school certificate.

Q: So tell me about the start of the war.

A: All right. After I finish the tutorial college, and have not passed the examination, I -- I passed everything except the English, I just wasn't good enough. But I -- I decided I was not going to go back to school full time. And I registered as the [indecipherable] I -- I went into the German Jewish aid committee, and saw what went on there for a whole day. And in the evening, one of the ladies, she was from the Shief fam -- family -- you know, these were all volunteers, people who did this. She had -- obviously has a tough day, and she says, "Would you like to go to Manchester?" I said, yes, I'll go. I thought it was very important that we -- we refugees would not all congregate in London, and so -- so I -- together with a few other people, a few days later, I went to Manchester, and again, there was a organized German Jewish aid committee, first liv --

first lived in a -- in -- what do you call -- would you call it, I don't know. Some sort of communal house, which again it was, you know, had to be kosher, and -- and it was very nicely organized, and all that, and of course we had to work and keep it clean and all that. And the c-committee went out and to tr-try to find us jobs. And -- and through them, eventually, I got a -- a job which -- which I liked very much. In fact, this was the first non-Jewish offer which the committee had had for jobs. And I wanted to go into machinery repair, and it turns out that this, we -- this part of this -- this plant was not -- the repair shop was not unionized, so I could go -- go -- go into that, and fit myself into that. And it turned out to be an extremely good experience. It's an interesting story, you can tell it in great details. Again, I had to make it clear that I wouldn't work on Saturday, I wouldn't work on Friday afternoons, or would go home early on Friday afternoons. But they -- they didn't mind at all, they said, "Look, if you don't work, you don't get paid. If you clock in and you clock out, and that's it." Initially the German Jewish aid committee subsidized my -- my salary a little bit, and after I found -- I had started working in this job, they told me in the home where we were, that I should go to a certain place, to a certain address where I would be able to make arrangements to finding a place -- permanent place to live, a lodging to -- to live. I went to this place, I had hardly changed from my work clothes, and I went to the right address, and to my great surprise I was in -- at a beautiful estate, very rich, obviously very rich people. I didn't know what it was all about, but I was hope [indecipherable] the right address. It turned out that my friend Mr. Jacobs had made arrangements for this very well-to-do family to go and be introduced to me. These were the Steinats. They were, you know, the Laskeys, the famous Laskeys were the richest family in Manchester, Jewish family in Manchester. And the Steinats were the second richest families. And they were -- s-started my relationship with that -- that family. The brother of Mrs. Steinats had also been an officer in the Jewish brigade in World War

One, and that -- so the connection between Mrs. Jacobs and the Steinats. So you see it's just all -- all a question of connection with -- and it was very important in England, everything is c-connection. It's not what you know, it's whom you know. And the Steinats made arrangements for me to be billeted, to -- to -- to rent a room from a lady who had been the second driver of Mr. Steinats father. Mr. Steinats hated her like the guts. He didn't like her at all. But it came in handy for me to -- to live there, and I lived there with another German Jewish man, who was two years older than I, and -- and there was a very old man also living there as a lodger. Now, this lady rented rooms, and she provided meals. It was pretty primitive, but all right, I -- I didn't [indecipherable] I d -- the -- the job which I had accepted, w-w-was technically very good, but it again, the circumstances of -- of cleanliness, and toilet facilities were just d-disgusting. But I th -- I thought this is part of living like this, and I was living on the -- during the week I was living in the poverty of a working class atmosphere, and on weekends I was going to the Steinats for practically all my meals, and living in a very, very high class atmosphere. Undoubtedly the Steinats were richer even than my father was. And I -- I thought it was greater -- a great experience. So I -- I think I have to take another trip to the toilet.

Q: Sure. [tape break] So where were you when the war began?

A: Well, just let me tell you about one more item that was also very significant in my life. It -- first of all, as you may remember or may know, I think it was in February, 1939, Hitler marched and took over the rest of Czechoslovakia. Of course, everybody thought the war was going to break out immediately then, but I -- I was sure it wouldn't. Because now the attitude of France and England changed, and they started sending their foreign ministers to Moscow to try and get a gr-great alliance with the Russians going. And of course that was their big hope, that they eventually would pull that off, and pull it off together. And -- and all the workers in -- in the

factory where I worked said we'll be in war -- at war in a week or so, and I say, no you won't be. They going to try this, and they're going to be -- do their best effort to -- to pull a -- make alli -- a major alliance with the Russians. And this is very much what happened. So nothing much happened politically, every -- except that everybody was sure that eventually there would be a war. But the -- these two elephants were not in -- on the way yet. Then on Shavuot, 1939, I was at the Steinats again, and so I mentions that I had just -- had bu -- gotten a chief rabbi from Manchester, Dr. Altman, who was, not to me, but to other people, a well known rabbi from Berlin. Quite young, he was in middle 30's, or -- at the time, and sa -- for the [indecipherable] after the synagogue ceremony, th -- the Steinats had invited Dr. Altman and his wife, together with a few other very prominent people of the Jewish community. The day was glorious, the weather was glorious, the food was incredible. Of course it had to be non-meat, being Shavuot, and this is where I came to know Dr. Altman, who later on became the head of the -- head of the Institute of Advanced Jewish Studies at Brandeis University. And he -- we became friends right there and then, and he is being -- he being -- he was my mentor, from whom I learned an awful lot, until the time he died in, I don't know, some times in the 80's. He was professor at Harvard, same time professor at Jerusalem University. And but that's -- basically he was a fantastic thinker, with tremendous ideas, and I attended a lot of lectures which he gave, mostly in Manchester, and then later on here, in this country. And he set me on a path of -- of studies, and views that have sur -- very much influenced my life and gave me a much deeper understanding of Judaism than I could have possibly gotten in any other way. So that was sometime on May, 1930 -- '39. And then, actually on -- so then, in beginning of September, 1939, it suddenly transpired that Germany had made a pact with the Soviet Union, or the Soviet Union had made a pact with Germany that they were going to divide up Poland between the two of them. I don't

know whether we were a hundred percent aware of it, that they were going to divide up Poland at that time, but you know, that's what it amounted -- amounted to. And now the road was clear for Hitler to march into Poland, and -- which he did on September first, 1939. England declared war on the following Sunday, this was -- September first was a Friday, and England declared war on a -- on a Sunday night. And I happened to be at the Steinats at that time, listen -- listened to the speech which Chamberlain made, over the radio, which he pointed out that I ca -- I -- I wish I had the -- the exact text of this. I've asked people to look it up, I think I want to look it up, it's very worthwhile. He said these [indecipherable] evil things we'll be fighting against, bad faith, something something, and oppression, but I can't remember exactly any more. And against these, I'm sure the right will prevail. So --

Q: Is it [inaudible]

A: That's this here. So the -- the first thing -- the first thing we experienced at the time, was that we all had to register, we German Jews, and we were, in a typical British fashion, put before a tribunal, which [indecipherable] each case individually, and people were classified into a categ -- German -- you know, we were off -- t-to the British we were all German. There were -- category A went straight into interment camp, category B could go on living under certain circumstances, and category C were totally free, and being treated like British people. Of course with my connections to the Steinats and all that, I had no difficulty in being assigned to c-category C. So i-it didn't affect me in the beginning, at all. The -- there now was a -- a c-call-up. Conscription was enacted, people were called to the services, and obviously the country was getting on a war fut -- footing slowly. This was the period which we call the phony war because nothing happened. There was a British expeditionary force sent into France but not into Belgium. And th-they were very -- an-and the western front was extremely inactive, nothing happened there at all.

Hitler was occupied in the east, conquered Poland, and this was a -- and apparently things were very quiet, but everybody realized this was a quiet before -- before the storm. I continued to work in the same place I was, and in January ni -- 1940, I managed to pass the high school certificate, which I had continued preparing -- prepared in pravin -- largely in private class, private pa -- private tuition, and not -- not even going to any classes at all. I had a pr -- civil pri -- different private teachers. I -- I had a very heavy German bicycle, which -- with which I run around all over the place, at all times of the days and nights. And somehow this way I -- I managed to -- to -- to survive. In -- now, you know, jobs became freely available. There was a shortage of workers everywhere, and after awhile I decided I wanted to go and do something closer to what I -- my long term aim was, and I got myself a job in a factory that manufactured agricultural machinery. They -- actual -- in actual fact, the actu -- the experience was -- I felt was not very good, and the agricultural machinery was very crude compared with what I had been doing up to that time, and I didn't think I was learning too much from getting -- being exposed to this machinery, and I have -- wuf -- had more or less made up my mind to give all this up, and go into a different direction, for to -- to go into machine tools, which were th -- at the height of -- of what has -- one has to know as a mechanical engineer. But then of course, came the invasion of -- first of Norway and Denmark, and after that the invasion of the lowlands, and the attack on the western front, and now everything changed. Obviously with the -- the use of secret sympathizers, Nazi sympathizers that suddenly rose up in Holland and in Belgium, in -- in less -- to a lesser extent in Denmark, but to a larger extent in Norway, now the British public became a -- very, very concerned about people like ourselves. The first affected --

End of Tape Two, Side B

Beginning Tape Three, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number three, side A.

A: So, after the invasion of the lowlands, and Hitler's victory in the west, and after the British expeditionary force had been brought back to England via Dunkirk in the famous Dunkirk retreat, it -- our life was made a lot harder. As I said, I had to given -- I had to give up my bicycle. Luckily it was summer, so I could do everything by bus, and the days were long. But very soon thereafter, we were interned -- put into an internment camp. The first internment camp I was in was near Manchester. It was an old disused factory, terribly filthy. It was in Bury, B-u-r-y, and there were about -- there must have something like two or 3,000 people in it. They ranged from German merchant sailors, so ver -- real Germans who had been taken prisoner on the high seas, to us, the ultra Orthodox Jew, or the Orthodox Jews. There was a whole big group of Orthodox people there, and we all stuck together. We of course didn't participate in the -- the general food, we -- we did our own cooking, and looked after ourselves, which meant no meat, and of course there were no such things as eggs, so f-food was pretty short. I don't -- can't remember how long we were in this disused factory. We were lucky that the weather was perfect, for England, and this was a beautiful summer, because I -- I -- thinking i -- in case of rain, I don't think the roof would -- would have held up.

Q: How did you first learn that you were going to be sent to this internment place?

A: Well, the police came around, you know, the police came around and said oh sorry, you ha -- you have to pack up and you have to go -- you'll be interned. The -- first they had come around before, and you know, told me to se-sell the bicycle, which I did, I sold it to a neighbor who --

who was a bicycle nut. He l-loved bicycles, and then they came around later on again, and said sorry, we have to intern you. So this was from one day to the other, pack up, and I --

Q: And when was this, when did this begin?

