This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with David Bayer conducted by Margaret Garrett on April 7, 1998 in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is a follow-up interview that will focus on David Bayer's post-Holocaust experiences. In preparation for this interview, I listened to the interview you conducted with the Shoah Foundation on March 10, 1996.

I will not ask you to repeat everything you said in that interview. Instead, I will use this interview as an opportunity to follow up on that interview and focus on your post-Holocaust experiences. This is tape number one, side A.

Mr. Bayer, shall we start with your experience in the woods at the end of your internment?

When I ran away from Blechhammer we walked in the woods for a while. And we were a larger group, but I wound up with two Russian prisoners. And we couldn't walk no more. We lied down under a pine tree, dense trees. And we cuddled in the snow. And later, maybe five to six days, without knowing what's going on outside the woods, and we had nothing to eat, we were starving. We only ate some pine cones, and I had some melted margarine on my body. And we scratched it off of my body, and we licked it, and we ate it.

And finally, we decided to get out because we couldn't-- we were freezing to death. I was scared that we will die in the woods. So we decided to walk out. After we walked out while in the dense woods, we come to a field. We only we only could see snow and the heavens. And then all of a sudden, on the horizon we saw some silhouettes. And we didn't know who they were, they were Germans or Russian or-- but we decided to get out anyway.

We came out, and they were Russian soldiers. And they had the guns on us, because they didn't-- they couldn't see who we were. Maybe we were German or something. But they realized that we are prisoners, and they picked us up, and practically picked us up. One of carrying me. I was maybe 70 kilos.

And you had weighed how much before?

I was 140, 150, maybe. I don't remember. But he took me and took us out to a little village not far from the woods there, and they took us into our house. A German family lived there. There were two women in the house. And the Russian soldiers told them to take care of us, to clean us up to, give us food, to give us a bath.

The German women were scared. They did everything that the Russians told them to do. There were no mans in the house. Theyu must have run away. And I was there maybe two or three days, but I recuperate a little bit. The woman didn't have much to eat. Anyway, they gave us some soup or some clothing. They gave me a woman's coat. I didn't realize it was a woman's coat. I took it gladly.

My feet were frozen, completely frozen. All of my toes were froze up. And she gave me a pair of shoes, but it didn't fit good. And I was very edgy. I wanted to get out. I wanted to go. I didn't know where I was going. I wanted to go back to Poland or to-- and I was very tired, very, very weak. But I still had the energy to go. And I was walking towards Poland, which I saw other people walking--

Were you by yourself when you were walking?

By myself, but in the process a lot of other people coming from different directions. And we'd meet on the roads and the highways, and we talk, and we ask, where you come from? Where you come from? Where are you from? Where you going? You know, everybody was trying to find a friend and a familiar face.

And we were going and going and passing by little towns, little villages with Germans, who were hiding, and the Russians were plundering. The Russians already occupied the whole area. The Russians were not so friendly, anyway. They were not so-- they told us, you're free, go. Go what you want, do what you want to do, but don't bother us. You know, we have nothing ourselves.

And anyways, I stopped in another house, which practically I forced myself in to stay. It was warmer. I mean, it was

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wintertime. It was January 1945. And I went into one house, and there was only a woman. There was no man. It was old people and women and children but no military age men.

And I went into that one house, which I wanted to stay with a few more people, but I didn't know them. And the woman got a Russian officer to eject us. Because she probably became chummy with him in order to protect her or whatever. So they kicked us out.

Now, were you still in Germany?

Yeah, was Germany. Was in the Breslau area. Which I think now is Poland, but then it was still Germany. So I had to find another place, and we find a barn or whatever. We spend the night and keep going every day, until we come to a rail station.

But on the way, a lot of things happened to me. I was going on a nice, nice road. It was still snow. Everything was snow, icy and snow. There was a little town, and I smelled like bread, a bakery. A bakery. I could smell the aroma from the bread. So I walked over there to that house building. There was no sign that there's a bakery or anything.

I knocked on the door. Nobody wanted to answer. So I said, yelled in. I'm going, the Russians are here, baking bread here. And please, I want some bread. I'm hungry. So a German came to the door, opened up, let me in, and gave me a loaf of bread, and said be quiet, don't tell anybody. Because if I tell, everybody will come and we won't have enough, he said.

So I got two kilo bread. I was happy. And right away I start eating. And I keep walking again on the road. A Russian-- two Russians, one driver, one jumped out of the Jeep. He said, "what do you got? Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home." "What have you got under your coat?" "A bread." "Give me a half." The Russian, fresh bread. So I give him the boots. It was very felt boots. Made out of felt. And I had but shoes. I couldn't walk anyway. It was frozen. I was glad. So I'll give you half. And he did.

Took off his boots. His feet wrapped around with rags. And I put the felt boots on me right away, and I put the other one on my shoulder. And I gave him a half of bread. And I just kept walking. I was happy. About a mile out after I walked away, maybe a mile and a half, he came back with another officer, and another one, three of them. They didn't say a word. They jumped on me, and knocked me down, and took off the boots.

Knocked me down, took the boots right off my feet and started yelling and cussing in Russian. And that's it. And I it I had no other choice. Lucky I had the old ones still. I didn't throw them away. And I walked again. And he asked me for watches, if I had watches. Russians crazy for watches. You know, he goes "[RUSSIAN] You have a watch?" I didn't have no watch. I had nothing. If I were to have a watch, they would have taken it away right away from me. That's all they were looking for.

