

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Edward Adler
February 27, 1992
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Edward Adler, conducted on February 27, 1992 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.

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

EDWARD ADLER

February 27, 1992

Wentworth Films, Inc.; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 2/27/92; Tamarac, Florida; Camera Roll 1 is up; Sync take 1 is up; the following is interview with Edward Adler.

beep

Q: Why don't we start talking about the 1930s, and why don't you tell me how old you were and what you remember of daily life as it was impacted by the Nazi party, how it came into greater and greater power--pogroms, laws...

A: Now, well actually I think I should start in the, let me see, I was born in 1910, so that would have been around 1930 when the Nazi party really came into being. And I remember that they were then a party #26, we had many, many political parties in Germany at that time, and they were party #26. They had advantage over other political parties such as the communists and democrats because they had a lot of money backing behind them and when they marched into a certain neighborhood, they had beautiful shiny boots and beautiful uniforms and they marched in military uh formation, whereas, democrats and the communists at that time, they were organized, but they were like a bunch of people running down the street, as compared to well-organized march of the Nazis. We lived at that time in an area called ----- in Hamburg, Germany, which was a working class neighborhood. I would say, very largely communist, not necessarily party members, but certainly sympathizers. There was one particular day I remember quite vividly, when the Nazis decided they wanted to march down the main street in our neighborhood, by the thousands incidentally. And, we...didn't exactly like the idea, this was our neighborhood, our turf. There was a lot of shooting. Machine guns had been mounted on roofs, would shoot into the air. Group, and so forth, and that became a very bloody affair. This was only one time. I guess it, I'm not quite sure about the date, but it was in 1930, a very early 1930. I was involved in many of the anti-Nazi street fights, and -----, I was never a member of a party really, but certainly a sympathizer. But then I was only 20 years old or 21 years old, so I had a lot of things that I wouldn't do today. And, it is generally assumed that the Holocaust, and it rightly so, actually started until 1942, when the death camps came into being, but that's not really quite true, not in my opinion because the first boycott of the Jewish stores happened in April 30, 1932! Where they took all, this is a long time before the holocaust started, as per se holocaust. They uh, boycotted the doors of the Jewish stores, put the name 'juden' on the windows and so forth, and they marched in front of those stores for prevent customers from going in, but there were many people, I remember very vividly, one

particular store in the area that we lived in was a cigar store, it sold cigars and cigarettes. I know, my neighbors went in there, they never smoked a cigarette in their life, they just went in there to spite the Nazi movement at that time, they were not very much in favor of it. But we have to put this in a proper context, things were very bad in Germany. Unemployment was perhaps, I'm not sure of this now, but I would say perhaps 20% people weren't working, there, there was no jobs to be had, and as time went on, they became more and more sympathetic to the Nazi movement, first, I would imagine, for economic reasons and secondly, it became very popular to be antisemitic because it was easiest thing in the world, if you want to hate somebody, the Jews are always around! They can be hated. So, in my opinion, the actual holocaust, with the exception of the death camp, started in 1932, and, as I said before, April the 30th. A group of young men, friends of mine, we used to hang around together, we were quite active in dancing and all this kind of thing. We decided we're going to join the army. It was not an army, it was called uh...Arbeits, Arbeits, Arbeiten, I don't recall exactly the name of it. It was a labor camp, in which we had regular military training except for weapons. That was against the Versailles Treaty at that time, which had been still obeyed then. We had no weapons, but we marched in military formation and, and we used uh, uh spades, shovels, as rifles, which marching and all this kind of thing, we had a regular military training. At that time that I went in there, it was, nobody asked me if I was Jewish, and I didn't mention it, so we all got accepted into this uh camp. Somehow or other, I don't recall how, they found out that I was Jewish. I was sta-uh stationed in Marineburg, East Prussia, which was right near the city of Elding, also in East Prussia, and Elbing then was German, but it had been independent uh earlier. It's been kicked back and forth between Poland and Germany for many years. We marched from Marineburg to Elding, which was, I'd say, about 30 kilometers, and we stood guard for Hitler, and I claimed to have very distinct, uh, I don't know what I should call it. I probably was the only Jew in the world that ever stood guard for Hitler. I saw him as close as I see you right in front of me now. He was making a speech at the city in Elding, and as he walked by us, reviewing the troops, he was a little man, everyone knows the mustache and his hairdo, and he looked perfectly calm and we stood out there waiting for him to finish, which took about 3 hours. When he came out, and he marched by us again toward his car, the man looked, and I remember this very vividly. He looked as, like a maniac, he talked himself into a total frenzy. I don't believe that he even knew what he was speaking about anymore, because he was, he looked a, a person that has not control over his emotions anymore. It was found out somehow or other, as I said before, that I was Jewish, and I was discharged from this camp. I must have been in there, I don't remember exactly, I'd say close to a year. This was in 1932. Nothing much happened between 1932 and 1935 except the regular political uh marches through neighborhoods that they weren't wanted and so forth, and in the meantime, the Nazi party grew, and grew in popularity. A lot of the German fellows, young fellows, they weren't really antisemitic or anti anything, but they had