A: This must have been something like June, July, 19 -- 1940. Sis -- so we were in this place in Bury, this -- this used factory, tried to make ourselves useful by working, it's one thing or the other. That was a lot of time to spend, but a lot of people had bor -- brought good books, and tis -- there were interesting discussions. As I said, I -- I think there must have been something like 2,000 people in that camp. From there we were eventually shipped to a place near Shrewsbury, which was an internment camp which was all tents, so we lived in tents. Again, the Orthodox j -- Jews kept together and had a very organized life. There were enough rabbis amongst that group to organize all this. And we kept to our -- ourselves, and everybody tr-tried to he -- help, and make -- make a go of it. [indecipherable] I -- I did feel -- I became quite weak because of the lack of food. The one main instance I remember is that when the son-in-law of the famous chief rabbi of England, Dr. Hertz, whose -- you know, who has written that book [indecipherable] Torah -- underneath the green you'll find the -- that's the Hertz Bible. And he came around and he -- he sort of assured us that they would see to it that the -- the food situation would improve. But, of course, it couldn't be for a very long time in this tent camp, and I think some time in -- probably in September or so, maybe it was later, I can't remember exactly any more, every -- these -- we were all shipped over to the Isle of Mann, where they had fenced off whole districts of the town and some [indecipherable] were converted into -- into internment camps. Again, there were houses with -- for Orthodox Jews, and we all kept to ourselves. But life was quite organized there. It was -- it was before Rosh Hashanah, because I remember, you know, the --

the houses were right on the seaside. For Rosh Hashanah, a lot of people went into the ocean for like a -- you know, doing the cleaning, for a mikvah. So --

Q: This is all 1940 still?

A: 1940, yeah.

Q: Who -- was it only Germans there, and were there any women, or only men?

A: There -- there was a women's camp somewhere. I don't -- don't know -- can't remember where it was any more, but there were only men, you know, in case -- there were only men in the internment camp. The -- yeah, the -- as I said, the life was very -- start getting very organized, there were a lot of classes. You could learn anything you wanted, people taught just about any subject you could think about. And of course there were a lot of aus -- Austrians there. There were very good lectures on psychology, and very intensive classes on -- on -- also Jewish subjects. Mathematics classes. I remember I started learning mechanical drawing there, and there were people who were teaching automobile design and things of that nature [indecipherable] was very -- intellectually very, very active.

Q: These are just classes taught by the other people who were being kept there?

A: Yeah, yeah, that's right. All self organized. Well, I don't know when it was, I think it was October, November, they had the -- there was an announcement that the age of entry into the army for enemy aliens, whi-which we were, had been lowered from 20 years to 18, I think. So, I had actually tried to volunteer for the army before that, but because I -- I still saw that eventually we wouldn't be able to avoid it, but I was too young. Then they lowered the age, and a few British Jewish officers came around, and organized meetings. Had a big meeting in -- in the internment camp and told us to come and volunteer for the army. Well, I -- I volunteered. It was somewhat resented by some people. A lot of people said that they will join if they were free men,

but they wouldn't join from internment camp, things of that nature. But I thought that was neither one way or the other, and that they eventually will have to go one way or the other anyhow, so might as well g-go and do it sooner than later. I d-definitely wanted to get out of internment camp. And --

Q: Was it a -- was it also a -- even though it was intellectually a -- a per -- you know, a period of fruitful intellectual activity, was it also just very harsh conditions, living conditions? What were the living conditions like?

A: No. Living conditions were pretty good, except again for this food business [indecipherable] the living conditions were quite good. We -- we lived in houses. Of course, every room had -- was full of beds, you know, and there was one common room, a dining hall where everybody collected for anything that's -- what wasn't sleeping. And -- and it -- it -- it was not -- it was not a great hardship, no way.

Q: Did you feel that it was unfair to -- to keep you in an internment camp?

A: Well, maybe I did, but I -- you know, I -- I -- I felt a sympathy, with all the things you'd read about the -- the Quisling regimes, and the traitors that had been in Fr-France -- in -- in Holland, or Norway and Belgium, I -- somehow I -- I -- I sympathized with the British, that they had to do this in order to make sure -- they couldn't j-justify -- before their own people they couldn't justify having us run around free in their country. So it -- it was more -- it was definitely done more for morale and propaganda than for actually being afraid that things might -- sas -- there might be spies amongst ourselves, and so on, so forth. So I -- I was willing to accept this affect, that this w-was a necessary move that the government had to make. And then in -- I think it was beginning of December 1940, it was my turn to -- to leave, and we -- I joined the Pioneer Corps, but actually what was happening was we were -- we were ju -- went by boat and train from the

Isle of Mann, first to Liverpool, and then to Ilfracombe, which is corn -- Cornwallis, or -- you know, it's just -- just south -- in the far southwest of England. That was the headquarters for the Pioneer Corps, the -- Pioneer co -- the alien man -- Pioneer Corps. The other members of the Pioneer Corps were British s- soldiers, who had -- actually were very -- had come i -- were not -- not completely trusted because of legal difficulties, or were people who had -- were not fit at all. So we had these German Austrian companies of the Pioneer Corps, that were made up of very f -- relatively very fit German Austrian Jews. And -- and the Pioneer Corps stayed there in Ilfracombe in the southwest for a few weeks, for some sort of basic training, which of course did not involve weap -- weapons. We were not trusted with weapons. And from there we went to Yorkshire, my company went to Yorkshire, and -- which there w-was a big army camp, Ketray camp, and from there we went to a very nice place in the -- the lake district, beautiful place where we build a -- a petroleum dump for storing gasoline. You know, it was all labor work. In Ketray camp, I don't think we did that much labor yet, but then we went to this Sedberg. Now Sedberg was in the lake district, a beautiful town with -- which had a -- one of these what's called public schools, which of course are these very, very private schools in England. And i-it was pleasant, very pleasant to be there, first time a chance to go out and go to dances, and go to m-mix with the population, started having a girlfriend, things of that nature. Also, the other thing was my father had a cousin in York. And I'd never met them, but I knew they were there. And so one Sunday I hitchhiked to York, and I came to know my father's cousin, who was the owner of a very, very successful factory in -- i-in -- in England. I'd heard about him, but I'd never been there, I'd never been in touch with these people, but I just happened to go there. And on -- on a Sunday afternoon, and I happened to find them at home. He had bought up a patent in Italy for a plastic which has what we would now call -- basically the structure of nylon. But he made it -- he

made it out of the milk that was rejected from the chocolate ma -- making process. And he sold this -- his idea to Roundtree in York, the famous chocolate company, and he ec -- he got -- got their waste product, and he made this plastic which was called not Bakolite, but Gansolite, because his name was Gans, too. And they had this big factory there, very successful, and his home really -- which was also one of these beautiful estates, almost in the center of York, his home was sort of the rallying point for all of us Gans and related families from the American and British army, who happened to be in England. And this was -- this was a very, very nice c-contact, and a very nice connection. I volunteered for every -- every damn thing that could be, to get me out of the Pioneer Corps. England was now alone. You know, the United States was not in -- not in the war, and Russia was -- had successfully divided Poland with hi -- with Hitler. So they were not in the war. So the i -- the British had the idea that the only way they could possibly inflict a lot of damage on Germany was to have a huge Air Force. So they were looking for volunteers for people to go into the Air Force. Well, I went to the examination, and all -- the examination was in Blackpool, which was -- was about two or three hours by train ride from where -- from where I was. Passed the examination, was accepted in, but of course they -- they didn't understand. When they f -- looked at my nationality they refused to let me in. But I had the -- I ha -- for ye -- for a long time I carried around this piece of paper which showed that I had passed the part of the acceptance process for the Air Force. So that didn't work out.

Q: And when is this now? What point?

A: This is n -- this is now -- now, wait a minute, let me see. This is 19 -- it's nine 1940 -- four ni -- '41. It's 1941. And this -- you know, in -- in the meantime of course, th -- round about -- I think it was in the spring of 1941, there was this meeting between Elizabeth and chur -- Churchill on the high seas. America was still not in the war, but America had -- was giving for free, 50

destroyers to Great Britain on generally supporting -- supporting the British war effort. But th -- Roosevelt could of course not go and -- and join in the war. There was far too much isolationism in the United States to allow him to declare war, but he was actually supporting the British in their war effort. And then in the summer of 1941, I don't know the exact date any more -- of course, from one minute to the other, Hitler moved his armies against Russia. It's apparently just totally expected by both the British and the Americans. They had made all the provisions just what -- what they were going to do when this event would happen. I wish I would have copy [indecipherable] if you could get it off the streets that Churchill made that night when -- when Germany invaded Russia. It's -- it's very applicable to our present situation in Iraq. He said something like I won't take back anything I have said against Communism, but I see a people now being faced with a totally different ideology. I see the ordinary Russian people, and -- be -- being faced with an -- a representative of an ideology that is totally alien to them, and I'm sure they will resist against it. [indecipherable] all this was -- I -- I -- I have to find the actual speech. I-I-It's -- it's very, very significant.

Q: And this whole time you were in the Pioneer Corps, still?

A: Yes. Now -- I were -- things were loosening up. They allow -- we were allowed to -- we were getting weps -- we were now subject to weapons training, and felt more -- by this time, I think we were in Edinburgh. As a matter of fact, I -- we were working in a anti-aircraft unit that was the first mixed sex -- sex mixed anti-aircraft unit in the -- in -- in Great Britain. And it was a very, very interesting experience, too. Also some very lovely girls there, no doubt. And later on we went to -- to Glasgow, and we worked -- we started working building an ammunition dump for -- let me see, can't remember exact date any more. I think by this time -- can't remember the

date, six -- ha-have -- have to think this out, but I have a feeling that we were building this ammunition dump for the Americans. So that must have been after Pearl Harbor then.

Q: And when did you get this rare opportunity that then came your way?

A: Well, as I said, I -- I volunt -- volunteered for everything, and I think it was the end of 1942, I think. By that time I had made my name in the -- in the unit. See, you know, th-these -- these Pioneer Corps units were full of people who were -- who knew how to boast, and push themselves forward very much. They were all experts at everything, you know. And I -- I, of course, I never participated very much in -- in -- in sports that were open to many people, things like that. Well, one day I remember we had a -- they were -- they had a fo -- a race, a su -- sort of like a sports day, and the -- you know, running a 400 meter, you know, this is actually one round on -- and that was the major event there. And of course there were all these guys there who had been such champions in all their Maccabee clubs, and God knows, all over the place. Well, I did the run, and I won it so easily. And now I had made my name, you know. I -- I -- I hadn't realized myself how -- how -- how f -- much better I was at sports than all these people who were so -- boasting continuously about their powers, you know? A-And I knew when w-we were near Glasgow at the time, and we were billeted on pr -- in private homes -- you know, we were not eating there, but were -- just slept there. Had a -- had a -- when -- I remember when I went home, I knew this was going to be the change of my life. And so it went. When eventually the call came for people to go to something very, very special, I was one of the first who was s-selected to -- but there being -- after this event, we started a -- we competed in many, many different sports events, and I was always very much the center of everything of the team that was sent by our unit, to all these sports event -- events, and I've -- I've -- I was running on -- on -- on a cloud, you know? So I think it was at the end of 1942 that I was -- went to London, and I was

interviewed by a man who had the uniform of a captain, and who obviously knew an awful lot, and knew what he wanted, and that turned out to be eventually the skipper, you know, he's -- he's all on the pictures there. I -- I s-should have gone through these pictures before with you.

