--the yellow striped uniforms, and I yelled and we marched to the camp. They call it Zigeuner camp.

Geuner?

Zigeuner camp.

Zigeuner. Zigeuner.

Those are the Gypsies, the Gypsy camp. We came in that-- we marched in that place, and we could see all Gypsies, all women and children, and they was very good dressed, and they felt them-- they looked to be good nourished and quite happy to have their own leaders there.

And they picked us in a few barracks. They chased out from the few barracks the Gypsies, asked them to-- chased them out to the field in the camp, and they chased us in in those barracks and asked us to lay down, lay down face down on the floor in the barracks.

This was in the evening, and we heard terrible screaming through the walls, just terrible, horrible screaming. It just shake up-- it just shook me up, listening to those screaming like people screaming for life. We heard machine-gunning and dogs barking. And this was going on maybe for a couple of hours until everything quiet down.

And in the morning, when he came out from the barracks, there was plenty bloodstains on the place there, and we find out that they took out all the Gypsies from that, which-- they was there for quite a while, for a few years, I think, and they put them on trucks and threw them in the gas chambers.

So this was the liquidation of the Gypsies there. Those were German Gypsies and-- mostly German Gypsies and some for Romania, and they divided us and the rest of the blocks.

They tattooed the-- gave us numbers, tattooed on the left arm, put us in lines and gave us tattoos on the arm. And they marched in another camp, the camp of the workers, which was the next to that field it was and so put us in barracks there until the next morning. We was going to different-- to work.

Your brothers were still with you?

Yeah.

What is physically-- what did the camp look like physically? How big was it, Auschwitz?

Oh, it was a tremendous complex of fields, like A, B, C, D. And I don't know exactly the number of it, but I heard it consisted of hundreds of thousands of people. This was Birkenau. Auschwitz was a few miles away.

And they had-- every field had barracks on both-- on two sides. In the middle was like a highway. There was one men's room, a huge building which was-- there was a washroom there. There was some water to-- for washing. Every morning, before we went to work, we'd run out there and you washed your face and--

Was it well-guarded? Was it well-guarded?

Every field was electric--

--wiring?

--electric wiring, and from the-- there was some posts with the SS sitting there with heavy machine guns.

What was your work? What sort of work did you do?

My first job was-- they was asking for mechanics, and I never was a mechanic in my life. But I figured-- but they told me, if you work-- I found out that I came to Auschwitz the first day-- I found out that there are gas chambers and crematoriums here from people which was there before, and they told me that if you don't work here-- if you work, you have a chance to live a little bit. But if you don't work, you're going to the gas chambers.

So then they announced if any are mechanics. They need mechanics. So I raised my arm that I'm a mechanic. So they marched us out on a field with hundreds of airplanes because it was a German Messerschmitts and the Russian planes-- I could tell by the markings on them-- and English airplanes, French airplanes.

And there was some German engineers. We got tools, and we was dismantling those planes. Those was planes which were shot down or that was bombed on different airfields. And they was bringing it-- the trains was coming in to the field, a large field, with hangars there maybe because I helped in there. I don't know. And they-- and we got tools and was taking out the motors.

Using the parts.

Yeah, used the parts, and then we was loading it on-- the aluminum was loading on certain trains, and certain trains came for the motors. [? And I-- ?] it was packed to be for metals.

They trained you, or you just found out what to do? How did you know what to do?

There was put into each plane about 10, 15, 20 people.

So you just--

There was no--

It wasn't a technical--

It was not technical at all. All we had to do, there was screws. You just screw it off. If it was not-- if there was nails, you just chopped it off with the hammer, with the tools what we have, just broke off pieces, not-- they didn't ask us to be careful with this thing as long they-- they wanted to really-- what they really wanted is to have separated the aluminum from the iron.

The brothers volunteered for this as well?

No, they was in the camp.

What did they do?

I really-- I really don't know.

Did they find another job or-- they get some other job. Oh, yeah. Well, one of my brothers got a job to clean the toilets. So they had a truck there, and the Jews was the horses. And there was a group there called the Kanalreiniger. It means the Toilet Cleaners. And they were scattered around over the-- not just our camp but--

All the other camps.

--all the other camps.

Cleaning them.

And that was just cleaning the toilets.

Were there kapos around there?

Yeah.

What were they like?

There was there German criminals. There was not just Jews but all kinds of nationalities, and which nationality had a different mark, the black mark was the criminals. This was mostly Germans, but those Germans-- the German criminals was the kapos.