nothing to do, they had no jobs, and here, they come around they give them a beautiful pair of boots, and they give them a nice shirt and a pair of britches, and have a gun in your hip, you know, you can go out and shoot somebody, it's okay, you'll get away with it. Now, that became very popular, but in 1935, actually it was September 15, a new law came into being, and that a German family could not have a gentile maid, there were many Jewish families were quite wealthy too, and they had a maid, a live-in maid. They could not have a live-in maid under the age of 55, for apparently, obvious reasons. They also at the same time a law took effect that did not allow a Jewish person, male or female, to go with a Gentile person, male or female. At that time, I was going with a nice young lady that I had gone with for some time, and we were out camping, I remember very well, I had a kayak, and we went out camping near Hamburg, and there was a fellow and, next to us, near us, in another little camp with a tent, we slept in tents. He wanted to make a date with this young lady that I was going with, and she didn't want any part of it. He reported me to, to the Gestapo, and I was arrested for going with a gentile girl. I got six months in prison, solitary confinement in 1935. When I was released, I became known as a habitual criminal in the eyes of the Nazi party. I was a habitual criminal. I never did anything criminal in my life, but as far as they're concerned, being, doing something against the law was enough to make me a habitual criminal. As a result of that image that was put on us, I was arrested again 3 years later, on June 14, 1938 at 4 o'clock in the morning. We had gone to a birthday party of my sister in law. I was already married. I had a baby, my wife was pregnant again. Four o'clock in the morning there's a banging on the door. We woke up, we said, "What are they? Crazy? They want to continue the party 4 o'clock in the morning?" And I yelled, "Go on home! That's enough!" And the banging persisted and I opened the door, and there came 2 plain clothes men with guns, "You're under arrest." "Under arrest? What for? I didn't do anything." No questions asked. I said, "Would you mind getting out so my wife can get up?" He says, "Oh, that won't bother us." I said, "It may bother her." So, they stepped outside the door, and I got up, I got dressed, they took me to a police station near the area where we lived.

Q: We have to reload. We just ran out.

A: The emotional impact of this...

beep.

Q: Okay, why don't we back up to the point where at 4 in the morning, they came knocking on the door, so go right back to that point.

A: All right. I opened the door, two plain clothes...

Q: Do the whole knock on the door, and back up a little tiny bit more.

A: Okay. We had gone to a birthday party on June the 14th, so some friends of ours who had come home, must have been about midnight, somewhere around midnight. Four o'clock in the morning, we had a banging on the door, and I thought those were our friends coming back to continue the celebration. I said, "Come on, go on home, it's enough already. You know, 4 o'clock, got to work tomorrow." The knocking persisted, I opened the door, and two plain clothes men with guns came in to the room, "You're under arrest." "Under arrest? What for? I didn't do anything." No questions asked. They didn't push us around at that point. I was, I got dressed, they took us to a police station in the neighborhood where we were. I got into a room perhaps as large as this one right here. There must have been 2 or 300 people in there, and we didn't know what was going on. "What are you, what are you here for?" "I don't know, I didn't do anything." We didn't know anything. Nothing. We had absolutely no idea what was going to happen. All we knew, we were under arrest. Around 7 o'clock or 6 o'clock in the morning, they loaded us all on trucks, and they took it to a remote train station in a place called Foulshorough. It's a name, it's in a, a suburb of Hamburg. The trucks were supported by a police--well, those are storm trooper cars, not really police cars, the private police had nothing to do with it. They had a car in front of the truck, and car in back of the truck and one on each side with bloodhounds. To be facetious, they wanted to be sure nobody gets lost, you know. They took us to the train station, and we were loaded, we were loaded into regular trains, not boxcars, as what happened later. We were not in boxcars, we went in a regular train, and then, several hours of train ride, we didn't where we, we had no idea what was happening, and you can imagine some older people, I was just a young fellow, but there were some older people--started crying, we didn't know, what did we do? When we got to Berlin, they loaded us back on trucks again, no that is not correct. We went to a town called Oranienburg, which is a suburb of Berlin. How far outside of Berlin, I don't know. The train stopped, they shoved us all out of the train, and we began to march towards the camp. We still didn't know what was going to be, we had no idea. Along the train ride, some, we had to run, there was no walking. One particular incident I recall (pause) like it was yesterday, an old gentleman with the name of Solomon, I'll never forget. He must have been well in his 70s, he simply couldn't run. He couldn't run, he had to walk. He couldn't run and he collapsed, and he laid in the road, and one of the storm troopers, a tall young fellow, very slender, very tall, stepped on this throat (blows his nose), this is true. Unbelievable but true, till the man was dead. We had to pick up his body, and throw him to the side of the road, and we continued on into the camp, where we were assembled in a courtyard, and a strange incident happened at that time. We faced a barrack, a door on the right, a door on the