Q: Yeah, well you can show me at the end.

A: Yeah.

Q: We can look at them.

A: And also then, we were interviewed by somebody from MI-five, who was supposed to make sure all on your background, and -- very knowledgeable people, very, very knowledgeable. You know this [indecipherable] combination of the CIA and the FBI. And I was absolutely sure that I had been accepted. I had no doubts about it whatsoever. And then, a few weeks later, or two weeks later, the [indecipherable] called to the [indecipherable] told me, and maybe three or four others to go to the Pioneer Corps center in -- in Yorkshire. I think it was in Yorkshire, horrible place. And there -- from there we were taken on a train by night, and the next morning we arrived in Abu Dhabi, which was the training pl-place for [indecipherable] commando. And there we changed our names, changed our identities. Within two hours, we all -- we had a false history, a false name, and that was it. And that was the beginning of the -- being in the commandoes.

Q: What was your false name and your background, your identity you were given?

A: My name was Fred Gray. I spelled it a-y. And we were all s-supposed to say that we were British by -- by nationality, but that our fathers, our parents had been assigned to such and such a -- m-my case it was, of course, Holland, since I spoke some Dutch, it was easy to do, had been assigned to -- to -- had -- had lived in -- in other countries. And so that's the reason why we had grown up in -- abroad, but we were British by nationality.

Q: What was the main qualifying factor for being part of this troop?

A: That you spoke German without an accent. This was extremely important. We didn't realize it at that time, how important this would [indecipherable] be. I only can ta -- give you one statistic. I must have caused the surrender of about 10,000 Germans [indecipherable] without a fight. I didn't -- I didn't -- we didn't realize it at the time. We were supposed to do long distance patrols, we were supposed to do interrogation on -- on the battlefield, which we did, and which were very important. No doubt these were very important, because you know, we could interrogate the prisoners right there and then on the battlefield. And we had been trained for that. I had been to the intelligence school in Cambridge, in -- in England. And so -- and that -- that was extremely important, no doubt about it. But the ability to walk into a German position and persuade people to surrender without fighting, proved more important than anything else. A-Anything else we learned. After all, we learned everything. Mountaineering, parachute jumping. Anythi -- we'd done any -- everything there was to be done. But it -- the -- the ability to walk into a ger -- walk into a German position and talk to them as if you were one of them, this was the main contribution, as it turned out to be, for the war for us.

Q: They would see you, of course, in your uniform, and you would appear to be, you know, a British, you know, soldier, or -- you know, but -- but you're saying the fact that you spoke without an accent was also more convincing to them, somehow, to get them to surrender?

A: Yeah, ju -- obviously there had to be some sort of infiltration and some fights before that, which you may have read about in the stories in which I wrote about [indecipherable] when we did this repeatedly, or in France. You -- there had to be some sort of infiltration before that, but once you were in that position, you -- then we were very, very persuasive. Don't threaten them with a gun, just tell them quick how many --

End of Tape Three, Side A

Beginning Tape Three, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number three, side B.

A: Again, they said that was not necessarily what was planned for us, but this was what turned out to be our greatest asset.

Q: Who was in this troop, the numbers of people, and what was their background?

A: There were 87 people in the troop, and they were all, I think this -- with the exception of one or two, they were all German or Austrian Jews, meaning Jews by the t -- by Hitler's definition. A lot of them by wh-what we call Halachak definitions are not Jewish, because they had a -- a Jewish father, and a non-Jewish mother. Quite a number of those, quite a number. Of course you know a couple like that had to leave Germany very early, otherwise life was impossible for them, and a lot of them did leave very early. So by what we used to call Halachak Jewish law, Jewish [indecipherable] maybe 75 percent of us were Jewish.

Q: And was this -- do you think this was an important qualification that -- that they were looking for, that the British actually chose Jews?

A: No, they didn't choose Jews, no. Those -- Montgomery -- I'm sorry, Lord Mountbatten. Lord Mountbatten, who was in charge of combat operation, who was -- you know, he's -- is the uncle of, you know, Prince Philip, the husband of the queen, he da -- his -- I think his parents had gone through some sort of experience in World War One, and he was in combat -- in charge of combined operation, which consisted of the units of the army, largely commanders, Air Force, and Navy. And he came up with the idea that he had to have German speakers somewhere, and that he needed really good German speakers, so he -- he sold that idea to Churchill, and

Churchill was very enthused about it, and Churchill said that the troops should be called X-troops. But of course that name had to be dropped, it was too suspicious. And then, you know, we became a [indecipherable] of the inter-allied commando. That's how we were -- were -- how we were known. Was a commando which had units, Belgian units, French units, Polish unit -- units, Norwegian unit, and well, that's about it.

Q: So previously I never knew about this troop, do y -- and I'm wondering if -- if it seems like it's been -- not only at the time, I guess it was kept secret, and -- but has it been sort of a well kept secret even -- even now?

A: Well, it's just -- not kept secret, but you know, we all went our different ways. The -- the skipper, the head of the troop got injured in France, you know, on a long term patrol, and he was taken prisoner, and he was -- did not return until after the war. He wrote a very nice assessment of the troop back in 1946 or so. And -- you know, we were all, after the war we were all -- we -- we didn't particular think that we had done such great things. We were -- we were involved in our own careers, had to make a living. Potential wives, girlfriends, were not interested in what we had done during the war. What they wanted was to get married and make sure that we had enough money to -- to have children and all that. And particularly this was the attitude of -- of the parents of all our potential wives and girlfriends. So the whole idea was not really -- we da -- we -- we didn't care to -- we didn't have any reunions until maybe the 40th anniversary of D-Day, and wh-what was that? That would have been in 1984, right? Yes. I -- I think that the first one was 1984. And of course it's the -- Peter Maas's book that really brought all this out into the open, better than anything else.

Q: Did you realize at the time how unusual this was, that you were, you know, Jewish, and able to train to fight and obviously eventually go to an area where, you know, Jews were so persecuted?

A: Yes, we -- I was very much aware of it. I was very much aware, and so were my friends, that this was something totally unique. My -- my closest friends were very, very supportive of all this, and they realized what were -- what had happened. But it -- but it remained a unique experience. We -- and, you know, my experience of course was very -- almost very different from everybody else's experience. First of all, I refused to go to the officer's training school. I didn't want to miss the war. My -- my closest friends in the [indecipherable] troop went in to officer training school for four months just before D-Day, and of course they missed most of the war. I absolute refused to go. I wer -- and then there came an order from the British army command that people were not to be promoted to officers in their field without going to officer's training school. Well, I didn't care two hoots about it, but it so happens that of course I was attached to a Marine unit. And the Marines didn't have to take any notice of all these army uni- units. I was with the Marine commando, and one day they colonel said, "Tell me who you really are. I -- I want to make -- I want to put you in for be-becoming an officer."

Q: So speaking of your other identity, what was that like to assume a different identity?

A: Oh, it was very handy. You know, I -- I had no difficulty with it. And you have -- in England you have the desire to submerge yourself. It's not like American society. You know, if you tell -- in those days, it's very different now, very different now, in those days if you told a British person -- a British person, I'm going to be naturalized, and become British, and they would say, "You? You're not British." You know, tha -- but here, people -- you come in this country, and it's -- the people ask you when are you going to get your naturalization, or have you gotten it

already, you know? And braka -- hurry up, and so on, so forth. Totally different attitude in this country. But -- so. you had a desire in England to submerge yourself and pretend that -- were -- to be something that you were not. And -- so that suited in very, very handily. Of course, I had to give up being an Orthodox Jew, in doing that, you know? But --

Q: How difficult was that for you?

A: Well, let's -- it was part of -- this was part of the sacrifice you make. I want to tell you a story which is very, very interesting, I've -- I've not told it before. When we were in the Isle of Mann in the inte -- internment camp -- as I said, we were Orthodox Jews living together, there was a man there by -- he was the son of Rabbi Spitzer from Hamburg. Rabbi Spitzer from Hamburg was known as a great Talmudist, very ultra-Orthodox who had come out of Hungary to become a -- a rabbi, chief rabbi of -- of Hamburg, in Germany. His son was regarded to be far superior to the father, as far as brain and knowledge was concerned. And one day t -- one day to the other, the son decided that a rabbinical career was not for him, and he wanted to go into law. He knew Talmudic law fantastically, and he then went and became -- took his legal papers in Germany. Of course he couldn't practice by the time he'd finished. So, you know, he couldn't be a lawyer, Jewish lawyer in Germany any more. But he was with me in there, in the same house in which I was in -- on the Isle of Mann. And he -- he was a tall man, good looking man, always -- he did not run around with a yarmulke, he run -- was running around with [indecipherable] golf cap -- golf cap [indecipherable], but I mean, he was a ultra, ultra-Orthodox Jew. Extremely well versed. I mean, a lot of the things which I have learned, attitudes which I have taken on Halachak and Jewish law, I've learned from him. Well, the day when we -- we volunteered, when I and two or three other people in the house volunteered for the British army, it came out -- we went into our dining room where -- which was the only common room there was, and we announced to people

there that -- what we had done, that we volunteered for the army. There was a fellow there by the name of Josele. Well, Josele was a devoted Yeshiva student, absolute -- not too brilliant, absolutely devoted to -- to [indecipherable]. He got very, very upset, and he said, "If y -- you -- what you doing is you will have to work on Saturdays, you'll hardly be able to eat kosher food. You will have to starve yourself to go. This -- the fact that you volunteer for this army, it just goes to show that you put your secular existence far above your Jewish consciousness." And in the corner was this ra -- Spitzer, the lawyer rabbi, and he was sitting behind his books. And he came out, he -- he looked up from his book, and he said, "But Josele," -- remember, this in 1940, "it's -- it's not a mitzvah -- mitzvah to fight Hitler?" Josele, he had a totally different -- totally different attitude to this -- to -- he saw the larger implication, in spite of the fact that by that time there had no -- not been concentration camps, mass extermination and all that sort of thing. You know, after all this was all st -- still to come. But it stuck -- stuck -- stuck into my mind, and --

Q: Did that influence you at the time, too?

A: Yeah, and this, you know, this is -- this is why I was willing to accept -- accept whatever it meant, or whatever I had to do, because -- including giving up being an Orthodox Jew, when the time came to be at the commandoes.

Q: Now, while you were in the commando, did you still, in your own personal and private way, was religion important to you as -- as you went through those war time experiences?