They were sort of responsible of running the blocks. There's a blockalteste and stubendienst. There was others which was going out with us to work, making sure that they were--

What were they like?

It has to do, I would say, with the person. Some of them was bad, wanted to prove themselves for the Germans, to show they was--

Show off.

--to show off. And others just-- other was just interested that everything was to be done what they ordered to do. It should be done. And if anything wasn't or anybody went out of line, you got hit.

They didn't have any guns. They just--

No, they had sticks. So those was the kapos.

You didn't have any bad incidences with them?

Oh, just-- I was always a good worker. It was always a kick or a push or a-- nothing to give me an injury.

Was there was any attempts for resistance in this camp, Birkenau?

And so there was-- the resistance was in the crematorium, in the gas chambers. There was a group of Jews there which they called the Sonderkommando.

They took out people from the camp, strong, healthy individuals, and they performed to work in the gas chambers by helping the people go into the gas chamber, by removing the-- cleaning out later the bodies because after the gassing, the bodies become very dirty, bloody. Some people were fighting for life to try to climb, so they scratch-- they were scratching from the crystal. The Zyklon B, which was thrown in, was make people blood coming down out from the mouth or from the noses.

So there was all covered with blood and dirt. So the Sonderkommando, after the gassing, when they opened to ventilate in the place, the Sonderkommando went in with hoses, and they washed the bodies off.

The Sonderkommando then pulled out the bodies from there and brought them to the crematorium. And other Sonderkommando groups was working in the crematorium. They was putting the bodies in the oven and later cleaning out the ashes, putting it on trucks, then they was bringing into the river. The Vistula wasn't far from there. They was bringing it to the river, to the Vistula, and they were dumping the ashes in the river.

That was the-- Eichmann was so efficient in his work by delivering-- especially 1944, the trains was coming so-- so many trains was coming that there was long, long lines of people in the gas chambers, and all what the gas-- what the crematorium can burn was 6,000 people in 24 hours.

But they could get more, so there was-- accumulated all the bodies there. And there was even more-- even the gas chambers could not keep up with the trainloads of people coming in and all over Europe that there was a place there were trees called brzoza was growing. They call it because of the name of the tree.

They called Brzezinki, and they was chasing people. The overflow of people that they could not gas and burn in the gas chambers in the crematorium they was chasing, bringing them over to the those-- in the woods, there were Brzezinki. And those alive was shot. The other bodies-- they burned everything. The overflow-- they was burned them there.

And what happened after? How long did this last?

I was there-- then in 19-- at the end of 1944, the war was getting very bad. It was getting bad for the Germans. The Russians started to--

--to get closer.

--to go closer, so they started to clean out-- to clean out Auschwitz. And every week and every few days, they was making transports of thousands of people [INAUDIBLE] came out to deep in Germany to different concentration camps, to ammunition factories, to-- I was in the last group in Auschwitz.

I left Auschwitz in January the 5th, 1945. The only left when I left Auschwitz was the sick people in the hospital. I remember seeing how the SS closed up-- closed the gates from, and it was a very bad winter, that January, very cold, with heavy snows.

And I tore my regular shoes. I tore my shoes. So me and a lot of people got wooden shoes that they got in Poland. And--

Where did you get the wooden shoes they gave me because I lost-- my shoes got torn.

The Germans you you?

Yeah, in Auschwitz. So they got-- because I was going to-- I was worker. I was going to work, so they gave me those shoes. And the last few thousand which was in Auschwitz came out-- went out in Birkenau, left in that-- left in that January the 5th, 1945. When we was leaving, we heard cannons, cannon fired in the very far distance, looks like-- I don't know, maybe 15, 20 miles, maybe further.

But you could hear the Russians coming. Yeah. They put us in columns. I don't know, thousands. And we marched. The snow was high, and the highest was, I think-- in the snow was 3, 4, 5 feet, winter for the months or so which was snowing.

And we was marching, and at night-- was marching during the day, and at night, they pushed us-- they chased us on the fields on both sides, cleaned up the highway, and go in the fields, and asked us to lay down in the snow. We laid all night in the snow.

And they had guards. We were very close to the highway, and about 50 feet away from us some Germans. The SS men were standing with machine guns, and they were watching us. And--

How big was the group?

Thousands, many thousands. I don't know, maybe 5,000, 6,000 or something, maybe more. It was for miles. It was, this column was going for miles.

Did people feel kind of glad at the fact that you knew that the Russians were so close? What kind of feelings did you have?

Oh, we was--

As you were marching.

