

We wish to go now back to Kovno. And let me first ask you before the big aktion, you told us about the event of the intelligentsia people. And when you came to the ghetto, you know about those who killed before you entered to the ghetto. What did you think, who killed them, the Lithuanians, the Germans? Did you speak about it? Did you ask yourself, what is going on here?

Well, I'll try in my own mind to explain. All whatever happened was is like you expected something should happen in that nature, because in Lithuania the war broke out in 1939. I'm not so sure exactly the date, a year later '40, or something, or '41, '40, the Russians came in. By that time, we had already a lot of Polish people who escaped from Poland and tell stories, maybe not in the details as we find out later. But they told us all kinds of atrocities.

In the beginning, I, that's my opinion, I'm not a scientist. In the beginning I believe that the Germans themselves were not set yet. With the eating comes the appetite. They were doing all kinds of bad things in Poland. But they were not to that extent. There were a lot of people, Jews, who ran away to Russia, and they didn't like. And they returned back to Germany, to the other side of Poland where the Germans controlled.

And that is before they came to Lithuania. And then later, there came, a lot of them came to Lithuania to tell stories. And then there were rumors in the press and from the radio and the Lithuanians, telling sensational stories. And you really did not know what to believe, not to believe, but [NON-ENGLISH] whatever it comes in the air, you know what I mean, we was suspicious. And it was not easy.

Then it was a building fear for the Germans, no question about it. Now when the Germans themselves came, they came in brutal. The reason why most of the people from Kovno ran is because they were already in fear of what will happen to them. They didn't want to remain. Some of them figured, why run? The Russians are not any better. We'll stay in a place, and we'll survive.

I mean I'm giving you the thoughts what was taking place. A lot of Jews remained in Kovno, and they didn't move. And they got caught in that pogrom from the Lithuanians.

Did you saw it just as a pogroms of the Lithuanian? But what happened before you entered the ghetto? Did you think that there was any connection between the Lithuanians and the Germans?

The only one connection what I could say is that both Jew haters, anti-Semites. And the only connection where it is that the Lithuanians hated Jews made of mother's milk. All I could say is they grew up in Lithuania from all those years from a child in the street. I had to duck. I couldn't walk straight on a sidewalk. If three Lithuanians were going my way, I knew I had to stay away. I knew that the all during the years we you used to come around in Paskha, that means the areas of where they call us Passover there. Now what they call us?

When they come in Easter, by them, we had to hide. A couple of days before, and a couple of days, later Christmas was not a happy time like in American. Christmas, is you know where to hide. Then what was the Keshet? The Keshet was they all had one motive, all of them.

The Germans probably had another alternative motive, whatever type of motive they had to get rid of the Jews. I'm not a scholarly person, but the little bit I read and discuss with people, I remember after the Weimar Republic, you know what I mean? It was influenced by Jewish intellectuals and it was hunger and it was things. Hitler needed to blame somebody. And he started, and then it expanded.

I'm not a scientist do all the dissertation, but then their motives, the Lithuanians came from religion, from Christianity. But it left in the same direction. Now if you ask me I should explain all this, I'm not so scholarly.

No. I'm asking about your feelings there--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

My feelings were in the beginning, I was afraid of the Lithuanians more than of the Germans. And the reason why my feelings was like this, that I didn't spoke a perfect Lithuanian. But I grew up, I spoke well enough. I spoke Lithuanian better the way I speak English. Then if I met Germans, I could lie to them who I am. I could never lie to a Lithuanian. Then I knew in the beginning, I was afraid for the Lithuanians more for the German.

As a matter of fact, even later on when I was in the ghetto, I was afraid only for the Germans, when they come and grab me. When I used to leave the ghetto and outside for speculation, I was afraid not every German. I was afraid of the Lithuanian. He'll recognize me and give me the Germans. I could pass by the German like anybody else.

And you see, how I could tie everything up together, I don't know. But that's is way it was. Then it wasn't so much fear, like a sense of survival, because I'll tell you the honest truth. Sometimes I did crazy things, which if I would be afraid, I would not do it. Ask me to explain it, I don't know. All I know is that I have to go out and do it and survive another day.

Then I find myself in a matzav. And this is the cocoon in which I live, and I function. And that's the only way I could function. It was the question of going on. Maybe that soldier is afraid before he goes to battle. In battle, he's not afraid. Maybe the Israelis went to the Six Day War, you know what I mean? They were afraid before it started. But when they were in it, we got that game.

Then I can't explain exactly how I felt. All I know is that for myself personally, we were speculating a lot. All kinds of rumors, all kinds of things, how long could the war last? Trying to figure out, how long will the Germans succeed. Can I outlive him? Not all of us will do it. Will I be between those who will? And things like this, and that's why in the ghetto people had ideas not to rock the boat. Because it'll be bad for everybody.