A: It's a -- in a sort of general way, yes. But you know, there was too many other things we had to concentrate on to -- to even start thinking about all this. I -- I -- to me the Jewish religion is a set of ideas which I practice, and it's -- I -- I'm not that comfortable in praying because the prayers to me are -- have a great depth, but they are an idiom that we cannot relate to. And just as you find in a lot of ultra Orthodox Jews, they rather sit down and study the Talmud than go and

do -- do prayers. And -- and you know, this is -- so you had a guidance there, and -- when it was absolutely needed, but that wasn't very often. And I -- when I was in difficult situations, I did not -- not pray. I remember that one [indecipherable] one -- you may have read this story I written about Pontlivek, when I suddenly found myself in this German artillery fire, very much exposed, and I just -- I -- you know, I s -- I sort of said, get me out of this. Bus -- was addressing wa -- I was obviously addressing a higher authority, like God or so. And -- but it -- it required moments of that nature to make -- to make me -- to make me even think about -- about religion. Normally the concentration had to be all on techniques. Going through a minefield, doing this and that and the other. Always a technique we had [indecipherable] out. You had to concentrate. There was no time to -- to think of anything else. And that's [indecipherable] made it all possible.

Q: So tell me about D-Day. You -- is this the first time that you -- you entered --

A: Yes.

Q: -- into actual war time fighting?

A: Yes, it -- yes. We had -- we had been -- we had tried to do certain raids on France before D-Day, by parachute, and certain missions were planted, or didn't come off, some of them, bec -- because we always -- when you were -- when a -- when a force like that went out by parachute, they had to go out with the massive bombers that attacked the American and British bombers that attacked [indecipherable] Germany at the time. So you had to blend in, and then you drop -- you drop out and do certain things. Well, none of these things came off, partially because of bad weather, partially because the information was obtained from different means and so on, so forth. So, though we had been prepared for certain raids, and some of us had been on certain raids, I personally had not been in any actual fight until D-Day. We were sequestered -- oh, let me go back a little bit. The -- our troop, the German speaking inter-allied commando troop was split up

just before D-Day, when there were four or five of us attached to every invading commando troop. I was assigned together with a fellow by the name of Morris Latimer, whose -- and the Sergeant Major of the troop, O'Neill, and a fellow by the name of Tommy sw-Swenton. These are all these cover names of course. Morris Latimer, for instance, was Morris Levi from the Sudetenland before he joined that troop. So we were assigned to 41 [indecipherable] Marine commando. And we were held in camps for I think two or three weeks while we were being briefed about the landing. And w -- we couldn't communicate with anybody outside because those -- they were -- didn't tell us where we would land. We knew -- we had -- we saw maps, for which people who really knew France well could have guessed where this was. But I'm -- we personally, we didn't know where it was going to be. We didn't know we were going to land in Normandy. So we were in these camps for about two or three weeks, and then one evening, total darkness, we were -- we embarked into little boats, infantry landing boats, which had -- each boat had maybe something like 80 people. And the -- all flotilla set out without light, without any intercommunication, in a pitch dark night. And as far as I know there were no -- no accidents. We sailed past the Isle of Wight in total darkness, couldn't see anything at all. And -- and that was it. The sea was not too rough, it was acceptable, and we -- as we approached, as we came closer to the coast in the morning, well, it must have been about six or seven o'clock in the morning by the time we landed. But before that we could start to see the massive bombardment of the coast, and the shooting back of -- of the -- of the German guns back to us. And one of us always sat on the steps, so that s -- way you could look out and sort of gave a running commentary on what was happening, what he was seeing, and soon -- of course pretty soon the German [indecipherable] guns started -- the shells started falling nearer to us. Lucky tha -- luckily we were not hit. And now, before all this, while we were in the camps, Montgomery, the

a -- the British commander had come around, and he had said, “Look, every time there’s a landing, everybody sticks to the beach because they want to be protected by the Navy. Get off the beaches. You can -- don’t,” -- and that struck me as being very, very significant. The really tr-trust that the British have in their Navy, that I could see that the soldiers wouldn’t get away from the beach. And I was absolutely set I was not going to let this happen to me. So, when -- when the -- the -- the -- our boat approached the -- the coast -- and of course as I said, we now were under direct fire -- as soon as I could, I run down the gangway, and I got -- got down -- was on the beach, and lo and behold, I saw about 25 German soldiers who had been taken prisoner by the engineer’s unit that has preceded us, who were supposed to blow up the obstacles, the anti-tank obstacles that were on the beach. And so I run over to those Germans, and I say to them, “Where’s the pass through the minefields?” Well, you know, at that time -- a few days later I didn’t have any fear of mines any more, but at that time I still was very much aware. And lo and behold, when I didn’t threaten them, and, you know, about being -- talking their own language, the first thing that occurred to me is these guys look exactly like us German Jews. Different uniform and they could be on our side. And lo and behold they told me. I didn’t threaten them, I had the tommy gun down. I just said, in a very calm way, “Where’s the pass through the mine fields?” And they pointed it out to me. And so I gathered as many people as I could, and I’d gotten through the -- gotten off the beach, and gotten into Lyon sur Mer without a single casualty. So the -- the -- the -- that -- that was, that part of it, that was off, and actually we lost 50 percent of the unit. Out of 450 people we lost 50 percent on that day. Later on, when we made the landing in Washoe, in -- which was much more heavily defended than the Normandy beaches, much more heavily defended, we lost, out of 450 people, we lost 11 people in the landing. But by that time we were so experienced that nobody could come equal to us. And

everybody did the same as I did, get off the boat, get over the beaches, forget about it and get out.

Q: So this was the -- the end of D-Day for you?

A: No, not at all. This was the beginning of D-Day. Now, they -- we n -- we knew where the German strong points were, and we were at the other end of the village. Luckily, the pass through the mine field was at one end of Lyon sur Mer, and the German strong point was in the other. I had no doubt where we were. You know, we had studied the maps sufficiently. I knew we were at the other end, we had nothing to be afraid of, not until we would get to the strong point. Obviously the Germans are go -- going to be in their strong points. Why should they be out on the road, in the French villages? The French who have murdered them, you know? So, the first thing, I gather up a few guys, we started making our way along the road that was le -- going towards the German strong point. But, you know, you -- you cannot be out in the streets, I -- and -- when it -- when it comes to -- when there's so much artillery fire and mortar fire. It's -- the splinters will carry. So you have to go from one door to the other, dive in and dive out. And of course the population was on our side. They willingly opened the doors for us. So I says you know, you couldn't do this in Germany. We knew that we would never be able to do this type of street fighting in Germany, and we didn't intend to do it, and the British high command saw to it -- had come to the same conclusion. So we were diving from one house into the other. In some houses actually there were people who had been quite badly injured, with all the bombardment by one side or the other. In fact as -- as we got out, you know, to the road first, there were some British soldiers who had obviously been killed by being out on the street when the -- when a shell exploded. You know, y-you cannot stay out under these conditions. So we worked our way -- a few of us worked our way towards the strong point. When we got into this position where we

thought we were about in the view of the strong point, we knew there was an anti-tank gun pointing at us down the road, we got off the street, we got into [indecipherable] abandoned houses, which was quite obviously that we were now very close to the strong point. And I went upstairs and tried to look out and look into the strong point, but some German sniper must have seen me there, and he fired at me, but thank God he missed. So I rushed downstairs again. I think I -- so I went down into the house, and we were sort of milling around, deciding what to do next, when we heard a loud bang on the house next door. And ta -- so -- obviously some missile was going from our side into the strong point. So we really didn't know what the hell this was. We were absolutely sure that apart from our -- our people there could be nobody there. So we went there, and we found an Arab, who had the typical look of what the -- how the Germans portrayed the Jews, you know, black hair, crooked nose and all that. And he had a 19 [indecipherable] war front loader rifle, which he somehow had gotten hold of, and he was firing this into the German strong point. So -- because nobody spoke French, ik -- yeah, my own French was very deficient in those days, I now speak French much better [indecipherable] transfer two years in the meantime. But we persuaded him that he should join us, which he gladly did. And he was with us for -- until the winter of 1944 -- '45. So, after that, the colonel of the unit wanted me to go with him and look at all the different positions which the different troops of 41 commandos had now taken up around the German strong point. And I went with him. And he was one of those guys who wouldn't take no notice of any German fire. He was running around with a briefcase. His name, I think, was Colonel Grey, but he spelled it with e-y, and not a-y like I did. And he -- he wouldn't throw himself down and her -- heard an artillery shell come over, and we heard a mortar come, and -- and [indecipherable] but I wasn't going to do this, so I dodged the way I'd learned to dodge it, and as a matter of fact the next day the colonel was severely injured, he was

out of the war. So, so much for somebody taking such incredible risks, were totally unjustified. But then we had -- I -- a troop of South African armored vehicles came up and came into the village from the beach, and the colonel persuaded them to make a straight attack along the main road to -- on -- on to the German strong point. Which was crazy. The way we did this later on, we used armored vehicles, and even tanks, only as mobile guns. We had them -- h-hid them somewhere in the field, and had them shoot and lay down covering fire while we went in. Anyhow, this attack totally failed. I didn't participate in it because I knew it would -- would be practically suicide to do that. But there was one of the troops of 41 [indecipherable] commando, Y troop, and they lost about half the troop of what they still had, in trying to do this attack, because as we knew well from our -- from the maps we had been given before D-Day, there was a German [indecipherable] tank pointing right down the road. There was no chance that an armored car could get by that. So we hadn't -- we hadn't -- we had not succeeded in taking the strong point on that day. By now it was getting late. We were in a -- on a farm outside Lyon somewhere, and I also was getting extremely hungry, and I -- I found myself of -- a ditch that had a sort of stone lining on both sides, which I took cover, and start -- started to prepare some of the food which we had, it was -- I hadn't eaten all day long. I don't think we had eaten during the night either. There was cocoa. There was -- I mean, there were drinks available, but I -- I didn't take strong drinks because they slow down your reaction too much. And jus -- just at that time, the -- there was a magnificent sight of massive numbers of allied gliders, British gliders come -- being pulled by airplanes coming over, to land on the other side of Lyon canal, and they were sort of -- you know, you could see them being detached, going on their own, and coming down.

End of Tape Three, Side B

Beginning Tape Four, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number four, side A.

A: So this shows that things were proceeding along the way they were planned. Also, by this time a German fighter came over and flew right along the beaches. And you know it says in the book the longest day? That's -- he got away with it, nobody shot at him, but that wasn't true, lots of people shot at him, of course, nu -- none of us hit him. But, you know, it -- one fighter alone could not make much of a difference, probably sent in to scare people off, but it didn't -- couldn't -- it wouldn't work in our case. So this was the first -- this was D-Day, it was the end of D-Day. I slept very well that night in my ditch. I needed it. Next morning, we continued what we were supposed to do on D-Day, we were supposed to conquer German headquarters, move it inland. We were supposed to get the Lyon sur Mer strong point, and we were supposed to get into Luc sur Mer. We had to -- not succeeded doing in any idle -- any of these things. So, next morning the first thing we -- it was decided we'll attack the German headquarters in -- inland. Well, that didn't tu-turn -- it wasn't much of a headquarters. This happens to be a battalion that had just come from the Russian front and they were pretty decimated. And we decided we were not going to go with covering fire, we were just going to run in and surprise them, and s -- which came off beautifully. And s -- I found three Germans there who were obviously volgama -- the Germans call volgadeutshe, the German nationals from -- from Russia or Poland, they're -- very hard to understand them. I tried to get some more information from them, but they proved t-totally useless. So then I turned around to take part in the attack on the Luc sur Mer strong point -- the Lyon sur Mer strong point, but by the time I arrived there, the strong point had given up. And th -- so, I was late. They -- I don't exactly know how -- I think it was B troop of 41

commando that was under the leadership of -- of very, very good officer, whom I had accidentally met already a year ago before that. And he managed to apparently get -- infiltrate his people into the strong point, and get the strong point to surrender. So we went on, and the next stage was very simple. We got into Luc sur Mer very easily, and this -- this was the far end of the British Canadian landing, and now we were at the border of the American and British beach head. And that was supposed to be our D-Day assignment, so this was the end of -- of our D-Day assignment.

