

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
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Interview with Rolph Hammel
May 9, 2002**

(This interview was conducted in Perigueux, France, by Polly Haas-Hammel. This is a translation of the French transcript, which is also available. Both were done by Ms. Haas-Hammel.)

Tape 1, Side A

Q Rolph Where and when were you born and what was your name at birth?

A I was born on September 11, 1912 in Karlsruhe, my mother was from Alsace and my father from the Bad region (Germany). I went to school in Karlsruhe and I couldn't continue for a simple reason, since at the time there was already a certain amount of anti-Semitism, that unfortunately I experienced at school. I can tell you simply, that often I went home from school around one o'clock with schoolmates protecting me so I wouldn't get beaten up. At the time I was already involved in Judaism, especially for young people and I was a member of a youth movement, *Camaradne*, which wasn't exactly a religious movement, and my relations with the rabbi of Karlsruhe, Dr Schiff, I changed direction and became someone who belonged to the Poalei Zion movement. And... it happened... I'll make it short, I was obliged to do an apprenticeship in a hardware store, that I did in a Jewish establishment and when the situation became very bad, I left for Strasbourg.

Q Your first memories of Nazism...?

A I'll explain right away. The war of 1914-18 was over and the French consul who was, the consulate whose headquarters was in Karlsruhe summoned my mother to come in. My mother was born in Marmoutier, so she was Alsatian, and since Alsace was once German and had become French, he asked her if she wanted to keep her French nationality or adopt German nationality. My mother decided, without thinking or anything: French. And thanks to her I had things very easy in the years 1932-33 because I wasn't naturalized, I am, according to the Treaty of Versailles, integrated, like all Alsatians. And when Hitler came to the government, when Hitler arrived, I decided to leave for France. Since Strasbourg is not very far and my uncle lived there and took me in, I stayed in Strasbourg and worked for my living in a hardware store, and then I started my own faucet and fixture business in 1937-38, in Strasbourg. The war – you want to know about the war – my father came too, my parents moved in 1932, 33, 34 – I don't remember exactly – to Strasbourg and Hoenheim, they started a grocery store. Of course you don't earn much with a grocery store but they survived. And I helped them working at the hardware store. Fine, and I was already involved in the Hatikva youth movement, a Zionist movement, and, wonderful thing, there were already young people making aliyah and we weren't afraid back then to sing and celebrate their departure at the train station. And naturally it came time to do my military service in 1932 or 33, I think, and I did it in aviation in Dijon. Unfortunately I got scarlet fever and was in the infirmary for two months and didn't serve. After that I worked in this wholesale hardware store and in 1937-38 created my own plumbing business in Strasbourg. In Strasbourg, wait... Sometimes I lose the thread, wait a minute. So I went into

business at the time, there comes a mobilization, the first in 1938, and a second one in 1939 when I was recruited into the DCA, Defense Against Airplanes, in Toul. Yes. From there...

Q Your army service...

A I have to remember what happened. The war broke out, and my concern was to save my parents. My poor brother was already sick, Edgar, he'd been evacuated to the hospital in Nantes, and I brought my parents to the Somme department, where I had contacts of course with plumbing manufacturers, to place them there. I was still in the army, but I kept in touch with my parents. [To resume]: at the rise of nazism, I was still in Karlsruhe, thanks to the opportunities of the reintegration of my mother's French nationality, it was easy for me. When I got to Strasbourg, maybe 6 or 8 months to a year afterwards, I was a soldier, drafted into the army, which no longer exists today. I was born and brought up in Karlsruhe and did an apprenticeship there as you know, and then, I wanted to go into acting at the time, because I knew people when I was young, but of course, given the situation, it was impossible. But I learned for example Goethe's Faust, the first part by heart, with the German diction!

Q So your parents were now in Strasbourg.

A No, they came in 1933 from Karlsruhe to Hoenheim, in Alsace. Since my mother was French, I was automatically French. At the time you mustn't forget that refugees who'd come in 1932, '33, '36, like Eric [his cousin], couldn't stay in Alsace and Lorraine, because France prohibited refugees from living in Strasbourg. It was easy in Strasbourg because you could get by with speaking German, everyone understood you, which wasn't the case, it was, evacuated towards the interior of France, that is, many of them went to Besançon, others went to Dijon, and that's why the community in Dijon became so large – at the time.