We had a good feeling that the Russians are coming, but we was going in the opposite direction. You could see that the Russians are coming, but we're going-- but that we're going away from there, so it was a very bad feeling.

Some people started to run. Anybody just move away of 2 feet from the column, right away they got a bullet in the head. The morning-- when we woke up in the morning, there's hundreds and hundreds laying frozen in the snow. And marching in the snow, people got tired. This march took about two weeks. There was--

No food?

There was-- every day, there was walking, marching by some military barn there which had warm water and a piece of black bread.

That's it?

This was for the day. And one was marching-- people was getting-- from the cold--

They were sick?

They was just sick and tired out. So they just-- some collapsed. Some just couldn't walk any further, I guess.

And the Germans just left them there?

So the Germans just asked them to go on both sides of the highway, those-- how do you call it? Ditches. So they ask them to go and sit in the ditch. And many people are in front of me. They sat down and came over.

Because on both sides was the SS man with machine guns and German shepherds was watching us. And while walking-- while marching like that, a German came over with a machine gun and grabbed me and just pulled me out, come in here. He pulled out another four five men, and he asked us to march back.

The column was going forward, but we was going the opposite direction until we reached the end of the column, and there was there two trucks like in Poland the peasants used to transport hay or straw, those giant ones. And they was loaded high with military equipment, with machine guns, and boxes of ammunition, and uniforms, all kinds of things like that.

And there was an SS man sitting on those trucks. They was changing. Some of them was marching with us, and after a few hours, they went up on the trucks. They were sitting there, and they went to watch us. And I came over to the truck, and there was about 20 or 30 Jews was there tied up with ropes to the truck, and they was pulling the truck.

Pulling the truck?

Pulling the truck, like . And there was two Germans on both sides, and they were sitting in the groups. And of course, it was ice. The snow was very, very, very high, and it was a heavy load. It was-- they was dragging with all their strength, but they picked us out to help out-- they couldn't-- it's up the hill. They couldn't pull it.

So they took us, and they tied us up with ropes there. We was helping them pull this. It was pulling. And two Germany was staying with whips and was whipping us. And if we hit something, whipped him over the head, and the Jew fell. And he fell. He just grabbed him and pulled-- dragged him over to the ditch and took out the and gave him a bullet in the head.

While we was pulling this through-- we was close to the top of the hill, and down the hill was already fine. It was good.

The men was pulling it. There was-- between us and the column was probably, I would say, maybe 200, 300 feet.

We fell behind. They was marching. We fell behind because we was pulling up the hill. They walked up a certain-- they walked away a certain distance. There was Germans with guns, walking near the ditches. The ditches was packed with people. Some of them-- most of them was tired out or sick. They couldn't walk.

And some of them just decided that-- the Russians are coming, so maybe they figured that, I'll sit-- they told me to sit in the ditch, they're walking away. So I'll sit, and maybe the Russians will come.

But the people in the front-- they didn't know that. But when I came over to that-- when I was pulling the truck and I could see that on both sides of the highway was going-- an SS man was walking around with machine guns and with other guns, and he was going go to each one.

Shooting them.

Yeah, was putting the gun right to the head, boom, boom, and shooting him right in the head and killing all those, hundreds and hundreds. Those ditches and miles-- I was pulling this-- I don't know, maybe for 5 miles or so. In all those 5 miles, I was just-- they was right in front of us, and they was shooting everyone sitting in those ditches.

Again, we came to a hill, and that [INAUDIBLE]. I could see that this would be my end. Another fella fell. He grabbed him by the neck and pulled him over to the ditch and gave him a bullet in the head.

So I say, eventually, I'll die too, so I figured I have to find a way how to get out of here. He came back again and brought another five Jews and put them on the ropes, and the fellas, from those fellas which were shot, took their place.

And we came again to a hill, and I was screaming to the fellas, fellas, let's go. Let's pull that thing up to the hill. And then we came down to the-- we came to the top of the hill, and we started going down. I said, fellas, let's come pull closer to the column.

And we started to-- there was a hill-- a good hill down. And the wagon started to go pretty fast with us. And we came pretty close to the-- almost touching them to the column.

The column was really-- maybe we reached it because the column was standing. They didn't go. It was lunchtime. So everyone was standing, and they was getting that food.

And so we stopped too, and we're supposed to go over to and take that warm water and that bread. And then I took that water and that bread. I didn't go back anymore to that. I was walking with that bread, eating it, and keep moving forward, fast, between the people. The people were standing. They're standing, and I was walking.