Q: Now for the rest of the war, if you could give me a sense just generally, the kind of movements where you -- where you -- you know, what kind of territory you covered in general, and maybe there are a few things that -- that come to mind that particularly illustrate the kinds of things you were doing. I'm also interested, especially when you were able to get Germans to surrender, were you able to learn important information from them along the way?

A: I can say that important information that had strategic significance, I ca -- don't think I ever -- ever was in that position. My idea was get as many of them to surrender as you can -- can get. Find some high ranking officer who will go with you and make everybody surrender. This -- this has worked out to be ex -- excellent strategy, and this worked ma-many, many times. Now, I must say that I know of others who j -- of -- from [indecipherable] commando, who had tried this and did not succeed in -- and -- and -- and who got killed in one of these attempts, and I almost was in a similar situation, too. Well, the -- after we -- we -- after this D-Day experience, we had a rather unique experience besieging two underground German radar stations. They had been left behind in the allied advance, and they were fully manned, and they were hev -- very, very heavily fortified, incredibly heavily fortified. And it was just decided that it was not worthwhile to make an attack -- a direct attack on them. So we were positioned around them, near -- near

them, and we were just as -- supposed to keep them on their toes, make believe that they were about to be attacked. The -- the tra -- the trouble was that the allies were building -- had planned to build an air -- airp -- airport, an air [indecipherable] abou -- only about maybe a mile away from these radar stations. And that plan had to go ahead, you know, there were fields there that were suitable for landing aircrafts on it, and this had to go ahead. And they couldn't take any notice of the fact that these ger -- these underground fortifications were still there. So our task was to make them believe that they were just about to be attacked. And -- which we -- which we successfully managed to do for about a week or so. There were a lot of adventures that we had, where we did things that were totally wrong, that you would never have done a month or two later when we had much more experience. But luckily most of the time we were -- we got away with it. Eventually enough equipment was saved for us -- spared for us that we could do a daylight attack on it, and -- and it was successful. Again, I managed to get these guys out, to surrender. So you had -- we took 450 people prisoner on -- on that day, and we marched them down to the beach, to the -- t-to -- to the prisoner camps of which there were there, but we shipped out. That was an interesting experience which I've written up in great detail. If you want to read, you can read it. After that experience, we went to the -- what we might call the eastern front of the Normandy beach head, which was on -- we -- we were in the part that was hev -- very heavily fortified, which was still the extension of what the Germans call the Atlantic wall. And, of course this -- I call it the Hedgerow war, because the -- we were always going along or through some hedgerows to get to our -- to find the German alliance, so [indecipherable], a-and th-this was a -- a -- oh, of course you got a -- a tiring sort of a -- of a experience, but we managed to keep the Germans on their toes with lots of patrols, and usually I had to go out on every damn patrol there was, because by na -- by now the troops, the Marines would hardly ever go out

unless I -- I or -- mo -- Morris La -- or I was present, Morris Latimer had been injured on the radar stations and he had went back to -- to England. The Sergeant Major O'Neill was still with me, swent -- Tommy Swentin had gone home on deeplus two or three, he said he was shell-shocked. And O'Neill was still there, but he was largely with the officers, so I hardly ever saw them -- saw him.

Q: Now let me ask you, the Germans you encountered along the way, did any of them question you and th -- and even, you know, wonder if you're Jewish, and -- did you -- that ever come up, was that ever a problem?

A: No, no, no. As a matter of fact, that was the un -- unbelievable attitude. If somebody spoke to them in fluent German, they thought that well, you know, we are -- we have -- of such high culture, of course other people speak our language.

Q: So they wouldn't even guess that you were originally German?

A: No, no, not at all. Not at all. Nobody even dreamt of it. It was -- it was unbelievable. And that I think is a -- a -- you know, of course ga -- cultured pe-people speak German, naturally, right? And I'm sure you speak German, too. If you don't, you're not cultured.

Q: [indecipherable]

A: Yeah. So -- yeah, and from -- from that -- so we got on the -- on the northeastern part of the -- of the -- of the Normandy beach head. From there we shifted over to something absolutely terrible, the southeastern part, the southeastern corner of the beach head. Again, this was the -- the only thing that was lucky about it is there ha-had been a British guards battalion there before us, they had dug some way with trenches. We were now something like, maybe maximum 200 - 300 yards away from the German lines. And the bombardment was day and night, mortars, artillery. Artillery is all right because you know it goes off and you can hear it coming and you

know what to do, throw yourself into a ditch. But the mortar fires were -- could be very surprising, you know. We -- we -- we le -- it was o -- it was a lot like being in World War One, it was trench warfare practically. But at night again, we went out on patrol, shot up patrols, we got shot up on -- on patrol and things like that until one day -- of course we were very much aware of the fact of what was happening on the other fronts. The fact that the Americans were breaking through and going south, that they were going west into Brittany, and that they were swinging around as the British -- had been a terrible mass l-losses of germ -- of two and a half German divisions in one night with that -- were poised for counterattack on -- on the British advance, th -- the Germans had not -- thought that they could keep this counterattack of two and a half German divisions secret, but they -- but of course it was all seen from the air, with the ability that the British Air Force had to -- to look at all German movements, and so it came in with a very heavy -- before the -- the Germans could even start to move, came in with a very, very heavy thousand bombers attack. And most of these two and a half -- the people of the two and a half divisions -- SS divisions, they -- they died through lack of ox -- oxygen, or lack of -- or ho -- of hi -- excessively high pressure that they ex-experienced being out in the open, being ready for counterattack. That was -- then -- that was a -- none of these divisions appeared again for the rest of the war. They were SS divisions.

Q: What was the most frightening episode that you experienced?

A: I think that, you know, sus-sustained frightening, was the position we were in in Pontlivek, because we were a cross place, the Germans are at one side in a railway -- in a railway station and we were on the other side, and we were be -- behind walls at [indecipherable] but we knew the walls were -- would not stand -- would not stand a anti-tank gun shot, and we knew that the Germans usually left -- with their rear guards they usually left an anti-tank gun. And that would

have gone right through us. But v-very soon -- th-this was realized that we were in too exposed a position, and we were told to get -- get out of this position and just -- because also, the Germans had left devices in -- in all the bedrooms of the houses, which w -- suddenly all the -- all the houses around us went on fire, and -- you know, this was a sustained, longer experience. But we managed to get out of this, and get out and then we did what we did -- always did, we defeated ma -- we made 10 night attacks in 10 days in that -- that -- during that time. So we were taken out of Pontlivek, was decided what we'll do is we -- we'll go around on the night attacks, and we sa -- we go past them, and don't do a frontal assault anywhere.

Q: So, were you at some point starting to imagine that the war might be coming to an end? When did you start to get a feeling that -- you know, that -- that this might actually be close to the end of the war?

A: Not until very, very much later. I -- even when I -- the first time I got back into my own hometown in Borken, which was Easter Saturday, the town had been taken on the Thursday, Thursday, that Thursday before Easter. I knew about it, and you know, by that time I -- I was an officer, I could move around as I wanted to. Everybody supported me, and I went into Borken, and we -- even at that time we realized that things were not over. And you know, actually there were quite a number of people from sweep of troop -- tank commandoes, who were killed before Hannover. You know, this is hundred miles away, this is almost on the -- on the line with -- where the two armies, the Russian and the -- a-and the ar -- western forces met. Even there, there was still resistance. It -- it was just unbelievable. We knew this fa -- and they were fanatics, these people. And the closer it was getting home to them, the c-ca -- th-the worse it got, and we had absolutely no illusion about it, that -- that there was still some heavy fighting ahead of us at all times. We had -- we si -- it so happens that they -- they -- you know, we were on the Dutch --

Dutch front, it never lit up. We -- we never personally were involved. But at any moment we could have been told get over to this and this and this position, and that would have been -- and there would have been real fanatical resistance. There was a very good friend of mine, a German writer, who wrote a -- a book called, “Five Minutes Before Midnight,” where he describes how there’s last minute resistance in this area, all the time, and of course he says this -- this led to the destruction of all these towns in -- in our home district, because there were always some fanatics who said they could hold out, and you had -- you had to -- had to take care of it. Quite apart from the fact that we just knew if there was going to be an invasion of Japan, we were going to be in it. This unit had been in the invasion of Sicily, had been in the inva -- invasion of Italy, had -- we had been in Normandy. We had done the invasion of Washoe. There -- no way was there going to be an invasion of Japan without us. So, the war was not over.

Q: And you were -- were you able to, you know, have enough strength throughout? Was this -- you know, did you get used to living with just always having a certain amount of fear, or did that fear go away after awhile?

A: No, w-we [indecipherable] particularly after we -- we felt very much experienced, battle experienced, superior to the -- to the Germans. Better -- we were better equipped, we knew how to move better. A lot of their strength had gone out by too fanatical resistance. The fear -- the fear was not a real condition any more. Ve -- very, very confident what we could do, particularly after the -- during and after the Washoe invasion. It was a -- was a terrific morale booster for us that everything had gone so smoothly against incredible fortifications. So -- so --

Q: Where were you at the end of the war? Where had you gotten to at that point?

A: We were still in the south of Holland, in -- you know, the -- that part of Holland never surrendered. Th-the Germans never surrendered at all until I don’t know wh -- well after -- even

after we left. So, you know, I had heard through people who had been -- go-gotten to Switzerland in this exchange of Eichmann's, of Jews against trucks, that my parents were in Theresienstadt, so I was set to go there at the earliest possible moment.

Q: When is the last time you had actually heard from them, or corresponded with them?

A: I would say in 1941. There were still Red Cross letters, you know. 1941. A -- long before I went into the commandoes. That was the last time I [indecipherable] then they went -- they went into hiding too, but of course they got betrayed. That's one story I've never written up and my brother is always telling me to write that up, that story, because I confronted that guy, and he finally got 10 years prison for -- but he done a lot of other things apart from betraying my parents. He had s-sold all the weapons of the Dutch underground to the Communists. When -- he wasn't a Communist, no way, but he was after money. He was state detective. So --

Q: So at the end of the war, you -- you didn't know what had happened to your parents, but you started to hear. How did you hear about them? Who -- who told you?

