United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Ernie Marx

July 26, 1995

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by Rose Halendy, National Court Reporters Association.

ERNIE MARX

July 26, 1995

Question: The following is an interview of Ernst Marx. It is taking place on July 26, 1995 in Washington, DC. It is being conducted by Gail Schwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. What is your full name?

Answer: My full name now is Ernest L. Marx.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Germany, in the town of Gelnhausen.

Q: And when were you born?

A: I was born November 8th, 1925.

Q: Let's begin by talking about your family. Who made up your family? Who were the members of your family?

A: The members of my immediate family was or were my father

Q: His name?

A: Sigmund Marx, my mother Bertha Marx, my brother Julius Marx. We lived in Gelnhausen, Germany only until 1926. And my father who was (?lair ocantor?) at that time, he became a rabbi later on in 1937 at the (?Westlau?) Seminary. We lived we moved, my father got a new position in Oudenburg, (?Obertower?) a small medieval town where we lived above the synagogue. And we moved from there in 1933 to Speyer, on Rhine. I want to talk about Oudenburg. Oudenburg I was I was a mischief kid. I played at a famous this is what I remember in a famous a sort of a well. That well was at one time the town accused the Jews of poisoning their well. And I remember I

was just a little kid when I was arrested by the town because I climbed on top of this fountain. And we lived across the street from the prison. And my father at one time I think it was 1932 my father was arrested for spying for the United States because or was it 1933? Just when Hitler came to power, I think. Because a rabbi a tourist from the United States came to visit my father in the synagogue and he was arrested. And I see it right now. I still can see it. We could see, from our upstairs window, his cell across the street. And we waved at each other. This is what I remember. He was released because they couldn't find anything.

Q: After how long?

A: After just a few days. And of course the heat on the Jews so I don't know what it was. We moved to Speyer, which actually this is the town I grew up. We lived under conditions which were actually I had no problem because I was a blond little Jewish kid, and I played with all the gentiles. Now my brother looked like a not like a blond, he was dark. And he was not liked by his peers. He had all kinds of problems.

Q: His nonJewish peers?

A: His nonJewish peers where he went to school. This went on until 1935. Now, in 1935 when these laws came to came about where we couldn't go to public schools anymore, my father became my teacher. And we had a small what it's called what is it? Parochial school or private school, Jewish, above the synagogue. A oneroom school, what about 25 kids from grade 1 1 to 7 or 8th grade what they call here. And things became a little bad for the Jews already then. Like markings on the walls.

Q: Saying what?

A: Saying: Juden raus. Like I was sent out, because I was a blond kid, to buy butter which we are not allowed to buy enough. We were only allowed to I think a quarter pound of butter. And we couldn't have a maid anymore. And

Q: You were 10 years old at the time?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember how you felt, what some of your thoughts were as a 10yearold boy?

A: As a 10yearold boy I was amazed by the parades by the Nazis when they walked down the streets. And I have talked to other people in the same situation that were my age, and they felt the same way. It was for for a 10yearold, the music, the parades, the marching and the things were exciting. I didn't know the impact, what it really was. I believe and I tell this to a lot of school children today that I was much more innocent as a 10yearold than the 10yearold as of today in 1995. And I had no problem personally. Yes, we couldn't do certain things. We couldn't shop at certain times, we weren't allowed to go out at night. It didn't bother me because I was a kid, I had to go to school the next day. Now my father was he was in charge of a nursing home in Neustadt. And he was on Sunday mornings he made his rounds on bicycle and I went with him to the little bitty towns outside where there was just a handful of Jews. And he did, what you call here, Sunday school. Now this went on really with no problem. However, 1938, my bar mitzvah

Q: Okay, we'll get to that in a moment. Did your mother work?

A: No. Never did.

Q: What was your brother's age? Was he older or younger?

A: He was three years older, yeah.

Q: Three years older than you, yeah. And you said you had before 1938 nonJewish friends?

A: Yeah, I had. He didn't.

Q: He didn't, right. Did you have any hobbies?

A: Soccer. I was a great soccer player as a kid. Sports were my hobbies.

Q: And you played again with nonJewish

A: Yeah, I played with nonJewish kids. I went out to the local soccer club or whatever it was and I watched them. Nobody bothered me.

Q: Did you belong to any youth groups at that time?

A: No, I didn't.

Q: Uhhuh. Obviously you had a religious family life, your father being who he was?

A: Right. And actually it didn't bother me. It didn't touch me personally. I know what was going on but I was a happylucky kid anyway. It didn't bother me until 1938.

Q: Okay. Now comes 1938 and it's your bar mitzvah. Tell us about that.

A: Well, it was supposed to be bar mitzvah. On the 19th of November however, 19th of November didn't exist anymore because it was wiped out by the burning of the synagogues during Kristallnacht, which I remember well.

Q: What do you remember about that?

A: I do remember that I was excited. Because I didn't know my portion, and I should have shown my portion a long time ago. And this is not it's not really funny. It's 13yearold boy who looks forward to his bar mitzvah and the presents are coming. The arrangements are made. It's supposed to be a huge bar mitzvah because I was the last one, my brother had his three years before. And his bar mitzvah, we had no problem. The family came, we were in the synagogue. It was you know, 1935 in April. So there was really no problem then. Mine, of course, never took place. On the night of the 9th of November the November 8th was my birthday on my birthday I received a brand new bicycle. And they hung up the bicycle in the

Q: Courtyard?

A: Not in the courtyard, the bay window.

Q: Did you live in an house or an apartment?

