

And one or two other barbers with razors. And I still hear the Dutchman say to me, shave us first so we can get out. And I said, no. I said, if I do that, the others will start screaming. I said, I'm quick enough. I said, I'll take one Dutchman, and one Pole, and a Dutchman again, and another Pole. Let me do it like that. And that's what I did. Because otherwise, there would have been an inquiry. What are you doing there, your people first? So that ended that way.

Why did they want to get out quickly?

Well, they didn't want to stay in the barrack. They wanted to get out. I don't know-- no reason for them to stay in the barrack. But then comes the time, the next day, that we had to march out with the Kommando. That was the Bauhof.

Before you tell me about your work--

Yes.

--could you describe the Auschwitz barrack?

The Auschwitz barrack were barracks built entirely out of bricks.

These were purpose-built as a concentration camp, weren't they?

I dare say they were built-- why they built that one in bricks, I never gave it a thought, Really but luckily enough, they still exist. And otherwise, they would not have been there. Because I doubt whether any wooden barracks in Buchenwald, or in Monowitz, or in Birkenau-- there are no barracks left. They've probably been destroyed or by age being destroyed. But Birkenau exists because of the brick barracks. I mean in Auschwitz, the brick barracks-- barracks, yes.

Yes, Auschwitz.

Auschwitz. Now, in those brick barracks, the lower part of the-- there were three divisions. The upper part was for the prisoners like ourselves.

You mean, they were three stories tall?

Yes. Yes. Downstairs, as I could, at that time, hear, and see, and think, there were important people that were taken prisoners-- probably burgomasters, doctors, lawyers, or somebody who had been, probably, in the government. Then comes in between, where people lived. They were less important. But the upper lot would be-- where I was sleeping, then, that were the Jewish prisoners and some non-Jews.

So who was in the middle then, the second floor?

Also what-- prisoners-- we're all prisoners. We all were prisoners. But some of them didn't go out to work, probably, I--  
[AUDIO OUT]

You were just describing the Auschwitz barracks.

Yes. As we had lice in Birkenau, we had not hundreds, but thousands of fleas trouble. I remember that the blanket were-- under which I was sleeping-- we just had only one blanket and a broken-down mattress-- there were so many fleas that kept us awake.

I remember, when the lights went out, and there was only a blue light, you could see the fleas dancing-- and not jumping away, but just crawling on your blanket, probably through the blue light or something. And I used to catch them and kill them. If you couldn't catch them, they kept you awake by crawling on you and the itch. So fleas was the second thing we had to do-- to deal with.

You said that you and your group were on the third floor in the barracks--

Yeah, yes.

--at Auschwitz. Was the third floor one great hall or divided into rooms?

No, the halls were smaller than in Birkenau. There were smaller halls.

How many people?

Well, let's say 400 or 500, something like that. So whenever you had to do your duty in the night, you had to go one, two, three downstairs. Downstairs, you had beautiful lavatories, porcelain-- the pans, the WC pans. That made me realize, also, that there were more important people sleeping downstairs in the barrack.

And I always had an idea. I didn't-- never wanted to sit on the seat of a WC. It's a habit of mine. I remember that I was doing my duty. And I didn't sit down.

And the man looking after-- the prisoner looking after the lavatories during the night, a big fellow, he pushed me down. And he said, sit down. I didn't want to. He said, sit down. So I sat down for the very first time, I think, contact with the seat. This jumps now and then just in my mind. Anyhow--

Were you afraid of disease?

Well, I always thought, who's been on here before me? Don't know where I got it from, but it's still like that, even at home. Funny, that. It comes into my mind now. And that was it.

Were the lavatories sufficient for the number of people in the building?

No, not sufficient, but you did it. And you got-- you did it quick and out. You couldn't linger. There's no need to linger in there because they soon made you hurry up. So you did it quick. You didn't took your time.

Were your bunks in three tiers again?

Yes, but they were-- either they were single bunks either placed two next to one another or just single. So you slept in each bunk alone, but mostly, with two of you-- head to feet, feet to head. And there was one week there were three in one bunk-- three. That was in Auschwitz. At that time, that was the hospital department of Auschwitz. It's like that.

