

That our interview would be recorded.

I do.

OK, thank you. So we are continuing the interview that was just cut off technologically, or technically, about 20 minutes ago. And if I recall, what we were talking about was Stalingrad. And how news of Stalingrad filtered down to Hohenelbe, to where you were living, to your family through the news and so on. Can you-- can you speak to that at all?

Yes, well, that's what I already said. It was very much a main item of the news at the time. And maybe it was [INAUDIBLE] because I think Hitler himself expected that it would be another win in the end, which, of course, it wasn't.

Did you have a radio there at home.

Yeah, that's what everybody had, a radio. There wasn't-- there was no alternative to the radio-- to the radio, not in those days.

Do you remember any of the broadcasts? And did you learn about Stalingrad from the radio or from people talking?

No, from radio. I mean, people talking-- the people in Stalingrad weren't talking direct-- well--

No.

OK, that would suggest something somewhere else. But I have to talk to you about earlier times than that to explain what my attitude was when Stalingrad happened.

Please do, please do. What was your attitude?

I was already very much a skeptic of the outcome of the war by then. But it was the experience in Prague that I had as a Hitler Youth leader that really was an eye-opener to me.

Well, tell me about that. So you traveled all the way to Prague on one occasion or on more occasions?

I think during the war on two occasions. But this was the first occasion. Because the German element that had been part of originally Czechoslovakia, and that Sudetenland, was basically an outer ring around the main Czech area in Prague.

So high up above leaders decided that we would have an annual leadership conference in Prague. So that everybody had a fairly short distance to travel to get there. And that was my first experience of it, just after being appointed to the leadership of the Hammer und Sichel group, which was quite a large group, well over 100 boys.

And we were in a sort of youth hostel place, which is where we slept. But the actual conference took place in very-- well-- substantial situations. We had chamber music. It was a very formidable kind of building.

And on the first evening, there was a special theatre performance in German in one of the Prague theaters of Bernard Shaw's, the-- what to call it--

A play? Pygmalion?

No, not Pygmalion. The woman from the Orleans, the-- the French woman that beat the English then got killed herself in the--

Oh, you mean Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc. Sorry, my memory is always a little bit shaky. Joan of Arc, and I don't know if you remember the story of Joan of Arc. She had got this mission directly from Heaven. And then she even tells the Cardinal, the French Cardinal, that her mission on Earth is directly from God. And what he gets is second hand or misunderstanding.

And that shook me so-- I mean, all the boys-- a lot of the boys left after the first act. Because Shaw's-- Bernard's-- Shaw's Joan of Arc and the young crowd from Orleans, Schiller, which we do at high school anyway, or did in those days, it's a total contrast. It's the-- Schiller's story is pure heroism of this wonderful woman. Whereas, Shaw, just shows how dangerous a person is who's obsessed with obsessive idea.

OK, you think it's from Heaven but, you know, how does she know? Anyway, to me, that brought me back to Hitler, who also seemed to have this sort of Heavenly mission feeling or gave that impression.

And I thought to myself, how dangerous that could be. In the case of the woman, it was only herself who in the end was delivered to the English and probably killed or thrown into prison, nobody knows historically exactly what did happen in the end of her. But Hitler, with him, the whole country, the whole-- the whole of Germany was involved.

And so, I think she was burned at the stake, if I remember my--

Well, that's one story. I tried to really read it all up at the time. And there are different versions. But there's no proof either way-- either way. Anyway, she probably got killed. And here was Hitler, in full charge of the whole of Germany, driving the nation forward.

And, of course, when he started the war against Russia, it was shortly after-- well, had already-- yeah, it just had happened. And I really got this kind of shock. And I said, I just wonder whether where this is going to lead to.

So I became much more skeptic. But I felt something to save-- if there's anything to save in this situation, I must try and do it. And so I became a kind of-- I talked to my sisters about it. And they were, of course, horrified. And said, don't touch anything. Just keep yourself, and keep down, and so on.

But when suddenly a year later, in Hammer und Sichel, a full-scale Waffen-SS [INAUDIBLE] came to find volunteers. They were so desperate. But they couldn't find any volunteers anymore. Youngsters who were 16 were really called up by the army. And where would the volunteers come from?

Anyway, they promised me the Earth. I was the only guy there to-- who was eligible, if you like. And I said, look, I'm already under order that I must finish my final exams [INAUDIBLE]. Oh, they just said, that's nothing. We get our way. Don't worry about that. And where did I want to go-- oh, yes, I want to go with the reconnaissance tank regiment. Yes, of course, we'll book you in there.

It was a kind of-- I didn't really believe it, but it seemed so unreal. And I thought maybe-- maybe in some way it will lead me to be able to do something about it. And so I volunteered. And, of course, all these promises of being called up straight away never took place.

Even so, the actual final examinations were done six months earlier, as I told you earlier, earlier on. My call up only came in July, 1944, exactly on the day when there was the attempt on Hitler's life at the headquarters.

So that's July 20th, 1944 in East Prussia.

Yeah, that's right.

I have a few questions.

I wasn't, of course, in East Prussia at the time. But that's the day I got my call-up papers to go to Riga.

OK. So I have a number of questions, a number of questions here.

Yeah.

Number one, I wonder, this performance of Joan of Arc was under the sponsorship of the Jungvolk, as George Bernard Shaw's-- they called together a conference of Jungvolk members to Prague.

No, that was Hitler Youth. I mean, that was-- that was Jungvolk and the older Hitler Youth kind, up to 18. But, of course, in those days there were very few people over 16 who were still around, because they were already called up for work services or for Army service, and all that kind of--

OK, so Jungvolk is different than Hitler-Jugend. It is a different--

Jungvolk was the early part, 10 of 14, aged 10 to 14. And then 14 to 18 was Hitler Youth, the way it started in peacetime.

OK.

And, of course, gradually the whole thing became one mass together. And in the end, it was more Jungvolk than Hitler Youth, because Hitler Youth was already called up to army service or work services.

So, OK. The first thought I had is, here this-- the Hitler Youth and the Jungvolk organization brings all of these young people from around the country, German speaking, to Prague.

Only the leaders. That was only leaders.

OK, but nevertheless, it's under their sponsorship that you go see this play by George Bernard Shaw about Joan of Arc.

Yes.

And you, as a young person, a teenager, make the connection between Joan of Arc, and maybe her craziness, and the leader of Germany, and maybe his craziness.

That's it, yeah, that's right.

Now, wouldn't it have been dangerous maybe other young people would make such a connection? I mean, did it not come to the mind of the organizers that this may not be the best play to show their young people at that particular time?

Well, there was, obviously, as a result of it-- because most of the youngsters actually having left after the first act in protest, that it was somebody's big mistake. But as far as the meeting was concerned, it was completely ignored. Nobody talked about it. It was just what happened last night wasn't-- wasn't on the order paper.

Well, that's interesting.

I mean, that was--

Because clearly--

And that was, again, for me, a real shock that people couldn't face up to an issue of that kind. But I was given to understand that with the war, we're getting more serious. The security police were very strong.

And obviously, if I'd been one of the organizers who'd brought this play to-- which was obviously something that had to be-- was on the Prague stage ready to be performed at the time. And so--

Somebody wasn't doing their job in the political police. Somebody was-- because here's the interesting part of that. Is

that if you got it, and you made the connection, and those other young people who might have been insulted and thought this is a terrible thing about the Fuhrer to have such a play, they made the connection, but took it in a different way.

Yeah.

That is how could you-- how could you insult him in such a way. Whereas, you're saying this is very insightful about who he is. Yeah, somebody--

Or who he might be. Obviously, I certainly didn't jump to any conclusions. But from then on, I was always considering the alternatives. And, of course, with the way that Stalingrad, particularly, I mean, sort of rammed it home in my mind, that really that's the most likely way things are going to happen.

Did you talk to any adults? That is, you say you talked to your sisters, but were there any adults you could share these impressions with?