A: We lived in an apartment, a threestory building. We lived there. And actually we lived on two floors. But it was hanging in the bay window. I was not allowed to ride this bicycle until I know my portion. And boy, did I start studying. And 9th of November I heard the sirens. I see the flames, which the synagogue was about corresponding to one block away from us, and the flames. My mother and father said we should go in the basement, because we heard all the noise in the streets, not to go into the bay window to look out into the street. It was the main street of Speyer. The Jewish butcher was across the street. The people by the name of Kauffman had a store two doors down. And we heard all the noise. We I really didn't know what it was. But we went down in the basement. And my father was very excited because at the moment we didn't know it was just the synagogue or more. He did get a phone call from a colleague that the synagogue is burning in Mannheim. So he probably knew. That's what he told us later. Then came two gestapo men to the door and asked: (?alera?) will you come with us and take one of your boys with you. My father chose me to go with him. And we went down to the gestapo headquarters, just down the street a piece. And well, we were assembled. It was cold, November, about 80 people. We were shoved in a truck, bus type, wall to wall people. And hold all night and wound up in the camp of Dachau. How that part how we got there exactly I don't remember too well because I was a kid. I was lying on the floor, may I was asleep. When we got there we were separated from the adults and stayed in the barracks with youngsters.

Q: Who made up the group of people coming from your town to Dachau? Who else?

A: The Jewish men. Only men, only males.

Q: And what about the children?

A: There was a few children. There was a young man by the name of a young man, my age, a classmate of mine by the name of Eddy Adler, which I understand survived the holocaust. And

Q: What were your thoughts when you and your father were being taken away by the gestapo?

A: Well, you know the word "Dachau" was feared.

Q: Did you know what it was?

A: I knew it was a prison, because it was used as a prison at that time. There was no extermination camp, there was no death camp, there was no such thing then. It was a prison. I found out it's more than a prison. That the Jews were of course herded. Not led,

they were herded. They were pushed. And we had to take a shower and the kids were separated from the adults.

Q: What did your father say to you before you were separated?

A: "Nobody is going to harm you. Don't worry." He had faith. My father was a soldier in the First World War for the Germans. And he told me that, don't worry about it.

Q: What language did you all speak at home?

A: German.

Q: German?

A: And the

Q: And that

A: He assured me more or less that no harm will come. I was with a bunch of kids.

Q: About your age?

A: About my age no, a little older. I was one of the younger ones. There were up to about 16 or 17. We were not allowed to talk to each other. I had to do a job, which was clean the latrine.

Q: Did you bring anything with you?

A: Yeah, we were allowed to bring some overnight change.

Q: Of clothes?

A: Of clothes. We did not use we didn't have to wear a uniform or anything, we wore our own clothes. We had to take a shower and we were shaved, I remember. Because Jews have lice. That was the reason.

Q: Your whole body was shaved?

A: No, just

Q: Just the hair?

A: And

Q: What did you think of that when that was going on?

A: At that time I had faith. It's not going to last. Come on, what's going I haven't done anything. I didn't know the impact of what it was. Maybe my father knew more than I did, but I had no problem.

Q: Was he a deeply religious man? I know

A: Very.

Q: what his occupation was.

A: But he was he had faith in human kind. He had faith in it's impossible who will let's look back. Who could imagine six million would get killed automatically by them? He had faith. My father and I, we were much I was much closer with my father than my mother. My father never laid a hand on me. My mother beat the heck out of me. But I guess I was a what do you call it? What was I called? Spitz poop. You know what that is? Well, whatever it is, it's like a it's like Dennis the Menace type.

Q: Was your father's health good at that

A: My father's health was always very good.

Q: And your mother and the children?

A: Mother well, she survived and was she just died three years ago. She would have been a hundred years this year. So would my father too.

Q: So here you are in Dachau with the other children.

A: Right. Life was what I remember was that you were not allowed to look up, you're supposed to bow your head down.

Q: Did that upset you?

A: I questioned it because I knew what it was.

Q: Which was?

A: Hope, look up to I knew that but we had no problem. Some kids got beat up because they didn't behave themselves and talked back to the soldiers. I know one kid got beat up with the butt of a gun. We weren't allowed to pick him up. I still see that kid laying there. And the soldiers took him away, the guards, and he never came back. So I really don't know who he was or what happened. Like the soldiers said: Let that be a lesson to you. And we slept on wooden planks with filthy straw or something.

Q: Were you wearing a star?

A: I did not have to wear a star there. I was supposed to wear the star I remember. I never wore it. I hated that thing. I was blond, I wanted to be look German. But we were liberated, we were freed.

Q: After how long?

A: I think it was the first week of December.

Q: So you were there for two or three weeks?

A: Yeah. I think it was about three weeks.

Q: And did you have a specific job?

A: Yeah, cleaning the latrine. That was my job. Under guard. Three guys standing, watching me washing. But my father, I met my father and we were both released.

Q: Had you had any contact with him during

A: No.

Q: those few weeks?

A: No.

Q: Was that very frightening to be without him?

A: Yeah. I asked questions and almost wasn't allowed to speak. You know. And the other kids the same thing, because we whispered at night. And they had their fathers too. But who would think that any harm can you know, you don't kill outright like this? In fact, now history proves that Hitler did not kill in 1938. Yes, a few that persisted. I met my father and we were released. In fact, we were driven home in a car.

Q: By?

A: By SR. Because my father was put in charge of keeping the area left of the mine river of the Rhine River Judenfrei, free, rid of Jews, especially children. Now history will tell me why this was done, because the Jews were all spies for the French and the English and the British and because Hitler already started working on the war with friends, you know, that this was on the border of France and Germany. This I found out later. Anyway, we came home and there was nothing in the house. My bicycle was gone. My bar mitzvah did not take place. I didn't care about if I knew my portion or not, I wanted my bicycle. No kid got a new bicycle. That bicycle was really that was in me for a long time. And I hated the Nazis for that bicycle. That was the thing. So here we are, a somebody downstairs told my father where my mother and my brother were. And they were with a taxi cab driver at the outside of the town.

Q: NonJewish?

A: NonJewish. I don't remember the name.

Q: Were there nonJews in your building, neighbors in your building?