The Russians were not so-- they had nothing themselves. The rifle he was carrying, it was a sling. No belt. No belt buckle on his pants. They didn't have nothing themselves. They were poor. Not like the Americans. And then I keep walking. This took me maybe a week before I reached Poland. And then I boarded some trains, military trains going. Because there were no regular trains.

Now, military trains what?

Russian military trains.

Russian military trains.

I think it was Russian. The area where I was, Lublin was occupied by the Russian military.

But you couldn't board the Russian military trains until you got to the Polish border?

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No, I could have boarded anyway. I mean, they didn't allow, but we sneaked in on the trains anyway. But there was no trains. Everything was knocked out. The war was still going on. But more to Poland we had more communication.

And I went to a [INAUDIBLE] and I reached Radom. With a train, a train going to Russia somewhere, and I reached Radom. Radom is 30 kilometers from my hometown of Kozienice. And it just took me maybe two or three weeks before I reached Radom. There's a lot of stops. I slept in railroad stations and on the floors, and I meet a lot of people. I met my teacher, who was in school-- I was in school in his class.

And he was a prisoner in Auschwitz, and I recognized him in a railroad station going home also, but he was very, very bad off. He was hungry. He was-- he looked like a-- he was a young man in his 30s, and he looked like was 70. And he was so happy to see me. He was a Polish-- in the Polish underground, and they pushed him into Auschwitz.

So he was not a Jew?

No, he was a Christian. And I knew him very well. I knew his family. But when I come home to Kozniece, to my hometown, I told his family about I saw him, and he didn't come home yet. It took him a long time to leave Kozienice. But in the meantime, when I came to Radom, I had to walk home. And the snow was still snowing. It was February already, or maybe the middle of February.

And this was the worst trip I ever made, worse than the march from Jaworzno to Germany. The roads were no roads. The Polish roads was completely icy and snowy. There was nowhere-- to walk a mile would take you an hour. And then my feet are all frozen. But before that, when I came to Radom, I had to last two or three days.

So I went into a Christian family and asked if I could stay. A woman saw me. She said, where are you going to? I said to Kozienice. "You look terrible. You want to stay in my house? I'll let you in." And she had two children. Her husband was missing. I don't know what's happened to him. She didn't mention it.

And they were Catholic people. And she probably knew I was Jewish. I didn't tell her. She didn't ask me. But she let me stay maybe two days there in her house. She gave me food and bathed my feet in hot water, but it didn't help much.

It was not icy, because I couldn't move my toes. But I wrapped around with rags and everything else, and I walked towards Kozienice. But the road was terrible, and I finally reached Kozienice in the evening. I have to pass by the cemetery. The Jewish cemetary you have to pass by when you reach the town.

So I walked up to the cemetery, and my dad and my grandmother's grave, because they died together. And I cried. I cried loud. It was already dusk. It was going to be dark. One Pole passed by in a horse and wagon. And he stopped. He walked up the hill to see who was there, who was there [? snooping ?] and crying there. He took me down. He said, "where are you going?" I said, "who are you? I just came back from the war, in Europe and Germany." "Come stay with me tonight." And he took me to his house.

I stayed there overnight. And the next morning, I went to see Leon [? Drylewski, ?] a man who worked for my father, and a man my father built his house. He bought his land. And he worked-- he got married when he's still working for my father. And during the ghetto, in Kozienice, when the Germans occupied us, we took a lot of possessions of ours and hide it in his house.

We give it to him, actually. We give it to for keeping. So the next morning when I got up, and so I went to him, the welcome was not so friendly. He didn't suspect me to be alive. And I come into the house, I saw everything ours-- furniture, tables, a bedspread, tablecloths. A lot of things what my mother gave me to take it over to their house.

I sneaked a lot of times out of the ghetto, and they gave me some food, in the meantime sometimes. They were not bad, but they were always scared for what other people, what other people will say, that they got rich because of us, or they didn't want to show that they have a lot of things. And this was ours, ours.

When I was-- when I was in Pionki, and [INAUDIBLE] and I was working that part because [INAUDIBLE] during the

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German occupation, I had wanted them a lot to send me some food, but they never did. I told him to sell whatever you can and send me some food. He never did.

But they were afraid for the Russians. So they treated me a little bit, pretending to be kind to me. But I realized that there's no place to stay there.

You mean in the village?

In Kozienice, my home, my town. You know, where I was born and everybody knew me, and everybody-- I knew everybody. But meantime, other friends of mine came back, also survivors came back to Kozienice.

Excuse me, that's making a noise. Thank you.

And we got together, and we got a house from-- an abandoned house, which was a Jewish house. And we moved in there, fixed it up a little bit, and we moved in there. But in the meantime, I went to the hospital for my frozen feet. And I stayed there maybe two weeks.

How were you treated at the hospital?

To answer your question-- bad. Very bad. I had to-- I lie on the floor. I had no bed. And there was a doctor, who he was a German.

In the Polish hospital?

He was a German, but only-- I knew and other Jewish people knew that he was a German. During the occupation, during the German occupation, he was the director of the hospital. But he didn't reveal-- he probably revealed to the Germans that he was a German, but he never told the Poles that he's a German.