No, I didn't. I didn't share that. I just didn't think it was safe. But as far as I'm concerned, it helped me a great deal when I was with the Waffen-SS, and when I managed actually to drag away our squadron from an engagement with the Russians and we surrendered to the Americans. I was materially involved in that. And it was like a miracle.

OK, before we come to that, that's the other question that I had, is that if your conclusion, after seeing that performance, and then seeing how people didn't refer to it or respond to it the following day, didn't even acknowledge it--

Yeah.

--and then your conclusion that, hmm, I'm more skeptical about this.

Yeah.

And then you volunteer for the Waffen-SS, that sounds like a contradiction. That sounds like. Instead of taking a skepticism and going another way, you actually volunteer for the Waffen-SS. Now, tell me, is the Waffen-SS the same thing as the regular SS?

No.

Or was it something different?

Well, it was-- Himmler was obviously one of the guys who was trying to get control over Hitler. But Hitler was playing off all these people-- the army people with the-- and Himmler conjured up an army of volunteers. In other words, the Waffen-SS wasn't the security services, but it was an army that was consisted entirely of volunteers in [INAUDIBLE].

Even that, at the stage when I joined, wasn't true anymore. I mean, they were dragging in Russians, and Ukrainians, and anybody they could get hold of. Whether they were volunteers or not, that's sort of questionable.

I remember dealing with a group of them in Belgium when I would an interpreter at the-- in the prisoner of war office. Poor devils, they were then, of course-- any kind of person like them who had been captured and then was released from America, or from the Americans and so on, in Russia they were all court martialled straight away.

So a couple of things then.

Yeah.

So number one, you're saying that the difference between the Waffen-SS and the regular SS is that Waffens were volunteers. To fight or for--

Yeah, fight. And, of course, they had to prove themselves to fight. So they were-- well, they were often sent to the most tricky or un-- less hopeful kind of battle situations to show that they could overcome it by sheer spirit of [INAUDIBLE].

And the other trouble was, of course, that they didn't really have the experience that the Wehrmacht had and the kind of leadership that the Wehrmacht had. It was all a bit of a wild quickly get together volunteers organization.

So they would know already at that time when I volunteered that they had much greater losses in battles than the other-- the Wehrmacht or the [INAUDIBLE], who were using their common sense and not just charging into any battle. Anyway--

So why did you join them? So in other words, why did you pick the Waffen-SS versus the Wehrmacht?

Well, I felt there was something I could do. And it turned out I could do something.

Yes, but what did you think at that point, if you're skeptical, and you-- actually, it's so symbolic you are called up on the day of the attempt of Hitler's life.

That's pure coincidence, yeah.

Yes, yeah, but it is symbolic of that. And then your skepticism plays in.

Yeah.

How-- with what kind of spirit did you join the Waffen--SS? And why did-- explain to me again-- I know you did at one time, but what was it that they were promising you that tried to make-- they tried to make it more attractive for you?

Well, that was sort of part of it. The extreme way they went around to get me to volunteer made me feel that I might get a reasonable chance to influence things when I get there.

As a Hitler Youth leader I found-- again, you find if you have the outer appearance of being one of them, you won't be trapped or anything. You're accepted. And I thought, if I'm sort of a Waffen-SS guy like everybody else, I can then, behind their backs make something or organize something that would be helpful and save lives. That was my-- one of my reading in those war years was a book called *Im Westen Nichts Neues*.

And the highlight for me was when, I think in 1917, at Christmas, on the Western Front, the English and the German soldiers came out of their duggins and had celebrated Christmas together. And I thought, well--

Yeah, this is Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

[INAUDIBLE], yes, [INAUDIBLE].

And it's a peace novel, which is why I'm surprised you had access to it during the Hitler years. I thought his was one of the books that ended up on the bonfires.

Yeah, if it did, somehow there was one in our library at home. And I certainly read it with great interest. Because at that time, it was, to me, the most real story I had of what real war is all about. But the way these soldiers got out of their duggins and so on and celebrated together, I thought that's the spirit. All this killing becomes so murderous and senseless.

Another impression I'm having as we're speaking is that you have some sort of dawning on you that what's going on in your world isn't very good and isn't very real, but there's no one to talk to about it.

Yeah.

Was there anybody to talk to about it? Was there anybody who you sensed shared your skepticism?

Oh, yes. I think Uncle [? Hannes, ?] [?Bertel's?] father, he did. He put it-- he was-- he left his directorship job in the [? ER ?] [? Kluger ?] organization because of having a disagreement with his two elder brothers, who were the more senior ones.

And so he was then made a major of the German Reserve Army. But he was obviously already well in his 50s, so he wasn't a front line kind of guy. But he was-- when Mussolini was-- what do you call it-- when the revolt was in Italy and Mussolini was removed, he was in charge of the control of the southern railway area, from Naples to-- towards the southern end of Italy, as long as the Americans hadn't started to invade and take over.

And he used to come to me when he was on holiday. And he would say, the only way he reckons the Germans couldn't win the war was if the Americans and all their allies were even worse at handling their troops. He said, as far as he was concerned, the German troops in southern Italy were always on the move, never on the front line.

So they were-- they were was retreating.

They were always being reallocated or-- we're always on these railways, rather than trains, rather than on the front line. And, of course, that exactly happened to me a year later. I was being sent around. First of all, to Riga, of all places, just in time, before the Russians got there.

I'm coming to that. But before we get there, yet another question of mine.

Yeah.

So the skepticism is born.

Yeah.

And it is growing. And there is Uncle [? Hannes, ?] who you can share this with, who has his own kind of skepticism--

Yeah.

--based on what he sees.

That's what I particularly liked about him. He was one of very, very few people who were downright about it, who weren't just glossing over it. And my father wouldn't say a word about anything.

OK. So here is the other part of this. The question that I have is one that is in hindsight--

Yes.

--rather than when you're there. But it is something that all of us who were not there, and who are-- particularly those of us who were born later wonder about. How much did you know of the suffering of, let's say, Nazi-isms targets, Nazi-isms victims?

And did that-- it doesn't sound like that ever figured into the equation. For example, whether it was Social Democrats in Germany, who would have been arrested, Social Democrats who might have ended up in the concentration camps, whether it's the Jews, whether it's the population at large, all the forced laborers the slave laborers, all these millions of people who are being ground into the ground, quite literally, by Hitler.

Was that something that just you didn't know about, so it couldn't figure into the equation? But from what I'm hearing, that inhumanity wasn't part of-- that expressed in humanity by Hitler wasn't part of one of the reasons why you turned away from him. And I'm wondering why. Because post-war, of course, we all did.

Yeah.

Well, at the time, of course, everybody-- the-- everybody was being called up, or forced to join, either a work situation or for the war-- the war itself. And that in itself was so universal. OK, [?Bertel?] had a [INAUDIBLE]. She had a Polish guy running or doing the farm, the day-to-day farm work for her.

And then it was a French guy, who was very opinionated. And she used to have her long chats and arguments with him time and time again. OK, as far as I'm concerned, OK, they lost their war. And now they're being used as labor. And then, of course, as far as the Jews were concerned, I couldn't believe that there was a killing going on.

I think our German side was pretty ruthless, but I didn't think it could be anything. The Russians, more likely, yes, as far as-- as far as my attitude at the time was concerned. But not the Germans, would never sink to that level. I mean, that was the [INAUDIBLE].

OK. You're giving me an answer. What you're saying is that your-- I don't want to put words in your mouth, but again, this is how I hear it-- is that your exposure to any kind of repression was limited to the people who worked on [? Bertel's ?] farm. And you didn't see, aside from that Jewish girl, who was in the factory, who gave you a bad look, you didn't see any of this, and so how could you believe it would happen.

Well, exactly. But the killing side of it, for them to be-- obviously, without having, shall we say, personal, intimate experience of it. The factory, the [? Kluger ?] factory was full of forced labor, of course. Because they replaced all the people who'd been called up for army service. Hello?

OK, OK, no, no, no, I'm-- I'm here. I'm just-- but you didn't see mistreatment--

I [INAUDIBLE]. I, obviously, being a youngster, was trying-- concentrating on what I could do about it. And with the SS, with [INAUDIBLE] coming on and so on, it sort of struck me-- why don't I join them and find a way of doing something for peace.