But if you could do things to survive like building bunkers and building malinas and things like that. And then there were the young ones who didn't care. You know what I mean? All afternoon they have to go out and fight their way through. They did that. And the ones who decided, they were less afraid, the ones who went and the ones who build malinas.

I don't know what comes for you. I really don't know.

Can you recall before the big aktion, after the event of the intelligentsia, can you recall rumors about liquidation, about killings of--

Oh, yes. We were talking. We knew already. We knew that we were systematic. There's no question on that point. We all knew that we were systematically liquidated.

Can you recall, when did you begin to understand this that there was a--

After children's aktion. When they came brutally, they took out people under false pretenses. And then if they lied to you, it was comfortable to accept the lie, because then you could go on and exist. But after the children's aktion, then there was really no questions. Because they saw brutally what they did. They drove in with the trucks, with [NON-ENGLISH]. And what they call this? They had gas pipes, piped in. So we saw it.

And they came in and they went from house to house, and breaking walls, and looking for secret hiding place, wherever they find kids. I would say till around-- they took even 12, 14-year-old ones. Whoever looked childish, whoever looked like a teenager go to work, they left him. Whenever they hold a person, anybody over 60 or even 50 and 40, if you look 60. They just took them, put them in the trucks.

And the way they beat and shot, you know what I mean? And just took it away. They didn't took children. That's safe to say on a farm to work or in an office to be a secretary. There was no more lying. It was already obvious.

Then after that, we knew already. Now it was a question, new speculation started. Well, they took the old and took the young. They left us because after all they need workers. We lie to ourselves that we'll maybe survive because they need workers. Because in the ghetto the [GERMAN]. The [GERMAN] was blocks. But they used to bring the officers

clothings from the fronts, to wash, to fix, sew on buttons. There were people who were operators and tailors and shoemakers. And there were people working there. And there were laundries, and we figured they need us to clean them.

Then we worked, like you mentioned before, we worked on the aerodrome, on the airport. What do you think we did there?

We used to chop wood, and then the pilots and the air force, the Luftwaffe, they had their prefabricated blocks where they used to live. We used to come in inside, make the beds, put on the potbellies, the woods, pull off pilots their boots, clean their things, and things like that. And they used to bring us to work there. And then if it snowed, we used to go out with shovels, clean the runways. We figured they need us.

We knew they're brutal. They'll kill us. But they won't kill the workers what they need. We ourselves created excuses in order to believe that we maybe survive. Otherwise, you give up. You stop living at all. That's the way I could understand it, what took place.

So when you saw the placards that said that everyone must gather together in the--

Everybody, it more or less said what it calls a census, that's the English word. I didn't say it before. The [NON-ENGLISH], the placard was that the German [NON-ENGLISH] that means the establishment coming to us, and they want to make a census, how many we are. We really don't know. Because they were problem of [NON-ENGLISH] and things like this.

And we have to know how many you are. And whoever is going to stay back will be shot. That's in essence what the placard said. Even, they said even, the sick ones can't be home, because we really have to know how many you are. Everybody has to go out. How did you call it? I don't remember.

[NON-ENGLISH]

[NON-ENGLISH] democratic place, democratic place.

Did you speak between yourself about the possibility not to go to that meeting?

Yes. Between ourselves, a lot of people said maybe not to go because we can't believe him no more. Maybe it's an excuse or whatever it is. Then a matter of fact-- no, that was already after the [NON-ENGLISH] after the police. Yeah, that was already later.

You see then we talked. We can't believe them. We can trust him. Then we were thinking. But I'll tell you if somebody didn't want to go, the ones who went, forced you to go. Because if they'll catch you, we'll pay for it. People were in such a fear that I could-- the minority could spoil it for the majority. There was an inner-- it's unexplainable. People are not mental on their highest level of thinking, people of self-preservation believe in all kinds of crazy things.

Then you had a lot of it. There was a lot of inner tension in the ghetto too, all the time we were there. That you were watched, that you can't do that. Because of you, we're all going to suffer. Some of them, there were a few who hid. And then later, we find out it's a good thing I didn't go and hide. Individuals came out who didn't go. But I would say, 95%, even more, I would say as a whole, everybody went.

And do you remember how the Altostenrat functioned there? Did they try to convince people to go, to gather?