He was there before the-- he was living in Poland before the war as a Pole. But he was a German, a Volksdeutsche. Means-- a Volksdeutsche means a German from the nation. Any German who lives outside Germany is a Volksdeutsche. Like the Jews who live in the diaspora, they could come to Israel, be Israeli either way.

So he treated me very bad, and I was glad to get out of there. The only thing was, I recuperate a little bit after.

Backing up in the Shoah Foundation interview, you talked about some burns that you had.

This was in Pionki. This was before the liberation.

Yes, but I wondered whether you recovered from the burns, or whether at this time after the--

I recovered in Auschwitz.

So you didn't have any leftover problems from the burns?

Nothing. My burns were from here to here, from the elbow down, and my face, and my legs. Because the explosion came from underneath. I had an explosion in Pionki.

So you didn't need any treatment for--

No, I only had the treatment in Auschwitz, which we put cream on me.

OK.

And after that, I was fine.

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So when you left the hospital after being treated for your feet, were you recovered, or were you still having a lot of with your feet?

I had trouble, but I was a lot better, a lot better. And then a lot of other survivors came together, and we all lived in this house. And we realized that Poland is not a place to stay, that our homes are are no more homes. It's just-- we cannot build no more in Poland. We cannot stay in Poland.

So we heard from the grapevines that the Jewish organizations are organizing-- organizing how do you call it? Like exodus, coming out from Poland, from Russia, whenever Jews want to run away from there, and they will help you, these organizations. There was an organization, the Jewish Brigade. The Jewish Brigade were in the war, but after the war is almost over, they try to get any Jew from Poland and Hungary and Romania to go towards the West.

You know, to Germany, to German-- so I went from Kozienice to Lodz by train, me and all my friends, whoever wanted to go.

Now, where did you get money for the train?

No money.

No money?

We didn't pay no money. Our numbers were our tickets. Everywhere we went in Europe on trains, we showed that we were going home. Showed the number.

The number from the concentration camp?

My number was B74. And they let us free, free passage everywhere we went. And the trains were-- most of them were transport trains, but it was still cattle trains. Regular trains-- was not many passenger trains. And we went to Lodz. In Lodz we stayed for a while. And then they went to Czechoslovakia, to Pilsen.

Now, where did you stay in Lodz? Did you stay with friends or?

Also people which we know. After the war-- after the war, you talk about friends, you're asking about friends. Everybody was a friend. It's like finding-- like finding a relative. You find another Jew somewhere coming or going, or alive, or doing anything, you ask him-- if you didn't recognize he's Jewish, you ask him a question like this, was a code word called "amho." It's a Hebrew word for the nation.

"Amho" means-- if you say-- for instance, if I saw a man in the street somewhere, and I wanted to talk to him, I didn't know if he is Jewish or not, I wanted to ask him something, maybe I recognized him. So I asked him, do you know the street "Amho?" The minute he hears the word "amho" he knows that I'm Jewish, and we start talking.

Say, which way are you going? What you need? What do you want to help? What do you want? You know? We helped each other. We were so like brothers, like lost sheep. You know, we didn't-- nobody was a stranger anymore to us. Even I didn't know him, I was confident he will help, or he will me, or I help him. So it was a lot like this.

So in Lodz we met people. "You have where to stay?" "No." "Come, come stay with me. I have an apartment. I know these people." You know, we got together. And then from there we went to Czechoslovakia by train, also a freight car. And we came to Pilsen.

Now, the freight car, it was just like an empty car?

Empty, going, right.

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And you just got there and sat on the floor?

Yeah, you lie down, and that's it. No, no--

And there was no freight in the car, maybe a little bit?

No.

Empty.

It was empty, we took it. With freight, if there-- most of them-- some trains went with military transport, mostly in Germany. [INAUDIBLE] It was empty, let's go. Nobody objected.

When we came to Pilsen, there were already organizations there, the Jewish agencies. They already give us guidance what to do, where to go. They came to pick us up, took us to another station towards Germany, towards Bavaria.

And we came to Bayern, and we went to a camp called Fohrenwald. There was nothing there. The camp was empty when I came.

Now, you had heard through the grapevine about the camp?

No, in Poland through the grapevine. Then later, when we come closer, when we come to Pilsen, we already had people waiting for us. Not for me. For anybody who was coming--

I see. From the agencies.

Coming, and they give us-- they want the names, where they come from, everything else. Actually all this was organized to take us all to Palestine.

OK.

This was the goal from the agency. There was people from the United States, from Israel, from Switzerland, you know, those kind of countries.

So the idea was that people, refugees would go to this camp.

Survivors to get out of Eastern Europe.

Yeah, so they would go to this camp. And from there, the agencies would help them get to Palestine.

Then the UNRRA came in.

OK.

The United Nations organization. And this was established camps, like displaced person camps. You know, I was a displaced person. I was not-- I have no home in Poland. I have nowhere else to go. So Fohrenwald was a camp-- before we came it was a camp for ethnic Germans, and they had beautiful houses.

And like townhouses, some of them townhouses, and some of them individual houses and with a gate. Like they're making now here. In our area there's a big development with fences and gates. It was a nice, established place.

When we came, the Germans are gone. And the UNRRA took it over, and I was almost the first one. The group, ours, we came from Pilsen. We were the first ones there. We choose a-- ours was a beautiful house. I met some friends, which I never knew, but we become friendly.