OK. So you join them on July 20th, 1944.

No, I didn't.

Oh, you were called up then.

This was [INAUDIBLE]-- we're talking now somewhere in the summer of 1943.

Oh, so you joined in 1943, but you were only called up in July of '44.

No, I didn't. Well, I simply volunteered. I signed a piece of paper for them that they would call me up. And, of course, they said they would call me up almost straight away, because Hitler's order didn't count with them. And, of course, it did.

OK, so now I understand. They come by in the summer of 1943. And they tried to enlist you.

Yeah, not just me personally, but they wanted volunteers by hook or by crook, because that was a whole, sort of what the Waffen-SS was supposed to be.

Of course.

They'd run out of-- obviously, out of any chance, any easy chance, or any honest chance of getting volunteers any more. Because the people had already been called over age 16.

OK.

And then they were under the control of the army and not the Waffen-SS. And of course, the contrast, or, shall we say, the internal warfare between the Waffen-SS and the army was very real.

OK, so-- so what I'm seeing is that they come by, and they're much more, shall we say, proactive in trying to recruit people, not just you, but others, because of their situation. And this is in the summer of '43.

Yeah.

And you say to them, well, I can't join because I'm under this rule, being the youngest, that I finish my studies.

Yeah.

And my studies are going to finish in January. And they say, oh, that doesn't apply to us.

In July '44.

In July '44. And they say, this doesn't apply to us. And as a matter of fact, it does. Even though later on, your studies are actually finished half a year earlier.

Yeah.

And they are not able to do anything to quicken the time that you would normally be called up. Is that right?

That's right, yeah.

OK, so, and being called up actually happens in July 20th, 1944.

Correct, yeah.

OK. And then what happens? Where do you go?

Well, then, of course, I had to-- I had just-- I had a week's time to get-- I had to be in Riga, report in Riga in-- about a week later. So I just tried to pack my things together at Hammer und Sichel. Take a train back to where [INAUDIBLE] was there in Felsberg, and dump it there. Stay there over the weekend and say goodbye. And then be on the train to-- via Berlin, Memel, to Riga.

And for that, and this learned afterwards, was this-- was, in fact, the last train that got through before the Russians cut it all off.

Yes, I mean, this was-- did you take a train from Berlin to Memel? Or did you take a ferry? Because there is a way of doing that. How did you get there?

No, it was by train-- by train. I know I spent-- I got to Memel in the evening, and the train-- or during the day. And the train, this train, was going from there to Riga the next day. I remember sleeping on a table in the what little restaurant they had there, at Memel, the station.

And then I was-- I noticed when we-- when the train came in, there was an armed, with a rifle, armed soldier at every exit door of the train. But otherwise, we rambled through the whole night.

Some time the next day we arrived in Riga. But the station was in a-- had been destroyed by a bomb. And we were told our unit was in [? Lielvarde. ?] No, is it [? Lielvarde? ?] Seaside place just outside, west of [? Lielvarde ?]

[? Lielvarde. ?] Well, there's their Jelgava, which is quite-- and Liepaja, which are on the coast near Riga. They're part of the Latvian seashore.

Yeah.

But there's something else I want to mention here. One of the reasons I asked how you got there is because July '44 was a very crucial time in that part of the world.

[INAUDIBLE].

Not only-- not only is-- there's the assassination attempt of Hitler in Prussia, which you then would have passed through. I believe it was Allenstein or someplace close to that. And wasn't the place called [?Wolfensbrutel?], like Wolf's Lair, or something there?

Yeah.

It was. So, of course, at that moment, in those days and weeks, is when Hitler is rounding up all possible conspirators for that assassination.

Yeah.

And Stauffenberg's arrested. And others are arrested. At the same time, there is a mass of people trying to escape the oncoming Soviet army, not just--

That's right.

--the German military, but civilians.

Yeah.

Did you see any of that when you were going by train? Did you see any people on the roads? Did you see them at the train stations? What do you remember seeing?

Well, as far as the train to Riga is concerned, it was half empty basically. And it didn't stop at any station, as far as I can remember. It was a military kind of train. And it certainly wasn't a packed train.

Well, it was going in the wrong direction, actually.

Yeah, absolutely.

Going east.

Yeah. And so we-- whole-- a group-- I was in a group of youngsters when we got out at Riga. And we were all supposed to report to whatever, to our unit. And they said, well, in Bulduri, you have to get out at that station and they'll tell you where they are.

Well, at that time-- we were all in civilian clothes, of course-- we were there at the beach. And we were sleeping in beach huts. And we had our parades. And then occasionally were called up to lug boxes and things around and load them. And the story was that we were waiting for our train to-- what was the port's name again?

Well, there's-- in Riga, there's also Liepaja. There's Jurmala. These are all on the coast of Latvia. And further down south, there is Memel. But I would have thought Riga itself would have been a port. Oh, no.

I can quickly look it up. Have you got the [INAUDIBLE]?

[INAUDIBLE].

It's just but my memory's just--

That's OK.

[INAUDIBLE]. No, that one wasn't very good.

That's the one you had.

It's only Germany.

What do you want? [INAUDIBLE]

Hello, I just found it. I just found it. Hello, if you could come back. Hello? Yeah, yeah.

[INAUDIBLE]. Yes, I'm back.

Bulduri is a residential area of the city of Jurmala. So this was on Jurmala. That's the coast. That's where you would have been. Where

No, that's where-- that's where we stayed. But then we took-- we helped load a train for-- well, the army and basically made for the military personnel, and it was a train journey of about five, six hours to get to this outer port, right at the western end of Latvia.

Liepaja?

What?

Could that have been Liepaja?

No, it's a different name.

OK.

But it's quiet-- it was a major port, maybe the major port for Latvia.

OK. Well, there are a number--

Because, even there we were then sitting without any kind of covers for another week. And then suddenly, there was one of those German holiday steamers that came up in the night. And we had to get quickly on it in the night for fear of Russian submarines torpedoing it. And so we then were-- landed in Danzig.

OK.

[INAUDIBLE].

Let's see if any of these ports say anything to you. There's Engure, Liepaja, Mersrags, Pavilosta, Roja, Skulte, Ventspils.

Ventspils, Ventspils.

Ventspils, OK.

Yeah, that's what it was.

So it was the port. So first you're in Bulduri-- Bulduru-- or however it's said. Then you go by train to Ventspils.

Yes.

And what is it-- and you're loading up things on military trains. This is it?

Well, we had to-- loaded it on the train to be dumped in Ventspils to be taken back to Germany, Danzig. Like our [GERMAN] boats that were sent to rescue us, the people.

So in other words, this was military equipment that you were loading?

Well, whatever it was. Yes, it wasn't then-- yes, it was military owned equipment. But what these boxes contained was-- it was uniforms, and odds, and kitchen stuff, clearing out kind of stuff.

So you were sent to Riga from the Sudetenland without any training. I don't hear that there was any training at all--

No.

--involved.

We were supposed-- The trouble was, of course, that Germany was so behind in admitting its defeats that-- that bureaucracy was carrying on doing the most stupid things. It-- it happened to me later on when I was actually sent to war for the fighting.

I was sent to a place that nobody has ever heard of. Nobody was sure whether-- where it was-- somewhere in Poland by the name of it. I can't think of the name now.

So that's how it was. But the trouble was, that Germany, the propaganda was stuck so much behind the real events that the bureaucracy made the most stupid things happen. And I think the final unit, in which I had my actual war experience, was just the next best unit at that station which was closest to the, shall we say, unofficial, but real, front line.

And they just said, there's a unit. And it was a unit that was just coming back from a fighting, from a week in fighting. And I was just chucked in there as an extra. Chaos, the chaos in those days.

It sounds very chaotic. It sounds like there is no sense to it.

Yeah.

That you go up to Riga only just come back. As if--

Yeah.