Yes, this was the hospital in Auschwitz, the barrack. And I had been chosen out because I wasn't well, the doctor said, after making us trip outside after roll call, asking us, are you ill? And are you-- I still was afraid to go into hospitals. I said, no, I'm all right, although I wasn't.

And he said, let's have a look at your tongue, pulled my tongue out. Let's have your hand. He felt my pulse. He said, in, into the hospital. Well, I was glad on one side. I was glad to get in-- meant a rest. And probably, they would tune me up because I had holes in my heels. I didn't feel well at all.

And as I stood there next to a bunk, I heard somebody say, hey, hey, Englishman. I wondered where the voice is coming along. And then I found him. Next to it, in the lower bunk, was a man. And he said, don't you recognize me? I said, who are you?

He said, I'm the barber from Westerbork. And I remember then, he had beautiful blonde, curly hair. He had all shaven off now. And he's laying there in bed. I said, oh, from Westerbork. So this is about two months ago. I says, what's the matter with you then? And how did they treat you in here?

He says, have a look. And he pulled his blanket away. He was laying on his belly. And I saw his back from halfway-- his back right down to the back of his knees was yellow, green, red beaten up.

I said, what's the matter? Did you fall? He says, fall, he says, a kapo hit me this afternoon like that. He said, look. Well, I didn't see him again. He could never get better from that. Anyhow, I got into bed. And I was dealt into-- I had to get into a bed. They saw to my heels by putting bandages on there and resting in bed. There were too many of us, three in a bed, and we couldn't--

In hospital?

--in hospital. And we couldn't sleep. Then came the night. Outside the barrack, the brick barracks, you had steps. And if you walk over those steps, which are stone, with the wooden clogs, wooden shoes, you heard the sound as if war horses were running.

And I remember, I was laying in bed and awake. And say, an hour before that, one of the three had to come out of bed. So we-- I was laying with another one in bed. And the third one was out of bed. And we didn't know where they went to. Probably-- we didn't know. What could we think? And all of a sudden, I heard a non-stop going down those three steps. On and on, it went.

And then I realized, they're going to be killed. They're going to be done away with-- too many of them. And they're weak. And they must have been gassed. While I was then in hospital still in Auschwitz, several incidents happened.

Before you tell me further about the hospital, can you finish telling me about the barracks in Auschwitz? You've described, there were only one or two men and three tiers. How were they heated?

We had the kind of, shall I say, central heating alongside the barracks.

You mean radiators?

Yeah.

Did they work?

Oh, yes, they was warm. There was warmth in the barracks, inside the barracks. Yes.

What about ventilation?

Ventilation-- you had windows. You could open the windows, I suppose. There's a door going open the end of the hall then. The door went into the corridor and the steps. So there's always fresh air coming in and out.

Light?

Light? Yes, there was light that went out in the evening. And only a little light kept burning for in case somebody wants to go out or what.

Electric?

Yes, electric. Yes.

Did you have water?

There was water. Of course, downstairs, you had to-- in the morning, when you had-- there was-- called out of bed to, say, 5 o'clock, quarter to 5:00, half past 4:00, called out of bed, you went downstairs to wash. There was plenty of water and no soap, no towel. You just washed as best as you could.

And then you got back to your bunk, you saw to that your broken down mattress and the blanket you had was so made that if the kapo and the SS could look in between the beds from a distance, there was one even heap. Several incidents come into my mind now in the barracks in Auschwitz.

One or two I can mention is that one morning, say, half an hour before time to get up, I was up already. I went down. And as I passed the table upon which was already laying to be dealt out loaves of bread, or quarters of loaves of bread. And the first piece of bread was a big piece because the ones that cut up the bread just did it anyhow. So you never had a good square of loaf.

And I saw that was number one. So I thought myself, I'll be up in time. I'll have my bed made. And I'll be number one in the queue. And I'll get that for the very first time. I'll get that large piece of bread. So when I came up, I'd washed already downstairs. And I came up and I made my bed. And I was all quiet in order. And I stood number one in the queue.