And I probably walked up-- I don't know-- a couple thousand people ahead. And when I came there-- I was there, maybe there for an hour or so, and then, again, everybody make a column and march. So I--

You got out of it.

I got out of it. I joined that group, and we was marching. What happened in the back-- I understood what happened. There was plenty of days of marching there, so I assume probably those which was there with me probably all got-- I'm sure they all got killed because no one--

--survived.

Yeah, no one was there-- no one was there changed. If they got weak, they shot them, and they brought other ones. So I'm sure that all those who stayed before-- I'm sure that no one survived. They was all shot there.

And until we came-- until we came to Austria, to Mauthausen, and in Mauthausen, they again came in a big building

and again take off all the clothes and shower and shave again. But this time we didn't get any clothes, and it was winter. It was just the-- it was two weeks in January, and it was very bitter cold there. It was snowing.

And they came out to the other door from the building. They asked us to stay and wait until our larger group there accumulates. Then we're going to march to the barracks there. I came out. It was about three of us there. It was so bitter cold we were shivering, staying naked, without shoes, just naked.

And so we started to-- very close to-- very close to each other to hold one the other. We got to keep-- to get some warmth. As more came out from there, something it was getting, a bigger group was just-- one bunch of people, one crowd, and you should see. It was coming out-- steam was coming out from the people like you would see in a cattle.

Steam was coming out. It was-- you could see that steam coming out from that group of people. A few hundred people accumulated there, and then we marched in the snow, complete naked. We marched up a hill there, and it was empty, empty building. And all there was in the building and lay down on the floor.

So we filled up that place-- the whole place like sardines. There was pushing in people and just-- and it was-- and this was not just Jews. There was all kinds of people. They was emptying Auschwitz. In Auschwitz there was all kinds of people there.

So we was laying on the floor there. I was in that place for about 10 days, laying naked on that floor. Then they took me out and another few people, and a lot of people died there while they're laying there. They took out me and another few people, and we got wooden boxes with handles.

And it was taken to the-- any time at night, when someone died, or in the day, those people-- they could have just threw it. They just threw them out of the building.

So they ordered us, me and the other two guys, that we should take those bodies, two to a box. It was like a box and handles, two handles in the front and two in the back, just [INAUDIBLE]. And they put up the bodies in this and walk over to the crematorium there, and there was a window right on the ground.

We came in there. There was a window there. I just took that, and I was carrying it. I covered it with a piece of white cloth, and they just put the box against the window and just raised it up. And the body just slipped in the window. There was there a piece of wood covered with metal on it. The body just came in contact on that and just slide down to the basement. In the basement it was almost there, and it was burning. It was burning bodies there.

After being there about 10 days, I got I got a civilian suit and a pair of pants and a little jacket and a pair of shoes. And I was sent to a camp, to another working camp, and the name of it is Melk. Melk was a camp of Russians, Russian war prisoners, so they was-- they sent in a small group of us between the Russian war prisoners.

And they was building there-- they was building a ammunition factory. There was the Alps, the mountains. That was in Austria, so there was mountains there. And we was digging-- we was going every day in the morning to work, and there was-- my job was to drill. I got an electric drill, and I was drilling holes in the walls, in the rock.

And then a German was putting in dynamite in it, and that was--

--blew it up.

--blew it up. And after they blow it up, we had a iron cart like. It was loaded in-- it was a rail iron card. It was loading up those rocks and pushing it out, pushing it out. And there was building like a tunnel, and I was looking there for quite a while.

So as soon as we digged out certain amount of it, they was bringing in machines that was making ammunition there, shells and [INAUDIBLE] they made an ammunition factory because the Americans was bombing Germany was already bombed at the time, the most of Germany. And they destroyed the ammunition factories, so they was building this--

started to build ammunition factories in--

From there, one day, I was put in another group, and I was transferred by truck to another place. And the name of this Ebensee in Austria. And this was closer to the mountains, deeper, and over there, when I came for the ammunition factory really going.

What date was that? What month was that?

The same thing. It was just enlarging and making the ammunition-- the tunnel, those tunnels-- there was a whole city in the mountains there. There was a very huge-- a very huge tunnel and then was small tunnels going from that huge tunnels in different directions. And in all those tunnels they were saying-- it was a machine there, and it was making shells and other equipment for the war.

And the same thing-- I got the same job there, electric drill. I was drilling. Most of the time, I was in water, and water was coming down from the walls. I was usually most of the time standing in the water to my knees.