--you had-- so you get to Ventspils. You're taken on to a boat. What was it that you said? It was a liner of some kind, of pleasure boat?

Yeah, the work-- there was this [GERMAN] workers thing that Hitler had, people, laborers. And then they had their holiday boats that would take them to Madeira and so on. It's one of-- it was one those-- one of those holiday boats that had been obviously changed to troop movement.

There are comedians who sometimes we'll tell you about something that is so bizarre, you say you can't make this stuff up.

Yeah.

Here in the middle of the war, here's an old sort of leisure boat that has been turned for military purposes that comes to pick you up in Ventspils.

Yeah, exactly. But at least we were saved from the Russian hands.

So then you're taken to Danzig, which is Gdansk in Polish.

[INAUDIBLE].

And it's right, part on the Baltic Sea. So you're very-- at that point the territory's still Germany, but not for long. And it always was contested area. So what do you go-- what happens then? Do you stay in Danzig?

Well, we were there I think for a day. And I had a good look around the city. But the people were hardly in the street. It was-- they-- there was-- people would just quickly slip out and then run into their houses again. It was a very desperate kind of place.

And then we went on a train journey through northern Poland, if you like. And the train, they had-- there was no coal. And these trains had sort of a wood kind of arrangement. So we had to get out of the train whenever there was an uphill stretch, not-- actually, we didn't have to push it.

But the train would-- the train would only move kind of walking pace along. And then when it came to flatter or downhill, we could jump on again. And then we got eventually into East Germany-- at that time-- of course, it's now Poland.

And then, again--

Are you forgetting the name of something again? It's OK, but we know that it's that part of the world.

There's another story, of course. My dad had two great friends. One was [? Curt ?] [? Bandhoff, ?] who was with him in Siberia. He was a German guy. And he was-- and they were both practical guys. And they saw that their own workshop was built-- acting on the theater stages and things like that and at performances, which the Russians liked to attend very much.

I want to interrupt you. We lost one another for a little bit.

OK.

And I want to repeat-- I would like to ask you to repeat what it was that you said when you said you had gotten to some part of East Germany, which is now Poland.

Yeah.

Looking for where you actually were, was that the issue?

Well, I was going to try and find where it was. I'll just--

It's not that-- it's OK.

OK.

We already-- yeah. We already know that it's approximately in this, I would say Silesia is probably the area.

Yeah, Silesia. Because funny enough, it became this-- also my place when I finally got allocated. As I told you already, my order to the front line was directed to a town or city that didn't exist on any maps. You couldn't-- nobody could find them on any maps.

And, of course, you had to report-- as the train arrived at the station, you had to report to the station commander. And he would give you a ticket for the next step. Obviously, he would always send you further east. Somehow, you would hit the front line. And then that's how it got--

I have a question here.

Yeah.

So from Danzig, you first start going further west into what was then still part of Germany.

Yes. And that was, of course, again, just an intermediate stop. We had the town park, the town gardens, surrounded by barbed wire. And we were in tents in the unit. We were a unit of about, I don't know, 150 youngsters. Still in our civilian clothes, which my Sunday suit that I, for some stupid reason I put on, was in rags at that time.

And then there we were for another six weeks that we got our uniforms. And then we were sent back, right back to Westphalia, where we had to post for our army training.

So what months was this? What months were-- approximately?

Approximately by the end of September. We were within 100 kilometers from where my mother and people, I had left them two months before. And that reminded me very much of Uncle [? Hannes, ?] what he said about people being just moved around.

So in other words, your first introduction is from July-- end of July to end of September. It's two months of chaos.

Yeah.

It basically makes no sense. It doesn't have any purpose.

And it cost a lot of money. And it was a complete-- and that's how it went on. That's how it went on. It didn't get any better.

All right, tell me what happened next. At least you're having some training in Westphalia-- Westfalen, which is the western part of Germany, closer to the Netherlands, closer to France. How long did that last?

Well, at the time, it wasn't directly under threat. But it had been a training, army training place for over 100 years. It was a famous kind of training, [?east?] kind of country in the-- near Paderborn in Westphalia. So we then had a--

What do you remember from the basic training? What kind of training was it?

Well, again, it was pretend. What can you do? We didn't have any ammunition to shoot or anything like that. But we had a bit of target practice with normal air guns type of thing. It was marching around, and jumping around, and keep doing-- they had a major job.

We were still pretending to be a tank unit. And there was one tank gun they'd mounted on some sort of stage with wheels on, which we could wheel to a shooting range, which took two or three hours. And then if you're lucky, you had one chance to fire that gun in turn, with everybody else queuing up. That happened I think twice. That's a day gone, each time a day gone.

But the real-- the real thing was, we were always hungry, real hungry. There wasn't much food, only these thin soups with bits of maybe-- they called it horse meat. But there was no nourishment.

So we, particularly we soldiers, particularly liked these night-- even sometimes during the day-- that you would go to the edge of this place where the fields were. And we were digging up turnips, potatoes. Cart them back to the camp. Put the water-- the washing basin on top of the stove. Light the fire and have some--

And, of course, the sergeants and corporals sort of joined in. Because they too didn't have much to eat. And my-- my particular problem to start with was that I, of course-- I was a school-- school graduate-- school graduate. And these sergeants immediately-- they would show this youngster where to get off and so on.

But time and again, they hadn't a clue to find their way back. And I was always good at orientation. And once they realized that I had that sense of orientation, I was a free man. And I had to be tactful.

When everybody seemed to have backed up enough, it wasn't a question then of a command. I started moving off in a direction, of a home direction. And everybody would follow me. The sergeant wouldn't hear me giving an order. No, that [INAUDIBLE].

So was this an advantage from being the-- disadvantage from being from the upper classes in this instance?

Yeah, definitely.

[INAUDIBLE]. Uh-huh.

I was a useful addition.

And you say this--

You can imagine, you spend all your time hunting for food and so on-- OK, in between, a bit of army like training, running around. But parades-- parades, yes, because parades don't cost any material or anything like that. Definitely [INAUDIBLE].

Where would the parade take place? Around the fields or in the towns?

Well, in around where the barracks were, which was just an open bit of field or ground. That parades, when I think of those times. Another thing, another advantage I found is I was a non-smoker. Most, particularly, sergeants and corporals, were heavy smokers. And so you had something to help.

And the quartermaster sergeant, I liked him and I think he liked me. And I said to him, I don't want to get in trouble with my gun at these rifle parades, have you got something that you could give me? He said, yes, I've got a special one for you, which meant from then on, I had to give him all my cigarette rations.

It was a 1914 German army rifle. And it'd been polished by generations and generations of soldiers, and all I needed to do, to dust it only-- it gleamed. And that rifle saw me through, right through the surrender to the Americans. But I was really sad to give it up. I would have loved to keep it.

Well, this is interesting. This means that by that point in the war, there are no-- there's no ammunition. There's no armament-- there's no arms to give these new soldiers. There's nothing that you're given to fight with. If it's 1914-- if the year of that gun. That's the conclusion I'm coming with. Is that wrong?

[INAUDIBLE] as far as the-- it's a standard German army rifle. It was still a standard German army rifle. So as far as that was concerned, it-- but it was the stupid safety regulations, that while you were training, your weren't allowed to have any live ammunition.

Yeah, sure, it does make some sense, but-- but again, it was-- when we were-- when I joined this unit for the actual-- for actual war, at the same place where we were on the way back from Latvia-- it happened to be the same railway station-- he had said, the station commander said, look, the unit is just about five kilometers down the road. They'll go and fetch-- they'll fetch you. They fetched me.

And then it was just about Easter, 1945 then. And this unit had just come back from fighting for a week of rest. And the commander, Waffen-SS commander had given strict orders that there must be daily exercise and so on. All these guys wanted is rest and take life easy.

But all the-- the officer and the sergeant had all private quarters in the village and disappeared at 6 o'clock at night. And we were in the school building, where was-- it wasn't big enough for all of us. You could just about somehow muscle in and sleep on the floor in these classrooms.