And then the gong went and everybody got up out of bed, and rushed downstairs, and came up, and stood in the queue. Then the kapo and the-- of my barrack, of my-- of the whole in my barrack said, Leon, Englishman, where are you? I says, I'm here, kapo. He says, did you make your bed? I said, yes. Yes, that's all OK. And I thought it was OK. It was OK.

He said, come here for me. So if I would go away, then number two is in the first queue. And you won't get-- I won't get that piece of bread. Now, he wasn't the kapo of the barrack. He was the chief of the men that shared out the food, what they call the Stubendienst. That's the kitchen department in the barrack-- saw to the food, dealt out the bread, the soup, and all that.

And he came to me. He got a hold of me. He said-- he dragged me to the bed. He said, make your bed. And my bed was all upside down. He had turned my bed upside down. And I was the last one in the queue to get a little piece of bread. Those are the goings-on in the barrack.

Can you compare the kapos at Birkenau and Auschwitz? Did you notice any difference?

No, I didn't notice any difference. If it came to punishment, they could punish you. They were all ex-prisoners, civilian prisoners, that were sent there to be governors of us. They were ex-murderers, fanatics.

A prisoner was imprisoned for committing murder, he got 10 or 12 years, he was set free-- swindlers, all those types of people who they, the SS could use to kill us off-- not to be nice to us, to kill us off. They could do with us how they liked. So they had to see to it that you behaved yourself. If you did behave yourself, you still copped out sometime. They saw to it that you worked to please the SS.

How did you know that they were murderers or swindlers?

I did not know until later on. That always puzzled me. How can a man do this to another man? Later on, I got to know, when we talked among one another. But then when I was a free-- when I was free, then I realized. Because a normal somebody would not have lent himself to have done to us what they did do to us. They had to be abnormal people.

Haven't you got it somewhere? There is an incident that-- yes I was ill then. I was still ill and laying in hospital in Auschwitz when I was queuing up to have my heels bandaged. And the doctor had a look at my arm, which had a big swelling coming up.

At that time, I daresay, my body was in bad condition. And he took my number. And I went back to bed. And I fell asleep. And then I heard my name and my number being called, Dr. Volman, 98288, where are you? Come out.

And I look down, Dr. Volman, as I remember his name, Polish doctor, a kind man, he said, come on, come out. He says, we got you on the list for operation on your arm. Down I came. And they put me on the table. And they cut into that--

what shall I say? It must have been a large kind of carbuncle. I still got the scars.

On your right forearm.

See?

Yes.

And I felt terrible that they were messing about with me because you lay there, they cut you, saw everything was happening, the dirt.

Without anesthetic?

And without anesthetic. According to them, that must have been only a small operation. And then I was led back to my bed. And I fell asleep. But I had another one coming up. And I massaged it away. And instead of staying away, it came up there. But I was afraid to get onto the table again, to be cut into.

And one of the prisoners who was a male nurse, I showed it to him. I said, look, I don't want to go on the table again. He said, oh, I'll see to that. And he took a crochet hook, which ladies used for crocheting, and he opened up the wound, and turned that hook around and got something out. And it only left a mark, as you see. So it was no need for me to go under the table again. That's how afraid I was that they would treat me the wrong way.

You said Dr. Volman was a kind man. What do you mean by that?

He was a prisoner. And I didn't hear a lot about. He was a calm Polish prisoner, but a doctor by trade. And I never heard him shout or what. Then comes the day that-- a picture comes into my mind now. I'm still in hospital and I'm starving. We're all hungry, hungry. And there's a-- in the bunk next to me, there's a young Polish prisoner, Jewish. And we're talking in broken German, again, about soup, and potatoes, and food.

And then from underneath his blanket, he showed me a bucket, which we usually use for soup, filled to the top with jacket potatoes. And right on the top, a very small one, small as my pink, my little finger on my hand, I says, look, I says, give me that small one. And tomorrow when-- or day after tomorrow, when we get the potatoes, I'll give you my potato back.

How had he got them?