Q How long did you stay in the army?

A A year. But the draft doesn't exist any more. A year or 2 ago it still did, but I don't think your children had to go into the army.

Q Did you have any problems being a Jew in the army?

A No, no problems. They were probably not very happy when I caught scarlet fever. A month in the hospital. And when you're in the military hospital and you get champagne you think you won't live till the next day. That's exceptional. But I was saved, like the last time here. So I stayed home for a month. I still have the photos, but it's hard to keep them with all the moves – Strasbourg, the Somme, then my parents went to Nantes, and despite the difficulties at the time, I managed to bring my parents from the occupied to the non-occupied zone and that way, my mother survived. My father died at 62 or 63, his heart couldn't take it.

Q How did you save them?

A A miracle, a miracle. My poor brother was in the hospital in Nancy, as a soldier, despite his illness, they made him do his army service, and on the dangerous line of Forbach, near Saarbrücken. Saarbrücken German, Forbach French, in Alsace, no, Moselle, that's about ten kilometers away. And he caught the disease that he never got over. He didn't have a normal life, spent it all in hospitals. My father couldn't bear it, nor my mother. Do you know where he's buried? Here. I brought him here.

Q When you brought your parents to the Somme –

A My parents came to Nantes since my uncle, who had a big import-export business in cereals, was there. Nantes was later occupied. They fled to the non-occupied zone near Chateauroux.

Q Thanks to you.

A No, by themselves. Luckily too, because the round-up was immediate for Jews in Poitiers – there were a lot of Jews in Poitiers at the time – a lot of Jews came to Nantes from the east, because they didn't know the war could be lost, people imagined it was won. During the war I was in Toul. First I was in the Air Force, without being a pilot, and afterwards in the DCA, then they transferred me to the DCA in Paris, a place called the Réduit Verrière, an old fortification, and from there of course I had contacts, when I was on leave I went to see the Braunschweig family. The DCA, is part of the army, I slept in soldier's bed, in this fortification. It wasn't pleasant, but it was nothing compared with later. And from there, we were... When the Germans attacked after 6 months, they suddenly attacked, and they were right at the gates of Paris, and we had to shoot the plane, we had guns dating from 1932 from England, the planes that flew by were 5 or 10 kilometers away when... No good – it was awful. We walked to Nemours, and there we got trucks and retreated from there to Villeneuve sur Lot. That's a long way. On the way we had to find gas, other things, and I always volunteered for a simple reason, that you understand, because I feared what would come next, what did come next. If you're taken prisoner it's automatically concentration camp for you once they know that you're Jewish.

Q Were there other Jews in the army?

A A lot. Everyone was called up, like all Frenchmen, there were no exceptions – on the contrary. At first I was at headquarters, afterwards they transferred me into battle, we were there, we were supposed to be shooting against the Germans with little machine guns. It was completely disorganized. And when we saw refugees, it was catastrophic. My parents were near Nantes by this time. I worried about them, you can imagine. And Eric volunteered, he wanted to sign up, don't know if they accepted him. At any rate one thing is certain, we met up, you know, a miracle, at Villeneuve sur Lot: Eric, Léon Reich, who lives in Strasbourg, a friend, vaguely related to us, he was a close friend of Eric's, from Freistadt, they knew each other in the countryside, even in Germany the countryside helped the Jews, they socialized, they'd become a family, all the Jews together formed a family, which is no longer the case today, everything is shattered.

Q Were you still in the DCA?

A Now it gets more interesting. In Villeneuve sur Lot, what to do? The war, or rather the Armistice, was here, you can't go to Strasbourg, Jews couldn't go into the occupied zone because those in the occupied zone wanted to get into the non-occupied zone, and so we decided – aside from Leon Reich, who went to the Indre department because the Braunschweig family were all there, I remember in what city – Eric and I decided to come to Périgueux, why, because the city of Strasbourg, as you saw, the whole city was here. Half or three-quarters of the community was in Périgueux. I couldn't go and see my parents, they were in the occupied zone. So I went to Périgueux. I remember well. I met the Rosenshteil family who were friends of my cousin Arthur Levy, and we slept the first night in

the hayloft of a house in Perigueux. Of course it was hot at the time and later I gradually got in touch with the community and started taking care of the youth. I had a friend who was in the Jewish Scout movement and the two of us, he took care of the scouts and I set up study groups.

Q But wasn't there already an active Jewish life?

A Since Strasbourg was evacuated here, it was normal that there were a lot of Jews here. So many that they had to do three or four services for the holidays.

Q What year was this?

A 1940. What they told me, and it's probably true – the first service – since there were no Jews here, only three families – who'd always been here, who'd come mostly from Poland[....]

Q There were no Jews before the Strasbourg Jews came?

A Three families; that's all! But all of a sudden, a mass! Of course everyone wanted to live in Perigueux, but it was impossible. My sister – my wife's sister – was in the administration, in education, she was secretary for the inspector of the school district in Strasbourg – she was assigned here. My wife came too, she was the secretary of the director of the Alsatian Company of Banks...[...]

Tape 1, Side B

So. I got here, I went to the headquarters of the community, we saw what needed to be done. The Scout movement existed already. We created two study groups, one which I led myself, that was not only for study, mostly Bible study, but also for charitable work. But all the charitable organizations were moved to Perigueux. There was an old-age home in Bergerac, one in Thiviers, wherever there were Jews. And there were services all over the Dordogne region! Especially in Nontron, it was well-known, and in Bergerac, where the parents of chief rabbi Goldmann were. The *hazan* there taught Goldman to be a *hazan*. After the war he became a rabbi and then chief rabbi of Paris. It was in Bergerac.

Q Did you realize what was happening at this time?

A Not yet. I'll tell you about the round-up soon. We lived very well, that is, we got subsidies from the state, of course, they had to pay a little something. I wasn't earning anything. I started a small business with my cousin Orbeck...

Q The state supported the Jewish community?

A The community was very sizable – when you look in the aron kodesh you still see the *mantele* of the Strasbourg community before the war, because they left some of their *seforim* in Perigueux. We use them.

Q So the Jews felt safe here.

A Yes. Wait, I'm talking about the period when we felt safe. Because we had to create the life. We held events, recitations and so on, and when I saw that a Jewish cultural life was missing, I staged part of the play "Jeremy" by Stephan Zweig and that event was organized to collect some money for the poor, because there were a lot of poor people who'd come from Strasbourg and who couldn't bring anything, just 20 or 30 kilos, you understand? They came by train, crossed the whole of France. The war was close, there was just a day's time before it broke out and people were evacuated. Whole trains arrived here. Lodging had to be found, people had to be divided up to Bergerac and all the towns and villages, and even now

some families live in the little villages. Not far from Perigueux, all along the line, from Chamiers to Montpon, there were Jews! There were Jews till Nontron. There was a community in Brantome. It was magnificent, it was superb. Of course the conditions were a little more difficult. There were no bathrooms like in Alsace, no toilets either. In the country there weren't any toilets often, you had to go out into the yard. But we got used to it. And I think, thanks to the intervention of the district architect of Strasbourg, Mr. Grombach, we gradually built barracks that were used for synagogues. I think I still have the photo of Rabbi Marx who was the rabbi of Strasbourg and the officiating minister Borin – you can hear his voice on the Internet now...[...] So we staged this play and the star was Marcel Marceau, who played Jeremy, and his brother, who passed away – a remarkable fellow, who played the king. We did two acts.

Q Was Marceau already well-known?

A No, he was just beginning.

Q What was his real name?

A Mangel, Marcel Mangel; he has often performed in America.

Q He was also a refugee from Strasbourg.