Hang on a second, hang on a second. We've now jumped about half a year--

Yeah. [INAUDIBLE].

From the train-- OK.

But all I wanted to say is that we-- a lot of cheating was going on, but we marched out into the woods in the morning so that commander could hear us sing. And there was a corporal [INAUDIBLE]. And he said, look, it's Easter, and surely, we must be-- we ought to have some better food for Easter. I said to him, you won't get it unless you get it.

And he said, well, he said-- I said there's of a lot of wild animals in these woods. Of course, as a new arrival from the home front, I didn't have any live ammunition. That would only be issued as you were going out to fight.

He said-- [INAUDIBLE] wait a minute. Went in his pocket and gave me five live ammunition. And then I shot a deer. And then we had an Easter-- an Easter thing. But again, that's-- again, it's another story if you like.

Mm-hmm.

But that is the way-- that is the way I found of doing something useful while I was in the Waffen-SS.

So here's my question at this point. When you describe going to Latvia, and there is this chaos and sense of absurdity--

Yes.

--of why were you sent there, what you do, how do you retreat from there.

Yes.

And then you end up in Danzig and so on. By that point, do you meet with other people who have the same skepticism that you do, other kids in the Waffen-SS, other soldiers? Or is this mum you don't share any skepticism with anybody?

Well, again a diversion. While we were training, we finished our training November 1944. I think it was November. Getting-- we're now in the start of our Christmas or maybe New Year. Anyway, there was a group of us, if you like, youngsters, high school guys and that kind of thing.

We were going to do a Christmas newspaper. I don't know whether you know anything about these [GERMAN] they called them. Universities were doing them in particular, where they list up all the teachers and all the students and make some critical poems about them. You're just treading the borderline and so on.

Well, I organized one of those with my sergeant major, who had this lovely rifle for me, and because he could organize some typewriter and so on, and we could use his office as a kind of room. And that was actually published and

distributed over the Christmas holidays.

And then there was no court martial or anything. There was some fairly direct statements, threatening. Yeah, I still got my copy of it. I sent it to my Aunt [? Tilla, ?] and she kept it.

I would love to see that. Do you remember any of those pointed kinds of satirical things that you mentioned in there?

Well, at a future fashion, I'll bring it along. You can see it and I can quote from it.

OK, that's very interesting.

Yeah.

So you're saying by December '44, the last Christmas--

Yeah.

--there is a general sense of-- there's enough skepticism that something like this does not call-- does not evince any kind of retribution, any kind of punishment for being satirical. Whereas, if we compare just a number of years before, two years before, if you say an anti-Hitler [INAUDIBLE]--

[INAUDIBLE]

--you could end up in a concentration camp.

We would be thrown into camp, in a prison, that's for sure. But it was already-- the situation was already compromised with the food. Because we were food hunting instead of army training.

Did you have any contact with your family since the training was not so far away?

Yeah, you were at the military post. That's how that copy of this newspaper for us got to my aunt. And she kept it.

Well, that leads me in another question. By contact, I meant more-- didn't you say that your stepmother was somewhere in the neighborhood? That maybe your siblings were somewhere around? Was that the case, or did I misunderstand?

No, no, they were all-- [? Tilla ?] was then already in the-- back and Felsberg, which Felsberg was the village where my stepmother's brother was the local doctor before and after the war. And during the war, of course, he was called up. He was in Norway. And he was also on the Eastern Front. And I don't know [INAUDIBLE].

After the war he was treated for a little while as not a reliable kind of guy. He was sent into a reeducation camp. He wasn't allowed officially to practice. But he practiced, nevertheless, and that kind of thing. And then he was OK.

Was he a Nazi party member or something? When you say a reeducation camp.

Well, I never thought he was, but my, shall we say-- his cousin, who's written a lot about the time, who was born in around 1930. And he was a school boy. And he was a lot of time with my parents and my young siblings in Felsberg and also in Wallbachsmuehle before that.

He became a leading Protestant parson. He's a doctorate. And he was basically in charge of the Lutheran people in Bavaria, which is very much a Roman Catholic area. And so, he-- he's written about this. He investigated all this. I would have never believed that Uncle [? Hannes ?] was-- anything but being a Nazi.

And, of course, nobody-- I was a prisoner of war in England when he was sent to camps rather than allowed to resume his work as the local doctor. Nobody ever talked about it. It was only-- he, when he wrote up his story-- his stories, he

wrote it up. And then private-- and published it privately among family members.

So if I understand, this is another young relative who is the pastor of the Lutherans in Bavaria. He's born in 1930. And he investigates Uncle [? Hannes' ?] background.

Yes, absolutely, he did investigate all these people. And he wrote honestly about it.

And did he write then that Uncle [? Hannes ?] had been a member of the Nazi party? Is that what he wrote? Or did he read just write he was sent to a reeducation camp by the Americans?

Yeah, that's right. That's right. He goes into-- he spent a lot of time looking at it and then-- in that sort of way. And I'm very close to him. When he was in his-- before he retired, I think around about 2000, he was the head of-- what was it called?

Looking after all Lutherans, German Lutherans in the world that are not in Germany. He got a high order of merit from the new German state, as my sister too, Rosemary, as a professor, as a leading professor of household economics.

OK.

Those two are the merits people from the new generation.

So this answer precipitated- or it followed my question. My question precipitated the answer, of did you have contact with your family that was in the area? And you're saying Aunt [? Tilla ?] by that point had joined them back in Germany, in Felsberg.

Yeah.

And did you ever see them? Or was this correspondence only by letter, this contact was only by letter? During the time you're training-- during the time you're training in Paderborn--

No, nothing. Obviously, any post during the training would be censored anyway by the German army. They were only very matter of fact kind of stories written about. And then, of course, after the-- when we were prisoners of war, at first, again, letter writing wasn't-- didn't exist.

And gradually was introduced according to the Geneva Convention type of thing, which was, again, fairly curtailed. So it was only later when we were bomb disposal in Britain and in London that you could write proper letters and post them privately.

But at this point, when you're still training, and you're in Paderborn, and you say you were there for most of the fall, it sounds like, of 1944. Your only contact with your family is through letters.

Yes.

And your-- is there anyone else you write to besides Aunt [? Tilla? ?] Or is she the only one?

Well, my parents and my younger siblings, my brother, Peter, who was the same-- more or less the same age as Klaus, the priest. But you-- I can't remember how we [?rationed?] this [INAUDIBLE] letter writing. And then, there's always a question, would they arrive? I mean, to get a letter from them was like a major holiday.

So when do you leave Westfalen? When do you leave Paderborn? When do you leave that training area? When are you then sent back east?

Well, just when we-- when we finished our training course, around about Christmas, 1944, there was a typhus epidemic. So we were put into quarantine for two months, I think-- eight weeks quarantine. And at the end of the quarantine, the

order was you have to do another training session of six weeks.

Now, in retrospect, it's clear that these people didn't want to be sent to the front line, the training company. They wanted something to do. The easiest thing was to say these guys need another training. So it was again a session of trying to get food from the local farmers in an illegal sort of way and all the rest of it.

And, of course, by that time the air raids were so frequent. So you were then supposed to be in ditches outside your huts while the air raid-- the alarm was on. And what these bombers-- British bombers at night-- they would-- in the evening they would fly to their targets, Berlin, Dresden, or wherever. And then later come back the same way.

So you would literally spend all night in your ditch. And then, of course, 6 o'clock around, you were sort of tottering around. I mean, you can't-- so in a sense, everybody was released. And suddenly, that thing finished.

And they put up-- I had-- I put-- I got myself a better sideline, where on the same area was a Waffen-SS leader training place. And leaders had a detachment as well. So they needed batmen [?from us?].

I didn't hear that-- batmen?

Batmen, yeah, officers to have somebody who cleans up for them, cleans their boots and that kind of thing. So I had two guys. They had a separate little hut. And I was with them. And they were-- well, they were about three or four years older than I. And we were a nice group.