He probably had a connection with one of his friends, who probably worked in the kitchen and got that in there. I found that some of the Polish boys, among one another, they could help in that way. Because later on, the Dutchman also gave me extra potatoes out of the kitchen where he was working. No, he said, I'm not going to give you a potato, nothing. And he put it back underneath his blanket.

And I was laying there, and waiting, and didn't know what to do. But my mind was made up. I must try to get that potato. And I waited for hours until he was properly asleep. Because if I was caught stealing, they could do anything with you.

Well, this was a hospital barracks. So I found he was asleep and slowly, my hand came from underneath my blanket, over the rim of the bunk, underneath his blanket, very carefully found the container-- his container with potatoes, and I felt for the little potato on the top. And I took it slowly back again, and put it in my mouth, and swallowed it.

And the next day or the day after, when I got my potatoes, I really gave him back one of the smallest potatoes I had given to me. And he looked at me, he didn't know what it was all about. I didn't tell him. So that's the first time I was a thief. That's how we lived in the camp. Whereas I had shared my food whenever I could, others were greedy and didn't do it.

Well, you were a thief in that incident. However, he, it sounds like, had more than enough potatoes.

Yes, yes.

There must have been instances in which people stole from people who didn't have enough.

Yes. My bread is certain-- more than a dozen times been stolen by just looking around or being called away, and coming back to my bed, and my bread was gone. Oh, yes. Couldn't do nothing about it, couldn't accuse anybody. Or if you caught somebody doing it-- but I never caught somebody doing it. It went so quick. And bread was gold to us.

What sort of bread was it?

Well, a kind of brown color. The Poles had had round-- oval, round bread. But there also were times that it was not oval, but probably straight-cut bread. But the outside was covered, which, I would say, was now the-- what do they call them, the-- you can buy in the shop now. I forget the words. I have it every morning, a spoon I put on my bread.

Bran?

That's right, something like that. The outside of the seeds. I forget the words now. I must be asleep. Anyhow, and-- but it was, I think, sawdust.

Husks?

Something like that, yes. It looked like sawdust-- not a lot of bread.

How did it taste?

Well, we didn't care if it tasted. Tasted all right. We didn't make a meal of the taste of what we ate. And the little bit of margarine we had three or four times a week and one spoon of little spoon of jam once a week, that was-- and, of course, in the beginning, a large piece of sausage, which, in the end, it was no more.

How big would be large?

Well, how big would that be? Five inches?

Yes.

In the beginning, we were surprised-- that was the beginning of Auschwitz-- that went small and smaller until that. And then there was no more. And I'm still in Auschwitz then, comes the day that I'm queuing up for my arm and my heels to be bandaged.

And a doctor came along, a man in a white coat who was a doctor. And he went along the queue. And he stopped at me. And he took my number. And I didn't think more about it. After being bandaged, I went back to my bed and I fell asleep.

And the next morning, I was called up out of my sleep, come out of my bunk. I was given wooden clogs and a coat to put on and follow the man, the doctor, across-- out of the barracks, across the space, into another barrack.

Do you mean you had gone from the hospital back to your ordinary barracks at this point? Or you were still in hospital?

No, I was still in Auschwitz hospital. And he placed me in a chair. And I sat there. And I thought myself-- and this was a laboratory, I should think-- bottles and tubes were hanging about, and glasses. It was a doctor's department, medical department. And I sat in a chair. And there were-- there was another doctor. And they were talking to one another.

And I said, what's going to happen to me? What are you going to do? What am I here for? Oh, they said, we just want to try out a new kind of tool or instrument, nothing much, he said. I said, well, because I'm a British subject, I said. And I think I ought to know what's going on. Anyhow, I waited 20 minutes, half an hour maybe. Then one said to the other, I don't think he's coming. So we'll take him back.

And they told me to get out of the chair, and put my coat on, my clogs, and I was walked back to my bunk. The next morning, the same thing happened. Come out of the bunk and follow them again. And sit in the chair. And we waited a few minutes.

And then the door opened. And in came an SS officer. And he said in German, commence-- [GERMAN]. So the doctors start strapping my hands, my arms, to the chair, and my legs spread out and strapped to the chair.