A: Yeah. But they didn't react. They didn't want to be seen period. They knew we were coming back but they had no they didn't want to talk. That's what I remember. We met my mother and my brother. And then my father and my mother were put in charge by the gestapo to conduct Kindertransport. You know what I'm talking about? To France, Belgium, Holland. And I was put on a train going to France. I think it was the 16th of December 1938 with 80, 100 kids. And my brother was put on a train to Switzerland and we were separated. And I went to Strasbourg first.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your leaving your family then. What was that like for you? A young boy to have to leave your parents?

A: I didn't think much of it because I was promised that: We'll see you soon. We're going back and forth. At that time they had to move to Mannheim.

Q: Your parents?

A: My parents, on the other side of the river. How my father survived financially I really don't know. All I know is when he came to France delivering more children to (?Baron/Mayer?) Rothschild and I remember exactly because I was put in the seminary at the Ecole (?Mymoni?) and the Ecole (?Rabbinic?) to become what my father was. And he came to visit us.

Q: Can you describe the trip with the children on the train?

A: Happy. We had a ball. The kids didn't none of the kids you asked me the question, what parents if they missed their parents. This was like going to a Camp (?Lama?) to on vacation. Remember, it's school time. School, we were supposed to be in school, right? The kids loved it and I did too. And then I was put in the seminary.

Q: Were there leaders on the Kindertransport?

A: Yeah. My mother was there.

Q: Oh, you were with your mother?

A: Oh, my mother was the chaperon and there were other people. I didn't know them. But I knew my mother and my father were in charge of many transports. They went back and forth.

Q: Oh, so they also went on the train?

A: They went on the train. See, I had so many coincidences in my life, that I was put in that seminary and I had contact with my parents, because they came, delivered kids.

Q: And would go back and

A: And would go back. My father went (?sloring?) at the Rothschild's. He took me with him. And I remember the Place de le Concord where his it's not a chateau, it's just a mansion. And he I had to wait outside, I couldn't go inside. My father came back smiling. He got some money and he was happy that he could go back and get more kids. So this went back and forth. I was all right because I knew where my parents were and my parents knew where I was. Until of course September 1, 1939. I always said there is fate in love, coincidences. The day the war was declared my father and my mother were in France. They couldn't go back.

Q: In France with you?

A: They were. They happened to deliver kids and couldn't go back.

Q: Where you were, they were with you?

A: No, I was in school. It was a boarding school.

Q: Where was the boarding school?

A: At the in Paris.

Q: Right.

A: And I lived there. Where were my parents? They had to live in a hotel.

Q: But in Paris?

A: In Paris.

Q: Okay, so they were in the same city?

A: They were in the same city. However, we had to register as German citizens living in France while France is at war with Germany.

Q: Okay.

A: I always tell this to children and tell the teachers here, the same thing as the Japanese were interned in 1940, '41. So the day we had to register the kids were not put in camp, my father and my mother were put in a camp.

Q: Where? Do you know?

A: My father and my mother were in a camp. My mother was in (?Bourse?). I don't know the exact date when she went to Bourse. My father was put in a camp called (?sejour man labour?), which was not a bad camp. Now when the Germans came and invaded France we ran and, as you know, maybe you should know

Q: "We" being?

A: We

Q: Your mother, your father and you?

A: No. We know now we, all of us know that there was an organization, the security (foreign language spoken) which is the (?OA OSE?) which was the highest of France, who helped children, which I was put in a what do you call it? A children home away from the northern part. When the Germans came, we had to run out. And we went outside of Limoges, in a castle. This is a new picture for this year.

Q: That was not with your parents?

A: I was not with my parents ever again until after the war with my mother. I knew that my father was in that camp and it wasn't very far. We visit him. Two kids went from this children home, walked over to (?Saint Jomai?), which was about at that time 8, 10 kilometers. And because we could correspond actually with him. He knew where I was. However, we weren't allowed to go back. They kept us.

Q: At your father's camp?

A: Yeah, in (Saint Jomai?). Well, we didn't like it. The French were the keepers of the camp and not the Germans. And the next day we got out of there.

Q: How?

A: Under the barbed wire. We had to go back to the home, and we did. I don't know if they let us go or what it was.

Q: What were the conditions like in that camp?

A: They were not bad. There were barracks, there were there was Jewish life even there. There was it seems like everybody wore a head cover and had their own clothes. And they complained about the food of course because they couldn't eat kosher. And I think my father made the decision for people: Eat what you can what you want. A lot of people didn't want to eat it. But, you know, like now you look back and you think, what's the big deal? They never came back, they were all delivered to the Germans later on. Well, my father from what I know now, I was in that home, my father was in that camp in Saint Jomai, my mother was in (?Geurs?), I was alone in the world, and the Germans invaded all of the country.

(Tape changed)

Q: This is tape 1, side B. Continue, you were talking.

A: And now I was alone in the world with a bunch of kids. And these kids who were sponsored actually by the this organization. In 1988 we had a reunion. There was

supposed to be 4,000 kids that were sponsored by this organization. It took about 10 years to find them but unfortunately they only found 175. We met in Los Angeles in 1988.

Q: What was it like living in this home? Was there enough food?

A: In the home there was enough food. The Germans came this was just when the Germans came. This was disbanded then because _ . And I went out in the from Limoges I went I knew my mother was in (?Geurs?) But I was caught.

Q: Who caught you?

A: The French. And put me in Geurs.

Q: You were by yourself when they caught you?

A: No. We were about oh, 20 or 30. I don't remember their names exactly, who they were, because they didn't survive.

Q: These are 30 children?

A: Yeah. I looked for them. And I ask at that reunion: Who was with me? And one fellow said he was caught but taken to what was the name of that camp? But anyway, he went to

Q: A different camp?

A: He was delivered to the Germans, to Auschwitz, to (?Transi?) and so on and but he survived.

Q: So you were taken to Geurs?

A: I was in Geurs.