And then I joined them, learning all this signaling and other things they were being taught in the-- doing their training. And I had otherwise a quiet time. None of these silly parades. So I remember, I would-- after, when the night alarm, 10 o'clock, came, I would slip back and sleep in my bed or spend most of the night in the ditches outside with the alarms going.

But so, to cut a long story short, there had been notices on noticeboard where you could volunteer which front line you wanted to go to-- Italy and so on. And, of course, there was for Russia. And by the time I got back that evening, everybody else had put their names down except the Russian side was completely empty.

So the leading commanders said, that's you. So that's how I came to the Russian front.

OK, let's pause a minute so you can have a little sip there. And this is like end of March, isn't it? Something like that, March '45.

Yeah.

All right. And we know now the war ends within a month and a half. But you didn't know that then.

You certainly didn't know it. But we were-- when we-- when I joined this group, who had just come back for a rest [? after a ?] thing, they had a system, that as soon as-- at 6 o'clock, all these sergeants and leadership people went home to their families in the town. Then immediately, the radio went on in the schoolroom.

And what was it? It was [INAUDIBLE], the American-- as loud as anything, with all the music of "Lili Marlene," and all the rest. And, of course, with the American news, everything. And that went on blaring the whole night. You had to sleep through it.

And so are you telling me that it was American propaganda radio that they were listening to in Germany?

Yeah, sure. Yeah. Well, obviously, it was especially broadcast to the German side.

That's very interesting.

So we knew-- we knew that whatever the German radio said, to what extent it was wrong. I think the Americans didn't have to exaggerate. It was happening at such a speed. So we knew that the war was finished.

And so this is while you're still in Paderborn? Or is this already when--

No, that is still in Paderborn. No, that was in-- it was the last station before the Oder River where we-- where I did my-- had my fighting experience.

So this is not Paderborn. This is when you are sent eastwards again and you are relieving a-- yeah.

Then my-- the people, apart from myself and a few others, were front line soldiers. And the front line soldiers, of course, the sergeants and the corporals, couldn't just scream at them and [INAUDIBLE]. Front line soldiers had their own sort of rights of existence.

And so as far as the sergeants and things concerned, made sure they weren't close. They probably knew what was going on. But let them have it. I mean, they'll be at the front line. They may even die soon.

OK, so we're talking, geographically you're in Silesia when you hear these broadcasts.

No, not in Silesia, in Pommern.

In Pommern.

Pomerania.

OK.

OK, so you're close to the Oder River, but from the Western side of the Oder River, rather than the eastern side.

That's right, yeah.

OK, and this is late March, '45.

That's right. Easter-- I can't remember if Easter was sort of early or middle of April.

And that's when you have the venison, the deer that you shoot.

Yeah.

OK. And had you seen any fighting by then?

What?

Had you seen any fighting by then?

No, no, no, no. Oh, yeah, we'd been attacked by-- on the train getting to that area by a British bomber. But that was sort of-- a few people were killed, but as far as the train stopped and we all charged out into the woods on either side.

But the bomber came back again. And they had-- they fired a rocket, a kind of what they call Christmas tree, which lit up the whole area. So that the bomber could see where to-- but the gunfire didn't [INAUDIBLE]. Except it killed a few people who were too slow getting out of the train.

OK, after-- after Easter, Easter happens, you have at least an Easter dinner.

Yeah.

And then what? We're talking now the second half of April, 1945.

Yeah, that's right. I remember one night-- I slept through all this radio very well. But one night, there was something different. An announcement was being made on this American radio. President Roosevelt had died. That's only way I knew, in fact, what date it was.

Mm-hmm. And so we have to look up right now to see when President Roosevelt died.

Yeah.

And then we'll know specifically.

And at the weekend following, we were marching to the front line at the River Oder.

Was this near Frankfort, Oder, where you were marching?

Halfway between Frankfort and what was the other town?

I don't know. I don't know. But I just--

It was north of Frankfort, about 100 K's North of Frankfort.

OK, so I now have looked up that President Franklin Roosevelt died on April 12th, 1945.

All right.

That's the date of his death. And so the next weekend after that--

I think it was April the 15th that we marched to the front line at the river. Hello?

Yes, I'm here. Can you hear me? Can you see me?

Yeah, very well. [INAUDIBLE].

So there you are, you march to the front line. And then what happens?

Something very strange. I mean, there was a lot of new guns there, and all lying around, just before the Russian-- the Russian artillery was constantly firing across the river, up to, I don't know, 500, 800 meters area. And the main road that they took there, so we had to put our luggage bags, backpack, on this truck, which we couldn't have it with us in the trench.

And then there were all these lovely new handguns there. And I thought, well, my old 1914 rifle, maybe I should have one of these modern quick firing things instead. And my Uncle [? Heinrich, ?] with the Austrian friend of my dad, had been-- he was always a designer. And he was a weapons designer for the German army.

What do you call it-- quick fire guns was a thing. I remember him having all these plans with us in Gneixendorf. And, of course, in the early-- in the early '30s, there was no demand for it.

But when Germany took over Austria, he was immediately called up into that design thing. And then he had married-- one of our big guests at Gneixendorf was an English novelist, Berta Ruck. She was in the-- in the war years, was she the one who produced two or three novels a year.

And she wrote altogether over 100 novels. And she used to come to us in the summer to Gneixendorf to dictate the next, or one of her next novels. So she would be there for three or four weeks. She would bring her own secretary with her from England.

And one of these secretaries was an American lady, a graduate psychologist, graduate from America, who then fell in love with Uncle [? Heinrich. ?] So by the time the war ended, he was married to this American lady.

And then the Americans were grabbing-- again to be quicker than the Russians, all the German designers, and capable inventors, and that kind of thing, and send them to the States. So Uncle [? Heinrich ?] and Aunt Frances went back to-- went to the States. And he then designed car seats for infants, and incapacitated people, and that kind of thing for the rest of his life.

But this is what comes to mind when you are being sent to the front lines, and you see all these nice guns lying there.

Yeah. But as I say, I grabbed one of those guns and sort of fingered it. And one of the old corporals came and knocked me on the back. And they said, do you know, these are beautiful, but will they fire when they're dirty [INAUDIBLE]? And I said, well, I better not take a chance. Because the worst thing is, if you have a gun and can't shoot.

So I stuck with my old rifle. And I thought maybe Uncle Heinrich himself made sure that he made such a position gun that as soon as there's a bit of mud or dirt, it wouldn't fire. I mean, the SS people said by far the best handgun was the Russian one. Because you can drop it in a puddle, pick it up, and it'll still shoot. [INAUDIBLE].

Did you ever fire the rifle?

Yeah, I did. I had to.

Do you know if it hit anything?

Well, it's funny. Everything, the whole war, by that time, on both sides, had become a kind of routine war. People did what was absolutely necessary, but not-- not with any enthusiasm or anything like that. And so the Russians would-- the artillery would fire day and night with one exception. 2 or 3-- 2:30 in the morning, they would stop.

And then the whole armada would come across the river. The Russian armada would come across the river. And each night, obviously more and more. And we would fight them back. All that was sort of programmatic.

On the German side, at 6 o'clock in the evening, just when it got a little bit too dark for the Russian planes to see what was going on, there was a German set of guns who fired exactly 12-- 12 [INAUDIBLE] towards the other side. And that was the German backing.

Does that mean that was it?

Yeah, that was the German artillery protecting us.

OK.

The other thing-- the other thing was when we were marching to the front line, into the artillery section, just before we got to where the artillery fire would start, who was standing on the right hand side of us? Our company commander in his nice, fine dress uniform. None of our people-- none of the staff would even look at his side. We were just walking past him, taking no notice of him. It was a weird kind of sight.

Why? Why was he there in his dress uniform?

Oh--

Was he going to go down in glory? Was this the idea?

No, I think he was checking-- checking that we were actually going out, but he certainly wasn't coming. But that's how the-- then I thought-- well, we were marching along this pass-- track. And right and left were meadows, which were sort of [INAUDIBLE], wet-- wet grass.