And the lights went out. A very small light is burning. And they were getting a hold of a tube. Up at the end of the tube was a metal something the size of a ball pen, about three times the size of that, that metal thing.

So it was as thick as a ball pen, about 18 inches long?

Yeah. And while he was doing that, the doctor casually mentioned to the SS officer, this is an Englishman who is in the chair. So the SS turned around, he said to me in English, you're English? I said, yes.

He says-- I said, and I'm here, really, under false pretenses. I says, I'm an Englishman. I don't know what they're doing here with me-- my wife and child. I said, and I hope that you can do something for me that I come out of this camp because there's no need for me to be here.

So he looks at me. And he said, I can't help you with your nationality. He said, you have to go to the political department for that. I'm here to supervise medical questions. And with that, he turned away.

With that, the doctors commenced by putting a tube in the front of my body and a large bottle with liquid-- they said it was water-- was pumped into me, into my bladder. And I let go. He said, don't let go. Hold it. So again, they pumped water into me. And I said, was-- there's nothing wrong with my blood then.

Anyhow, they didn't say nothing more. And they just went on. And the lights went out. And they placed this instrument in front of my body and twisted it around and around. And they pulled it out and adjusted something. And then they put it back again. And they started hurting me. And they took it out again.

And they weren't succeeding, I think, in what they wanted to do. And became to feel very uncomfortable and start aching me. And then they put it back again. And they twisted and turned it.

And then I said, they're hurting me, now in English so that the SS officer could hear it. He wasn't far away, staring out of the window. I thought myself, what can happen? He can give me a good hiding. But I don't want this.

So he said, all right, stop here and take him-- let him go. And he need not come back again. So they took the straps off my arms and my legs, gave me my coat and my clogs, and I was marched outside, and taken to the bunk.

For the next week, whenever I had to answer nature's call, I urinated blood. And all the men next to me-- must have been about 50-60 all next to me, they all underwent the same thing. I dare say it was an experiment. Perhaps it was Mengele. Perhaps it wasn't. I don't know.

Have you seen pictures of Mengele?

Yes. But I don't remember the face of this SS because at that time, I had no idea that they were using prisoners as guinea pigs. I had no idea that there was a man such as Mengele. I didn't know.

This catheter or whatever they were experimenting with, did you and the other victims have any idea of what they might

have been trying to do?

Maybe sterilizing, could be. I still don't know. Probably get never to know what they were trying to do. But it shows you, we were just like sheep. They could do with you what they liked.

Now, I was lucky that this man, this SS officer, could understand English. Perhaps he was a German who had studied medicine in America. I remember a slight American accent on his-- in his talk. He was-- there was no time enough to take him up properly, to take his face and remember his face. I don't.

Well, there were, of course, other doctors as well, with Mengele.

Yes, must have been. Later on, I heard stories about other men. And they had also been used as a guinea pig.

In what way?

Well, stomach-- finding things in stomach, that's one.

Did this only happen to people like you who were in hospital already? Or were people taken from working parties or whatever for experimentation?

Well, I suggest that they take them from anywhere, everywhere. But it's still a puzzle to me why he stopped in the queue and took my number. Was it that I physically seemed to be still OK? Whereas where the weak ones, they probably-- wouldn't matter what they'd done. They wanted probably healthy physically examples. And then they could make them ill or something like that.

While I'm still in Auschwitz hospital is another incident. There was a day that the SS and the kapos brought in a barrel, a large barrel of black olives, which probably came from Crete or the Greek islands. And they start sharing out buckets full of black olives to the prisoners. I've always said, well, it's food, but it's salty. Why they give us this?

Well, most of the prisoners didn't eat them. And the men not far from me, two or three men, they didn't want them. I said, can I have them? And I got them. And with a knife, I got during my-- in my possession, I start cutting the meat off of the-- the flesh off of the olives, throwing the pits away. And in the end, I had a bucket loaded with the flesh of olives. And I start eating them, thinking, olives, olive oil, it's good. It'll keep me longer alive.