Yeah, the Altostenrat convinced people to go, because the Altostenrat read the mandate from the Germans, and also from the Jews, that they advised. Because the Germans forced them to do what they have to do. Then the Altostenrat advised to cooperate. Because the Altostenrat when I read from other ghettos, when I read, let's say from Lodz, when I read let's say from Warsaw or whatever it is, I'm talking about the Altostenrat. I'm not talking about certain groups. They cooperated more, you know what I mean?

Then the Kovno ghetto was a very responsible one. The Altetenrat and all, I could say in a way as a Lithuanian Jew, I'll tell you a little something now, which I don't know if you know about it, if you heard it from other ones. Which we got something what to be proud of too. The Altetenrat cooperated when you put a gun to their heads, you write or else. But many of times they tried to save as much as you could.

Coming back, right now to the police in the ghetto. And that's why I'm proud. Because the police, the Jewish police in the ghetto run by the Altetenrat on the surface, they were brutal. If you came with food or something from working, when they used the shirts, they used to stay with clubs and beat you up, and things like this. They appeared by the Germans that they owed order for them.

And then later, they used to grab people from the streets and arrest for certain things and beat up. And some of them were a couple of [NON-ENGLISH] there too. I wouldn't say no. A matter of fact, a lot of survivors who survived Kovno ghetto always talk about Aronstam. Aronstam was a very brutal man. But as a fact, I know, that was more a facade than anything. He did whatever he could to help when he could or hide.

Because there were a lot of people who went away, let's say, to the underground, to the partisans. And they smuggled themselves out of the ghetto, organized. They used to come to the police. And they used to create, I'm a [NON-ENGLISH] who beat up people in here and there. That the attention should be there and help get out. Then it's hard to be a judge. But in one case I could tell you, here is where I'm proud.

In spite of everything, of the Lithuanian police and that means about the Lithuanian kibbutz of Jews, because no ghetto was that. After the [NON-ENGLISH] whoever remained there, there were a lot of malinas in the ghetto. Where I know the children who survived, the children who survived the kinderaktion were not visible, the survivors. There were not too many. They were hiding in malinas.

And there were registered places where the Altetenrat knew where they are. And the police knew where they are. I didn't. And a lot of them didn't. But there were secret underground shelters made where the police cover them. When Germans used to come, their job was to cover the malinas.

The Germans knew that there were. They were looking. They couldn't find them. Maybe they were figuring out to liquidate the police for another reason. It doesn't matter. Because if they have to liquidate, finally when they're thinking about liquidating the ghetto, because they came to a point that now they're going to liquidate. Maybe they didn't want to have no more police, young people we could put a resistance or to say resist.

They called-- I don't remember that place, where the police station was. There was a little place. They called the police like what do you call when you have to-- when you put them out information. You want to check how fit they are and how clean they are. What do you call that?

[NON-ENGLISH]

Yeah, they call them for a [NON-ENGLISH], all the way over there. There is to check them out, and they made a ceremony when they were all in line. They surrounded them. They took them out in the Ninth Fort, all of them. A matter of fact, one of them, his name I remember Ika Greenberg. He was in Hashomer Hatzair, one of my elder leaders, he was in the police.

And my own cousin, my first cousin, David [PERSONAL NAME], the one I was in Yanova by his father and the watermill, he was in the police. They took them all in the Ninth Fort, and they wanted to get them out that they should tell the secrets where they get to these-- by the [NON-ENGLISH] of taking their life. You're dead or you show us.

From all contingents of police, I know two maybe three who broke down, who went to the Germans right around and showed where the malinas were. They all paid with their life without saying nothing. The Germans cut off ears and noses and pieces. And they throw to hungry dogs in front of them to torture them they should say. Nobody said nothing. They all gave their life. They didn't gave out.

And they stood up. And there were-- Aronstam I think was one, and Leibke. What's his name? He's alive. He's with me in New York. He comes to Lithuanian Jews for meetings, a fellow of mine. I don't remember his name. It will just come to me. Leibke. Oh, God.

He was my age. I knew him from Maccabi and Irvin Aron. He survived too. And we had many discussions in Lithuanian survivors in New York. And I mean we just accept him with us. I stood up for him. I was his [NON-ENGLISH] So why we have to accept him? But only two or three people, the rest of them all perished. They didn't, you know?

And overall, the Altestenrat in Kovno covered himself with pride.

Do you remember Dr. Elkes In this situation of the aktion?

Yes, I remember. I was there. I saw the way he got beat up by the gate. Dr. Elkes came with a list. That was the following day when they took us to the fort, when they keep take us away in groups. A matter of fact, I was standing nearby there and saw the way he was beat up and taken away, and dragged away back to the ghetto.

He came with a list of people. And I don't know who the people were, or from the Altestenrat people, or family people, or other important people, or maybe they were rabbis, and maybe there were some scholarly people. He had a list of people what's important. And he had an [NON-ENGLISH] or whatever is is.