left. People went in the left door, came out the right door, entirely different people. Their hair was shaven off, they had a prisoner's uniform on, the very wide striped uniform. My number was 6199. A strange thing happened as I mentioned before. My parents were separated. I hadn't seen my father, and he was my step father I must say, in perhaps 8 years, maybe 9 years, right after I was bar mitvahed, my parents separated for a specific reason, and I hadn't seen him in all these years, and I saw him, met him in that camp. It was uh, hard to describe the emotion. My father was a very, very big man, he weighed 350 pounds. And I introduced myself, he didn't recognize me of course. And we became a family again. While we were in camp, I tried to take care of him as much as I could. There wasn't too much that I can, could do at the time, but, I just have to mention it because this all relates to a very traumatic experiences in my life. We worked ten hours a day if I remember correctly. We slept on straw, on strawbacks, it was a uh jude sack filled with straw. I guess that's common uh you know, under certain circumstances, many people sleep that way, and we worked 10 hours a day. On a field that was approximately a square kilometer, somewhere around that area. One area of this field was quite high, the other area was quite low. The area had to be leveled, and what was done was they had tracks running from one end to the other. On those tracks were mining cars. Now in this country, a mining car is square. Over there a mining car is a triangular shape. Steel mining cars, and each train had about ten of these mining cars on it. On each one of those mining cars storm trooper was standing with a re--and we had to run from one end of this field to the other, shovel the mining cart full of dirt, and return to empty it out on the lower end. If anyone would have told me at that time that I can run 40 kilometers a day, I'd say you're crazy. But I did. Day after day after day. The food was barely edible, I remember one particular incident, it so happens I hate broccoli, and they had broccoli soup for 3 days in a row, and for 3 days in a row I didn't eat anything, just dry bread. The other prisoners gave me some of their bread. They ate the soup, I got the bread. I just couldn't eat it because if I had I would have gotten sick. Psychological? Certainly, but I'm entitled. At one time, they assembled us in a courtyard. They had machine gun towers all the way around, and they were shooting machine gun bullets over our head, maybe a foot above our head, and they said, they made a, the commander made a speech, they said that if Germany, this was the time of Germany taking over the----- in Czechoslovakia. They said if Germany gets involved in the war because of -----, these machine guns will be lowered and we're going to kill you all. We, we were hoping that this wasn't going to happen. Perhaps, many people will recall a Christian pastor with the name of Niemoller. He was arrested from the pulpit in a little church somewhere in Midwestern Germany because he simply didn't believe in the Nazi doctrine, and he was preaching openly against it, and he was arrested and put in camp, it became like an international incident at the time. I met him in ----- Sachsenhausen. What they did to this man, one human being doing this to another, is beyond description. This man in the perhaps 6 months that he was in our camp, aged 25 years. Perhaps I

shouldn't say this, but they literally made him eat his own waste, but he lived through it because he had very strong faith. I just mention this to convey what one human being can do to another. When you read this in a book it's one thing, when you see it and it actually happens it's quite another, I assure you. While I was in the camp I had pneumonia. The commander used to come in and inspect the sleeping quarters. There was no living quarters, we only had beds in the barracks, and other than that, we stayed outside, there was no anywhere where we could relax or assemble, no way. And he used to hold his nose, "Uh, these Jews stink, I can't stand it." This of course is all in German. One time, we were assembled, and I always tried to make it my business to stay in a back row. We always had 3 or 4 rows of soldiers. I tried to stay in the back row not to be conspicuous in any way. One time it just didn't happen, I was standing in the front row. And as the guards walked by, they stopped in front of me, and I dreaded that because I knew this might happen. And he says to me, "Why are you laughing?" I was in no mood to laugh, I assure you, but as far as he was concerned, I laughed. He says, "You're going to hang. In two weeks from today you're going to hang."