Well, it probably made me sick. And there was one incident that I--

How could you have got a knife? Well, it wasn't a right to have a knife. But if you found a large nail on the field where we're working or wherever it was, and you could beat it down one side to a very fine edge, you used it as a knife. And that's what you cut your piece of bread with, your bread in little pieces.

How did you beat it?

With a brick on a brick.

Did a lot of people do that?

Yes. And sometimes, you have to give it up because after all, it was recognized as a knife, as a weapon, which the kapo then got a hold of. And there was an incident that I was in with a Gypsy Kommando. And the Gypsy kapo, one day, emptied all our pockets.

And all the knives that came out-- some had pocket knives-- some of the Gypsy boys got a hold of a pocket knife somehow-- and the nail knives, then, like I had. And they were all confiscated and thrown away in the fields. So you waited until you found a nail again. And you did the same thing. Or the back of your spoon-- if you had a spoon, you could beat that down to a sharp edge and use that as a knife.

Could you-- because the bread, you could eat it two or three times in your mouth. This bread was gone. But if you had a knife, you could cut it into little pieces and make yourself believe it took a long time before you finished it. You see, so a lot of fantasy you always have to keep, all to keep you going, keep you going all the time.

So the olives made you sick?

Made me sick. So I remember--

How sick?

Like this-- I jumped out of bed. And we had two metal containers in a wooden encasement in the barrack. That's where you did your natural duties in. And when it was full, you carried it to the outside lavatories and emptied it in the outside lav. Not all in the barrack, but you had a department where porcelain pan, WC pans were for the doctors and for the prominent people. And then you had to empty it in there, and carry it back again, and so on.

Well, I had to give over. I sickened. And I sickened into one of those buckets. And I went back to bed. And I felt cold and shivery. And I lay there. And my tongue was surveying my mouth. And I found that my false tooth had gone. And I thought myself, gosh, I can't be like that. When the liberators come, I can't talk to the soldiers with a tooth missing in my mouth.

Now, where is it? And I looked under my jacket, which I used as a cushion. I looked in between the blankets. Nowhere, it wasn't there in the mattress. No. So I start thinking, the only thing is it could have been in the bucket. So I climbed down again. It was very quiet. It's a barrack for the sick. So that hall was for the sick barracks.

There was only doctors now and then and the male nurses now and then. And otherwise, they were in a room, chatting with one another. So there was no-- it was quiet. There was no noise about it. So I went to the bucket, and got the bucket out, and took it to the department where all those porcelain lavatories were for the doctors. And I found a kind of something in the corner of that room. And I started emptying the bucket.

You had something to use as a ladle?

Yes, as a ladle. And bit by bit. And then the door-- halfway, I was there. The door opened. And one of the doctors came in and said, what are you doing there? So I told him, my tooth have fallen into it, and I want to get it out. He said, ah, and he closed the door. And he went. He didn't say no more.

And really, at the end of the bucket, I found my tooth. I picked it out, went back to the barrack-- to the hall, to the ward. And on the ward, they had a table. And on this table was a big enamel bucket. And they had a little ticket on it-- disinfection.

So thought myself, I'll put it in there. And I washed my hands in there. And I left it in there. And I was-- nobody were watching me. It was properly clean. I put it in my mouth again. I went to bed to sleep. About two days later, I was just peering out of my bed across the room.

And I could see the bucket of disinfection standing on the table. And I saw one of the prisoners, one of the male nurses getting a hold of it, and bringing it back, and pouring a pail of water in it. It wasn't disinfection at all. It was water. I had fooled myself. I felt so embarrassed. So that's another part of my life, trying to be a gentleman, afraid to talk with a hole in the mouth, and all that.

Where in your mouth is your false tooth? Did you think it would show?

Yes. If I wouldn't have had it-- that one tooth, I had it out by, early in my life, boxing on the street with the boys. That was the first time my tooth was knocked out. And I had a bridge made to it. And I had it-- my tooth.

In front?

Yeah, front tooth, yes.

Were there any other incidents about hospital that you wish to recall?

Yes. I was in sufficient strong again to get out of bed, and to be given a razor, and to shave the prisoners who had been brought in from outside with wounds, especially wounds on the heads or on their backs or arms. And I had to shave them. And I remember one big fellow, a wonderful, big fellow, he was brought in from outside.

And of course, the winters are terrible there. And he had a hole in his back as big as my fist, really. And when he stood straight up-- because I had to shave the hair around him-- he had a hairy chest, hairy back-- he stood up, the dirt just dripped out. I still see it. He had to be operated on or whatever they did to him. Then I had a man I had to shave his-- behind his ear. Half of his head had to be shaved. He had something wrong with the ear.

And for that I had then a little extra soup given to me by the kapo of that department. It was a poor sight to see all those people coming in with big holes in their legs. And I showed them how they were treated with bandages. And the wounds were cleaned and all that.

I don't think many got through. The wounds were too big to heal in time enough to get back to work. So three, four, five weeks in hospital, the SS doctor comes along, finds you there, and you go to the gas chamber. They had no use for you.

Why, in that case, did they bother curing people if they weren't going to be cured?

Yeah, that's always an idea to me in my mind. But, of course, Auschwitz and around Auschwitz, you had camps where things were being built. Now, for instance, Monowitz had the Buna works.

The Buna was-- first of all, was a rubber factory. But there was also a large piece of land upon which dozens and dozens of warehouses were built-- and factories, all built with the blood of our slave laborers, Jewish blood and non-Jewish blood. And they had to have people to work these things.

So if the prisoners were treated-- so if you were too weak to live on, right, away with you. But if there was still a possibility that you were physically fit and they could make you better that you could continue, even for a couple of months or whatever it was-- because the SS was earning money from the people who paid them on behalf of us who were working there.

I heard, say, that you got three marks a day, that 1.50 went into the pockets of the SS and 1.50 was then spent, so-called, on your food and your sleeping in the camps. That's how it was told to me. So if hundreds of prisoners just were done away with, there was a gap. And it didn't bring any money. And the works didn't get underway.

So that's how they tried to weed you out. You worked there until nature made you die. Or if you were still alive and too weak, we will kill you off. That's how it was. And there were plenty of people to come in yet from all the countries occupied. That went on and on. That's why so many millions were killed-- deliberately or by weakness, no food, and hard work.

There must have been occasions at which the SS themselves were taken ill or were injured. Did they go to the same hospital?

No. I've never seen an ill SS in our hospital. They had their own barracks. And they must have had their own hospitals and their own doctors. And they could be sent away outside the camp for treatment. And they were never with us.

The only time we saw SS, we came in to the barracks to count you or to see that everything was all right, otherwise-- or at your work, to see that you were there, that you were working. But I say, if SS was ill, it never come into my mind at all now. We never saw one.

What about kapos, if they were taken ill?

Kapos was treated, of course, in our hospitals. But I never heard of kapos being ill, funny enough. I never heard of ill kapos. Of course, those people had a fairly easy life. What did he have to do? They could-- they got the food. They got probably special food from somewhere. They had clean clothes. They had the enjoyment amongst one another.

All what he had to see to-- that we marched out and that we marched back, and in between, that we did our work. If they became ill, I daresay, they had a way of getting special treatment from prison doctors. And if there was no medicine, probably from the outside came medicine via the SS or whatever it was.

How long were you in Auschwitz hospital?

Six months-- not in hospital.

No, in hospital.

Hospital, say, four or five weeks-- four or five weeks. I remember, one morning, I was still shaving the wounded ones, when I was told, you leave tomorrow. And I had to leave.

Were you better?

No. We were never better. But we had to get on with it. You picked up your life again. And you tried to carry on as good as you can.

How adequate was your continuing care in hospital?

Well, every other day, you came out of your bunk to have your wound dressed. In hospital, you were not ill-treated. The doctors didn't beat you. Or the kapo of the hospital didn't beat you. Although I must remember now, something comes in my mind. I'm still in Auschwitz. And I think I got into a fight in bed with another prisoner. And we let our fists go to one another.