I was walking back wet. I was always wet. I got wet in the tunnel, and I had to walk for maybe an hour to an hour and a half, sometimes two hours. And it snowed. It was constantly-- it was the winter. There was snow there, and my shoes fell apart.

So I didn't have no shoes. If you don't go to work, you don't get-- you wasn't getting any food. I was working there. We was getting a piece of bread and some potato skins, water and potato skins. But if you don't go to work, you didn't get nothing and were starving to death.

So I tore-- I had a blanket, so I tore pieces from the blanket, and I was rolling up the feet. And I was-- tie it up with some wire, and I was walking to work like that. I wasn't the only one. There was more people without shoes there. This time you wouldn't get any other shoes. You don't have.

And I came to the work there. I was staying in the water again. So my clothes was constantly wet. I'm walking in the snow. The piece of bread got frozen. I felt that I'm going to-- I think it's going to be an end of it for me. I was getting tired. My feet was starting to swell up.

Until one day the-- it was already-- it was already the end of April 1945. The Germans announced that-- they didn't even go to work. No one went to work that day. And they told us that everybody should leave the barracks and go in one of the tunnels there.

But there was-- one of the kapos just came in the block and said, we loaded up dynamite in that tunnel. Let's go. They're going to dynamite us. And that camp was maybe-- I don't know, 5,000, 6,000 people.

So they planned-- they wanted-- they asked everybody to come-- was calling everybody to leave the barracks and go in the tunnel. So no one moved, so they asked everybody to come out on the field. We went out from the block, and all the thousands, maybe 5,000 6,000-- and there was not too many Jews there left. Most of them was Russian war prisoners and Poles, the Yugoslav partisans.

And this thing spread so fast around that they're dynamiting that thing, and the SS commandant stepped up on a chair, and he was talking to a loudspeaker that the war is coming to an end, that the Americans are not far away, and we survived all that bitter war.

They want us-- the Germans want us to survive. We survived till now. Then they want us to survive. There will be fighting and there will be shooting here. We should all go going in the tunnel. After the shooting, the Americans will come, and then we will be free.

But we knew that what the kapo said, that they unloaded dynamite there, so we all started to yell, no, no, we don't go, no, no, we don't go. And that German officer was so-- he was so-- he couldn't believe it.

He stood there. They couldn't believe that we're talking back. Before, in a situation like that, right the way he gave an order, and they machine us. They put the machine guns on us.

But I think maybe they couldn't do that because there was about 6,000 of us, and there must have been maybe 200 SS men there. So the people had the feeling already that it's coming to an end, and it looked to me that we was ready to jump at him. If they would start to shoot, we wouldn't lay there, just waiting for it, but we would just attack them. And they felt that this will be like that.

So everyone was yelling-- all the thousands was yelling, no, no, we don't go, no, no, we don't go. He said, OK, you don't want to go? You want to be killed? OK, go back to the barracks.

So we went back, went back to the barracks. For a week there was no food. And one night, we came out, and there was those-- there was a machine gun standing around on the camp on those-- and we came out, and it was quiet. We don't see no SS men in the camp, but all but we seen the SS men sitting on those wooden buildings, watching us.

Something was unusual. It sounded something-- it felt something unusual. Then it wouldn't take long, and you could see on a hill there Jeeps-- people in different uniforms.

Americans.

It was Americans, and they came over to the-- when we seen them, we broke up the-- when we see the Americans there, we didn't care that those guys are sitting. They were still sitting there with the machine guns, and we just broke-- broke open the gate, and we--

--ran out?

We ran out. Then we run-- straight right away we started to run over and to-- ran up and start dragging down the SS men from the top, but what it turned out, that there was old people. There was our men there sitting in one of the-- to the one I ran over there, I wanted to kill him. He took off the helmet from his head. There was an old man maybe 70 years old or 80 years old.

He started to beg, don't kill me. They came at night, and they took me out from my home.

I see.

They dressed with the machine gun. That machine gun has no bullets. They done this-- the purpose to-- that they can go. They knew still go without-- that this will keep us, that we will think really that that's machine guns, so we would not-- we would not run after-- we would not attack them.

So in the meantime, that night they left. They found uniforms there and empty guns and took the shells. They took-- maybe throw it someplace else. So we find the empty guns there, and then we came and tracked down all the four of those-- they were old men from the next-- from the next village, yeah, from the next-- from the next little village.

Did the Americans come into the camp?

The Americans-- no, they just asked the people to go back to the-- people went out. I went out too, out of the camp. I started going to hide, and they said, no, please go back. We just-- this patrol-- there was one with two Jeeps. There was, I think, eight soldiers. And he said, just wait here another half an hour, and our company is going to come with the officer, and he will say-- don't run away. Don't go no place, and we'll take care of everything.