Q: We have to stop and reload.

beep

Q: Now this time when you start, back up to where they lined you up, and just tell that whole thing again, they used to line us up and I used to try to stay in the back row, include all that, okay?

A: At one time we were assembled on the atrium, the courtyard as you will, and as I, I always like to make it my business to stay in the back row, not to be conspicuous, I was afraid, to be honest. This time it so happens that I wound up in the front row. As they watched, that is the guards walked by this assembled group, they stopped in front of me,-----Nazi uniform of course, storm trooper uniform, he says, "Why are you laughing?" I was in no mood to laugh, but as far as he was concerned I was laughing. He says, "You're going to hang two weeks from today." Hanging means on your ties, your hands are tied behind you and you hang on the tie on a pole, perfectly plain pole, after, for 24 hours. After that, you'll never use your arms again. This was supposed to be done on the 16th of September, 1938. Now, I was released on the 15th of September. My father was released first, and I was released about 2 weeks afterwards. The release came about because at that time, the Nazi government was satisfied if a Jewish person could leave the country, they let you go. They had no death camps at the time. I must track back a little bit. When I spoke earlier of leveling out the area in the Oranienburg concentration camp, we didn't know it at the time, but Oranienburg became the first death camp in Germany. So, anyway, we

were building the death camps, but of course, we, not only didn't we know, but we had no choice anyway. But, I just wanted to go back to that. Uh, my wife had been very active to trying to get me out. The first 6 weeks, she didn't know where I was, if I was alive or anything. There was no communication. But she kept on working to get us out of Germany. She had family in this country in Providence, Rhode Island, the papers were all ready and everything, and she went and got me released on the 15th of September, one day before I was supposed to hang. How I got from the camp back home, I don't really know. I don't even know what I had on or anything. All I know is that I came home, and she didn't recognize me ten feet away, she was pushing a baby carriage down the street, but I was home. There were many incidents that I really have to go back to recall whether many people were shot during the day as we worked, and worked among others I was many times, because you can't run that much, and they, soon as you make one step walking, they whipped you. Uh, I recall at one time, they got us out of bed at 4 o'clock in the morning, with water hoses. The guys had a ball, they had a wonderful time, they get us all out with fire hoses and water. Just for no reason at all, they just wanted some fun so they got us all out and standing in the yard, and after an hour or so, we all had to get back and continue to sleep if we could on that wet straw. I will say that during the time when the Vien--, when the Austrian, when the Austrian guards were on duty, they had German guards and Austrian guards. When the Austrian guards were on duty, it was horrible. They were the most brutal of anyone you can imagine. But they did with us, and we had no choice. Many people will say, "Why didn't you fight back?" I equate it with the situation in Ethiopia when Mussolini went into Ethiopia with tanks and they were shooting uh slingshots against the tanks. We were in the same position somewhat. How can you fight back? You had nothing. You had to take it. Fortunately, I was there for only 3 months. I know people who left whether from, they had no family anywhere in the world. They could not get out, and they were all killed of course. After I...

Q: Let me ask you now about the pogrom on November 9. Describe that to me.