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Actually, I had two houses, one with a single boys-- a bunch of single boys, me and Derek Weinberg, and Max [? Korner, ?] and all are my age, in the 20s.

So you're about 23 now. 22, 23.

I was 23, right, in 1946, '47. I was born in 1922. So and then I had a house-- I had a room with the friends what we came from Kozienice. My friends, that one who just talked to me and her husband. She was not married yet, but they were boyfriends in camp. And a few other people from Kozienice. We had like a big townhouse.

So this was not barracks. This was nice houses.

It was beautiful houses. And the UNRRA, they made the streets-- named the streets, put names on the streets-- New York, Connecticut. All the streets were United States names, the states from the United States, the Americans put right away. This was an American zone already, because we came from the Russian to the Americans.

OK. Mm-hmm.

It was like from day to night. The Americans treated us very good. Especially the UNRRA gave us everything we needed-- clothing, food. They treated us like human. But we got frustrated. We went from one camp, torture camp, to a good camp. But we want-- the people, we want to produce something. We don't want to stay and get rations, food, and chocolates, and candy.

You give me the best food in the world, but still-- they're still giving to you. So we live in the Fohrenwald and there came other people, and thousands of more people. And there were at least 3,000 to 4,000 people in that camp, maybe more. I don't know how many.

And we became a very, very tight group. You know, and a lot of started smuggling people out to Israel.

Now, how did you spend your day if everything was provided for you?

We played all kind of football and baseball. All kinds of games. We do nothing.

So they didn't give you chores to do or ask you to help sweep the streets?

Yeah, there were shops to repair for clothing. There were schools for young girls to how to sew. And there were young kids, kids like youngsters, maybe 16, 17, and school for them.

I was supposedly-- not officially but supposedly became like a guard. All my friends where we were in this big house together, they became-- one was a chief of police. And they were police. They made like a whole city. So I was helping him. Actually, I didn't want to become a-- put on a uniform. I didn't like it.

Why didn't you like it?

I don't like being in uniform. But we started doing some business. Young people like me, we didn't want to do nothing. So I started smuggling. Guys who went out from the camp to the farmers, to the Germans, to buy up produce from them, fresh produce, apples, fruits, meat, clothing, and bring it to the camp and sell it. We start being a commerce business.

And this became very big, and become a black market. And also they will start selling to the Germans, but the Germans were still on rations.

Now, how did the people in the camp get money?

That's what happened. We start doing some business, selling stuff. We used to get rations. We got cigarettes. We don't

smoke. You know, little by little you accumulate money. You don't need it, so you buy something else and sell something.

For instance, I didn't have-- I didn't have-- I didn't work. I got cigarettes. I never smoked.

OK.

I used to have stacks of cigarettes. And a German for a carton of cigarettes, he'll give you anything you want.

OK. So you could start with the cigarettes and build up.

I once went with my friend Derek Weinberg. He was working for the US army as a courier. They gave him a motorcycle, gave him a uniform. So I traveled with him from one military camp to another. [INAUDIBLE] the Germans-- the Americans took us-- took him and they paid him with rations, too, whatever. And he liked that.

And I met a woman called Maria Lehmann, a German woman. That woman was-- her husband was a German also, but from Mexico. She was from Bavaria. And she lived about 10, 15 miles from the camp, a little town not far from Starnberg. So we passed by there a few times, and she was very friendly. One time we stopped there.

So she asked if I have extra bread or extra butter. You couldn't get everything there. So I said I'll bring it to you next time. And from then we became very friendly. And I asked her for, among other things, what she has. I got in touch with a man. I mean, not in touch. I knew him in camp in, in Fohrenwald.

He was an organizer for the Irgun. Irgun Tsvai HaLeumi, the Jewish underground organization Israel, who was fighting the British. He wanted me to find out if I could get any kind of guns from the Germans to buy. So I mentioned this to Mrs. Lehmann. She said, I will check it on-- check it out. She brought me one gun first.

So much-- I can't remember how many marks. She told me about a man who want so much and so much. I said OK. This Jewish man from the Irgun, I have a picture of him. I can't remember his name. I gave it to him. So then he paid me. And he said, bring more, whatever you can. Whatever you can, whatever you bring, we need it. We smuggle this to Israel. We need it.

So that's what happened, and I started smuggling a lot of these things. She got me in touch with another guy, a guy, a German with one leg, a wooden leg her had. Yes, He claimed that he was a driver for Goering. I don't know if it's true or not.

And he came to camp. He brought me some guns in his wooden shoes and wooden leg. And so the old man was going to Israel and I was cut off with him. We didn't do it anymore. And I was still in touch with Mrs. Lehmann. She was very-- then she brought me jewelry. She like-- you know, she became like a [INAUDIBLE] she wanted gasoline for her car. She had a car, but she couldn't get gasoline. And I had plenty of gasoline.

Because from the Americans plenty, they stocked up the gasoline tanks in my garage. We had more cars, so we had a garage. So I had plenty. They give it to me as much as I want. And she was really happy.

We have to turn over the tape.

Yeah.

This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with David Bayer. This is tape number one, side B.

And in Fohrenwald, a lot of things happened there between the displaced-- between the DPs and the German police. The German police-- became the German police. They give them all the guns. The government, the Bava-- the Bayern government-- Bairische government organized with the help of the Americans regular German police.