He came. And he thought that he wilt-- that he live enough, that he should let out and make exception, take certain people out. When he was splitting by the gate, and all of a sudden they started to beat him. They beat him to pieces, to the ground, things like this. And then they brought him back to the ghetto.

How the people, the Jewish people relate to Dr. Elkes?

Very warm, before, after, all the time. Dr. Elkes was very respected in ghetto. He was the head, in the ghetto he had a terrible job to do. But they all trusted him that he is doing to the best of his ability. Dr. Elkes was very highly respected.

Did anyone say the Judenrat told us to gather here, and they told us that this a census. And--

I don't know.

And what happened to us? They took us to the Ninth Fort, and they killed us?

In the little ghetto?

I mean after the big-- you said the big--

After the big aktion, in the little ghetto? I tell you the honest truth. Nobody wanted. Nobody talked. Everyone was busy fighting for a room.

What was that fighting? Could you tell us something?

Let's say me and you, you with your family, me and my family, running there's a house. And we're running to get in, to grab it. And now two families are there inside, mine and yours. I holler, I came here first. Go look somewhere else. You say, oh no. I have a right like you, and I came here first than you. And we just fight, and whoever was stronger threw the other one out. We were fighting.

Nobody talked about nothing to my observation. Nobody thought what was going to happen. Nobody thought who is guilty. Nobody thought who told us what. Nobody told us about anything. Nobody talked about the selection. We were like [NON-ENGLISH], like you get numb. You became an animal. All you knew is one thing. If you won't find a decent

room to live in here, you'll have misery. And if you find a better room, you'll be able to live a little bit better in the misery you live in.

Did you have any organization made this night?

No, nothing. There was no organization. No, no. There was no. There were people left hanging in the air fighting for a little corner to find a room. Nobody even had time to think. You think after the dust settles, after it goes up here with time, then you start thinking, talking. There was no private conversation, no talking. It was like trapped mice.

I don't even know what my father thought. I don't know what my brother thought. I was running around with Hirski to look for a place maybe we'll have a place to escape. My thoughts I could tell you, that I was ripped. He convinced me we should go together if I had the opportunity. It doesn't look good. Let's run. And I was ripped up. I loved him. He was a good friend of mine. And another thing, he was a very physical man. He was taller than me. He had shoulders. A matter of fact, he was also training boxing. I figured he was a good soul with whom to run. He'd protect me. We were very good friends.

And I remember it was very humorous because in peace time before the war in his house, we used to play poker. And he was always humorous and joking, and we had fun. He was a fun person to be with. And here I was torn. This is my thoughts. Should I run with him and risk my life? And my brother could not take care of my father is sick. Should I stay, and we're all going to perish? Those are my thoughts.

Because I was active in thinking not to settle here. I don't know what other people think. All I know is my general observation is that people became animals. They was cursing, and screaming, and fighting. And I saw women going in the air, another woman ripping her apart, ripping up clothes from each other, physically, just to fight for a spot in the [NON-ENGLISH] ghetto, to have a better place to stay.

Do you know if your father and your brother got a place?

What?

If your father got a place this night?

Yes.

Your father?

Yes, I had a place with my father. I had a place with my father with another family. They get in, and we got in there. And they told us to get out. I said, listen, we won't fight. We really don't know what it is. Let's war later. We says, we're here. There's room for all of us. We'll sleep on the floor. We'll see. If you won't push us out of here, from my part you're welcome. That was not my words, my father's words. And somehow we settled down.

How old your father was at that time?

Father was-- the [NON-ENGLISH] I'm not sure if it was '43 or '42, but I believe it was in 42. And I was 22. And my father must have been 43. Because my father was 21 or 22, I'm not sure, when I was born. Maybe another two years, I don't know. My father couldn't be more than 44 or 45.

Many of times I think he was 42, 43. I don't know. But my father had an accident by the Russians, two months, three months before the Germans came. Because before the Russians came, he had his own bakery. Was a baker and konditor.

When the Russians came, he worked in a military bakery, baked bread for the Russian army. I don't know, if you know it, if you ever saw it. In order to make the oven hot, there used to be like a flamethrower, like a square box with a flamethrower. And you used to heat up the oven.

In that particular time, he went to light a match to start the flamethrower, and the head-- I don't know what happened, exploded. And he got burned, maybe 60%, 70% of his body. He got burned so severe the doctors from Moscow and from all over came. They couldn't understand with such a percentage of burns how he survived. He was a strong man.