A: Yes. When I came out of the concentration camp, I had to report to the Gestapo. Ten o'clock every morning except Sundays, you had to go downtown, report every morning at ten o'clock sort of sign in ceremony. They want to be sure I'm still all right, that I wasn't sick, you know, they wanted to take good care of me. Kristallnacht happened on November 9th. November the 10th in the morning, we stayed at my mother's, and my wife says, "I'll go downtown with you." We went downtown, we got on a streetcar, and was all kinds of commotion. What's going on, we didn't know. We hadn't put a radio on or anything, there was not television in those days. Didn't put a radio, didn't know, and everybody was whispering and pointing, we didn't have no idea. We got downtown, and there were a million people. The city of Hamburg had 3 million people, was a very large city, and in the finest stores, the finest Jewish stores, the windows were smashed, and the mannequins were laying on the street, and people were burning books and dancing around it. We had no idea what's going on. I turned up my collar, I'll never forget, and put my head down, and said, "God, somebody should recognize me, I'll be torn to pieces." We went to the Gestapo building, and there were lots of people loitering in outside on the first floor, I said to my, "I'll tell you what, run upstairs and see what's going on." We had no idea. She ran upstairs, I don't think she ever ran as, a flight of stairs so fast in her entire life, she came down, she says, I was hiding, incidentally in a building, in a basement of a building across the street. She came over she said, "They're all going to be arrested again." This was November 10, 1938. She said, "You have to get out of here." How can I get out of here, we're not ready, I don't have... We went back, no we went to the Holland/America line where we already had re-made reservations to come to this country because my wife took care of all that while I was still in camp, but we didn't have the money to pay for the tickets anymore because it was all confiscated. My father in law who was well-established in business, they had nothing left, everything was taken away, and at that time, they already been in this country, we had nowhere to go. My wife called a very famous banker with the name of Walberg, W-a-l-b-e-r-g. Was a very famous bank in Germany. He called Holland/America line, he guaranteed payments for the tickets on November 10, 1939. I took my wife back home to my mother's, and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I got on a train, and I left for Holland. My wife had a sister and a brother in law that lived in Holland at the time. She was married to a Dutch fellow, and they moved to Holland probably 3 or 4 years before. I don't know exactly when, my wife had, could verify the date. The train where I was on, this is kind of interesting, the train that I was on stopped in a city called Aldensall, that's the last German station. It stopped in Aldensall for 5 minutes. They changed train personnel, the Dutch person now would come on and then they go further into Holland. As we were riding along, customs came, came into

my coupe, we had no trains like they have here. Everyone has uh, there are coupes, which I think seat about 6 people. Each coupe seats about 6 people. Not the way it is here, it's one long train, they're all coupes. The customs came in and asked me for my passport. I showed him the passport, and I must say that on the German passport, the first page has a great big J printed on it. A red J, so that anyone who opens up your passport knows instantly that you are Jewish. He looked at it, there was no problem, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to Amsterdam." No problem, okay, gave me back my passport, and I was very relieved, I had, you know, really didn't expect it to be that easy. Well, a few minutes later, I went walking through the train, in towards the dining car, I wanted to get a cup of coffee or something, and there came the black uniformed SS. "Where are you going?" "I'm just going to get a cup of coffee or some tea or something." "Go back to your Coupe." So you have no choice, you go back to the coupe. In my coupe was a young American couple. I know it was an American couple by the passport. They came into the coupe, asked this young couple for their passports, he says, "Americans?" He says, the fellow says, "Yes. We're on our honeymoon." Okay, give them back their passport. He came to me "Passport please." I showed him, he says, "Ooooh," he says, "Your'e a jew, you're running away from, where you come from?" I said, "I come from Amber." He says, "You're running away. You didn't report to the po, the Gestapo this morning. Get off at Aldensau. I said, (pause) "I'm not going to get off." If they kill me they kill me, but I'm not going to get off (crying). The train stopped at Aldensau, and one minute is like eternity. A minute went by, two minutes went by. Know those watches, I had a watch, you know in the vest pocket, those days, long time ago. A minute went by, two minutes went by...

Let's reload.

Change film, camera roll 4 is up; sync take 4 is up.

Beep.

Why don't you start with the train coming to the stop.

All right, the train stopped in Aldensau, it was supposed to stop, as I said before, for 5 minutes. I said, I'm not going to get off this train. 5, one min, two minutes, three minutes, it's endless. When you wait for one minute to go by it's awful long time. This--the train started rolling, to a stop, I was not out anywhere. Came back another coupe -----. I said, "I thought I was all set..."

"Don't give us any excuses." They opened the window and they threw me out the window onto the platform of the train. They held me for, I was searched, I mean totally searched, nude searched, and they said, "Something wrong here. You didn't report to the Gestapo this morning. You're running away from something. We're going to call Hamburg." Whether they did or not, I really don't know. At midnight, they let me out, and I was allowed to go to another train that went into Amsterdam. I stayed in Amsterdam, I waited for my wife. She was not allowed to come, the American consul wouldn't give her, her Visa at that time because she just had a baby and she had some veins in her thighs that were very prominent, and he wanted to wait till that cleared up, and then he gave her, her passport. I waited in Holland for 6 weeks until we came to this country.

Why do you think people had such a hard time, other people had such a hard time realizing what was happening. How do Jews not understand that...

I don't quite understand your question. Why did Jews not understand?

Yeah, how did people not realize what was happening?