A: Well, as I said, there was this exchange of Jews against trucks, and some of these had gotten to -- family had gone to Switzerland. They wrote to my uncle in -- in New York, saying that my parents were in ter -- Terezin, and he wrote it t -- to my younger brother, who was still -- whose address he still knew. Of course that nobody knew what I was doing, or where I was. I had a cover address and all that, and eventually that news got to me, that they were in -- probably in Terezin. And this is why I decided I want to try to get there. So after -- soon as I got permission to do that, I took a Jeep and a driver, and we drove all across Germany into the Sudetenland, which had not surrendered yet, still German divisions, it was still real German. Then we drove into the Russian lines, and Terezin had been liberated by the Russians just two days before I came there.

Q: When was this?

A: This was -- I think I got to Terezin on May 12th, so I think it was -- must be May 12th I got there, or May 11th, something like -- or maybe it wa -- somewhere around that time. It was two -- two or three days after -- after V-E Day.

Q: So, first of all tell me a little bit about the journey to get there. Was it a -- a difficult journey, what -- what was it like, and what did you see along the way?

A: The -- the journey was hard for us because we had so much trouble with the Jeep. But you know, you could always drive into some British or American repair station, and they didn't fuss around very much, they gave you new wheels, they gave you new -- new shock absorbers, new brakes, whatever you have -- whatever you needed could always be obtained pretty rapidly. But then, you know, once we left there, w-we ca -- first we came accidentally into the Russian line. I hadn't wanted to do this, so I went back into the -- went back to American lines, spent the night there. I described it in great detail in my report. And then, next morning we set out and we crossed over into unconquered territory, the -- Germany has [indecipherable] to be. That's the northern foothills of the Atz mountains of the Sudeten mountains. And it was an interesting experience to see Germany as it had been, officers strutting around and so on, but of course I couldn't stop. And we went up into the mountains and came across two and a half German divisions that were still there, f-fully armed. And they, I'm sure, are the same divisions as I menti -- as I mentioned -- as -- as mentioned in the story of -- Schindler. You remember the Schindler story? That when -- when they -- when he was going [indecipherable] to be rushed into the American lines from the Russian lines, they -- he -- he -- he came across two -- two and a half German divisions. I'm sure that those were the same divisions. Anyhow, we crossed that, went down, and finally hit the Russian lines, and it was -- the Russians were so enthused when they --

everybody wants to shake hands, and embrace you. You know, the [indecipherable] was a manifestation of these two armies, western armies, and the Russian armies having -- having come together, you know, there must have been millions of such encounters. But particularly these people whom we met there, they had -- they had not been through this experience at all, and therefore they -- they were just delighted to see a western allied vehicle fully armed, with people in it. This was their meeting of east and west, you know. Fa -- I forgot [indecipherable] they looked as if they had come all -- all the way from Stalingrad, and this was, you know, the first German defeat in the f -- major German defeat in -- in Russia, and we had come all the way from the Normandy beaches.

Q: Was it a very emotional time for you as well?

A: N-No, I can't say so. I -- I -- I -- I was -- didn't feel emotional in those days, I really didn't. Ther -- they were happy, we were happy, it was a great experience. This is what we had looked forward to, and -- [interruption]. Yeah, the attitude, thank God, was -- that I had was different, that's right. … I am -- when -- when -- when I got into the camp -- into the camp there, you know, and again the officer at the entrance of the troops who were guarding the exit there, he wanted to shake hands, you know, make his contact with the western allied army, and then he said, "Look, there's one area in this camp in which there's the -- what you call the zoif --

Q: Typhus?

A: Typhus, yeah, but he called it zoisha, of course, in German. And if your parents are in that, you have to promise me that you'll come out and not go -- go, forget about seeing them. Otherwise I can't let you go back into your own army. So --

Q: Was this trip dangerous, do you think, to go to Theresienstadt at that time?

A: Yeah. Now that I think about it, it was just incredible what risks we took. Incredible. Was all these -- first of all there's -- there's the danger of the car breaking down, what are you going to do? And the second thing is, the Germans up in the Sudetenland. They were fully armed. They -- you know, they were there to -- to fight. But I -- like -- just like on -- on the -- some of the patrols I did, in open daylight. You rely on the fact that they're not going to shoot at a single vehicle. They're too surprised to see just a single vehicle, just like they are too surprised to see -- see a single person coming, approaching them in a friendly way, you know? So people don't have their finger on the trigger in a position of that nature. So that -- that was the second danger. Now, the Russians I think were very, very cooperative, but I also -- there were certain situations which I carefully avoided, such as ch -- taking girls out of the -- out of the concentration camp [indecipherable] be very inviting to do that, but we would have never -- would have never gone back with the Russians, you know. This is -- you couldn't do any of those things. So there's question of having enough gasoline, you know, there was no gasoline, and we -- we -- we were just loaded up with gasoline and we had to rely on the fact that we would get back into American lines before we run out of -- of gas. So --

End of Tape Four, Side A

Beginning Tape Four, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number four, side B. So tell me about your first impressions when you arrived to Theresienstadt.

A: Well, first bi -- it was -- it was a -- pretty shocking experience to see people like this, you know, in their -- their starved state. Some of them -- quite a number of them too weak to even get up -- get out of the way for our car. That's -- it was a -- that was [indecipherable] impressions,

the next impression I had is this -- these are all very familiar faces. These are the Jews amongst who I've lived all my life. So n-not that it struck me as being so emotional at the time, but this is what I realized. And I don't know who told me, maybe the Russian guards told me that there's a registry where I could find out whether my parents were still there, or whether they -- or where they would be. You know, I asked around and found my way to this central registry. And there was still one girl working -- by now it was something like five o'clock in the evening I think. We had been traveling all day long without a break, without stopping for food anywhere. And I p -- asked this girl -- gave her my name of my parents and she s -- she said, "You are extremely lucky. They're still here." So she said, "I'll come with you." So then went to the house where they were. They were supposed to live in, you know, again you saw this terrible overcrowding, went to -- I left the driver outside of course, and went upstairs. It was like people everywhere, you know? There was just -- there was just no space for anything. It was like having people move around you. So the girl then went to my parents, she found them, and [indecipherable] and she told them, "I have good news for you, your son is here."

Q: Was it overwhelming to you at the time?

A: No. No feeling. I was shocked to see my parents in the state they were, particularly my father. I wouldn't have recognized him, I -- a bit of a shock, y -- it was not -- it was not emotional experience at the time. Now it is, when you think back about it.

Q: Why wasn't it emotional at the time, do you -- do you know?

A: No, I just -- I j -- managed to f-fight down all my feelings for things. Shock yes, but deep emotional, no. Now -- now y -- now you remember this and you cry. Most of the time I couldn't have done that. There was no -- no way. There was no -- were not my feelings.

Q: Do you think it's because you had to be so strong and focused on fighting in the war?

A: Yeah, yes. Yeah, I mean you had to do without your feelings. I mean, you know, it's -- you have to overcome your feelings when you jump out of an airplane, you know? Particular if -- if you jump out of an airplane through the bottom, and not through the side door. And things of that nature. Y-Y-You had to s -- just have to s -- s -- concentrate on technique and not -- not get carried away with any emotion. Yeah, there's a good saying was -- they had in the parachute school, the instructors, they told us always, if you start feeling sorry for yourself, get out of here, you won't jump. Ge -- get out before you have -- before you're going to get your badge, because you can still ge -- if you get frightened when you -- this was the British army [indecipherable] says, "If you get frightened and want to get out, get out." They let you get out, but once you had your badge, of course, it was your du-duty to go ahead and -- and jump. And th-tha-that's something -- something worthwhile remember, I -- I very often quote -- quote that, if you start feeling sorry for yourself, you won't jump. Y-You know, you can't feel sorry for ourselves. We're in the position where -- where we are, just our own choice. Maybe not by own choice, but then we can't help it, and that's it.

Q: You say that you were shocked the way that your --

A: My father looked like.

Q: -- father looked, and what di --

A: I wouldn't have recognized him. If I had met him on the street I wouldn't have recognized him.

Q: What -- what was so different?

A: Well, I mean, he -- he was, you know, he -- he was a well fed man before the war, and people shrivel up, you know, particularly in that situation in which they had been. They totally shrivel up. And he -- you can hardly recognize. They age. I mean that -- you know, after my father had

been back in Holland for two or three weeks, he looked his former self again, you know? But people changed totally.

Q: What about your mother?

A: She somehow -- somehow she was slightly different, she was more -- you see, my father not be -- having only one lung and one leg, was probably more subject to -- to these hardships. And my mother somehow had managed to live through it. She worked in the S.S. kitchen, stole -- s-stole the potatoes. Had no fear of these people, and somehow got through in a more positive way.

Q: So what was it like, your -- your first, you know, reunion, what did you talk about? And -- and tell me about that.

A: Well, just about everything of course, you know. They had been totally cut off from the world. They obviously wanted to ri -- wanted to know what -- what wa -- what had hap -- what was happening to my brothers, and they wanted -- wanted to know about all the other relatives, my mother's sisters, and my -- my fathers relatives. You know, we're family oriented family. And they had a -- they -- they were amazed that I was an officer. Of course they couldn't recognize British ranks. They were amazed that I was a paratrooper. They had no idea what wa -- all these insignia meant. And were absolutely in-incredible. And they want -- want -- and to -- they told a lot about their experiences, and what had happened, and in the camp on the -- then they eventually were joined by other people who wanted to know what was happening in Holland. They were living in what was called the Dutch colony of the Terezin camp. You may have heard about the group of young girls, [indecipherable] young girls, who were in Terezin. My mother was very friendly with them because ya -- ha -- eventually was -- was going to be Israel. And these -- a lot of these girls came to congratulate my mother, you know, and all that. Mainly they wanted to know what had happened. They had no idea about the Normandy

invasion, only vaguely what -- what had happened there. They didn't know about the total destruction in Germany, they couldn't believe it. I -- you know, I -- I -- I -- I j -- I -- I -- I told my father -- he -- he had one [indecipherable] he said, "We can never get r-revenge for this, because we can't be that cruel." So I said to him, "The revenge has been, it's finished. It's not what we wanted, but this is ha -- this is what happened." And I tell him -- told him, in -- there is not a single -- in Muenster, which was the capital of our county, there is not a single house standing any more between this boulevard and that boulevard. It's like telling you, look there's not a single house standing any more between -- between 72nd Street, and -- and city hall in New York. Everything is destroyed. That gave him a concept of -- of how incredible the destruction had been. When I drove through Muenster, which I had known, through this massive rubble, where -- but you know of course the roads had been cleared by American bulldozers, because after all, our armies had to get through, all I met was one woman who was crazy, was on -- on -- on a ha -- on a -- on a -- in black -- in a black dress, with all around was -- that was Germany. That was the revenge. I don't remember what the -- the divisions, the two and a half S.S. divisions that had been blasted out of the s -- from the sky, and that -- that -- that died for lacks of -- lack of oxygen. And they were supposed to be counter-attack. That was revenge. Nuremberg trials, none of them -- none of us thought of them. The revenge had been. It was -- it was the end.