[INAUDIBLE]

And when this happened, we started to run around the meantime and to look for kapos. There was the German that was

still with us, the Germans. And then the killings started. Blood was just covering everything. We was hitting him with everything we had, with pieces of iron, stepping on him and choking him and hanging him. There was dozens of-- a few dozens of those kapos was killed at that time.

And we went back in the back there of our barrack, and hundreds and hundreds of bodies was laying there. This was bodies from our people which died. They didn't have no time, and they didn't-- there wasn't-- there wasn't mood already to continue the work, so they were just piling up the bodies there in the back of the-- of our barrack there.

And right after that, I just-- I found a gun there which had an ammunition, a German belt, I put it around me. I found a bayonet. I put it in, ride it to the next town, to the next village. And I go to look for SS.

You went out? You went to the village?

I took another-- I took another fella with me.

Yeah, in--

I wasn't waiting for the other-- for the other Americans to come. I just went. And I'm not going to talk about this, what happened in that village there when I came. I just took a revenge. I took a gun.

And not much because the Americans came right away, and they started to grab anybody who ran out from the camp and started to bring [INAUDIBLE].

Were there any SS men there?

I got one SS man. He was in a civilian-- civilian pants and had-- all what he had-- but I knew that they're supposed to have marks on the arm. I asked him to take off the jacket and the shirt. And the he didn't want to, but he did it. And I found the-- I found the marks on his arms and this was his end.

The Americans came. They found the body there, and they wanted to start to investigate who done it-- very, very serious. It was a very serious matter there with them that they have to know who will killed the German, who killed the SS man.

He was saying, look, this SS man, he was killing-- he was in the camp there. He was killing people. They just-- I don't know but no one was saying anything. It just probably better, then they did the [INAUDIBLE] there.

Did you go back to camp afterwards?

To this camp? No, I didn't--

Where did you go? Were you in a DP camp?

I went to another place there, and there was most Polish people from Poland.

Yeah. A DP camp? Deportation camp?

It was-- I don't know. The Americans organized this sort of-- and then a few days later, the Jewish Brigade, a group-- trucks from the Jewish Brigade came by, and I start to speak to one. You know, I was a halutz before the war. I was in a kibbutz for awhile in Grochow. Near Warsaw. And I met-- one of the guys that I remember from there-- and he said to me, you know what what we're going to do now? We're going to Palestine. And I said, right. He said, pick up 30 of the young people here, healthy ones, strong ones. They can go to cross the Alps, and we're going towards Italy.

And I organized-- I picked up some young people, and a truck came over from from the Jewish Brigade, only one, three, four trucks came, and there was two Israeli-- two brigade soldiers on motorcycles. And we just jumped on the trucks.

Where did they go?

To the Alps. And then we--

Through to Italy?

Towards Italy, and then we came in the mountains. And went off the trucks, and they gave us English cans of food and bread and all kinds of things there. There was someone else there. We met someone there in the mountains, and we marched through the Alps towards Italy. We came to Brennero and Milano, and there they-- there was a DP camp in Modena.

And he asked us to go to that place in Modena, and he said, here are the Jewish Brigade group. It was under the English military supervision, which was-- this was a military-- the Italian Military Academy, a giant building. Mussolini used to speak from the balcony there.

So a few thousand of us-- it was bringing in other from Germany groups like that, and we went in this place. And--

How long you were there?

But then-- I was there maybe for two weeks, and at the beginning, we could go out. And then the English-- the English army decided to close the gate. They wouldn't let us go out anymore. So I spoke to the group that I came with, and I said, we're going to-- we have to escape from here.

So we went to the back of the building, and we tied on-- took our belts and some rope and the--

Let down.

We was just putting people down from our window, and we--

--escaped.

And we escaped. And then we went down the boot of Italy. This is the beginning. It's North of Italy. It was going to the South. And eventually, we got as far to the South as we could, which is Santa Maria, inside of the boot. And we organized that we could stay in kibbutz [PLACE NAME].

I met at that time in Bari, which was the biggest city there, with an officer from the Israeli-- not Israeli but the Jewish Brigade had somewhere they had to put us there. And I went there to the head police. And I spoke to officer there, and he said, organize yourself there.

And then we came to the Santa Maria, it was empty buildings from the fascists. There was a building there like a palace with the fascist-- the fascist organization had meetings. There was a kitchen there, a dance hall. So we moved in there. There was no people. They ran away, the fascists, and we took over that building.