Q: Did you speak French?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you know French?

A: Well, I was in the seminary and it was all in French. And

Q: So you learned when you came to France?

A: I had no problem learning the language. In fact, I became a French citizen later on. Nobody knew. Who cared? But, again, I was alone in the world. I couldn't even ask where my mother was. At that time my gosh, I was 17 years old.

Q: What month was this? Do you know when you got to Geurs?

A: The fall, I think it was October.

Q: Of '42?

A: '42, yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: I was there until the Germans came and the French really let us go.

Q: What did you do at Geurs?

A: Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I didn't do anything. I had no clothes. They gave you clothes. I didn't do anything. The French got it us and they had to do their job. They were polite. I had no problem there.

Q: Did you have enough food?

A: No. Never. I mean food was a matter of what we have. Ovaltine, yuck. And a bowl of soup at night and a slice of bread in a bucket. And I had no work to do, just clean your area.

Q: Where did you sleep?

A: In the barracks. There was it was like an army cot. It wasn't bad. That part was not bad. The bad part came later when I was when the Germans came and we ran.

Q: "We" being?

A: We, the children. We were not with adults, there was a separate area.

Q: Did not see your mother in Geurs?

A: No.

Q: You did not?

A: I did not. I ask and they didn't know or didn't want to tell me.

Q: How upsetting was that to you?

A: I was more worried about my father because I felt I was safe here in Geurs. But my father, where the heck is he? Then I found out that he was in (?Limile?), which was a camp. He had a visa to come to the United States. All the I don't know what you call it.

Q: Paperwork?

A: No, transition camp to go away. But the Germans came of course and the French delivered them. They wanted to deliver my mother too. My mother had a stroke.

Q: In Geurs?

A: In Geurs. They left her for dead and she survived. How she survived, I don't know. I tell you how I survived.

Q: You're now running with other children?

A: I'm running from A to Z in the Alps. And we were told: Go to the Alps, the Italians are occupying that part, they're not as bad as the Germans, on the east side of France. I got to Geurs. Here's the amazing stretch to Geurs. To the town of (?Sheer?) near Grenoble and where I was I have no idea how I got there, how I made contact with that woman that was part of the French underground. And she told I think there was about six or seven. I was the youngest one. But one at a time we'll take the streetcar kids don't know what a streetcar is anymore today and the little train to go at the end of the line in Bourgd'Oisans near Bourgd'Oisans, you know how to spell it? Bourgd'oisans and the to go join the French underground. I, one morning, was told she gave me what they call a (?peckla?) a bag made out of a blanket and put clothes in there and stuff. Gave it to me and said: Go to the streetcar, here's some money for the streetcar, and we go to the end of the line, you will be greeted by people that will take care of you. When I got on the streetcar, sure enough a mile down the road or a kilometer the Germans came and stopped the train for identification cards I did not have.

Q: Did you have any ID on you?

A: No, I had nothing. I listened to the Germans because I understood German, what they want. They had their own interpreter who spoke to the conductor, the driver of the streetcar. There's a platform in front and then there's the cab and the door which the passengers sit. And I was standing on there because I was always interested how this thing works. And the German said to the driver no, he asked me if I have in French, if I have identification card. Before I could answer, the driver said: He's my apprentice, he doesn't have a card yet. That saved my life once. I went up in the end he was part of the underground too, the driver, from what we found out later. And I tell you that at the end of my story.

Q: So they believed him when he said

A: Yeah. Oh, no anyway

Q: They believed him when he

A: They believed him because I forgot to tell you this. They asked me to drive the streetcar. Have I learned to drive the streetcar? And me, in my stupid voice, said yes. And the guy stand there looking at me. I went over there, took care of the controls, put this thing in gear and it worked. So they went. They went into the compartment, asked by

then there was two or three people, and it was 5:30 in the morning, people going to work or something. Anyway, at the end of the line there were two guys with guns. I thought I was dead. But these were guys from the Maquis, and welcomed me with open hands. They were Spaniards, they were mean characters. They hated (?Jews?). They were from the Spanish War of 193738.

Q: The civil war?

A: Right. The Franco war. These guys were all ex felons. You know, they were all they were mean. They had no pity with anybody, they only hated Germans.

Q: But they nonetheless welcomed you?

A: They learned because I hated Germans too. It's the only reason.

Q: Now, again, you were young. Were you very fearful yet or at that time?

A: I was I had no time to have fear, I had to survive. And I sort of always I was an optimist. This cannot go on, because I didn't know at the time that the killing took place. And I heard from the NBC the NBC, the BBC, which they had up in the mountains, what was going on. Well, I was up there and I had to do the chores up there. I was like a little what we call today militia. We had to go down and blow up a bridge. And I got a gun, which I reluctantly used.

Q: How did you know how to use it?

A: We got training. They taught us how to do it.

Q: How big a group was this?

A: 400.

Q: Men?

A: It was well organized.

Q: Was it only men?

A: No. Women too.

Q: And any young children?

A: No, no young children there.

Q: And

A: I think had an affair with a girl up there. But anyway, the life was not bad. We had food, at times we didn't. At times we had to kill a cat to eat. Yeah, it tastes good. Like a chicken. You know, it wasn't kosher of course but it's we survived. I had to learn how to

be on guard when they blow up a the convoys of the trains and the trucks. The Germans could not come up. We were on top of the mountain in the Alps. They knew we were up there. The British came and dropped us some ammunition and guns and food.

Q: Now, exactly what location was this?

A: This was right on the Italian border. Actually the closest town was was it Modane, Modane. It's not very far from (?Shalmberi?) where the and (?Updуez?) where the Olympics were held a few years ago. And I don't know how we survived, it was cold up there.

Q: When did you arrive there? What month?

A: It was in it was November or December 1943.

Q: And you were treated as an adult?