I remember for days and days, day and night, I used to stay with rags, and put him in some kind of a chemical, cover his body, and then rip off the rags, and put out the wet rags. And he had like a big hood over him with lamps and dry skin. But anyway, he survived. And he had a new skin, and purple like a baby. And he was very weak. And when I brought him home, it was two or three weeks before the Germans came.

And when the Germans came when we were running on the road, my father was a weak man. We put him on a bicycle. And me and my father was holding the bicycle, me and my brother pushed him. And that's the way we ran after [NON-ENGLISH]. Day and night, me and my brother and my father, we came back. And since then, we never had the strength. He was always like a-- yeah.

You were together?

What?

You were together, you and your father and your brother in the group, when they take you to the--

Yeah, we went. We were in the last group-- my father, my brother, and me. And Hirski, like I told you, ran from that group. And me and my father and my brother, Nachum, we went directly there.

Do you remember aktion year that was before the aktion [NON-ENGLISH]. That was--

We called it by different names.

Oh.

There was no-- when they're talking about aktion, they're talking about that aktion.

She meant, when they gather you in the end, they didn't took the Jews, took anyone from the ghetto?

I don't understand.

Well, small tickets, white tickets, were given to people.

If I recollect that one time in the ghetto they gave us labor slips. And we wish to fight, we're going to get them. But it really didn't matter. It really didn't mean anything. It was not like-- not like enforced, because they grabbed everybody to work, they brought everything back. And later, and here, you just brought up a point. When the [NON-ENGLISH], there was a lot of people who had before labor slips that they are workers. They're working. It didn't matter.

They had labor slips like a worker in the werkstatt or I work on the flugplatz, it didn't matter a thing, left, right, whatever it took to go left and right. Not in Kovno. Nothing saved you. At one time in the ghetto, I don't know the time. Was it a year before, six months, I don't know? At one time, you had to go to the Altstenrat and prove that you're working in certain places, you got slips that you're valuable laborers. I don't know how exactly it was written there, whatever it is.

And a matter of fact, I never got one. And I was young enough probably to get it, because I think in that time I was in Yanova working as a lumberjack with Michal at that time, in cutting woods for the Germans. When I came back, they used to take us away for two weeks at a time in the woods and bring us on a weekend, and then drive us back.

Because they had to change the guards. The guards used to come and other guards used to go with us. And that's why probably I never had it. But it didn't matter. It didn't save. Didn't mean nothing. Probably one of the gimmicks, again, you know what I mean? That those I need and those I don't need. And the ones who feel safe we need, they'll keep quiet.

The ones-- I don't know. I really don't know.

But really they didn't have no value, not in our ghetto, not as I could recollect. They didn't have value. A matter of fact, I personally was in more danger in the ghetto than other ones after I lost my father and my brother when I was by myself. Because here is again, it was a policy of the Altstenrat, the way I understand.

They used to come. Let's say for instance, it was honest, something's honest, something's not honest. Let's say they need let's say for 24 hours work, or for maybe for a couple of weeks. They have a certain project they need people to work. They come to the Altstenrat. We need 500 or 50 or 100 young people. You've got to deliver. When the Jewish policaj used to run out in the ghetto and grab young people, if you had a family, they said, well, we don't know where he goes. They used to cover up for you. Because the father, the mother, or whatever it is.

Me, there's nobody who could cry and ask for me. Then I was always a special builder, a special Malinin, when I lived with the Nehmut. A matter of fact, some Nehmut lives here in-- I hope is still alive with a Nehmut family with whom I lived in the ghetto, which the whole family perished. But their son, Sherman, went out on the arisch side, survived the war, and he came from Russia now lately. And he lives in Jaffa.

Three years ago when I came to Israel, I find him and I went to see him. His brother and his father got perished in kleine ghetto in the base aktion. Sherman survived.

Now I don't remember now what I was talking about, why I brought him into the conversation. I don't know.

Now back to this after the night, you were in the kleine ghetto, when Dr. Elkes came in, did people come and asked him to liberate them?

People were-- here is what I know. Dr. Elkes came during the day like, around 11:00, 10 o'clock, 12 o'clock. I don't know. It was already a couple of hours when they took out the people from the ghetto to the Ninth Fort.

Already?

They were taking people already. When he came with two German soldiers from the big aktion from the big ghetto to the little ghetto, to the gate, now what happened is there was a bridge. Paneriai gatve was a main thoroughfare. Then the Germans didn't close this up. They made a bridge from the big ghetto to the kleine ghetto. But when they keep taking out from the kleine, they didn't took us to the bridge to the big ghetto. They open up the fence, a gate, to take his right to Paneriai gatve and walk up.