Well, I'm sure I was among them. When Hitler was party #26, we all said, "Ah, he's never going to anything. It's a great big joke. Doesn't mean anything." What we did not realize, I don't think many of the German people didn't realize, that's not the right phrase really. We're all Germans. I was a German at that time. What many of the people didn't realize, let's just generalize it, is that they had a backing of the most powerful people in Germany. He had the backing, what, how he sold them, I have no idea. I think maybe the background of it was money or, or power perhaps more than anything else. Power. The Kroops and the Thysses, they financed his whole campaign, and there was a friction as well. The so-called aristocratic Germans. They were not in favor of Hitler. And to prove a point, they made attempts to kill him after he became the big man, and they all got killed in the process. But he had a backing of the big industrialists in Germany. They were very much in favor, they saw billions of -----, and power and conquest from other countries, Germany, you know, today Germany, tomorrow the world. That was the philosophy, that was their, their big phrase. We all thought it was a joke. "Ah, it won't amount to nothing, just another political party." And as far as the Jews were concerned they said, "Well, maybe it's not so wrong after all," because there was no killings at the point. We all knew from the book, Mein Kampf that he was very extreme antisemitic, but we never thought, nobody in his wildest dream can really imagine that it can, that anything can come to such extremes. Nobody can imagine. I don't believe

that anyone in the world can visualize six million people assembled in one place, and he killed 6 million people. Six million! It's incredible such a figure. Along with 5 million non-Jews, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, or anyone who did not believe in his philosophy. Life meant nothing, it's the most expe-expendable thing in the world. Life is the cheapest thing you can get. Nobody paid much attention to it at that time. Nobody, you can't in your wildest dreams imagine that anything can go to such extremes. And actually the extreme started in 1940 at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin, outside of Berlin, where Reinhardt Heidrich was appointed was appointed to be in charge of the quote unquote final solution. Of course, Reinhardt Heidrich was killed in Lidisi, Czechoslovakia. He was assassinated, and as a result of his assassination, in Lidisi, Czechoslovaki, the whole town was obliterated. Totally, every living thing, every man woman and child was killed in that town in revenge of Reinhardt Heidrich's death. When Heinrich was killed out, Eichmann took over the Final Solution. At that time, of course, I was already in this country.

Let's go back and I want you to tell me again the story of being in the, the army , how you and a group others and nobody knew you were a Jew, and how you guarded Hitler. Tell me that whole story as though you haven't told it to me before because there was a very loud plane when you told that story, so...

I didn't even hear the plane.

Just do it again as though you haven't told me.

I was 22, and a bunch of my friends, we were buddies, non-jewish fellows. I lived in, I must, I must say I lived in a non-Jewish neighborhood, not totally, but predominantly. Right a--I believe it was on my 22nd birthday. I went to my mother, I said, "You know, I'm going to join the army." She said, "What are you, out of your mind? You can't join the Nazi army!" "Why not? All the other guys do." So, we all signed up at the same time. There was no question asked if I was Jewish or not Jewish, and we all signed up, and I was stationed in a town called Marienburg, it was in East Prussia. This was about 30 kilometers away from a city called Elbing, which was in Gdansk, it's the biggest city in Gdansk, that's exactly what it was. No, I'm sorry, that's cor-incorrect . Gdansk is a city. Elbing is near Gdansk in the same general area. This has got to be voided. This is not...

Just start it again. And leave out those, just leave, just use any name-----, but start

again on you start again on your 22nd birthday.

Yeah, we decided, a bunch of them, we were friends, we decided to join the army, but, I must say that the army was not weapons. We had military training in every aspect, except we had no weapons. We used shovels or spades as shoulder weapons, shoulder arms. Other than that, we had regular military training. Nobody wanted to know that I was Jewish, and uh, I don't know the exact date, we went to, from Marienburg, where I was stationed, to Elbing, a city about 30 kilometers away, where Hitler was to make a speech, and when he spoke, he spoke for 3 hours, like Castro, he can go on forever. I happened to be in the front row of the formation, and as Hitler looked like a, a little person, he's a normal man, short, with a mustache and a hairdo, and perfectly normal. He walked into this hall in Elbing, where he spoke for 3 hours, and when he came back, the man was totally frenzied. He, I, he didn't even, he didn't look any more normal than anything can, you can imagine. He talked himself into a total frenzy. Whenever he made a speech, he was a great orator, he hypnotized the masses. They would have killed their own mother if he said "Go kill 'em." He had that ability to hypnotize the people. And I claim a very dubious distinction to be probably the only Jewish fellow that ever stood guard for Hitler. This is true.

Do you remember, did you hear the speech?