And our sergeants and we were marching in normal marching order. And I thought to myself, that's crazy. We should spread out. But it was that kind of bloody mindedness that we were just walking [INAUDIBLE]. As it happened, there was no direct hit. And that was that. But I just couldn't understand why take such chance.

But that was the kind of-- there wasn't-- I mean, everybody was just unprepared. On the Russian side, probably equally. There was no spirit of anything left.

OK. It's hard for us to say--

And what we found--

Yeah.

And what I found-- what we found of the other when we got to the river, I thought we were relieving the defending [INAUDIBLE]. There was no defense there. We were defense arriving. The Russians could have just come across and not bothered with firing all their guns.

And so once you get to that river, what do you do?

Well, again, in a typical bloody minded way, from the front they-- look, they said, that's got to be a manhole here. So the guy, the first soldier stepped down and started digging a man hole. That's how we moved along.

And, of course, we being a rag pack at the end, we were standing-- standing around for an hour before we got to our location, which was-- the river side was fairly high up from the actual river on that stretch.

But by the time we got to where we, the rag pack got through, there was a-- there was a little island there, which was more or less river level or not much higher than the river level. And we had to get-- cross a plank across to there. And we, the rag pack, were so the catch up area.

Because when the attacks came, the Russians-- of course, the river was coming from south to north, with their boats and various things, they would obviously-- in crossing, they would come drift towards the north, towards our island. And, of course, these guys that they had at the top there would shoot at first, because the Russians [INAUDIBLE], the Russians would never get as far as our island.

But in the end, they had a tank. And our corporal had got an anti-tank rocket, which he fired and stopped it. But he burned his back. And the back blow [INAUDIBLE]. He'd never fired one of those panzer [INAUDIBLE] things.

So he got killed there. And then we were relieved [INAUDIBLE] within a few hours by what they call kids and granddads, with all these beautiful new weapons. They were wonderfully equipped. I said, for Heaven's sake, make sure you keep them clean.

So you were there for all of two or three hours in that-- on that island? Is that--

[INAUDIBLE] For about a week.

You were there about a week, I see. I see. And then after-- so it's after that shooting that you were relieved after two or three hours. Is that correct?

Yes, yes, that's right, it did happen to be the same night.

OK.

But that's another story.

And what kind of story is that?

Well, the situation was, here was my corporal. And I was next to him, the nearest to him, in my foxhole. And he-- it was all-- I mean, it was a-- a battle is a terrible scramble.

It was-- the tank was coming. And he said, don't fire until I fire. So we were kept completely still. And when the tank was about to reach the island, he fired it. And the tank stopped and sank, which was amazing. And we didn't hear any more.

But there was a mass of Russian soldiers now coming onto the land, onto us. And we were all just firing where-- where anything, because this was all bush [?and things?] sitting there. But we just fired and fired. Where everything, any moved, we fired.

And then suddenly, everything stopped. It was quiet. And there was a soldier next to me. Whether I killed him or not, I just don't know. But he was dead. And he had a sack thing.

And as I tried to fathom out what to do about him-- did he have any food on him maybe, because we hadn't had anything to eat for nearly-- for four days. And suddenly, the most terrible screams from my corporal.

And I rushed across. There he was stuck in his foxhole. And his back was completely bare, right to the bone, bleeding, because obviously, the back-- the back blast of that rocket, which he had no training in firing. And he said, kill me, kill me. I took his hand. And I said, I can't kill you. Then he-- he just rolled over to the side. And that-- felt his-- his wrist. And he's gone.

But then the sergeants from the other side-- because when the call came that we would all be leaving, they said, if you don't bring him with you when you come, you'll be court martialed. And I said to the lads, if we did that, we will be left behind because they won't wait a second for us. They'll run off and just leave us here.

And I said to them, when the replacement comes, each of us, just run as fast as we can to the street to catch up with them. And as I say, I was one of the fastest to run. I got there. And the food, the field kitchen, was just about to leave.

The guys had had their food. And they're-- obviously the field kitchen didn't want to hang around in a dangerous area. But when we started to arrive, they had to stop and wait.

Wow, when it finally came, it was bloody.

Yeah, yeah, [INAUDIBLE].

I didn't quite catch, though, the soldier that was dead, was it a Russian soldier or a German soldier that was next to you?

It was a Russian soldier. And he had a-- he had a crust of bread in his-- in his pack, which I certainly ate with delight. But I didn't touch him otherwise.

So you retreat across the plank, back onto the other side.

[INAUDIBLE] And, of course, all the uncles had already gone, except for us. And we ran as fast, each as could through the-- the guns that started-- the Russian guns had started firing again, as they would. And then, as I say, we got our soup at the roadside.

And then behind the roadside, about 100 meters into the woods there, the Germans had made some positions, defense positions, to cover, I suppose, in case the Russians got [INAUDIBLE] of this pathway.

And for the first time in a week, we could actually sleep. They had straw on the ground there. There was three or four of them. And we spread out into the different things. And we slept there for the first time, properly.

Then I woke up at dawn, 5:00. I looked out of the shooting thing. And I had the view, by chance, onto the street. There was a Russian group just marching along there. So I thought, right. As soon as the Russians had disappeared along the road, I jumped out and shouted into each of these bunkers-- the Russians are here, we must collect at the-- at the gun position.

And charged-- I had a rough idea of where it was. And I charged off without looking back. Everybody followed. Only sergeants [INAUDIBLE] like that. That's what they wanted to hear, somebody giving a command. Never mind who it was.

Anyway, of course, when we got to the gun-- to do the big gun position who fired the one battery shot every evening, they had gone already, completely. They were-- so by then, of course, the sergeants took over. The [INAUDIBLE], everybody counted, anybody missing, all kind of thing.

And then they turned to me. I was obviously the suspect. They said, I think we send you to find our commander now. He's probably in one of those villages on the other-- on the far side. So I was quite happy. I had a wound in the back as well from one of the splinters from a gun, from one of the Russians.

Anyway, so I shot off. And by that time, of course, it was early-- light, 6 o'clock or so in the morning. And I went straight to where I could see some roofs behind the trees. And then crossed the fields, no footpaths or anything.

And just before I got to the far side, one of these Russian planes-- they called them sewing machines, they made that kind of noise, of the old fashioned sewing machine-- but like the German Fieseler planes, they could slow down in a-- extremely, to quite a slow flat.

And of course, this thing starts slowing down and starts firing at me. And, of course, the one thing I knew is upright is better than [INAUDIBLE]. So I marched on them with them firing around me. And they came back a second time. And I just kept on marching.

And then I found command-- commander with the sergeant major and a medical sergeant in the pub in the village. And I immediately-- I reported. And he went back to the-- our commander. Our Commander never actually spoke to us directly, only through the sergeant major. The sergeant major was always the go-between.

And while the sergeant major had gone to the go-between, I went to the medical sergeant. And I said look, help me, I've got this thing in the back. And my feet are full of blood, because-- [INAUDIBLE]. So the sergeant really took charge of me.

And when the sergeant major said, now, you must go back and tell the people where to go to, then the medical sergeant said no way. The guy is sick. And from then on, I was the sick guy.

So what happens after that? Where do-- what happens to your group? Do you continue-- do you continue staying there? Do you retreat? What happens?

No, we found our way to the-- well, they had, in fact, the vehicle, the truck with all the luggage on it. And there was another group-- well, no-- there was obviously the group that I'd left. They didn't stay where they were. They moved.

And we met in-- near the town. That's the one where I had arrived two weeks, or a week before. And we joined forces. And from then on, it was without any orders being given. Certainly, our commander never gave any order anymore

because he didn't want to be the-- the what you call it? A traitor.

Now, officially we were still a war unit. Unofficially, we were moving. But the whole spirit of the company was completely changed. We were a gang now, making sure that we had food, that we had things.

And all the-- or some of these guys, who before just couldn't look right or left, now, during the day, you couldn't move because of the-- mostly Americans, and the Russian planes. But during the night, obviously, we moved as much as we could.