Exactly how he came upon Paneriai gatve, how he got to the ghetto, all I know is it came to the gate. And I observed it. Because that's the time he used to come and look and talk with Hirski. He said we go with the group, not go with the group. They didn't-- the Germans didn't even grab so many people. At the end, they start grabbing when they were not enough people. But people, they said should be taken away, we wouldn't stay. And then people want to get over it. They thought maybe they'll-- I don't know what they thought.

When Elkes came with the list, bargaining with the guy by the gate, you know what I mean? That he has a list and the permission to take out those people. Maybe some German over there help to make a list and say, OK, go get those people. Maybe that German decided he wouldn't give these people. Then he was arguing. And I saw him arguing. I saw him arguing, and then I saw him the way with a club. They start beating him up. They dragged him away from the gate.

And we were looking. You see the reason why I know because people stood closer over it, that it was bargaining for certain people. He has a list. And then later they came, he says, the Altstenrat has a list. He wanted to get some people. Altstenrat had a list. He wanted to get some people. That's how I know.

And you didn't have really any meeting with him?

Not, me. No.



No, people from the ghetto itself? No.

No, the only the-- only I don't know if they even had a chance to talk to him, because all the witnesses were by the gate when he was arguing with that head German who was there by the gate, organizing to take out groups. Only he didn't give him his request. He just send them back. They beat him up and send them back.

Was somebody else on the Alttestenrat with him?

What?

Was somebody else from the Alttestenrat with him?

I don't know. Because all I was concentrating on him and what's happening, the way they beat him up. And I really don't know. Maybe somebody else was. Maybe somebody else wasn't. I don't know. Things happen that you can't-- you yourself are a tortured person, you don't concern every little details, you know?

Now I know that the road from the ghetto till the Ninth Fort, if the 9 is 3 or 4 kilometers. What happened on the way?

In our group, nothing. They just--

Did they force you to go?

No, they had German soldiers and a couple of Lithuanians and they had some dogs. And whoever fell behind, they hit you with a club and push you on, and push you on. And if somebody couldn't walk, they made a couple of strong ones pick him up and drag him. And

Go ahead.

Yes, and what did you want to say?

Nothing.

How many of you were in this group?

I could only estimate.

Yes.

But I can't tell you.

The last stragglers, we were there, we could be there 300, 400, 350. I don't know. But just I don't know. It was the end. They did took big groups all day. They used to take out 400 or 500 people at a time. And every 15, 20 minutes every half hour, they used to take out another group. They didn't took-- I would assume that that would happen. When they took-- they needed in between time to take care of one group, and they bring another group. They couldn't kill 12,000 people. And that's the way I would estimate. That's the way I would think, my brain, that way they'd carry it out.

Because they used take a group, probably they had a certain amount, how big the hole was. I don't know. And I didn't see all the other holes. All I know is when they brought us, it was already at night. It could have been 7:00, 6:00, 8 o'clock. I don't know. It was already dark. When they brought us there, it was like [NON-ENGLISH]. We would say [NON-ENGLISH]. I don't know.

[NON-ENGLISH]

[NON-ENGLISH] but it a little light enough and dark. I saw them come in. They said we got dressed. And I saw them drinking. They were all drunk.

The Lithuanians?

All drunk, everybody. They were all drunk.

Who told you-- who give you the orders, Lithuanians or Germans?

The Germans were supervising, but the Lithuanians are the ones who gave the orders. The Lithuanians who beat us who would talk to us, get undressed, in Lithuanian. Lithuanians.

When you came to the Ninth Fort, did they take you immediately to the grave, or did you--

Straight up to the grave. They put us on there. We got our order, get undressed. Put away the clothes over there. There were no ceremonies, no time, no nothing. You know what I mean?

Did--

A few of them didn't get undressed I noticed so quick. And I heard one of the Lithuanians say, what's the difference one way or another. Let them go. Let's get over it, something like that.

Did they look for values?

They didn't look for nothing. No. They didn't look for nothing, just I don't know later, whether they looked for. They didn't look for nothing.

In the way, did you go with other people?

I believe, I don't know about it. But talking to Michal and Yitzhak, and talking with somebody else which I don't remember his name. They were on the Ninth Fort later. When they were digging out people. The cut off fingers. They took off rings. They took out gold teeth. Before they put them to ashes. That was already maybe a year later. You know what I mean?

And a lot of things happened there already in other-- we say this in other stories. But they didn't bother with it. They just chit chat. We just came. We were tired. Told us to undress and boom.

And the only thing that I can understand is that my luck was that was the last-- we were the last people. When they didn't cover it, they didn't cover us up. But they distinctly said, [NON-ENGLISH] maybe chances are I was not too deep. Maybe there were a few people on me. I don't know. But I heard. And he says, we'll finish it and the other one says, why finish it? It's getting dark. They can't go away from here. We'll find them in the morning. That's the last I heard.