No. It was on speakers, I believe, I, I really am not sure, I don't think we heard it. No, I don't believe so. I don't even know if they had a P.A. system in those days.

Do you have any other direct knowledge of Hitler. Did you ever see him any other time?

Only on, in normal appearances when he came to the city, you know, when he was riding in a car down the street, like you might see President Bush riding down uh, Commercial Blvd. or something. You know, other than that I had no contact with him. We seen them all, like Goebbels and Herring and Hitler and Goering and all of those people, and Rosenberg, and Hess, but only in passing, when they came to the city to visit.

You talked about antisemitism and you talked about being more German or being more Jewish. Talk to me about that.

No, I didn't quite mean it that way. To the best of my knowledge, my family has lived and was

born in Germany for 400 years. I, at one time, many years ago, went through a certain procedure with the American Red Cross, and they found out how far we went back in Germany, and while I was always very Jewish, my nationality wasn't Jewish, my nationality was German. I was born there, my parents, grandparents, great grandparents, I don't know how far back. They were all born, as a consequently we weren't Jewish first, we were German first. I must say, I feel the same way about this country today. I'm American first and Jewish second, and I think anyone should be that way. I think your country comes first. Who was it that said, "My country right or wrong, my country." And that's how I feel about America. And at the time, I didn't know any different. I was in Germany, I was born there and lived there, and I was German. Being Jewish was my religion, which had nothing to do with the nationality at that time. See, we didn't know any different. We didn't make a special point of being Jewish. I was brought up in a Jewish home and all of that, and I went to a Jewish school, but there was no special em--uh, no special emphasis made out of that. It was just a normal way to live.

Okay. We have to reload.

Wentworth Films; Holocaust; 7-1/2 IPS; 60 cycle sync; 2/27/92; Tamarac, Florida; Continuing interview with Edward Adler.

Beep.

Beep.

People say that Jews went like sheep to the slaughter. I'm sure you've heard that. How do you feel about that?

Uh, at the time that the actual slaughter happened, I was already in this country. But, I have to refer to a statement I made earlier, when I equate a certain situation with Ethiopia, when Mussolini went in there, and the Ethiopians were fighting with slingshots against tanks. I like to say to the people who make that kind of a statement, that Jews went to the slaughterhouse like sheep. How do you fight machine guns and submachine guns with your bare hands? I'd like, I'd like them to tell me how this can be when you're surrounded by hundreds of storm troopers with heavy weapons, and you stand there naked. Men, women and children in the yard. How do you expect to fight back? That's a very, very foolish statement. They did not go willingly I assure you. That's a very,

very foolish thing to say, and I get very emotional about that, when somebody says that thing. They stand in that yard, naked men, women, and children, surrounded by machine guns and submachine guns, and they, people expect them to fight back? You don't have the strength to fight. You don't have the emotion to fight. You are scared stiff. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Those people who make that kind of a statement, they have never been in a situation like this. Ob-ob-obviously otherwise they wouldn't say anything like that. You can't fight that. Whether they wanted to or not. But the fight should have started before, when the world knew from 1932 that antisemitism became very, very strong and, and ultimately they must have known or should have known what will happen. Nobody came to our aid, nobody helped the Jews. They help everybody else, but the Jews, they're very expendable, they don't mean nothing. We had been crossing through-----5,000 years, and nobody ever came to our help. And those days, certainly, not, the whole world stood by and, I can't believe for a moment, well, I have to make another statement that just came back to me. When the St. Louis, the ship, the St. Louis, and came into Miami Harbor with 856 men, women and children aboard, and our beloved President Roosevelt sent them back to certain death, back to Hamburg. What's the excuse for that? I mean the president couldn't invoke his executive to aid, to save 856 lives? 856 lives! In this country of then 132 million people. And they sent them back to certain death. And I know people come and ask me why we didn't fight back. Come on.

One thing you said was what a waste of the Nazis did on extermination.

What a what they did on?

Waste, they wasted, they spent so much effort and intelligence and effort on...

Yes, they did. Well, that was the plan after the Wannsee Conference. Prior to that, I don't believe, uh, I don't believe, I'm not sure, I don't believe that it was in the Nazi doctrine to eliminate the Jews as a race. I do believe that they wanted them to leave the country. They didn't want the Jews in Germany, but I don't think the killing was part of their philosophy at the time, that came later. So as long, like in my case for instance, and many, many others, many, many others, I'm certainly not unique in any way, uh (coughs), excuse me. At that time, as I said before, if they wanted you to leave the country, they did let you out. And many people went to, all over the world, they went to, I have cousins that went to China because they had no place else to live, or nobody wanted them, Australia didn't want them, England didn't want them, nobody wanted them. Why? Because we're

Jewish. Eh, nobody wants the Jews, they're filth. It's a terrible thing, but the world is to blame for that, not one govt. I don't believe that the killing was part of their original plan, that came afterwards, I think. No, no way of proving it, it's just my opinion.