A: I was treated as an adult, oh, yes. They made prisoners of German prisoners down there. I remember one time they brought them up and shot them in close blood, which I didn't agree with but I had no choice. They were killers. And one we were all we didn't have our own name. Like I said, I used the name Lulu. That was nobody had their real name.

Q: What was your full false name?

A: Lulu Berger.

Q: Did you choose that?

A: The reason is because I knew somebody from (?AlsaSlovan?). I had a little AlsaSlovan accent because of the German to the French. And they says: Use an Alsatian name, which was at that time because one of the lieutenants or the chiefs of this of the Maquis took me aside and he says: I am Jewish, you're Jewish, nobody knows, sha.

Q: How did he know you were Jewish?

A: I don't know. I don't know because he said first he looked Jewish, he had a beard, and I had a beard too. And he said: I am Jewish, I know you're Jewish but don't you tell them anything, don't trust anyone up here. This went on until we saw a jeep.

Q: Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about this resistance group that you were in.

A: I forgot one thing. When I was running from Geurs, I came to the town of SaintVictumien, a town two, three kilometers from the town of OradoursurGlame. Many people have never heard of that town. I was there at farmer's house and we saw flames. And by golly, these flames I still see more than I see our (?shewl?), our synagogue in Speyer. It was a church burning where they put the town inside the church and burned

down the church because they were hiding people. That's what we found out later. And I told the story to other one time in Louisville. And a man came to the synagogue and I heard you the story of Oradour, and about the church. I took some pictures of that church. And he had slides he had made a long time ago because he was one of the liberators in 1945. And I he gave me the slides. And here are pictures of the church, what's left of it.

Q: Did you know the people were inside the church?

A: Nobody knew. I found out later. This is just one of the things that I remember. Now, you wanted me to

Q: I wanted to talk a little bit more about your life in this resistance. Did the resistance group have a name?

A: It was called the Maquis, force Francois interior forces

Q: Did it have a specific unit name?

(Unclear simultaneous speakers)

A: We were actually no, we were actually attached to the first French Army.

Q: Was there a leader? Do you know the name of the leader of

A: The leader's name was I don't remember. Wait a minute, I knew some names that were in there but they were all phony names anyway. Like Lulu disappeared. Lulu, when France was liberated, Lulu disappeared because he was looking for his mother and father. So I was up there and did this dirty work with these clowns.

Q: What other things did you do? What other tasks did you have?

A: You mean up there?

Q: Uhhuh.

A: I had to do what do you call it today kitchen work and I had to go on guard. I had to be outside all night with a you know, with a machine gun and be on guard.

Q: Did you stay up around the camp site the whole time?

A: Yeah.

Q: You did not go off?

A: I went off. Yeah, I went off. I had to go off. I had to go down and get the set up explosives. We were like terrorists, so to speak.

Q: So you left the camp site?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you set up explosives on bridges?

A: On bridges and

Q: And railroads?

A: And railroads and German convoys who came through. And I was scared.

Q: Why were you now scared?

A: Why was I scared then? Because guns scared me. And that's what I preach. Guns is a four letter word. Hate is a four letter word. There's a lot of four letter words that gets used today. But I think guns and hate are much worse than the other four letter word. And I was always anti violence. I'm not a fighter. I didn't want to be a fighter but I had no choice. And from what I've been told up there that I was a tough cookie.

Q: Were there family units there?

A: No.

Q: No?

A: These were all, I think I don't know if they were married at one time, there were older people and younger people. They were from 16 through 60.

Q: Was there any doctors or nurses? Were there any medical

A: Yes.

Q: facilities?

A: There was medical facilities. Very little. Do not use any more than you have to. If you got sick, you medication was hardly any I wasn't sick so I wouldn't I've not been sick in my life. But BandAids

Q: Scarce?

A: Was scarce. You know, kids got hurt, you know, a gent gun or something, they took care of them.

Q: Were there

A: They couldn't all speak French because some of them spoke Spanish. And some there was a language barrier there that we had a problem with.

Q: Did you form any close relationships there with anybody?

A: Not really, not really. I never did. I was sort of a loner. I had only one thing in mind, where is my mother, where is my father. And I think this was more important to me. I knew that my brother was in Switzerland.

Q: Were there young women there in the group?

A: Yes. I flirted with them. What goes up hey, I didn't ask if they were Spanish, Jewish or Italian, I don't care. But that's life. Life continued there. And I

Q: What was the treatment of women? Were the men were the women treated as equally as the men?

A: I had no trouble with them. There was today you would call it rape. They were forced. Get yourself a girl. Nobody thought anything about it. A man needs woman, go get it. I didn't know anything about this stuff, but I know about it. I don't think it was important to my life to watch this stuff.

Q: But you heard that that had happened in

A: Yes, it happened. Yeah, it did happen. So I was up there until the end of the war. It was only one coincidence. At the end of the war I had to report to the First French Army at the

Q: How did you know it was the end of the war?

A: We saw the Americans coming down the road. Hey, funny vehicles. What is it? A jeep? We didn't know what a jeep looked like.

Q: So what happened?

A: They the Americans, they waved an American flag. They knew where we were through radio or something. Because we did have radio contact with especially with the British, in June '45. '44. '44, yeah. And when the southern invasion came, we stayed there until the southern invasion came from Marseille and so on. We were waiting for them. We knew they were coming but we couldn't go anywhere because the Germans found out that too.

Q: So you stayed in the camp until you saw the American jeeps?

A: Right, right. So and then they came with their trucks and took us to the (French spoken) outside of Paris where we became automatically, if we wanted to, part of the French army, the official First French Army. That was our choice. I had no place to go.

Q: Let me backup a little bit. When you were in the resistance movement up on the mountainside

A: Yeah.

Q: how religious did you feel?

A: There was no religion. I had didn't know if it was Shavous or Yontif or whatever it was, that was the least of my worries. I knew my father would have wanted me to survive. Forget religion, survive first. The anger over my bicycle has never stopped. Now this is this has been over 50 years. And

Q: So you were still thinking of that bicycle when you were in

A: I still see it.