There was plenty of room, so maybe 30, 40 empty rooms. So we-- it was-- organized kibbtuz and we gave it a name [PLACE NAME]. And organized there a soccer team, and we got some machines and joined. And tailor and I made uniforms and the soccer team, and--

Till when? So how long did this last?

How long we was there? We was there probably around-- during the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.

Three years you were there?

Yeah, but not all the people. Now I got in contact with the people in Bari, in the Jewish Brigade, and then some people came from the Sochnut from Palestine. And they had some kind of some kind of a-- something in Bari, a headquarters, and they were sending in-- and they were sending in people which was-- they was bringing over more people from Austria, from Germany, from both.

And they were sending in here-- and after-- from the [NON-ENGLISH], I got-- it was over 200. And I was asked to be [NON-ENGLISH] at that place, and so I managed it. There was a kitchen there that the fascists used to make parties, and so we used the kitchen. And there was tomatoes growing in that place there. There were some chickens there.

So we was getting-- and then we was getting-- then the UNRRA organized a camp there in a little town. And they-- so we went to most of us, which was there at that time about maybe 50 or 60. We went and registered ourselves with the UNRRA.

UNRRA was giving out rations, was giving us some food, was giving us straw for-- it was-- I was making sacks like that to bring the straw to make mattresses to sleep. Because we would sleep on the floor.

This was in '48?

This was-- I was there-- I was there in '45 already, so from '45--

--until '48.

--in the middle of 45, about June. I was there in June '45 until the establishment of the state of Israel.

And then you went to Palestine?

No. They did not let me go. Before I wanted to go, and they was sending in people all the time. They used to come in-- they told me, we have ready for that night 50 people. They shouldn't-- take away the documents. If they have any papers or any pictures or anything, take it away. You keep it. Send them to-- they'll get it in Palestine later on.

And they're going to go-- they're going to go in Italy or there was-- there was going to be a sheep, and this was in Santa Maria. It's on the ocean. It's a port on the ocean. So there'll be a sheep someplace. [NON-ENGLISH].

And they said trucks were going to come from the Bricha, from the Jewish Brigade that we're going to take them to the ships. And so pick up really 50 from this group. There was about 200 there. And so I was doing that I picked up one by one and telling them, you want to go to-- all those people was there wanted to go to Palestine, so it was very-- they have to keep it secret that others should not know because people were getting enough. They was jealous and was getting mad.

So I was calling them one by one and telling them, OK, be ready for tonight, very quietly. Then I'll come over, and I'll just-- you see them just walk out from there and down the corridor to the [INAUDIBLE] will be there. And trucks was coming like that, and 50 again and 30 more and 40, and it was going back to the vehicle.

And they left with me all the-- later on, I had a whole bunch-- hundreds of documents, hundreds of pictures, hundreds of passports of different people from different countries in Czechoslovakia, from-- a lot of them was not in concentration camps. They was hiding. Like people from Hungary was there, Romania. They did not-- there wasn't a concentration camp, but they had documents. They asked-- they left everything there. All what they took-- they told me what they took is a small package in the back. He was making there-- you know, in the back. They have to have their arms free to be able to climb the boat and things like that.

What happened to you?

And then after this was going on for about a year or a year and a half, I said to that man in Bari-- I say, OK, I want to go to Palestine. He said, we need someone to run this thing here. You're doing it good. So we'll let you know. We'll let

when you're going to go.

And while this was going on, one fella came, and he said to me he wants to he wants to join a kibbutz. It had happened that I know him. He was a smuggler. He was smuggling cigarettes and heroin from-- he was going to the mountains and bring it, Germany and Austria.

And so I said to him, we don't need people like that in Palestine. He says, OK, you don't want me, I'm going back. And he went back to Germany. He went to Germany, and he met one of my brothers there. I didn't know that I am-- if my brothers are alive.

My brothers-- and he came back. He said, I have good news for you. Will you let me go to the kibbutz now? I said, what? I know where your brothers are. You have two brothers, and this is their name. He brought a picture of mine.

When he met my brother on the train-- he was coming on [INAUDIBLE] on the train. He wanted to go to Feldafing, which was a Jewish camp. And my brother was living in Feldafing. So he came on the train, and he sat on a bench there. My brother was sitting there, and he said to him, I want to go to Feldafing. How do I-- so he said they got a truck [INAUDIBLE] from Italy. He said, what's your name? He said, Arbeiter. He said, oh, I know Arbeiter, the guy doesn't want to me to the kibbutz.