And that created some noise. And the kapo doctor came along. And he inquired what was going on. And I had to come out. And for punishment, I had to sit in front of the bunk with bended knees for a while-- and outstretched hands like that. And then he said, well, get up to bed again.

What did you fight about?

Something or another, probably lying in one another's way or something like that-- irritation.

Five weeks seems a very long time to have been in hospital.

Yes. Yes.

Which suggests that you weren't receiving very adequate care.

Well, if they knew I could shave, so they used me to shave this thing-- to shave the patients there.

So you were useful.

I was useful, yes. They say, that's it. I remember, now, that they gave me a little bit extra bread or extra soup for my work there. And it wasn't every day. It wasn't non-stop all day, no-- whenever they brought in prisoners. And that day, I had to go out. And I didn't get my extra rations. That was Auschwitz. And just now, there were several other incidents in Auschwitz.

When you returned from hospital, did you go back to the same barracks?

To the same barrack? Sometimes, you went then after into another barrack. But what I can remember, went to the same barracks. And you had then one or two days in the barrack to remain before you were sent out with your Kommando to work.

Now, incidents jumps into my mind. I was laying in the under bunk, three high. So the middle one was a Polish prisoner, non-Jew, who had also been in hospital. And he had a bandage around his head. And I'd seen him there several times, several days.

And one morning, I said-- there was my-- I had to work-- get out to work then. And he could stay in there yet. I dare say, he had several more days being ill. And I said, cheerio, see you tonight-like. And because I always tried to be friendly to people. I had no hatred or aggravation. And I was trying to be just normal. So you said to one another, good night, and see you in the morning again. And you became friendly.

So on my work, I was working, then, with the Kommando for erecting barracks. So you-- pieces of barracks, you had to carry from one part to another part and erect them into a barrack. And that was about 12:00, half past 12:00 in there.

And we looked in the distance. We all-- people next-- the man next to me-- we were at work, digging the ground or whatever it was we were doing, we stood up. And we looked in the distance. And we could see, in the distance, a lot of men coming towards us. And on and on it went. There must have been at least 1,000, according to what the kapo let fall out of his mouth while he was standing, watching us and watching them.

And in there, I saw this man who had said cheerio in the morning in there, walking as well. And then a suggestion came to us, they're all going to the gas chambers. They were useless. I never saw that man again. And when I came in, his bunk was empty until somebody else came in again. So every time, I seem to have escaped that road to be done in.

Did you use a euphemism for what was happening to those people? Or did you admit to each other and to yourselves what was happening to them?

At that time, if you-- we knew then that if you were too weak to work, you went in the gas chambers. That's what you mean?

Yes. And you actually said gas chamber, did you?

Gas chambers, yes, [GERMAN], and the [GERMAN], yeah. That's why you try to keep as strong as physically as possible.

Now, I wondered if, even though you knew it, you didn't want to say the word at the time.

Oh, no, we talked to one another about it. Yes.

Now, I'd like to talk about your work at Auschwitz.

Yeah.

Can you start by telling me how they divided or sorted people for work at Auschwitz?

Well, I was then in the Kommando of 1,000 men, the Bauhof Kommando, that went out to build barracks, to build the factories, the warehouses, to dig in the grounds dugouts for laying cables, electric cables, like you see still reels in the town here Siemens. Sometimes, I read the name. They all had to be laid.

But it was very hard work because, if you can imagine, say, 1,000 of our men-- if it was a smaller cable, 500 of our

men-- we had to stand in the dugouts and drag the cable between our legs under the ground, inch by inch, you could say. While the kapos at the top-- not one, but several kapos, took a whistle and whistled. Every time he whistled, you had to pull, had to pull.

Now, imagine that the man in front of you and the man at the back of you didn't feel like pulling. And you had to pull it. And it was more difficult. And if he saw you were struggling, the kapo saw you were struggling, he came over, and he had a right to whip you or to use his-- kick you or something like that.

Was everyone doing this same task? Or were there different things that people were assigned to?

Different things. That was one-- that's the cable Kommando. Then you got a Kommando that unloads the trucks, train, trucks loaded with 100 weights.