Q: And even when you were in the resistance?

A: Yeah. But I didn't know that Auschwitz did exist until the end of the war.

Q: Even when you were in the resistance you didn't know?

A: We knew there were take the Germans took all these people, the French Jews and so on, but didn't know what they do with them. You can't imagine, I mean

Q: The other Jewish man who came to you, did you have a special relationship with him?

A: No. He just gave me advice.

Q: That one time?

A: That one time. He I never got to talk to him again. He was one of the what do you call it spies? Big shots.

Q: Did he stay with the group?

A: He came and left. He came and left.

Q: What was his name? You don't know? Okay.

A: A little guy, a very nice guy. And I don't know if I was the only Jew. He might have said that to somebody else also. Well, I was too stupid, I was just worried about you know, I had faith sort of. And then came the end of the war. And this now, where is my father, where is my mother.

Q: Okay, you've left and

A: I was in Paris. I had I was in the French army.

Q: Right.

A: I was a goodlooking soldier. And I became an interpreter for the French army because I spoke German.

Q: What month was it?

A: It was just after the liberation. Is was '45.

Q: What month?

A: I think June or

Q: June.

A: And it was summer, it was warm. And I became part of the CCM (?cha cha alpa?) That was my unit. Yeah, you were right. We were part of the cha cha alpa, an alpine group.

Q: That was the name of the

A: That was the name. CCM cha cha, 6th regiment or whatever you want to call it. The other coincidence is it's unbelievable to this day. Where is my father? Where is my mother? I went to the ChampsÉlysées in 1945 looking for the boards that were put up on the side with names. And I put my name on, who I'm looking for. And I had no idea where my mother was. I went back because I had free I was a second lieutenant, I could go anywhere I wanted to. You know, France was free. And I could ride a bus, a train, anything I wanted. And I went back to (?Sheer?). For some reason, why would I go to (?Sheer?) to see that woman who sent me up to the Maquis?

Q: What was her name?

A: Oh, I have that somewhere. Madame she's dead. My mother told me at one time she's dead. Because I got on a streetcar, who was the driver? The same one. And he recognized me even if I was in uniform. We hugged. This was amazing. And you know, this you know, I told him, (French spoken) you have saved my life. And he embraced me. He invited me to join him, the family that night for dinner but I didn't go. For a simple reason, when I opened the door to go in to the where the people sit

Q: On the streetcar?

A: On the streetcar. Who was sitting there? My mother, looking for me. She was in real bad shape. She had pieces of paper in her hand. She still couldn't talk too plain because for her slow. We never had a good conversation. She and then she got well again later on. I'm talking about 20 years later but her memory was gone. And this is the coincidence there. She knew that my father died in Auschwitz. She had a piece of paper where somebody told her that he was he perished in Auschwitz. He went to _. That was it. We went to the American consulate. My brother was safe in Switzerland.

Q: What were your thoughts when you saw your mother?

A: I don't know. It's one of those hugs and that you never forget. She had BO, and I remembered it because she didn't have much to wear. This is what I remember. We stood

there for 10 minutes. Even the driver stopped. It's yeah, it's one of those things. I don't care if what happened. This has I've never written down anything and this is 50 years later. I still see it like it was yesterday. It was a green street car. I still see the benches, wooden benches, my mother sitting there disheveled. We went then I knew what to do, we went to the highest and got help. Even (foreign language) gave us _. Anyway, we got money and we could go to the consulate of the the American consulate.

Q: This is we're talking are you still in (?Sheer?)?

A: We were well, my mother was put up in Grenoble at that time then. And I was still in the French army. And I was made a French citizen but I had to give up my French citizenship in order to come to the United States because of the German quota. A lot of people don't understand that anymore, but that's the way it was. And then in 1947 my brother joined my mother in France, in Grenoble, and lived with her. I was in the army. In the 6th of June 1947, we embarked on a boat to the United States. And I have been here ever since, and I am still an optimist.

(Change of tape)

End of File One

Beginning File Two

Q: This is tape 2, side A. What information do you have about your father's experience?

A: Really none. Because all my mother had, papers and conversation with survivors that have seen my father in Auschwitz, they have not seen him going either to the gas chamber but they have seen him because he was a spiritual leader despite what was going on. He I was told that he told them: Eat what you can, do what you can, pray in your own way and have faith. He was a good man. He believed in people, he was an optimist, he had a tremendous sense of humor, which maybe I inherit, and I'm glad. My father was the man who couldn't see bad in anything. He had a good marriage with my mother. He was well liked by his motherinlaw, they were proud of him. My her my grandfather, his fatherinlaw was a wine merchant near Westerburg, Germany. He was the because he was an educated person, the others were all businessmen. And he was the best liked of them all. My mother was a strict disciplinarian. She had my father I had no fear of my father, I could talk to him. I was scared my mother, I had fear. In my dreams at night I still see my father walking the other night, walking with me in the park. And this is so funny, it doesn't make sense. I had a dream my father was walking with me on a Jewish holiday. I don't know if it was (?Paca?) or if it was Sukkot, I have no idea. It was not Yom Kippur. We were walking in the park after show and my father was smoking a pipe a cigar. And another Jewish fellow came to him and said: (?helaire?) you don't smoke on Yontif. And

he said to him: I did not light the cigar myself, I can smoke on Yontif. That is it did happen. But I saw it again. And these things are not going away. I came to this country

Q: When did you arrive?

A: In 1947.

Q: What month?

A: June 13th, I think.

Q: And you came with?

A: I came on a boat called *SS America*.

Q: With whom?

A: Paid for by my mother's uncle in Argentina. A rich uncle who had money who paid for the affidavit and all that stuff. And he my mother and my brother.

Q: The three of you?