Q: Did a lot of people at Terezin want revenge? Is that something they felt --

A: I don't know, I didn't talk to a lot of people. People who -- whom I talked to were t -- were like the justice of -- The Hague court of justice, who gave me a letter to Princess Julianna. They -- they wanted to have some certain practical things solved, like repatriation in -- in a hurry, and so on and so forth, which -- which I managed to have a hand in arranging later on. You know, it was -- everybody had his own practical needs, nevermind go-going after things like revenge.

This was a -- a concept that people whom I talked to were not concerned with. They wanted to -- me to take letters back. I must have taken something like 500 letters back, which the wife of a friend of mine gave to the Red Cross in London, because of course I didn't have a postage stamp to send all these things out. So I put them in -- in a big parcel, and I got back to my unit in -- in -- in Holland, and she send them to -- to London, and the wife of my friend took them to the Red Cross, and they sent them out. And apparently most of them did arrive. [phone ringing]

Q: So how did other people react to you when you came to Terezin?

A: Well, as I said, they were concerned with practical things like please take a letter for me, and -- or do this and this and this for us. One guy came along, and he said, I own two factories in Germany in the Zarund, which is not very far from our -- my home, Borken, and I want you to be the -- the manager of these two plants, because if you can come here and win, it's everything. And I told him, "Look, I'm not out of the army yet, you know? It's a long time pi -- we still have a long war ahead of us." So people weren't -- the discussions were not -- not in any of these abstract subjects, they were very, very practical. Told them that in -- in Holland you had to pay a gilder, which is, you know, a lot of money, for just one potato, but the starvation was like in Holland, it -- it was occupied by the Germans, not in [indecipherable]. And th-those were the things people were interested in, the practical things.

Q: What about the fact that you'd been part of this -- this British commando, and did that come up much, your involvement in -- in -- had they known, you know, anything about that?

A: No. They -- they -- they had not known that they -- did not know that there was such a thing as a Jewish brigade, again. They thought it was of -- they -- a lot of them felt it was sort of natural. We were in England, so we -- we -- we -- we did the fighting. As Peter Maas has once said, "We were the em-embodiment of all their dreams."

Q: It seems like maybe it was, you know, an inspiration for them, a-at the end of this experience they'd gone through, to -- to see you. Did it feel that way?

A: Yes. I think so, yes. I th -- I think it was -- some of the -- but some of they felt that they -- all right, this -- this is what you ha -- has to do, thank God you did it. We didn't have the chance to do it.

Q: What did you learn from your parents about what their experiences had been during the war, during the time you weren't in contact with them?

A: Well, they roughly told me what had happened to them when they were in hiding, and how they had been -- how they were picked up, and they -- they went into this camp in Holland, in this concentration camp, and they had a chance to -- my mother absolutely refused to let herself be shipped out until she [indecipherable] forced to ship out. My father wanted to stay with a certain group, but my mother thank God, refused, because that group went straight to Auschwitz to be gassed. And they -- my father had this letter, which he was hiding in his af -- artificial leg, where he were -- his deeds were acknowledged by the organization of the League of German War Widows, Orphans and sa -- Injured People from World War One. He had a letter from them that was written in 1934, thanking him for his fantastic service. [indecipherable] in view of the time, you know, she has to give up that job. And se -- he -- he made the most out of this letter, to get himself promoted just in these -- these camps. The -- the fact that he kept his diary, which I have in here by the way, he did -- didn't tell me at the time, but -- so there's something that was interesting, and it came out later. Well, they -- they tried to -- they -- they tried to tell me -- th-the worst part for them had been these transports from one camp to the other. They had been in this Dutch camp, and then they had been in Bergen-Belsen, and then after that they were shipped to

Terezin, and it was this -- these long voyages on these horrible trains, on these cattle trains with the S.S. in one of those, and -- and they were real -- that was a real horrible experience for them.

Q: How long were they at Terezin?

A: I don't know, I can't remember.

Q: So that first night, what -- what else happened the night that you -- you were at the -- at the camp?

A: Well, as -- as -- we -- we talked until about three or four o'clock in the morning, and then we decided to [indecipherable] myself down in someplace or the other, and decided to catch a little bit of sleep before it got daylight again. We had -- I had gone to the commandant of the camp -- ration commandant, and just to -- I don't know, can't remember what the motive was, but he was very, very -- very, very friendly, and he -- but he also said, "Look, you cannot stay here. By tomorrow morning, 10 o'clock, you have got to be out of here, otherwise you're going to be infected, and I can't let you -- can't let you go back to your own army." But he was very, very, very friendly. Very warm feeling. His ti -- the mayor was very -- doctor [indecipherable] lady doctor who speak -- spoke fluent German, or Russian. She did the translating. Thi -- thi -- that was it. He [indecipherable] and I reported to him. I said, "Yeah, I've come to look for my parents," he -- he wou -- turns to the lady doctor and said, "Here, how -- how do we find his parents for him?" And then she said [indecipherable] in the meantime already he was very concerned about it. Very, very friendly atmosphere.

Q: Did you -- did you go there thinking that if you found your parents you would try to -- to bring them out?

A: I was absolutely settled not doing that, it was far too dangerous. The roads were dangerous. People threw hand grenades, fired shots, did all sorts of crazy things. Quite apart from that, I felt

I had a duty to pick up as many American and British soldiers as I could. In the end when we -- in the end when we crossed the American lines, the Jeep -- we had 18 people on the Jeep. Si -- the ex-prisoner of war, Americans and British, who -- who wants to get back and absolutely settled on making it. Some of them were in very, very bad shape, too. And we managed to get them across, and get them onto the buses to go to the Nuremberg airport for repatriation to England. Returned to England.

Q: But your parents were not infected with typhus, right, they were generally healthy at the time?

A: Yes, yes. They did not have any of the contagious diseases, so I had been spared that. People who had these diseases were in what they called the -- the [indecipherable] the -- the castle. Listen, I've got to [indecipherable] now.

Q: Okay. [tape break] Okay, if you could just tell me about then -- your -- after you leave, and -- and what you -- what you do to -- to help people leave Theresienstadt eventually -- Terezin.

A: Okay. So, I left, I picked up all these [indecipherable] of wars, went back into the American lines, and then th-the generals from these two and a half German divisions, which I had met in the Sudeten mountains came into the American lines, and the American com -- local American commander asked me to come with him to make these people surrender to the Russians, because they had fought the Russians and therefore had to surrender to the Russians, that was the agreement we had. That's -- every German division surrenders to those whom they -- whom they have been fighting. So the Americans could not accept their surrender, wouldn't accept their surrender. So we returned them to the Russians. Now, so we eventually got back to my unit, and it's in the south of Holland, and I na -- went to see Princess Julianna, who was in ch -- chas -- charge of repatriation, and I gave her the letter, which the justice of [indecipherable] court had given me, and she said she wants to talk to me, but I didn't have a chance to do that. That's it --

later on, because by the time my unit moved on to Germany, and nobody to this day believes that -- believes me, but the first town we moved into was my hometown, and I had absolutely nothing to do with it, nothing. Nobody will believe this. What an experience. And there we actually -- we were -- we weren't even the occupation force. The idea was for us to be equipped with new weapons to get ready for the invasion of Japan. So it wa -- it -- it was of course was incredible experience to be right there in that town. We confiscated the best houses in town, to which Jews would never have even been invited before Hitler, and -- [phone ringing] -- Yeah that -- that was quite -- quite an experience, to be back, out of all places, in my hometown. Well, I just don't want to get into all the details, but actually [indecipherable] were -- my last job in the army was to be the deputy intelligence officer of a 12,000 people camp, 10,000 men, 2,000 women of high ranking Nazis, largely preparing for the Nuremberg trials. A very interesting experience, from every point of view, which I have rarely told anybody about, because even in Germany today, people do not like some of the things that their relatives experienced while being in this camp, not -- not that in my opinion they didn't deserve them, but this is what it was.

Q: Such as -- such as what? What's an example?

A: Well, you know, people were held in these camps, and -- who were -- who had been say of [indecipherable] of my hometown had been a guy who -- I only learned about this afterwards, actually -- who -- who had been a judge in Poland. You know, that's an automatic arrest category. Somebody goes to the judge, German judge in Poland, can you imagine that? And, you know, you j -- obviously we were -- w-we prepared a case like that, we pec -- practically condemned the guy to death already. He di -- that's not what they did to him in Nuremberg, but they di -- they did get, you know, like the long sentences. So somehow or the other, I think there's still too many Germans around who, if they know it at all about what went on at that

time, think that a lot of these things are very unfair. And they still cannot imagine all the crimes that were committed in -- by say a guy who was a judge in Poland.

Q: How did you feel talking to the Germans, interrogating them? What's the name of this place where you were, and how did you feel about it?

A: [indecipherable]. Well, again, we had a job to do. Th-The British had a very good system of making us filling in certain questionnaire interrogating people. I filled in all the questionnaire with a typewriter, because I typed on a German typewriter quite well in those days. And I -- I -- I had no pity on any of these people. Most of them really deserved it. We had Mr. Armeyer from Auschwitz, and you know, he had been a commandant of the -- of Auschwitz for a while. And I don't think before too long, I thought, hey, he was a common criminal, who was in prison with Hitler. Hitler was in prison in the 20's. He was in prison for murder. And so, you know, he stuck to his Nazi regime, that's how -- how he made his career. We had 500 high ranking German officers, who had spent their time in Norway during the war, who wouldn't believe all these stories that were being circulated around about concentration camp. So we made up a [indecipherable] I give them a lecture on what happens in Auschwitz. He describes it in great detail, of how people came in, were -- were -- were -- were put into these so-called showers, which were of course the gas showers. [indecipherable] and we told [indecipherable] who was -- thank God was stupid enough to believe that, that you know, he had got nothing to fear, because after all, he only followed orders. And he described all this to these 500 high ranking German officers. And these guys were stunned. Th-They don't -- there's a film, "Judgment at Nuremberg," where some -- something similar is being done. But you know, we did it. Ours was not fiction.

Q: Did you feel a lot of resentment?

A: To whom?

Q: To the Germans that you interrogated?

A: Well, I don't know what -- what you mean by resentment. What about y -- I -- I felt that these guys had to be brought to justice, you know. That we had -- had a to -- a totally different subject. We had a major investigation of the attempt on Hitler's life in -- in -- when was it, in -- in June 1944 -- July 1944? Was -- was after the invasion, wasn't it? Was it -- yeah, yeah, it was in July, so it must have been in July 1944, do you remember that?

Q: I know you wrote a --

End of Tape Four, Side B

Beginning Tape Five, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans. This is tape number five, side A. So I think we were just finishing up talking about when you were interrogating Germans, and I was wondering if you had any other feelings or encounters with not the -- those who had been high S.S. officials, but sort of more the ordinary Germans, and if there were any kind of different feelings you had, or did you kind of hold them responsible in the same way?

A: I wa -- while I was -- the short time I was an -- actually a military [indecipherable], I -- of course I met a lot of ordinary Germans, and it -- I didn't have any prejudice against them. I was willing to judge people on the basis of who they -- what they were, and who they were. It was the -- I -- we were go -- gotten quite friendly, I mean not friendly from the point of view of fraternization, but ma -- with s -- with some of the Germans who were obviously had been -- not been [indecipherable] Nazis, and who were constructive. We had to work for them. Certainly in military government we did. Then, of course, they made the rule, very wisely, that no extra -- extra Jew, or extra [indecipherable] could be in military government. It would be a very good idea if the United States had the same rule for Iraq now. It -- it -- it just is -- became -- was a bit of a shock that we had to leave military government, one day to the other, but I think it was an extremely wise decision. They wanted to show the military how -- the British authorities and American authorities wanted to show -- no, I think it's only the British who did this, they wanted to show that they had confidence in the political leaders who were coming up wer -- like Adenauer and Schumacher, who were now coming up in Germany, and that they would not be sidetracked by anybody who had been -- who had left the country and who had not gone through the same experience as these political leaders had gone through.

Q: So when were you discharged, and how old were you?

A: I was discharged in August, in ni -- 1946. At that time I was 24 years old, and wa -- in -- from one day to the other I changed my name back, I didn't -- didn't [indecipherable] to Manfred Gans from Fred Gray, and I was discharged on a Saturday night, and on Sunday morning I started studying for my entrance examination for the university, which I -- you know I had of course been back in England once or twice on -- on leave, and I tried to make arrangements for getting into university. Now I wanted to go for chemical engineering because I -- there was a government grant for se -- ex-servicemen, and now all these things that I had thought were not possible before the war, were now possible. The results of getting these -- what we -- you c-call in this country, G.I. grants.

Q: And by now where's the rest of your family?

A: Well, you know, my parents, of course died in the meantime. They -- they -- my -- my parents went to -- c-came to Israel in 19 -- they were here fif -- that must have been [inaudible] I don't know, 1950 something. I ca -- and you know they lived in Israel until they died. My father died wa -- he was 95, so -- yeah, in ni -- 1980 he died. So they lived a -- a very full life in Israel. Very full, very good life. Course they -- you know, th-they had pensions, and -- and the restitution from Germany, my father fought like blazes for all those things, and he knew how to do it. So they had a pretty good life.

Q: And your brothers wound up in Israel, too?

A: My -- ma -- my older brother, of course, was in Israel all the time. My younger brother went to Israel in 1952, I think. Yeah, '51 -- it must have been 1952, yes. Yeah, I think my parents went to Israel in 1953 or '54.

Q: And when did you emigrate to the United States?

A: I came here for the first time in 1948. I got married, and I went back to England, and came to United States for good in 1950.

Q: So I just have a couple overall questions and then we're done, I think. When did you decide to write your memoirs about your experiences, and how long did that take you, and was that a difficult process or -- or not.

A: Well it -- you know, par -- part of it I had written before. I had written it for my niece in Israel, the one who drew your -- your attention to my story. When she was doing -- she was going in for a master degree, and she felt that all she had to do was to translate my -- my holo -- my tere -- Terezin story, that will be enough. But the authorities didn't let her get away with that, so she had to pose a large number of questions to me, and I answered those. And a lot of it came out as such at that time. I -- you know, it [indecipherable] about -- must have been in 2002 or so [inaudible], about 2002 sometime, I started to write, sitting down and writing things up on the computer. And it's been -- it's been growing ever since.

Q: Has it been hard to do, to write about these things?

A: Oh yeah, yes. It's ver -- ver -- th -- the main -- as I said, the main -- main hardship is not recounting all the experience, but realizing what terrible risks we took. We were so inexperienced in the -- in the fighting stage, in the beginning. We learned pretty fast, I suppose, but we -- we did things that were crazy, that -- that we would never have done if we had been more experienced. That -- that part of it gave me nightmares, re-realizing how -- what -- what wrong steps we took.

Q: Although it seems amazing to me that you have such detailed and vivid recall. Have you always had that memory all along of -- of all these incidents?

A: Well, I -- I don't -- don't think so, but I mean, these were very special experiences I have written up, and th-they -- you know, I recall them. If I was to recall all the experience I've had in my professional life, I don't think it would be quite that experience, but I've had a very, very adventurous career in my professional life, too, and maybe if I sit down -- would -- would have sat down a year or two ago, and shud -- conjured up some of those experience again, it would have been -- would -- they would have come back. But you know, you start concentrating, and as you know, of course, these were very unique experiences. And so the -- Peter Maas's book has been quite an ex -- quite a motivation for it.

Q: Are there certain sounds or smells that take you back to that time period?

A: Mm, I don't know. I -- I -- personally I don't have a very good smell -- sense of smell any more. No, I don't -- I don't think that there -- that any of that nature would -- would take me back.

Q: And when did you write about your journey to -- to find your parents? That was at a different time, right?

A: To find my parents? When I wrote up the story? The night I came back from the trip. I wrote this whole story in one night.

Q: And why -- why did you feel so motivated to do it right away?

A: Because I wanted to inform all my friends of what I had -- what I had done. I didn't think that was a historical document. Luckily, the guy who typed it up, who was in -- with my -- who had also been in the unit already on D-Day, he said this is a historical document, I want to keep a copy of it. So I wrote it up, and it took him about four or five days before he finished the typing of it all. And I don't know that I've given you one of the originals. I -- I can ge -- probably get a copy of one of the originals, the way it was originally typed up. It's -- one of them is in Terezin,

my cousin deposited it in Terezin on one of their trips, the or -- original type, what this guy did. Of course, has mistakes in it. This one you have in there is -- which was done on a computer by my secretary is -- is more correct.

Q: And finally, do you feel that there have been things in your life, decisions, or the way that you've approached things in your life that come directly from, you know, the experiences, what you went through during the war, what also, in general, the Holocaust, you know, that experience?

A: Yeah, yeah, it's hard for -- it's hard for non-technical people to realize that, but the fact of the matter is that I've had a few -- if -- if -- as I've done, if you put a large chemical plant on line, with a new process, new, untried equipment, and all that sort of thing, the -- the experience is more telling than almost anything I'd done in the war. As I said in one of the comparison, on the night of the fifth or sixth of June 1944, we landed in fra -- landed in Normandy, 1944, in the night of the fifth and sixth of June 1957, I put a high pressure, or elevated pressure chlorination plant on line in -- in southern France, and I sweated more blood in 1957 than I did in 1944. But it's very hard for non-technical people to realize what is involved in the invention, development, design and start-up -- a commercialization start-up of a chemical process. That -- that's one -- on aspect of it. So there have been very -- a lot of very interesting experiences. The highlight of my professional career, I suppose, was my giving a lecture in the University of Hanoi in 1986, to a totally hostile -- hostile audience, trying to persuade them to give up doing basic research, when they should do applied research, and you know, as I -- as I said, they were totally hostile, not willing to listen. I -- as I said, in one state I was in the University of Hanoi lecturing 13 years before Mr. Clinton did so, and the atmosphere was still very different then. But --

Q: I -- I s -- I think I read somewhere that you -- you've also been back to Germany and have spoken to students there.

A: Yes, regularly.

Q: And what's -- what's that been like for you?

A: Regularly. Oh that's a very interesting experience, very worthwhile. In 1988, on the anniversary -- or was it the -- the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht, they invited us back from my hometown, and we, the Jews, or a lot of us came back. My two brothers came from Israel with their wives. Everybody could bring one companion, my wife came along. And we -- I made a condition for coming back, we made that we were going to be allowed to lecture in the schools. And the people were so enthused about what we did, that they kept on inviting us again and again. I've been there almost every second year, my younger brother, while he was alive, he s -- he died in the meantime, he went there back every year to lecture, and it was a very worthwhile experience. I insisted on not only lecturing on my war experience, and the Holocaust and all that, but also on Judaism, and the basic concepts of Judaism, which went down extremely well. It's a great privilege to do that.

Q: And students you found were receptive?

A: Oh very. Extremely receptive. They -- well, of course it depended a little bit as to who the teacher was. If there was a teacher that had prepared them for this, they were very much more [indecipherable] than if it was just somebody who let us cu-cut in. But this was a very worthwhile experience. And as I said, they paid for it. They gave us all expenses. I've written up a lot about these experiences. Unfortunately I have not [indecipherable] but when the BBC thought of making a film about my life, they wanted to incorporate this into their -- into that film. And no -- and just -- and th-they -- they, in fact they asked me, think you can get us some non --

ex-Nazis, who have not -- non -- what do -- ho-how do you call it, non-regenerated? The wa -- y-you know? I said I can, yes I can. I know we -- we can produce it. It's still there. So --

Q: Did you enjoy going back to Germany? Was there a part of you that enjoyed going back?

A: I did, I enjoyed it very much, after the first experience. My wife in the -- the first time -- she only went along once, she was very apprehensive about it, very apprehensive. She somewhat frightened, but maybe she was already coming down with the sickness at the time. So --

Q: And your -- in the house where you grew up, tell me just about the different stages it went through during the course of the war.

A: Well, when my parents left it became Gestapo headquarters. And they even had a torture chamber in our wine cellar. And then it was taken over by the mili -- British military government as the headquarters for the district. This was when I came back there, only two days after -- after the town has been liberated, the advance people were just mo -- moving in. It stayed that way for awhile, and after that they sold it, or they -- it was handed over to the German police. It became police headquarters in the town for a little while, not very long. And then it went back into private possession. At the moment it's largely -- there are four lawyers in it, I think it's [indecipherable] their offices in there.

Q: Do you remember the address?

A: Yes, of course, Bochholderstrasse 48.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

A: Yeah, can talk for a few more volumes if you want to.

Q: I know you have a lot of experiences.

A: I want to tell you one other little story that's very interesting. You know, when I was in -- preparing these, we were in the zenolager, with high ranking Nazis who had to investigate the

attempt on Hitler's life, inter -- interviewing some of these generals, you know? And I was asking them exactly what they went through in order to get into a conference with Hitler. These guys were hardly searched at all. It -- unbelievable, you know? I -- so I took all this down, and didn't say anything, didn't say anything [indecipherable]. And I said -- said to one of those guys. "You goddamn idiots. You were not willing to take the risks which we on the -- soldiers on the field had to take. It would have been so easy of you to -- for you to take out a pistol and shoot this guy, and pilt -- ge -- get rid of him, and get rid of the war, and all that sort of thing. And if you -- you -- after all, you had free access to him." So the guy said, "But captain, in view of Field Marshall Sbaten, the spine becomes rubber." I -- I [indecipherable] understand. That's all -- all they wanted to be, get a field Marshall, become a field Marshall.

Q: Well, I want to thank you so much for -- for taking so much time, and -- and -- and --

A: Thank you. I'm surprised I could talk that long.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Manfred Gans.

End of Tape Five, Side A

Conclusion of Interview