A He was born in Strasbourg, of a Polish family, his mother was a friend of Lucette's, and his father was a *shochet*, no, he worked in a kosher butcher's shop, there weren't that many kosher butchers in Strasbourg at the time. Look at Paris today, it's wonderful. To finish the story, the evening didn't end so well because people didn't have enough room, they even broke windows to get in, so we had to perform two more times and could collect more money Why? To help the social service that distributed money all the way to the department of Indre. Wherever there were refugees from Alsace and Lorraine, this fund helped them, with clothes also, the social service created an old-age home in Thiviers. Of course we had an enormous amount of help from the administration and especially the municipality of Perigueux whose mayor was Gadeau.... These men helped of course if they could during the war, they did all they could, but it was hard for them, their lives were also in danger. When I thought it could work out I created a small business, also plumbing, but when the Germans arrived – no, it was Vichy that decreed that Jews don't have the right to own their own business and for that reason I had a temporary administrator and this temporary administrator became the chief of the militia [collaborators] of the department. But I can say this: he knew more or less where I was hiding during the war – he never went after me. Of course he took the money that was in the cash register, but without paying the taxes. And when I wanted to go back after the war the commercial court told me, "Sir, you can't continue working, you are bankrupt!" First I heard of it! That lasted two days and it was quickly settled because they knew very well what had happened and many businesses were in the same situation – the temporary administrators helped themselves first.

Q Did you choose them or was it imposed?

A No, it was dictated by Vichy. Vichy was already in the hands of – oh la la!

Q In what year?

A Oh, '41 or '42 already. I don't want to mix things, I'll continue with the cultural life. In my study group there were a dozen people, no one is still alive, and they were all

religious. In the other group of course there were more or less religious people. But for the holidays I can say that 95 or 96 percent of the Jews came to synagogue. Of course they come when there is danger.

Q Were many Jews business owners like you who had to give up their business?

A I'll tell you. After the war – this is in parentheses – some important dignitaries asked me how the Jewish people survived despite the six million dead. I found an example, it was in September-October, and here in the Dordogne as you know, people look for snails and eat them. I explained, it's like the snail. When the snail senses danger, it retreats into its shell and Judaism is like that. We've survived many a cataclysm and we retreated and suddenly became more Jewish, more or less observant, but simply a lot of people turned to Judaism thanks to the study groups and the youth movements. But I wanted to reach the masses and we needed money again. I'll tell you why. When the war was over – you must have heard of the Gurs internment camp. The camp of Recebedon was near Toulouse, an aunt of mine was held there who was later deported. I'll tell you what we did. Despite my other work, I staged another play, the "Dibbuk". Six months of rehearsals. It was a very difficult play to perform. I still wonder how I did it. Very hard to stage. We lacked all the elements. We didn't have the music either which was indispensable for performing "The Dibbuk". There was a girl from Strasbourg who knew all the tunes. I put her in touch with the former head of the choir of the synagogue of Strasbourg, who wrote it down. His name was Bochner, and he was in Lisle [near Perigueux] during the war, not far from Brantome, and there – it's a calm place – he rewrote all the synagogue music, that they couldn't bring from Strasbourg because it was occupied. Since they'd burned the synagogue of Strasbourg there was nothing left. So what could we do for the music? And I have here the photocopy – that cost a fortune – and I sent it to Strasbourg and in that way Strasbourg was able to reconstitute its music.[...] So, the round-up for people who'd arrived in France after 1936 had started a little already, and two of my best actors were called up for the workforce, it wasn't the STO [forced labor], that came later, first there was, they would go picking people up.. All those who came after 1936, especially young people, to work.

Q Who picked them up?

A The French police! Like when I was picked up by the gendarmes. I'll tell you why. So for the two actors, I went to lots of trouble, all kinds of interventions, first of all with the préfet to get them out for the evening....[..]

Q You got them released?

A They released those two, because I couldn't put on the play without them.

Q You went to the police?

A Not me. People intervened. So we could perform twice. There was a woman who handled the finances and we collected money also for the charities, so the community (rue Thiers) could spend money. But not a cent for me. I got a subsidy like any other refugee, and I lived on that.

Q And your business?

A That was over! It was only six months and then the administrator came and pocketed it all – I had nothing more. And anyway we weren't making much money. So we lived on that, with my mother; my father died young, his heart couldn't take

what was happening. So we had to perform twice. It was even mentioned in the Swiss newspapers. I found the program and sent it to Strasbourg.... But that isn't all we did. When we found out about Gurs [internment camp], the seven or eight others in my study group collected money. People who had nothing, who'd come from Strasbourg with nothing but 25 kilos of luggage, I asked them for money or clothes, and you know the SNCF [French railroad company] was remarkable, they gave us the use of a railway car. And since the community (rue Thiers) had also transferred from Strasbourg clothes for the poor, we had the good luck to send it all to Gurs. This story is not known, I never told anyone, you're the first to learn about it. And the railway cars arrived in Gurs, Gurs was guarded by French gendarmes. The end of the affair is that after the war I learned from someone who escaped from Gurs, a certain Althausen, who became a member of the consistory of the Bad region, who's no longer alive, who told me that a good part of the merchandise, a good part of the clothing, got sent elsewhere. Those poor people didn't even get to use it. Of course there was – at the start it was a disaster in that camp. People were deep in mud and rain. I was there a few times, even during the war once. It was terrible to see and now there's a cemetery with 1,200 tombs. I feel that the tombs aren't quite like in Auschwitz – because you can visit them, they have names on them – but they died an awful death. And I know very well. My relations with chief rabbi Hirschler of Strasbourg who became chaplain of the all the camps in the south of France, not only this one but many others, I can give you the list, it's known all over the world. There was Les Milles near Marseilles I think, in a brick factory where people slept on the floor, atrocious things we saw – but not comparable to Auschwitz.

Q How did you go to Gurs during the war?

A I went once, but with difficulty, you can believe me. Because I had friends from Karlsruhe who were held there, but I couldn't save them, how could I?[...] They didn't know my address, I was lost too, just like everyone, everyone was lost, I just went there to see.

Q By train? Alone?

A Yes, yes. No, by train, oh it took a long time, from here to Toulouse, it was hard with the train at the time. I just paid the train ticket.

Q What did you hope to do?

A Just to see, and to get information, to make up a second shipment. This story isn't known. I know quite a lot that I won't tell because everyone did what had to be done, and I did it like everyone else, I was just a simple soldier and that's what I want to remain.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

A So to tell you, the first round-up, which was at the same time as the Vel d'Hiv, was meant for our fellow Jews and others, who had come into France after 1936. Among them was my cousin Eric Hammel. And since the director of the service for foreigners at the prefecture always informed us, either me or chief rabbi Herschler, we knew that a list was being prepared of all those who'd come after 1936, to deport them. So what to do, how to let the people know a round-up was on the way? It was easy to tell Eric and get him to leave. But for others, who lived in Sarlat, Bergerac or Brantome or Ribérac, or wherever... the refugees didn't have telephones, there weren't any telephone lines, so we had to go there, by bicycle, because there was no means of transportation. Ah – to go to Brantome, in the direction of Angoulême – aside from the little train – there was a little train that went to Brantome, to St Pardoux la Rivière and Ribérac, and another one that went, yes, not far, not quite to Limoges, and that way and on bicycle, we could go and alert some of the Jews.

Q This is 1942, at the time of the round-up of Vel d'Hiv, and Périgueux was already occupied, right?

A No, no, no, Périgueux wasn't occupied until November 11, 1942.

Q Two or three months later. So you had –

A There were no Germans, maybe there were some hidden, or something, but Vichy was in charge and it was Vichy that ordered this round-up.

Q But the préfecture was on your side.

A No, and I have to give the Prefecture of Périgueux credit. Thanks to information we got from Mr. Leygues, head of the service for foreigners, we knew about the roundup. We didn't know what date because he himself didn't know it. Only the prefect knew the date. But we were able to notify quite a lot of people. I have the list... there were 270 people on the list. 200 were rounded up, and 70 escaped. An unhopèd-for result.

Q How many of you went out to alert people?

A Seven. I covered the city of Périgueux. Believe me, it was difficult, with the list in my pocket, huh? I can tell you how I was caught once, but it was just in time, by the gendarmerie.

Q Tell me...

A It's interesting. And we managed to save 70, Eric among them. Let me tell you about Eric. He couldn't find work so he went to the ORT school [Jewish technical college] to learn to be electrician and mechanic.

Q That was transplanted from Strasbourg too.

A Yes, everything was here, evacuated from Strasbourg, the whole Jewish community too.

Q With its schools and hospitals.