A: Yeah. My brother is the one that learned to speak English in Switzerland. And he ordered on Friday night the meal which came, bacon and eggs. That was he knew about English. These are little things that I remember. Anyway, we came to the country. We had a little storm and stood outside of the harbor in New York. We're supposed to come in six days, we came in seven days. And at night, it's a beautiful site outside of New York. We had I had no idea what the Statue of Liberty was.

Q: Did you know any English?

A: Me? Chair, ceiling, boy, girl. I had no idea. The first words I learned in this country were bad words which we're not supposed to use. And

Q: You say the Statue of Liberty, did that mean anything?

A: Yeah, they told us, this is the Statue of Liberty. What do I know? I was more interested in the lights going on on the Hudson west side highway. I never seen so many lights flickering. This was and I made the acquaintance with an English young woman on the boat and we were standing there holding hands. That was my look, I was 21 years old. And when we came here, there were people standing at the pier. I think it was pier 32 in New York. And the first thing they said, like they all do and have done it before and do it again: Forget the past, forget about it. It's easy to say, right? Now I'm 21 years old. They drove me through New York and showed me the tall buildings, which I didn't want to see because I was more interested in the girls on the street, on the side. And I had an uncle here who was with me, who came through, and he says: You leave the American girls alone. If you kiss the girls here, you have to marry them. Anyway, I came here and

everyone said forget your past. And I have not spoken about this until 1985. Yes, but not in public or anything. I think Rabbi Schlossberg, my rabbi, my boss, he convinced me to speak about Kristallnacht at one __ We observed the Kristallnacht. I don't know, it was the 45th or 50th. Anyway we had

Q: Did you speak with your mother and your brother about your experiences after you

A: My mother, she didn't remember everything because she lost memory. My brother lived with my mother, never got married. He died in a car accident in 1970 outside of Indianapolis. The same day I had a child that also died on the same day. But anyway, I have survived and I'm not in bad shape as far as mentally. But I have, like Rabbi Schlossberg and other people told me, that I have an obligation to spread the word. Reluctantly I do this. Now I get a satisfaction of speaking to people in the hinterlands of the Midwest. We're not talking about New York, Washington, Chicago or Detroit, we're talking about where I live where Jews are still seen with horns. That I get a satisfaction out of speaking to schools and tell them not necessarily my life but what the holocaust can do to you. Because many of these kids' parents don't believe the holocaust happened. It's everywhere. When I talk, I remember one school, I talk about the sten gun I had in the Maquis. The kids write me letters afterwards, which are very interesting. None is alike. Because I ask the teacher that the kids write something about the speech. Some of them go, some of them don't. One of them, a kid writes: I like Mr. Marx's talk about guns because I love guns. The kid is 10 years old or 12 years old. We shoot every Sunday and I love to play with guns. Well, my mission wasn't done. I had one experience in one high school, I spoke to 200 juniors and seniors, they were exchange students from Switzerland, Germany and Poland, I think it was. And I told them my message there is different than when I tell you my story. My message is it shouldn't happen ever again, because it can. A young woman from Germany comes to me: I want to show you something. Do you speak German? I said: Yeah, but speak to me in English, this is America. I can speak English. I want to show you something. She opens her purse and shows me the picture of her grandfather in an SS black uniform with all kinds of ribbons. Proudly she showed me this picture. What shall I do? I had enough how do you say that in English (?kayack?) to walk away, not to get involved with this child. Because later on, when I tell this to people, they say you should have taken the picture and tear it up. That's not the answer, but it did happen. These experiences are still out there that 17, 18yearold young woman is proud to have that picture. She probably doesn't know what that man did. He probably killed a few hundred.

Q: What did you do professionally? Did you go back to school when you got here

A: Here I went to work. I worked in a delicatessen in Indianapolis, made sandwiches in the window because I couldn't talk.

Q: How did you end up in Indianapolis?

A: I had we had an uncle. My mother had eight brothers and sisters. One of them was here. And he wouldn't hire me in his business because I can't speak English, he couldn't either. But and he his name was John Steinberger and he died since, and he is the one that gave me that ring. Anyway

Q: How long did you stay in Indianapolis?

A: I stayed in Indianapolis until 1959 when I got married. And I worked in that delicatessen and I got fired because I wanted more money. I was tending bar and go to school at night at Indiana University. I didn't get a degree, but I went to business school. Because a long, long relative, cousin picked me up and made me work for him. His name was Max Reiss. I don't know if you ever heard that name before. But he's Finer Foods. He died since too. And I worked for him and then I worked for his competitor. I was in the food business. I was in the I was moved to Minneapolis. And there I became parttime cantor on Friday. I was home Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Went back on the road Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. And that's how I got acquainted with because my background from home, from the seminary, from the school in Paris, and the encouragement of Rabbi Sacks in Minneapolis, who was a lousy chauffeur blower. When I heard that, I says: Give it to me. And I've been blowing the chauffeur ever since. But I became their cantor on Friday, on Shabbat. And there was no money. And then I was moved to Dayton, Ohio where I did my voluntary services for the Wright Patterson Air Force Base on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. I was the divorced from my first wife because I spent too much time on weekends, instead of with the children, with the what she called me, she came from a very informed environment, she called me a religious nut. And I shouldn't have done it, we didn't get along any more to call her that. I came to Louisville, Kentucky in 1978 because I wanted to settle down and not travel anymore. There was an opportunity for opening up a gourmet delicatessen food store which I was knowledgeable. And it didn't go over. Rabbi Cling from the congregation _+ said: We need a religious director. What's a religious director? A religious director is a glorified (?shama?). I said: What is my job? He says: Anything that I don't want to do you do it. And I've ever been there ever since.

Q: Can we talk a little bit before we end about your feelings and your reflections? You had said that you have this sense of optimism that you probably inherited from your father. What else kept you going through these terrible times of the war? Anything else besides that?