But during the day, we were usually near a kind of village. And then everybody was looking for good food. And we came across fairly soon about Volkswagen Jeeps, brand new Jeeps from the Volkswagen factory, which wasn't all that far away from where we were.

And the guys had the idea that if they went-- there were distilleries in most of these villages, or small towns-- pure alcohol. Would the vehicles actually run on pure uncle rather than on normal petrol? And they did. Again, a bit like the train from Danzig.

But at least they carried the luggage. And on the straight, they would-- we had our own vehicle where we could take a rest on it.

And so in other words, this was a retreat. This was--

It was an open retreat. I mean, we were then, so to speak, between the Russians and the fleeing mass of German soldiers and civilians. We didn't-- we didn't go on any of the main roads.

The main roads were truck blocked. And both the American and the English planes-- the Russian planes would come and shoot-- and shoot at them and so on-- civilian people. [INAUDIBLE] We were just doing it on field tracks far away. So that's how we got to the American line.

So does that matter-- So the image that I'm getting is that the main roads have both refugees fleeing, civilians fleeing, and German soldiers retreating, all en masse.

All en masse, everybody trying to get there first. And we, along our field tracks, were obviously doing better.

So were you-- if we go geographically now, you are coming from Silesia, from the Western side of the Oder.

Yeah.

And are you towards the south or closer to the north?

No, Pomerania-- Pomerania. The lake-- all these lake districts, and all these linked different lakes there-- northern, northern Pomerania.

So that which does suggest that, if you're going north, is that where the British army was?

We were going west.

You're going west.

We kept along-- clearly north of Berlin, if you like. And we sort of-- in the broad direction we would move towards Hamburg, where the Elbe makes a sort of-- it comes from south to north, and then some miles before Hamburg, it turns more in the westerly direction. And it's at that lake there that that's where we finally hit the Americans. They had built a pontoon bridge there.

They had built a pontoon bridge near the-- near Hamburg?

Well, it was about 100 kilometers south-- southeast of Hamburg.

OK. And so you do you meet up with the American army at that point?

Yeah, sure. We came down towards the river. There was an American soldier. And he said, rifles on that side, vehicles on that side. Watches to me? And that's how it was. So I--

Rifles on that side, vehicles on that side, watches to me?

Yeah, and revolvers. That's what he was personally collecting. And then they said, just wait, we will-- and you'll be told what to do next.

So no formal-- I am surrendering-- OK, you want to surrender, nothing like that?

Nothing at all. And it emerged that only trucks were allowed to come through towards the bridge. They had to park there. And the bridge would only be open the next morning. And in the meantime, trying to find a truck or a driver going in your direct-- your home direction, and see that you-- they'll take you home, that was the general instruction.

And I found myself with another couple of youngsters. We were sort of looking around, along the river stretch. There were basically farm-- grass fields for farming. Barbed wire, but not-- civilian-- only civilian kind.

And in the distance-- the distance we could see some sort of pattern in one of these grass fields. That I said, I wonder what they've got there. So, we, the three of us, went along. We clambered through the fence and the fences.

When we got there, there were big bales of hay there. So we each took one of those big bails of hay and walked back. Put it back very close to the trucks obviously. Otherwise, it's all wet grass there. And we sat on top of our bags-- the bales in great comfort.

And after about half an hour or so, who comes along? Our company commander and a colleague of his. And they said, we would like to have some hay. So we said, well, what do you have for us. They had all kinds of bars of chocolate.

So every bale of hay, or for every arm of hay we gave them, we got a bar of chocolate. So we fared quite good.

And that's your--

How life changes.

And this is once you're already taken prisoner?

Well--

Sort of.

--not formally. Obviously, we wanted to be with the Americans because we certainly didn't want to be mistaken for Russian prisoners. We felt the Americans were human.

And based on your experience afterwards, were they?

Well, they were pretty rough. When we became British prisoners of war, we were treated like soldiers-- OK, enemy soldiers, but like soldiers. But the Americans treated us more like criminals.

How did that manifest itself?

Well, they would just sort of herd around without speaking or anything. It was, you know-- rough and ready.

Did you stay in the same location? Where you moved anywhere?

No, the next morning I found a truck to Eisenach, which was the nearest destination to Felsberg, where family was. And we got-- we were in good company on that truck, about 15-20 people.

But, of course, the streets were totally empty, except for American army traffic. And, of course, in the afternoon, on the way to Hanover, we had no petrol anymore.

Does this mean that you-- does this mean that you weren't really taken prisoner? That is, you gave up your--

Not formally, no.

OK.

We were just passed along. And when we got stuck without petrol, an American truck stopped. And they said, well, you have to get off the road anyway because it was [INAUDIBLE], it was getting dark. He said, we'll requisition some place for you. And we'll bring you the petrol in the morning.

And so they took us to one-- to a big farm of the nearest village and requisitioned it. And that's where we spent the night. And the next morning, they came with their own truck. And said, forget about your truck. We take you in our truck.

And then we ended up on a football field in Hanover, on the fringe of Hanover, with barbed wire around, and guards. And they said, well, you have to wait here for release papers.

So all these little groups then had their own little circle of camping. Eventually, some sort of food was being issued. And all this sort of led up to my birthday, the 14th of May. And there was a hairdresser. He was-- who was-- who was very kind to me. I think it was-- what you call them-- homosexual inclined.

But he said we're making a birthday party for you. Sure enough, he extracted from everyone something edible for a birthday place for me. And just as all this was taking place, there was a-- the news came, or an announcement was made, that all members of the-- sorry-- what is that?

I don't hear a thing. Did you hear something?

No. OK, something just appeared on my side, if not on yours. So the Waffen-SS must-- you must report. You've become a war criminal. And so the next day, we were on a truck, [INAUDIBLE]. And as we all-- I mean Waffen-SS, you couldn't really easily deny because you wore-- had your blood troop on your arm.

And so we ended up guess where? Where I had my first army training, in Paderborn. But they built-- the Americans had built a new camp there, very huge barbed wire around it. But new. For the first time for months, I had a clean floor to sleep on. I mean, I was in rags anyway.

So this is less than a year since you-- this is half a year since you had been in Paderborn.

Yeah, it was only two months after I'd left to go to the front line.

Yes.

Yeah.

Two months-- not half a year, but two months.

Two months.

And so much happened in those two months.

Yeah. And, of course, you were allocated alphabetically to one of those nuts. New as they were they were crammed full of people. To find room to sleep was a problem. And most of the people in my hut were officials of some sort, not necessarily soldiers, but mayors of places.

But a better class kind of people, who were terribly, terribly worried. I mean they were a desperate bunch. All day long you had to walk-- everybody had to walk around the inside of the barbed wire circle.

And it was sort of really horrible atmosphere. But I sort of started looking around. And all these people started walking, bent down, along-- it was a sandy sort of way, so as not easy to walk. And there was just one guy who had his head up, a young-ish guy, and I.

So we made sure we met up. And he was a university graduate. And he'd been inside of a factory, of an-- [INAUDIBLE] what do you call it-- IG-- IG Farben factory.

Oh, my.

[INAUDIBLE] But he had started to-- he got some scraps of material to write on. And we were taking to pieces one of the Greek stories about-- and we had a wonderful time just--

You know something, I am only hearing--

[INAUDIBLE]

I'm only hearing-- yeah, I'm only hearing parts of what we're speaking about now.

[INAUDIBLE] homosexual too, actually. [INAUDIBLE] properly?

I am not only-- I'm not-- hello?

Hello?

I can't hear very well right now. I would suggest that we're getting a silt-- a much more-- not a very strong signal, a weak signal. And since we've passed our time anyway, and this seems to be a good point, why don't we wrap up for today.

Yeah.

And start off in this-- at this point tomorrow when you are in the-- in Paderborn again, and you're describing the atmosphere. And this one fellow, who held his head high, and how you got to know him, and what you talked about.

Yeah.

Yeah, let's stop for today.

Yeah.

OK. All right, then.

Yeah.

Until tomorrow.

OK. Yeah, until tomorrow.

All right.

Thanks very much.

All right then, bye-bye now.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye.