

RG-50.120 #093
LINGFELDER, OTTO

- 1.01 My name is Otto Lingfelder. I was born on November 29, 1915 in Jakovo, Yugoslavia, the youngest of five children. My father worked in Osijek as an inspector in a sugar factory. I finished high school and went to work in Osijek. [Interviewer wants to talk about the Jewish life in Otto's youth.]
- 1.03 In Jakovo there were about 50 Jewish families, most of them well off economically. There was a synagogue, a rabbi and a cantor, the Hebrew school, etc. Otto tells that when he went to Osijek to work he lived with a Jewish family there until he was imprisoned in 1941. [Yugoslavia was attacked by the Axis on April 6, 1941 and totally occupied within 17 days.]
- 1.05 Otto tells about his vivid memory of the terrible day when the Germans came to Jakovo in their motorized units. Otto informed his parents that he was escaping to Osijek, which turned out to be a huge mistake. Otto's father and mother and most of the siblings remained in Jakovo until 1942. Otto was taken by the Ustashi when one night in July 1941 they burst into the house where he lived searching only him. Otto believes that he was denounced for applying for a visa to go to Makarska. [Marsaka was a city in Dalmatia which was occupied by Italians.]
- 1.08 Otto tells that he and others in Gospic [several hundreds of men] lived with the farm family to which they were assigned. There were no guards. After seven weeks they were rounded up and told they were going home, which Otto and others believed. Instead, they were beaten mercilessly and shipped to Jasenovac. In August, 1941 in Jasenovac they were stripped of all their belongings such as money, clothing, jewelry, watches, etc. Anyone not handing over any hidden jewelry was beaten severely. The inmates were placed in the unfinished barracks, with no roof - September, and the rainy cold days were just around the corner. The inmates had to complete the construction of the barracks, including the barbed wires surrounding the camp. There were daily beatings, ferocious and indiscriminate. Older inmates who couldn't work fast were taken away; Otto did not know whether they were liquidated immediately or in what manner.
- 1.11 The younger and stronger inmates remained in the camp. Otto was 26 years old and at the peak of his strength. Under the most adverse conditions they labored the entire day. The food was miserable - hot water and a little bit of cabbage. The clear intent of the camp command was to make the inmates as weak as possible in order to control them. As soon as any inmate was unable to work he was taken away and killed, not with a bullet, but slashed and dumped into the Sava river. [Sava is the main river in Croatia and a major tributary of the Danube.] Otto and other inmates learned this from the gravediggers who described the 'bloody Sava'. After the camp construction was completed the Ustashi didn't have any other work so they created make-believe projects. Otto was assigned to one such project for flood control. This was a backbreaking work, carrying the earth and stones back and forth while being beaten

- continually. The Ustashis made this like a game, beatings and killings. Hundreds of inmates died while being on this project. The camp consisted of three sections. Otto lived in Jasenovac I, the original section. Then there was Jasenovac II and Jasenovac III, populated mostly by Jews from Sarajevo. Jasenovac III was surrounded by a 3 meter [about 10 feet] wall plus the barbed wire. Next project where Otto worked was near Kapija. This was forestry management, cutting down
- 1.15 large trees. Each inmate was required to produce 4 square meters of wood. Those who did not meet the quota were beaten mercilessly, sometimes to death. In Otto's unit there were about 40-50 inmates who were guarded by 80 Ustashi guards. The Ustashi here were mostly very young kids who seemed to enjoy beating up and killing the inmates. The inmates lived in barracks without floors and they slept on the ground
- 1.16 which was always under water. This situation continued for Otto for 5-6 months until Otto learned of the opening in the shoe shop, and he volunteered. The shoe shop was initially located in the Jasenovac complex but was later transferred to Stara Gradiska. Many of the inmates were master bootmakers from Sarajevo but Otto had only learned how to stick shoes on a form. Nonetheless, by working there, Otto was able to avoid the tortures and death which was the fate of many other inmates [the Ustashi need shoes, Otto says.]
- 1.18 In Nova Gradiska facility, which was a prison before the war, with some prior prisoners still remaining, there were several hundreds of inmates. The conditions there were about the same as in Jasenovac. Otto was initially placed in a 2 meter cell to sleep on the floor, but later was transferred to the general prison area.
- 1.20 In 1942 there was an epidemic of typhus and Otto was stricken as were many other inmates. He was lucky that his brother-in-law lived nearby and was able to send him some food on occasions. Hundreds of inmates died during the epidemic. Also, in 1942 the inmates started receiving some food packages sent by the Jewish community [council?] of Zagreb. The Jewish community had been sending food packages prior to 1942 but the Ustashi would take them. The packages ordinarily
- 1.21 contained bacon, jam, cigarettes, cookies and toiletries. The most important content of the package was cigarettes. The entire underground economy depended on them. With cigarettes one could buy food, clothing, special privileges [lesser beatings], etc. The cigarettes were in the true sense 'the means of exchange'.
- 1.22 After some time in the shoe shop, Otto signed up to work on the 'economy'. The Ustashi stole livestock from the Serb villages and brought them to Stara Gradiska 'economy center'. Otto worked there for several months. During that time the Ustashi liquidated [killed, the Germans and Ustashi brazenly used this terminology when talking to the inmates, who eventually adopted the term] a tremendous number of
- 1.24 people. Every so often there was the 'tenting', i.e., lining up of inmates and selecting for liquidation every tenth person. The interviewer asks about the subject of conversation among the inmates. Responding, Otto states that the topic of conversation revolved around how to stay alive. One could not escape. All around them were formerly Serbian villages which had been destroyed and replaced by well-
- 1.25 guarded Ustashi bunkers. Sick people were taken to the 'hospital', which meant they

would soon be liquidated. Otto was saved as a shoe shop worker. Stara Gradiska was like a fortress.

- 1.27 Because there were now more people than the Ustashi needed, liquidations were more frequent.
- 1.28 Otto remained in Stara Gradiska until 1943 when the boot shop was transferred to Lepoglav. Only the master bootmakers went with the bootshop. The rest were sent back to Jasenovac. In Jasenovac Otto volunteered for work in the mechanic shop. Otto and other lower level mechanics manufactured chains which the Ustashi used
- 1.29 for chaining of inmates. In Jasenovac there were frequent lineups, followed by 'tenthing' for liquidation two to three times per week. Otto remembers some of the more brutal Ustashi. Alaga, the camp commander; Ljubomilos, a chief; and the
- 1.31 worst Majstorovic, a priest who delighted in killing Jews. Majstorovic would just take people out of their work and kill them. The inmates had an idea when liquidations would take place: the Ustashi would come to the shop and borrow the tools they needed such as hammers, chains, etc. The Ustashi drank heavily, and that is when they were most dangerous; you had to stay out of their sight to avoid immediate liquidation.
- 1.34 There was always some 'event' taking place at the camp. To reduce the number of people to feed, especially after new roundups of Jews, there were daily liquidations. The liquidations were not some merciful killings with a bullet; instead, the inmates were taken to the Sava river, severely beaten, then stabbed, slashed and thrown in the river and drowned. We learned the details about the 'bloody Sava' from the inmates who were charged with disposal of bodies.
- 1.35 In 1943 the Partisans bombed Jasenovac. In the melee that followed, the Ustashi trained their machine guns on the inmates. Many died from the bombing and the Ustashi machine guns. And the regular liquidations continued. One day you made friends with someone only to see them disappear the next day.
- 1.37 Near the end of 1943 and beginning of 1944 the inmates started receiving food packages more frequently. This helped them to survive since it was very dangerous to walk to the caldron to get your food.
- 1.38 At one time during that period, Otto and some other inmates were taken to harvest plums. This lasted for about one month. There might have been an opportunity for the inmates to escape during that time, maybe to the nearby Kozar Mountains where the partisans attacked. But most of the inmates were physically exhausted. [The interviewer asks for details about possibility of a rebellion.] Otto believes that the inmates could not stage a revolt or a break because they were exceedingly weak. The food and other conditions in the camp were designed to keep the inmates physically feeble and emotionally exhausted. Also, besides the number of guards and the electrified barbed wire the Ustashi had built gallows and the frequent hangings were designed to discourage and intimidate the inmates.
- 1.44 The daily routine at the camp for Otto was simple. From morning until the night he

- made chains. Others similarly had their duties, mechanics made tools to fill orders. The Ustashi guards were overwhelming twice the number of inmates. Otto and others around him stopped going to the chow line for fear of their lives - they relied solely on the occasional food packages received from the Jewish community. The Ustashi guards would not bother them too much if they were working fast; they would come in to pick up the orders and, of course they would be there for the 10th person selection for liquidation. Otto survived by the sheer luck of the draw.
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- 1.47 Otto tells how the inmates would always know how the war was going for the Germans and their collaborators. The worse the war went for the Germans, the heavier the liquidations. There was this facility where the Ustahi were manufacturing tanks. [Tanks meant cars with steel shields around it.] In late 1944 Otto ended up working in this facility as a mechanic aide. On April 21, 1945 Otto and others were transferred to a building which used to be a sewing factory. The liquidation at this time appeared to be total. The Ustashi were systematically blowing up the camp facilities. That very day the women inmates were herded into one large building which was then locked and set on fire and all the people inside burned alive. By that time the Ustahsi had liquidated all inmates except maybe about 1,000 men. Otto estimates that the total number of people massacred in Jasenovac exceeded 20,000 Jews. Serbs were by far the greatest victims; over 600,000 [?] perished in Jasenovac. The Gypsies were liquidated upon arrival.
- 1.53
- 1.54 On April 22, 1945 the last remaining inmates made a prison break. They broke down the doors where they were held and ran either toward the river Sava or toward the forest. Otto and two friends went toward the forest. Then the partisans attacked. Otto and the friend hid while the battle raged around them. When the battle ended Otto and his two friends went to the nearest village and knocked at the door of a house. The Serb woman whose husband had been killed by the Ustashi opened the door and when she learned who they were, could not do enough for them. She gave them a place to hide, and they remained there for several days. Otto's friend suggested that they go over to the partisans. The partisans helped Otto to return to his home in Osijek. Otto hoped to find his family there, but, of course, this was not the case. Otto had not had any news about his parents since he left home. Because Otto and his two friends didn't have identity documetns they were imprisoned by the partisans. The partisan guards took them to Slavonski Brod, then to another prison and yet another one. They were going from one prison to another, always walking, the three former inmates and two partisan guards. In Lupanje a partisan officer ordered that they be taken to Osijek. The two guards took them to Osijek. but once there they took them to the prison. After several days, Otto talked to a partisan officer and following an intensive interrogation Otto was released.

Once released, Otto had no place to go. Following a suggestion Otto went to the Jewish community, which provided financial assistance. The interviewer asks more information about Otto's family. Otto talks about his family. They lived in Jakovo. A married brother lived in Osijek but later went to Subotica. He was taken there and sent as forced labor to the Russian front. Other brother, Julio remained with his sister

Irma in Jakovo. He was a director of a factory and in 1942 he was in a 'hachshara'. He was later taken prisoner by the Ustashi and put to work in a mill near Jakovo. His oldest brother, Victor, escaped to Subotica. [Here there is an abrupt termination of the interview.]