And then later after-- I don't know a period of time, I don't know. When I estimate it's very quiet and things, then I says, how long will I lay on? And I climbed out? That's as far as I could remember that.

On the way to the Fort, you remember people going, talking?

People talked. I talked to my father and my brother. People go and they talk, but you don't concentrate when they talk. Each one has his own. each one is-- we didn't have a discussion what's taking place, no. I don't know if I remember well. But I would estimate-- like my father said it one time. He said, I don't care what will happen to me. I lived my life. Maybe at least one of you will survive. That's something like this. Or [NON-ENGLISH], we'll survive, you know, something. We were just between ourselves like this.

And then at one time, my brother says, Nachum, to me, this I do remember. He says, maybe Hirski is better off because he took off. And all four of us, he was coming, going with me. He took off. We saw him getting killed. My brother said, maybe Hirski is better off. He doesn't have to go through anymore what we going through. We don't even know where or what, something like this.

Between ourselves, it was that kind of a conversation, not much, just sporadic because everybody was broken, beaten, with his own touch. They kept chasing us. We could walk, from dragging hungry, tired, all night not sleep. What could we talk? And here and there, people here and there, I don't know what other people probably talked the same thing, things like this. I didn't know what other people. All I was is in a group with people. But I didn't have no contact with nobody. My contact was only with me and with my brother and my father.

And I couldn't even figure it out it. We were just numb. What I did was just a sporadic impulse. It wasn't a [NON-ENGLISH]. [NON-ENGLISH] nothing. It was just an impulse.

And Hirski is running with an impulse, gambling, that if you break away to the fields, they won't catch them no more. And then we go to the game. Then he gambled and lost, and I gambled. You call this winning? I don't know. Just, it's no more no less than that.

Was it a German that killed him?

No. They were Lithuanians. I don't remember there in that group we were going, I don't remember even being a German. I remember being Germans by the kleine aktion. I remember all the guards mostly were Lithuanians. I remember the Lithuanians screaming and beating up people, going on [NON-ENGLISH]. And I remember when it came to the hole, I saw a German officer giving them orders, talking to them. But most of the work was done by Lithuanians.

But really it doesn't matter. They didn't volunteer. The Germans or them, they were all the same guilty. I don't know. I don't know.

When you came back, you did tell to others that these people and the Alttestenrat?

Well before when I was explaining you, I tried. I didn't go there to tell. I was beat. When I came in, it kills me. But I don't remember the name of that teacher. The teacher in [NON-ENGLISH]. I can't for the life of me. I remember that when I came in, he says, [NON-ENGLISH]. Because was my name, Shmelke. [NON-ENGLISH]

And I remember distinctly when I said [NON-ENGLISH] doctor, or my brother, or my tata. Then he says, amen. And I broke down. And then he direct me. I didn't want to go. I went through the night and the following day, he says, come. [NON-ENGLISH]

When I came there was a [NON-ENGLISH], they themselves probably knew things or whatever it was. We had an [NON-ENGLISH], how do you say? They were an [NON-ENGLISH] or I don't know what. Maybe they got news before me from somebody else. I really don't know. Maybe there was somebody else who survived like me or similar. I don't know.

Because you were so-- you were like in a pressure cooker like you couldn't think. All these, all you felt is your own thing. And when he came to me, [NON-ENGLISH], I came there. And we looked somewhere, still nobody had the time to listen. Nobody listened. Nobody want to listen. As for me, it's concern. Nobody sit down and like, take [INAUDIBLE] say this. Like somebody would say, who needs it? I don't know. This is my feeling.

Because I don't even remember who was one of the people there in the building. He says something like this. [NON-ENGLISH] something like this. And we went away. That's as far as the whole report went, between me and that teacher who lived with me, what was his name? I can't remember.

To people from the youth movement, you didn't tell?

What was the question?

To people, friends from the youth movement?

I'm going to tell you something. Most of them were from the youth movement, the organized ones, most of them were out of the ghetto already. And then later, when after the [NON-ENGLISH] and liquidation, a lot of them were confused. They couldn't help. They were just looking for themselves. A matter of fact, after the [NON-ENGLISH] aktion, before the liquidation of the ghetto, the time they killed [NON-ENGLISH], it's a funny story by itself.

Unfortunate something, here is a story and I don't remember his name, Moishele. He was a young kid, two or three years younger than me. He was my brother's age and my brother's a friend, and he was in the youth movement. He was a scout. They used him. He looked like a [NON-ENGLISH]. They used to use him to go out on the outside to be [NON-ENGLISH] between the communist with the ghetto. He used to be a runner.