A: Well, one, how can anyone believe six million, five million, four million, one million? Impossible. Okay, so they're put in a camp, don't get much to eat. But killing? It's how can and I was a young punk who loved life. And I don't know, I still do. At the age of 70

I still believe that I'm one of the luckiest people in the world. And this is what I tell the people. What kept me alive is I don't know. But I wanted to stay alive because and I don't want to be a saint or anything, but I hope the next day is better than the one yesterday. And when Rabbi Kurshner says bad things happen to good people look, I'm not good people, bad things happen anyway. Bad things can happen to anyone and not everybody is good. It's easy to say bad things happen to six million. They were all good people. And like you asked me awhile ago, my father had a big influence on me despite I only knew him for a few years. And my love for him, I don't know. Children ask me, and this is what I say at the end: Why do you still believe in God? I keep a kosher home. I'm not what you call an orthodox Jew. I wear a kippah when I go to holocaust museum. I'm not a fanatic. As a child I wore a (?talibkatan?). As a child we wore a very _ from home. The question is why I still believe in God? The answer is why not? And that's me.

Q: You had talked about the fact you still have dreams about those times. And in any other way has the holocaust affected your everyday life?

A: Oh, I was told that I get very emotional at the time of Yom HaShoah. I found out that other people are in the same boat. That it is amazing there's a scar. We all have scars. And this scar may be healed but it's there. But why did it take 50 years to get a holocaust museum? All of a sudden in 1950 nobody wanted to talk about it. Was America ashamed of it? Maybe they should have, maybe not. I'm not a politician. But America should have done more and they know it. All of a sudden not necessarily all of a sudden, in the last 10 years or so the stories come about. There's a lot of people, myself, who I didn't mention what I saw when we were running from the Germans, that the Messerschmitts up there were shooting at at civilians running away from Paris. We just saw people getting killed and bloody stuff in the on the way to Limoges. You know, it's impossible to explain these things. There are no witnesses to it. There are just those who survived and they didn't want to talk. I know people that were in the same boat as I am. I met them out in Los Angeles. They didn't want to talk about it. They have a new life. Some of them went to school, some of them became very wealthy. Some of them did well. I don't know if they have done their share to Judaism or not. Because if I win the lottery tomorrow, that's another story. But I think we have now and I realize, and like I said, I'm not a good guy, I'm not a saint. We now have an obligation to spread the word. And as a school, I'll tell the teacher is waiting for me over there now in the little county. She she says I'm her she's a very devout Christian: I am the Jewish what do you call it? Preacher.

Q: Proctor?

A: No.

Q: Messenger?

A: No. The man that goes around and makes speeches like oh, the preacher that is on the radio, TV

Q: Billy Graham?

A: Yeah. What is he called? A

Q: Minister? Evangelical?

A: Well, whatever it is. A messenger. Then I have and the teachers are really appreciate that.

Q: You said you never wore a Jewish star?

A: I was supposed to.

Q: When?

A: I was supposed to wear it in France.

Q: And why did you not wear it?

A: I ran away, didn't I?

Q: What were your thoughts on the star?

A: (?Sweeve?) was the one that my thoughts on it? Well, I don't know. I disguised myself as a Frenchman to survive. Why should I put a thing on there and give myself away? That was my

Q: Did you receive

A: In the camp where I wore the (?sweeve?) I never understood that. Why wear, in a camp, a thin (?sweeve?)

Q: So you did not even wear it

A: No. I never had to. I never was forced to.

Q: You never were forced to, you said?

A: I never were forced.

Q: Did you receive reparations?

A: I oh, my mother, she messed us up. Years ago, years ago for education, we got a lump sum something. Now my mother is financially she was all right. And I tell you why. My father was an employee of the German government. The clergy was paid by the government. Until 1938. And she now, her all these years that she was in the nursing home was paid with the pension from the German government.

Q: How do you feel about her getting having got the money from Germany?

A: Should have gotten more. But money doesn't pay life. A lot of people say that but it's not true. Money can do a lot of things. And I know people who went back to Germany. It's amazing how our Jewish people feel that way, when they say: My hometown. Uhuh, I have no hometown. My hometown is where I live now, where I have a wife. That's my hometown. I hear people going back to my hometown in Castle or wherever they are. That's not a hometown. She never had a home, she got chased out of there. We have our own Jewish people buy MercedesBenz of course. And to me, I said it one time, I says: I won't go in that Nazi car. And the man was very upset about that, what I said. Let them do what they want. There is I don't want to go to Germany. People went to Germany as guests of the German I wrote for the heck of it. I wrote to the town of Speyer: I am Ernst Marx, son of Leo Marx, later (?Abino?) Marx. And I would I hear that I'm welcome in your city. What when shall I we intend to visit you next year. I don't know, it's always in German. Anyway, said: What is your what do you help us out financially? The answer came: My name is not Bürgermeister, my name is Ober Bürgermeister _ port. And he says: I am 42 years old, I do not know anything about the past. Our town is not in position to finance your trip. However, you will always be welcome in our city. Oh, achtung _ Very Truly Yours. So I am no, a lot of people ask me do I want to go back. I went to Israel three times. I went to Israel to pick up my mother who was in Israel and had another stroke in Israel. And I had to bring her back first class on Luf on Lufthansa to Frankfurt. This is the funniest and because El Al didn't have any room. And went back on two trips with the synagogue to Israel as part I was at the upper shem. And I said (foreign language) at the flame down there. I think this was the highlight of my whole life. You know, we have a beautiful museum right over here, which is historical. It's not for us, I think our it's not a museum, a memorial is in Israel. They're building more, I understand.

(Tape change)

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

A: No.

Q: Well, thank you very much for doing the interview.

A: What are you going to do with this thing now? What are you going to do with it, sell it?

Q: Thank you for doing the interview. This concludes the interview of Ernst Marx. It took place on July 26, 1995 in Washington, DC. It was conducted by Gail Shwartz on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

End of File Two

Conclusion of Interview