So he said, how does he look? What's his first name? He said, I don't know what his name is, but [INAUDIBLE] he took out a picture, and he said, my brother. And you'll go back? You're going back? He said, yeah, I'm going back in two weeks. If you go back, show him this picture, and tell him that his brother Ern is here and his other brother, Israel is here.

So he came back on me, and said to me, if I'll tell you about your brother's, you'll let me go to the kibbutz? I said, don't play any tricks with me. You have anything for me? Yeah. Let's see it.

He said OK. So he show me the picture, and he told me [INAUDIBLE]. I got in contact with my brothers. And I wanted to go to Germany to join them, and I was arrested in the Alps.

[INAUDIBLE]

By the Italian police, the Italian border police, the Italian border police on the Brenner Pass. I was crawling on the-- I was in the middle of the mountains, and they hit me with a reflector. And they had some dogs there. [INAUDIBLE] dogs after me.

I came down the mountain, and they started to investigate me, whether I was smuggling. I said, OK. Look what I'm smuggling. All what I have is oranges, oranges and bread. And they gave me-- there was an international commission there of English, American, and French officers, the Allied commission, and they-- and I told them I'm a foreigner, and I didn't-- I'm not smuggling anything. I was going to join my family.

And they didn't happen to tell us they had no right to-- they didn't have any jurisdiction on foreigners. So they brought me over to-- out from jail to the English commission. And the officers started asking questions about it, and I told them. I told them all my history. I told them-- I showed them the number from Auschwitz, and I told them I went to my family. I find out I have some family there.

And they told me, you have no right to cross borders. It's against the law. You have to wait until diplomatic relations will be established. Then it will be normalized and will go. You cannot cross borders.

So they sent me back. They asked me to-- I went back to the-- go back where I came from. I left another fellow in charge in the meantime. I just wanted to go to talk to my brothers and to take them to-- bring them over to Italy that we should go together to Palestine.

And so I went back to the kibbutz there, and I was talking to that man in Bari. And he said, you have to stay here. We'll

let you know when you go. And this was going on until the establishment of-- in the meantime, my brothers went to the United States. They told me that--

[INAUDIBLE]

I get in contact with them already. I got a letter from them. Another letter, they told me that they found the relatives and we have relatives in the United States. From there, contact with the relatives in the United States, and they go to the United States. We should meet in the United States that we won't go to Palestine. We'll go to the United States.

So then in 1948, the Jewish state was established, and I remember the first boat came, The Negev, and all the rest from the kibbutz-- I marched them over to the ship, and that was not-- you have to go on little boats, but the ship was right parked in the Bari port, and that was all-- looked up, and [INAUDIBLE]. The Negev is still around, but they went-- this was the-- I think one of these groups that went legally to Palestine. And after that, I went to the United States.

From Italy?

From Italy, from Napoli.

'48?

From Napoli.

In '48?

In '49.

'49. So you were constantly working up until that time with people-- getting people organized? What were you doing until '49?

Up to '49, the UNRRA made a factory that was making clothes for the refugees, which was coming from different countries. There were different camps, so I was running a part of the factory, making pens and making clothes for the people.

So I was working there until 1949. I was teaching there some people tailoring. New people didn't know nothing. They just-- they was pay, not much, but the UNRRA was paying for working there. So I organized that place, and some people didn't have no idea about tailoring. I was teaching them how to do it, and it was an assembly line. And I was there until 1949, until I went to the United States.

And there was family in the United States? Who was here?

Yeah, I have here-- the two brothers was here already.

Before them, who did they have before they came?

I have here an uncle and two aunts.

They came before the war.

My mother's-- yeah. My mother's brother and two sisters.

--were here before the war.

Oh, yeah they came here from before the First World War, before the First World War, yeah.

I see.

Because I know that my uncle was serving in the American Army in the First World War. So they come there before. And though my dream to see Israel was as a tourist.

As a tourist.

Yeah. I came back to Israel, and I met a lot of those people which went illegally. I met those people. A lot of them got killed. Many of them I knew from the people that went illegally from those groups got killed right in the beginning when the Egyptians attacked. A lot of them.

So they were sent right-- they were sent right from the ships. As they came from the ships, I was told, it was the right to the front lines, right to-- they didn't have-- all the instructions they got on the ship, how to hold a gun. They didn't have too much-- and they got one day with a big fella because [INAUDIBLE]. There was one girl from my account by the name Czyzyk, and she drowned when it came to the [INAUDIBLE]