I remember distinctly-- I can't remember his name. Because I used to go smuggling with him for food. Part time he was a co-worker, a partner in smuggling, and partly they used him because of his face, of being more daring or younger, doing for them.

He came to me one day. That was before they took me to [NON-ENGLISH]. That's when I had my gun already. I mean I think he helped me get it. I didn't belong to an organized movement. And I don't know if he was belonged, because I think they only used him.

He come to me. [NON-ENGLISH]. What's this? [NON-ENGLISH], I come from the ghetto. [NON-ENGLISH] that everybody, organized, not organized, the ghetto will be liquidated. Whoever could save himself and go should go. And there's a truck prepared to take out as many we could go.

[NON-ENGLISH] I remember his name. Because he was like the leader from the communists, and Chmielke Berman I think was in the same group. I told him this is what [PERSONAL NAME] said. And they told me, close your mouth and don't tell nobody. I was trying to think to me what is it. They were planning like it will be a [NON-ENGLISH]. They won't be able to run. They won't tell nobody. Organize as many as they can and go. But they were only politicians in the ghetto in the movement. But they were never doers, like [NON-ENGLISH], Chmielke Berman, a couple other ones.

They were just big mouths, commanding. And they didn't manage to go. Then I said to him, OK, Moishe, [NON-ENGLISH] and then there was my brother's two French twins, and I don't remember their name. Kill me. I lived not too far from them. One survived by partisans and one got killed, I understand. They were two French twins. I don't remember their name.

They went with me, with Moishele on Dunkelberger. And Dunkelberger was a boxer in Maccabi. He was a middleweight to heavyweight. He was a prominent boxer. He fought in the Lithuanian Baltics, and he also was in the police. And I happen to know that he survived, and I happen to know that I think they arrested them in Italy. I think he killed somebody or robbed somebody after the war. I don't know for sure there. I heard about him.

And we got out of the ghetto. They got out, because of us, a small group. There were two or three other people. I don't remember who they were. But I know Dunkelberger, those twins, and me and Moishe, and I don't remember his name. But he was a little skinny [NON-ENGLISH].

And we got out. And we were hiding in the first raion, where the ghetto used to be in the beginning when they liquidated the first raion, there were empty houses. We got out of the ghetto. And hiding in the first raion in a basement. That means we were not in the arisch side. We were in no man's land. Moishe had to go away to [NON-ENGLISH]. And tell them that we are a small group of people. Nobody else is moving, and tell them what happened that [NON-ENGLISH] tell them to be quiet.

And he had to go tell Chaimele and you should tell us where to go and what to do. We did not know where to go.

Moishe came back, pale and crying. He says, I saw the way they killed Chaimle in the Domino cafeteria. What was the street? [PLACE NAME]. It was a main street where it used to be before the war, I ain't got for you. They call this Domino. The name was going on until the Lithuanians will run it. It was a Jewish place originally.

He had a meeting there with a driver. That driver double crossed him, a Lithuanian driver, the full story exactly how it was, I don't know. Of course, a lot of things I heard later. But this I heard that Moishe she went to Domino to meet with him. He saw the way the Germans were chasing him. And then he came back. And everything went kaput. When we left, here was dangerous. And we figured what to do.

I remember we all, two by two, went to [PLACE NAME]. And there were fishermen's boats. During the night, we were laying in a boat. We turn them upside down, you know, to dry on the shore. We were laying under the boat till this morning, and planning, talking to each other. And then we decided, organized that the way we are together we can't do nothing.

Each one should figure out what he wants to do on his own. Because together, we'll get caught. And then slowly, two by two, the two twins left and went away. Dunkelberger left, and there were another thing, a girl and a boy. I don't remember who they were. They left. And me and Moishe decided we're going to go back in the ghetto. I'm going to find out maybe from the other ones. Then when we came back in the ghetto there was nobody to talk to, because they were all scared mice, even the ones who are supposed to be the leaders. The few of them, and they were all confused they didn't want to talk to you.

We tried. I tried. I remembered to negotiate. He says, listen, everything fell apart. Come on. Don't bother. Anybody does whatever he can. A matter of fact, later in Lager II, Chmielke Berman was with me in Lager II when everything was liquidated. And I remember that I had at that time food, because when I worked in the [NON-ENGLISH], because I knew him, I used to share a little food with him, just because I knew him, and I had an abundance.

I really don't know what happened to him later on. I don't know.

When did you meet Michal?

Huh, Michal, Michal I met in the ghetto. And we became friends. Michal, you knew Michal?

Yes. [NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]