What happened to your parents? And, do you want to talk about other members of your family?

Yes. As I said before, my parents were separated. This was my stepfather. My first, oh yeah, let me give you my life story. My real father I never knew, so I'm the subject of twice-broken home, as actually, it didn't turn out too bad really. My real father I never knew, he left my mother with 3 children and she never heard from him again. I was then 2 years old. I never saw him in my life. I don't what he did, I don't know anything about him. All I know is his name. My mother remarried when I was 7 years old, and there was specific that they did not stay together. They separated when I was, it was after my bar, my bar mitzvah, I'd say I was about 15 years old, so it must have been somewhere around 1925 or so, they separated, and I hadn't seen my father ever in the meantime, except at the time when I got into a concentration camp when I met him. MY mother was killed in Treblinka. She was shot in Treblinka. I know this from 2 sources. First from the Red Cross. Many years ago we made an inquiry from the -----, actually, not the Red Cross. And I also have a cousin who now lives in Sweden. I'm not sure that he's still alive. He was an electrician and he was in Treblinka also and he saw my mother. He wasn't killed because he was useful, he was an electrician by trade, so he, he stayed alive, and eventually wound up in Sweden. Was married and had children, but I don't know anything about him, but my mother was killed in Treblinka in 1942 I believe. My sister was married, had 2 children. She was killed by bombs. They found her body and they got her the next morning. With her husband and her son. She also had a daughter that by now must be in her 50s, I would imagine, like my children, or maybe a little bit older, but, went somewhere into the farming area, but I don't know anything about it. When we were in Hamburg in 1982, incidentally, it's very interesting, we were invited by the German government all expenses paid, including spending money every day, to come to Germany to see the city again. At first, I didn't want to go. I said, "I don't want any part of this." We were in, well, let me go back a little bit. We were in Switzerland, we went to Israel and Switzerland and Italy and England in 1972. And while we were in Switzerland, we went to Hamburg. Just for one day, my wife wanted to see my mother's grave, and we went to Hamburg. And I cracked up totally. Everything came back to me. I remember, I wanted take a -----, we got into the hotel room, never forget it, I was terrible, I was terrible, not uh the situation, I was terrible, and the TV wasn't, I didn't know how to put the TV on, and the room, the hotel room, and some German guy you know,

came in and put it on, and he said, "Well, you Americans, you don't know anything." I threw him out of the room, and I became almost wild. Couldn't stand it. We only stayed that one day, so when this 10 years later, when we got the invitation to come back to Germany, I didn't want to go, I said to my wife, "I, I, I, I'm not going to go, I get sick and all that. Then I reconsidered as time went on, I said, "You know, the hell with, we can take side trips, we can go to England, we can go to Switzerland, we can go to Israel. They paid all expenses. The lady that was in charge, I must say, we stayed in a very fine hotel. The lady that was in charge was a very, very nice lady. You could really see that she felt what we went through, and that, I mean, the city of Hamburg had at one time, I don't know, I think 60,000 Jews or something like that, was a big city, 3 million people, we had about 60,000 Jews, there was nothing left, and all the big stores that used to be owned by Jewish people are now, have now been taken over by the Nazi party those days, and eventually probably through generation their father, grandfather now owns it or whatever. And this lady felt very sorry for us, she, they, I asked her, "What's the purpose of inviting us? Do you expect anyone to change his mind to come back to live here after living in America for 50 years?" She says, "No, no. That's not really the purpose. It is perhaps, to ease our conscience a bit." That was her statement. We stayed there for I think 10 days, it was very nice, really very nice, the city of Hamburg is beautiful city. It was 75% destroyed, and after war, through the Marshall Plan, naturally American money, we built it up again into beautiful city, it really is a very beautiful city.

Thank you. I asked everything I wanted. Thank You.

All right.

We have to do one other thing. We have to, actually we can't do it till the coffee stops perking, probably, thank you very much.

Your welcome. I hope I..

It was very....

The following will be 30 seconds of room tone for interview with Edward Adler.

End room tone.