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German police?

Police. You know. They formed that. Time is passing by. Since the beginning, already the end '46 was already Germans' police and the Germans' government, and the Americans are really established under the American control. And so they started cracking down on the black market things.

The German police?

Yeah.

OK.

There was a few friends of mine who used to be on the black market business and they were going to farms, and buying a cow from a German farmer, slaughter the cow, and bringing the meat to the camp and sell it. And also sell to some Germans who couldn't get all the kind of meats in the rations.

So was one incident which the German police stopped a truck with some smugglers. I mean, some black market guys who were coming to camp. Because our camp was on the main highway going from Munich to Austria, to Linz, to a Garmisch-Partenkirchen, to Berchtesgaden. They're passing by the main highway, and our camp was maybe a little bit in from the road. It was visible from the road.

So the Germans stopped that truck on the road, and they searched him. They had a fight, and one Jewish boy was shot. They were struggling with the gun, and-- so we actually rioted. We went out from the camp, and we start up the highway.

Were you part of the riot?

Right, an American police constable or police, military police came and blocked the camp, didn't let us out for a while. And--

For how long wouldn't they let you out?

Maybe two weeks. We couldn't go to the funeral. We had to take the young man to Munich. Only 10 people were allowed. It was very tense. The situation was very tense then. We stopped a bus with Germans, and threw the bus over on the road. We damaged the bus. The Germans run away, and the American police came and blocked the whole camp. We couldn't get out.

There used to be like a city, going and coming the way we want, but they locked us up like in prison. [INAUDIBLE] So we were a little bit tense with the Americans. The Americans helped more the Germans lately. In the beginning, the Americans, the first group of Americans who came to occupation, they were friendly. Were nice to the survivors. They were helpful.

But the other wave, the new ones who come in were already more friendly to the Germans. The Germans were all young men. They were all young blonde German women. Some of them married. They became already buddy-buddies.

And we resented that as young people. And which we also run around with German girls. Single guys, you know, happy go lucky, like me. All of my friends, we didn't-- some of them married Jewish girls. They met them and they went away. And I didn't.

Did you go out with German girls?

Yeah. I met a German girl named Monika Rosenzweig. We were together. She was a telephone operator, and she was crazy about me. But--

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Was a German Jew or?

She was German.

German. OK.

So it wasn't Jewish. You was a German girl. She came from Sudeten Germany. And I don't know whatever happened to her. I still have a picture. [INAUDIBLE] And I had a lot more pictures. I threw them away. And that's it. And then I couldn't go to the United States.

Now, were most of the people in this camp, were most of them Jews?

All of them Jews.

All Jews, OK.

The beginning, there was some German refugees. When we came, they had to move. And then-- but when the camp, the Jewish camps were getting thinner and thinner, all the refugees came from the Ukraine. I didn't see them yet. I didn't see them because I was already gone. When I left Fohrenwald, there were still all Jews.

And then I heard from other people after that other came in, refugees from the Ukraine, from Russia, from Belarus.

Not Jews.

Not Jews.

And was the idea of the camp when you were there mostly to help people get to Palestine?

The idea was Palestine. Then not everybody want to go to Palestine. And besides, there's a lot of families people had in America. And also, the United States, there was a quota system before. A quota system to go, how many people. But the United States let in 100,000 refugees without quota.

And I was one of the 100,000. And I said, no, I'm not going to the United States.

And why did you say that?

Because of the conflicts with the American soldiers.

Oh, OK.

With the--

OK, so you were angry with the Americans.

No, I was--

It didn't appeal to you.

I said, well, I could go whenever I want later on. You know, I didn't-- I was not in a hurry, because I didn't have nobody there in the United States.

Did you have any place that you did want to go?

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That's what happened. I had to choose to go to Panama or to the United States. What happened? I would have probably gone to the United States if the friend who lived in Panama didn't search for me and find me in the DP camp through the American embassy.

Now, he was from your hometown?

In Kozienice.

And he looked for you.

After the war, he start looking for family, for friends, whoever survived. His father, his mother was there.

And he found you through the UN.

Through the United States government.

Oh, OK.

He went to the American embassy in Panama, and he told him the story. I have a friend-- I had a friend before the war, and if I could find him, I would appreciate-- and there was some-- this guy, he lived alone and searched for me.

Now, how did your friend get to Panama?

He went there before the war in 1938.

Oh.

He emigrated from Europe to--

And why did he go to Panama?

He didn't go to Panama. He went to Honduras. What happened, my friend's father emigrated by himself to South America before the war.

OK.

In '38 or '37, I don't know what year. He couldn't make it in Poland, so he went to-- by himself, left a wife and children in Kozienice, Poland.

He was Jewish?

Yeah. And he went there to look for work for the government, you know. And he was sending money home every once in a while. Whatever he made, money to sustain his wife and children. In 1938, he came from South America to Poland, took his wife, took 1, 2, 3, kids he had. Three. My friend, a daughter, and a son. No, four kids. One daughter was born in '39.

So he took them all to South America in 1938, right before the war. I went with him to school together. We were buddy-buddy when we're children, friends. And I remember he left me a golden pen. His father brought from South American and gave it to me.

So he wasn't just one of many pals. He was a very close friend.

He lived down across the lake here. I see him every once in a while. So the father lived in Honduras. He took him over. From there he left, went to Panama. And in Panama after the war, he searched for me. And his father said, OK, let's

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bring him over here if he wants to come. So that's why I said, I go to Panama.

The purpose was, they had a daughter. They wanted me to marry the daughter. I didn't want to get married. So in Panama, I didn't want to live in Panama City. I don't like the system. I don't like the people, how they work. I didn't like the civilization. I got angry from everything already.

So I went to live with the Indians. He had one other son, next to my friend, which was-- also he was in Panama, but he didn't like it either. He was confused. So he got me as a friend. He said, look, we both don't like it here. Let's go over to a place called Concepcion on the border from Panama and Costa Rica.

Province is called Chiriqui. The capital is called David. In Spanish they call it Dah-veed. And I went with him over there, and we lived with the Indians. We were making leather and--

Making leather?

Leather.

Leather. From alligators, from iguanas, from all kind of-- and I was very happy.

Now, what was this set up? This was an Indian village?

An Indian place. It must have been a little small town, maybe 2,000 people.

A little small town. And was there a leather factory?

No, no.

What?

Just primitive way. They make-- the Indians make the leather from a bark.

Yeah.

The bark is called mangle. It grows in swamps. Take the bark off, then it grows back all the time. That bark is used to make leather. And we learned that from them. But I came from a family from leather business. My father had a shoe factory, and we all knew about leather.

His father also used to make leather, worked in shoe business. So what can we do in a small place like this? They had a banana plantation, and that's all they had. There's a few business. And Indians are living from the fields, and we had nothing else to do. So we tried to have a tannery, a co-op tannery. A tannery is a leather--

Tannery.

Tannery. And they had a small [INAUDIBLE]. We made holes in the ground, cement holes, and we put the hides in, with cal. Cal is a-- call it in Spanish "cal." C-A-L. It's a grain, a stone, a white stone, which fermentates when they put it in the water. That's what we did.

[BEEPING]

Shall we stop this for a minute?

We stop for a minute.

OK. OK, let's continue.

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And he left for home back to Panama. And I stayed for a while there with the Indians. And one day--

Why did he leave?

His father wanted him home. He had a business in Panama.

So did you and your friend have your own little business together?

No.

Or you were hooked in with the Indians?

We just didn't need much anyway. Over there we lived primitively, very primitive. I lived in a shack on the ground. I slept on a board. Very like the Indians. I bathed in the river. We had no--

So you and your friend had your own shack.

That's it. We didn't--

You didn't need any money.

We didn't need much. We lived from the [INAUDIBLE], and we lived exactly like they did. We ate the same food. I didn't have much clothing. A pair of sandals.

And so what did that feel like to you?

I was happy.

You were happy.

I was very happy. I didn't know want-- I went away from the hustle and bustle of Panama. I went away from the-- like you asked me before if I told my story to somebody. I wanted to talk to them in Panama. They didn't want to listen. They didn't wouldn't say nothing. They play cards in the organizations the whole time. Like I was not around.

Like you didn't exist.

I wouldn't exist. Like, they didn't care if I survived or not.

Did your friend want to hear what had happened?

No, none of them.

And his father didn't?

No.

Were there many Jews in Panama?

Maybe 1,000.

1,000?

And there were two kinds, three kinds of Jews over there. The one Eastern European, the one Sephardim, means Jews

from Latin count-- from Spain, from Turkey, from Greece. This is the Sephardim. Means Jews who came there during the Inquisition. Three types of Jews in Panama.

The first are there from the Marranos, the one came there in the 14th, and 15th century. From Spain under Mary [INAUDIBLE] Christian, but they still observe Judaism in some way.

And the rest of them are Turks, Turkish Jews, means Sephardim. And the rest are European. These Europeans from Romania, Poland, and some from Germany. That's all. Total about 1,000. Now maybe more. Some Americans.

Was your friend's family religious?

No. They all go on from Panama. They lived there. They all died. My friend lives in Costa Rica. The other brother who was with me in Concepcion died in Mexico or in Canada. And one other son who lives down in New York State retired, and he's very down. His wife just died. One daughter lives in Philadelphia, and one lives in Miami.

So the whole family dispersed. And I meet him once in a while. But in Concepcion, I was very happy with the Indians. They treated me very nicely. They were very good people. Every once in a while, they went with me to the market. I went with them, actually, to Concepcion.

I mean to David from Concepcion. And they introduced me to a Jewish man. His name is [? Sam ?] Sand. He told me that he's a Polish Jew. When I came to meet him, he told me he's German. He was a German Jew, actually. He didn't know.

They call-- in Panama, they call every Jew Polish Jew. It doesn't matter where you come from. They call you Jodio Polaco. It means Polish Jew. Because the majority of Polish Jews had a big influence in Costa Rica, in Panama, in Nicaragua, and Honduras, and El Salvador.

The Polish Jew taught the natives there, when they came there after the Second World War-- First World War, they taught them everything. They are so appreciative for the Polish Jew, all the shoe manufacturers in South America were the Jews-- the Latinos didn't wear no shoes. They wore sandals, and that's the only primitive way they was making.

A pair of shoes come from the United States, but they never made them over there. The Polish Jew start making shoes in these special countries. They opened factories. They taught them how to do it. And now they are the best shoemakers in the world, the Latinos. In Panama, in Nicaragua, El Salvador, in Honduras, in Venezuela, all those Polish Jews. That's why they call them-- every Jew was a Polish Jew.

So when I met this [? Sam ?] Sand, he said to me, "you're crazy. What are you doing here? You survived the war, you come here living in a hole like this? What are you doing here? There's nothing here. There's no people. There's no Jews. There's nothing. What is going to be out of you? What will happen to you?"

Said I don't want-- I don't want to live no more in Europe. I don't want to live no more in the hustle and bustle. I don't want it. I was disillusioned. I was disappointed. I was very down. And also with the religion. I was very religious when I was a kid. And during the war, I prayed to God all the time, but God didn't come to my rescue, not to my parents, nobody.

You know what the solution? I don't want to be religious at all. I don't want to pray. I don't want to talk about God. I want nothing. Then he was talking to me. About three or four times I met him. And he says, I'm going to send a telegram to the Jewish Agency to New York and find out what can be done with you, if you want to go anywhere. You should go to Israel, he said to me.

Israel has become independent. He showed me newspapers. It was 1947, '48, with the Arab armies mobilizing to attack Israel, and Israel is becoming independent. The United Nations voted for independence. And here you are running away? He said, you're running away? I said, I'm running away. That's exactly what I'm doing, running away.

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And I met a man in Panama. His name-- I knew his name. He couldn't read and write. He was from a town in Poland called Zelechow. That town, I had an uncle there. And he was a Polish Jew. He came there also before the war. He became a builder without knowing how to read and write. Made his own blueprints, built his own high rise in Panama. It's unbelievable.

In Panama?

In Panama City. He became very rich. And he let me in the Jewish Community Center in Panama. When I tell told him I'm leaving, I'm going to Concepcion, he said, I have a house between Concepcion and VolcÃ¡n. He built a house there for summer. You can have the key. And every time you want, you can go there.

This house was unbelievable house you ever saw. He built it on top of a river. Atop a stream. Not a big river. A stream. And the water from the stream was going into a pool, a swimming pool. Made a swimming pool. And the water was constantly changing, and with filters, that should not allow all kind of fish or other things in there.

And he gave me the key, and I went there every once in a while. This was between Concepcion and VolcÃ¡n. VolcÃ¡n is right on the border. They call it VolcÃ¡n because there was a dead volcano. Once interrupted-- once erupted over there. The land is very good. There are a lot of German Jew-- German-- German people lived there, but they're not German. They are-- like the Seven Day-- no.

They are a religion, which they run away from persecution somewhere, and they lived there in VolcÃ¡n, like a big area. They have farmers. They have cows and cheese and everything else. And they don't mix with nobody else there. They're very nice people, but the Panamanian government didn't like it, but they said they didn't want to pay no taxes.

Well, come back to the story. So this [? Sam ?] Sand got a letter from the Jewish agency, from New York, that there's going to be a ship coming through the canal going to Israel. And I could join that ship if I want to. Because the ship come into Panama to pick up 180 trucks, who the Jewish Agency brought from the Canal Zone, surplus. Mack trucks. And I could take care of the cargo.

They give me a title. I'd be supercargo. That's what they called me. And I will watch that cargo, taking care on the ship, that I want to go to Israel. So I agreed, said goodbye to my Indians. And I said goodbye to [? Sam ?] Sand, and I went back to Panama.

And I went to ColÃ³n. The ship came. And I took whatever possessions I had, and I went to Israel on that ship. I went to Curacao with the ship to pick up gasoline for aeroplanes in barrels, put it inside. Then the ship, when it was still in Panama, got an order, first we got the trucks on the ship. Then they got an order to get cables, special cables that you should buy in the Canal Zone.

And from there to go to a port in Cuba called Antilla. On the other side of Cuba, Havana. To pick up a torpedo boat, and to pull this with the cables to Israel. That's what we did. On that ship, there were two Israelis who came from San Francisco. They were college students. And they got orders to come home.

There was a Jew from New Jersey, a woman who was passenger on that ship, opening a chicken farm in Israel. There was a Mexican Jewish boy from Mexico, who joined that transport. And there was a French Jewish boy from Mexico, also. He was living in Mexico, but he's from France.

And then there was in Miami, from Miami two Jewish guys stole a torpedo-- actually, I know they stole it. For $80,000-- the Jewish agency paid him $80,000 for a torpedo boat the United States Navy got from Germany.

It was a German boat?

A German torpedo boat with two live torpedoes. And the American named that little boat Honduras. And that boat, the two guys, one a Jewish, one a Christian, American, took that boat from Miami's naval yard somewhere to that Port Antilla. And there you had to schlep it, pull it from there to Israel.

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With live torpedoes.

Two live torpedoes and a pump, to pump up the boat at all time. And the ship name was Vassiliadis RAF. Like this ship, the owner's son was a Royal Air Force pilot and got killed in the war. He named after him, Vassiliadis. The ship was Greek crew, very hostile.

Hostile?

Hostile to us, because we meet, for instance, to tell them to write down everything they do with the cargo. So they got extra time they have to pay. And it was very-- and the torpedo was hampering the travel. It was very choppy, and we had to cross the Atlantic.

And we went-- and when we came to the Gibraltar, the British didn't let us go through. We had to sneak through at night. And they told us to stop. We didn't want to stop. They kept constantly was in touch with the Jewish Agency in New York. And whatever they tell him to do, he had to do. Because it was chartered by them. And then there was a storm--

Now, this was in 1948?

Beginning of '48.

Beginning of '48.

OK.

End of '47. It took us about a month, but maybe five weeks to travel on that ship. And then the engineer, a Greek, broke his leg, and he wanted to get off in Sparta, in the Mediterranean. We couldn't tell him no. And they were very mean. Finally, they stopped somewhere, on am island. And they got him off.

And he want to Greece somewhere. Somebody came, picked him up. And we arrived in Israel.

Now, how did you feel about leaving Panama and going to Israel?

I went back to Panama.

Yeah, but how did you feel when you left?

Well, I felt very, very-- I was very melancholy. I was very-- didn't know. I didn't know myself what I'm doing, right or wrong. I didn't-- one thing, I was happy that I'm going to fight for Israel. Because here I heard the news everyday, the Arab army are gathering at the borders. Nasser is threatening to attack, and this and that. And here there's no help.

Also when I was in Panama, there was a company, an airline company, cargo airline company with eight big transport planes. They were all Israeli. We didn't know. I found out when I came to Israel. I found out about it. The Jewish agency was the best thing ever happened to Israel, especially in New York. The Jewish Agency did it.

They opened up a fictitious-- fictitious company.

[PHONE RINGING]

I'm not going to answer that. She did. And there were eight cargo planes with all Jewish pilots, used to be pilots during the Second World War. And they were teaching Israeli pilots how to fly. And they were bringing guns and ammunition and everything else. The company was named Panama-Argentina, but they never flew to Argentina.

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Somebody want to take a cargo to Argentina, they told them we're occupied. We're busy. We can't go there. Constantly flying their planes to Israel.

So there was a lot going on.

Yeah, I met them. I met them. The reason I knew all that, I met them in Panama. And I didn't know who they were. I saw their company. I didn't know. And then I met them in Israel. Then I find out what happened.

So you were-- you went partly because Sam thought you should go.

No, not only him. I realized what's going to be. I mean, what's going on. But am I going to do here? I mean, I'm going to live with the Indians? I'm happy, OK, but what's the end?

No future.

Because he can-- he kept giving me sense in my head.

So he nudged you a little bit.

Yeah.

OK.

And he was partly responsible. So when I came to Israel--

You said that you were glad that you were going to fight for Israel?

Yeah, I was very glad.

So you wanted to fight.

I did.

OK.

And this was my criticism all the time, even now till now, till this day, I always feel guilty that I didn't fight the Germans, knowing that I would lose anyway. I even talked to this yesterday with a friend of mine. I said to him, "didn't hit back, didn't hit back."

You mean when you were in the ghetto or in the camps?

Everywhere, anywhere.

Everywhere.

We didn't hit back. But the thing is, in this country, or any other country, you have where to run when you hit back. You have somebody to help you hit back. If you have nobody-- how can a-- how can an animal in a cage fight back?

But you still have the feeling, even though you know that--

Yes, but he has no hope. He cannot-- he has no way to get out. There was no way to get out. But in Israel, I have a gun. I have an enemy. I could fight. That's why when I came to Haifa, they didn't let me off the ship. David Bayer, Camp Fohrenwald, Irgun Tsvai Leumi.

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You're what?

I was in the Irgun Tsvai Leumi. Underground organization.

OK.

If you sign that you-- we have Haganah now. We have a state. You sign this, sign your name that you're resigning all underground activities.

And this was the British?

No, this was Israel already.

Israel.

Was not-- was not-- the British already was leaving or left or whatever.

How did they know you were in the underground?

They know.

They know.

They know my name. They had my name from Fohrenwald. I didn't mention Fohrenwald.

And so there were reports that you were in the underground from there.

I signed my name. I signed everything. I joined the Haganah right away. And I was sent to a camp called Tel Litwinsky in Israel. In Tel Litwinsky they show you how to work a gun, how to shoot. About maybe three or four days. From there I went to a camp called Camp Sarafant.

From Sarafant I went to a place in the Negev desert called Faluja. In Faluja, I was faced the Egyptian army. It came right on time. There was shooting. And we took the whole Egyptian army prisoners with Nasser.

So were you in actual combat?

In combat, right in a valley. In the area called Faluja. And there was a desert. It had nothing there. Nothing there before. And the Egyptian army just marched in. We caught them right there in the middle. And my officer was a religious young man. He was not-- he was from Poland, but from closer to the Russian border. He speaks with a bad accent.

And he speaks to me in Yiddish. I didn't know Hebrew then. And there with me, my unit were a bunch of boys from Brazil, from Mexico. So I speak Spanish with them, and we got along all right. And we took the whole Egyptian army prisoner. And the UN came in and freed them. And we took all the equipment, all their equipment, the most beautiful British equipment-- trucks, guns, tanks, all kinds.

The Egyptians had the British equipment.

Everything British, and they left everything, just put their hands up. And Nasser was not-- was an officer. And he took over later on. This was 1948. He was not leader of the country yet. It was King Farouk. Nasser became head later on.

He didn't last-- 1956, 1968 War, lost it. And in Israel, I was stationed at Sarafant and with some people I know. And there was next to me an Israeli, also in the army. And I ended up friendly with him. And that's it. One day--

We have to turn over the tape.

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