A The hospitals were I think decentralized to Bergerac, because Bergerac was the second biggest town, a lot could be put there, and in Thiviers too, because during the war, the first year, we went there often with the study group to put on dances, poetry readings, plays – that's how I met Lucette [his wife]; she played the role of Leah, and her name is actually Leah. We got on well; she was a journalist too. In Strasbourg she became the secretary of the director of the bank, the Alsatian Company of banks,

I'll tell you about it, he helped save me. [.....] About the round-up. To alert people it wasn't so simple. I think, I'm not sure, that the parents of professor Steg lived in Sarlat and his father was taken in the round-up. [.....]

Q So his parents were. –

A His parents, the father survived Auschwitz, I don't know how. He's not only a great doctor, he also as president of the Alliance Israelite in Paris and a great intellectual. Whenever he speaks, he talks about his youth and people listen to him with the greatest pleasure, because he tells that he wore the shtreibl – imagine. In front of dignitaries! I was present when Chirac decorated him with the Legion of Honor, he spoke of his youth with payos. He said, "I wore payos," he wasn't ashamed to tell. When people tell the truth without being ashamed, about Jewish things, it impresses them. I've noticed that here. [.....] So for the round-up we saved 70, among the 70 were two who are still alive, in Strasbourg. No one knows this but I'll tell you – they picked people up in St Pardoux la Rivière. There was a work camp there. And when two young fellows (I'm talking about at the time, because they're younger than me – Bloomberger is 82 now) – they had to sign an affidavit in which it was specified that the moment you leave France all your property is confiscated. That's when the two young fellows woke up. They went to see the police inspector who ran the camp, to explain. This police inspector was from Alsace... they explained to him.

Q Wait, they had escaped the round-up or they were taken?

A I'll tell you: they asked him for advice and he said simply, "Try to get out." That's clear! The minute you leave French soil you lose all your property!" – they didn't have much, they worked at Marbot [a bookstore]. They would have been rounded up on the spot. This way they were able to escape. And I visited him, and the director of the library visited them too, to get information. Now we have all the information, we'll no doubt erect a monument at St Pardoux...

Q You mean they were taken....

A Not afterwards, afterwards they went into the underground resistance, they left.

Q Were they on the list?

A But unfortunately the two guys never came back. And among the – I found the guys who played in "The Dibbuk". And Eric, as you know – in Thenon les Bains there are little fishing boats and there is a thing that I'm not sure about, I don't want to – it's not sure—at the time, the former minister Robert Lacoste – he worked at the treasury or maybe was the director -- told me that – he saved quite a few people.

Q Here in Perigueux?

A No, in Thenon les bains. He saved people in Thenon, with little fishing boats, that crossed over to Lausanne. There it was sometimes possible to save quite a few people. But you had to be very careful. And among those he saved, he told me himself – there was the former socialist minister Jules Mock, whose wife went mad in the middle of the lake. Imagine if something had happened, the Germans would have found out, because they could go anywhere. Because it was French soil – Geneva was nearby – but 5 kilometers away; Today if you go to Thenon – you should go – you'll see a very big monument to those who saved our people. The person who built it is a young man, only 18 or 19 years old, imagine, and he said at the end, he hoped he would never have to build another monument; That is deep, that says a lot. And I attended the inauguration. Lucette was already very sick, it was

maybe two years ago, it was a month before she died. And she made me go. I'll tell you why, it happened afterwards. It was in 1943. [.....] I wanted to go, I'll tell you why. Do you know where the train station in Annemasse is? It's 300 meters from the Swiss border. Geneva is here, Annemasse is here. There's a big hangar for merchandise, the merchandise that was for Switzerland. But in 1943 merchandise for Switzerland didn't exist any more, everything was closed off. And Henri Wertheimer's parents... him I could save, he went to Geneva, like Eric, the same route. Listen, in my own family, I could – it's normal that I did what needed to be done – I wasn't in danger but Henri and Eric were. I saved Henri's parents too. I remember, when they picked up my Aunt Germaine, who was very sick but still a beautiful woman, who was taken to the police station here. [.....] They brought her to Nexon, near Limoges. Nexon was the beginning of Drancy. And I – alerted my uncle to come.

Q The beginning of Drancy?

A From there they sent people to Drancy. First they got picked up, and then. So Eric, no, Louis – I alerted Louis and they met up in Nexon. Since she had ties with Alsace, she was born in Marmoutier,[.....] luckily at the time the prefecture could make exceptions. There were exceptions.

Q She was French.

A No, not at all, not yet, not when the war started. She applied to be, but afterwards, and it was harder by then than when I did it in 1933. But she was born in Marmoutier, which was considered French. Since the government was carrying out the round-up, not the Germans – there were exceptions. And that's how, thanks to chief rabbi Deutsch, and that's why we're friends, and he calls me "haver" – so one of us could get her released. But not Henri or Bertie Wertheimer, they went to Lyons. They went – Eric went via Thenon les Bains. He left from here and went to our friend Leon Weill in Isoire, and Clermont Ferrand.

Q By train?

A Yes, there was still a train from Perigueux to Clermont, you see? It went, who knows how fast, but no matter. And from there he went to Thenon les Bains. But I didn't hear from him any more after Isoire, where he went, near Clermont Ferrand, till Thenon. You couldn't write or phone, and I didn't have a phone.

Q No one did.

A How could you? Coming from Strasbourg, in the countryside? The telephone wasn't free like it is now, today it's a present! But then, there was nothing. Only the administration, those who had preference, could – and also they weren't making any telephones anymore, the Germans had confiscated everything. So I heard indirectly from him. Because passing the border – it wasn't so simple – because of the soldiers. The Swiss army was stationed at the border. The uncle of chief Rabbi Dreyfus was killed trying to cross the border.

Q Swiss soldiers shot at refugees?

A Yes. A lot of people don't know it, but I'm telling you; I'm saying what happened. I have the example. And there are others, that I don't know, but of course. Don't forget, Switzerland was considered invaded. It's not like your mother-in-law, who got into Switzerland officially from Thereisenstadt [in a Red Cross exchange] because of an

agreement with the Americans. [.....] Luckily Switzerland was there because quite a few were saved.

Q And in Perigueux...

A I'm telling you only about 1936, there is a distinction, those.... But the others were left alone for the time being.

Q What was the feeling here?

A Of course when the first round-up took place, things weren't so simple.... From November 11 on, it has to be specified, yes, 1942, when the free zone became occupied, it was all over. The Gestapo installed itself in Perigueux – you know where? At the Credit Lyonnais bank, on the second floor. [.....] I got a telephone call through my relatives the Wertheimers, who couldn't stay in Lyons, I had to see if they could get to Switzerland. And at the same time, I was involved in the office of the Jewish community, rue Thiers, with René and Laure Weill [.....] and we wanted to try and save the children. There is a section in the OSE [Organisation for the Rescue of Children] that carried out huge rescues for children. Quite a few friends who were active in the Scouts were later in charge of this service – and we wanted to possibly evacuate the children to Switzerland. Annemasse, where you can cross the border, was occupied by Italians, who weren't as bad as the Germans. We thought about it, but we had no communication, no telephone. We couldn't talk like today, it was secret. So they asked for a volunteer to go to Annemasse to gather information. At the same time I could look into saving my aunt and uncle. What did I risk? I wasn't married, we were engaged. I decided to make the trip. It wasn't easy, because there was a train from Bordeaux to Geneva before the war, but now it only went from Bordeaux from the occupied to the – no, the whole zone was now occupied, at the time I made the trip. You went from Bordeaux to Lyons, you couldn't get all the way to Geneva. You couldn't get over the border, it wasn't possible. And in Lyon you could change to a little train that went as far as Annemasse. But the trip from Perigueux to Lyons wasn't simple. It lasts a long, long time. And it was hell to get through Lyons. The *Feldgendarmarie* was there, the Gestapo, the army. The whole train station was occupied by Germans, who looked in the trains. And a good part of my trip was spent in the corridors of the train and in the bathroom. At one point I spent such a long time in the bathroom that some guys knocked at the door (laughs)! So; I got there, to the Annemasse station. The train came to a stop, there were first, second and third class cars, but all separated into compartments with their own exits. It was a steamer with a locomotive, not electric like it is now. So; I get there, I get off the train. I had a briefcase with me. In this briefcase I had a plumbing catalog from a factory that I'd kept just in case, a little catalog, because I was a traveling salesman at the same time, you understand, if somebody asked me! Because you had to expect everything. And I see a lot of Jews, this is what has stayed in my mind, with their little suitcases, coming out on the third platform. I didn't move. It was a miracle, God was with me, what do I know... And I stayed behind, with the last people. All of a sudden I see an employee of the railroad company come towards me, he looks at me, I look at him, he asks me, "What are you doing?" I say, "I'm going to see customers, the Baud company," you see, I remembered the name from before the war – to find a name to mention! Because if you didn't find a name, you were lost. And I felt that the fellow was more open. I

only regret that I didn't get his name, to give to Yad Vashem, because he deserved it. But this isn't all. He questioned me. I thought, why is he questioning me? Maybe he's from the Gestapo, dressed as a railroad agent. You get like that in your mind. You're afraid. But I didn't tremble. I showed him the catalogues, an insignificant little catalogue. He said, "You don't need to show me. There's no one around. I'm from the railroad resistance." Should I believe him or not? I said to myself, In the situation I'm in, I'll believe him. And it turned out to be true because he told me afterwards, You cross the tracks, you know, it's like in Paris, so many tracks, exactly the same, but there were no maneuvers, nothing, because the border between France and Switzerland was closed. Switzerland was 300 meters away! Annemasse was the goods station for Switzerland at the time. "And you go to the Baud hardware store, the name you gave me," he said, "he's one of us." What did he mean, one of us, did it mean, of the resistance, I didn't know. I crossed the tracks. With difficulty, because I was scared.

Q You saw the other travelers being arrested, people from the train you were on?

A I saw, I saw... with the little suitcases – because he said to me, "Look at the exit," because we were just opposite the exit of the third platform. And I saw. The train was almost 80 percent Jews. The Gestapo and everything. Three times a day there's a train from Lyons, so you can imagine. They put everyone there. And since the Italians weren't so hard on us, just the opposite, they'd put the Gestapo and the *Felgendarmerie*.

Q You mean as you were getting out of the train you saw Jews being –

A I saw it at the exit, because there is an underground exit, he said, Look. At the same time I saw that and thought about myself. What do you want, you think only of yourself. But it stays with you, even today it stays with me. So I crossed the track and went to the hardware store. The warmth. When you feel somebody's warmth, half the battle is won. They gave me coffee and bread, they told me, "Go to such and such a bar, 300 meters from here, in that bar say you're coming from me and stay there till tonight for the train." And I did that. They took me in. I understood that it was also someone from the resistance. He put me on the second floor and I spent the afternoon there. If I think about it today.... I looked at the time often, it didn't move. I thought it was forever. Waiting. For the return I was scared. I went back the same way, crossed the track like he told me. I found my guy. But now there was another problem. "I got information," he said. "You can't go into the compartment. The Gestapo checks one compartment after the other. But I'll contact the mechanic of the locomotive, it's a steam locomotive. Behind there's a coal runner." He asked him. No, you can't take this train. They look into the locomotive too. But how can I be saved? Suddenly the mechanic said, there's only one possibility. Put him down flat on top of the coal runner and cover him with a tarp. What do you do in such a case? I said yes. The 50 kilometers to the border – what's the name of that place, to the fork where one way goes towards Chambéry and the other to Lyons – there, I had to get down and change trains. I don't know, even today I wonder how I managed to get off the train. Because there was snow and rain and wind, I was exhausted. At the time, there were garages for the locomotives. They stayed there for the night and behind there were rooms for the conductors, and a shower – but what a shower! What did they do? They gave me a shower! I wish I'd written down their names – but if I had, I

would have had to tear up the paper, it was too dangerous. So they gave me a railroad outfit, pants and jacket – I wasn't called SNCF yet, it was another name, France was divided into three railroad companies then, the SNCF was created after the war. And then – I was proud to go back into the train. And I didn't run into any controls. Maybe they went by, maybe I was sleeping. I can't say how I got to Perigueux. My mother was so worried, you can imagine. And I couldn't let her know, not by telephone or any way. And in that way I got back to Perigueux.

Conclusion of interview