

You were just saying, you had always wanted to be in that dysentery hospital.

Yes, because the kapo was a very good man for his prisoners. And this male nurse carried me on his back again to this barrack. And I was laid down in a bunk underneath. And he went. And probably, my feverish thoughts-- I start talking English.

And one of the prisoners called out to the kapo. And the kapo came along. And he started asking me in English questions. And I told him who I was. And he said, well, you're going to stay here for a long, long time. And he made himself so friendly that I said, oh, thank you. But I got a terrible pain in my back.

He said, oh, I'll call my friend a doctor in. And he will examine you. And this was in the evening. Who ever thought that a thing like that could take place? And really, five or 10 minutes later, a doctor who I knew in the camp came in. I had to come out of my bunk, sit on a stool, bend over, and he examined me. And his verdict was-- I just mentioned it.

Pneumonia?

Pneumonia. And I couldn't stay in the barrack. I had to be placed straightaway into another barrack. Well, so I had lost the chance of meeting this man.

Why was that kapo in the dysentery barrack nice to you?

Well, he was pro-Allies and he was pro-English, I daresay. But also-- he was also probably pro-good for the prisoners. Really, then, they meant that if you come in there, you got no beatings, no nothing, and he looks after you until you're better. And then you clear out. Well, you can be better in a week, in a couple of days. So we had a good time.

And I never-- I couldn't remember him now. I-- well, he's a tall fellow. But well, there you are. The chance was gone. So I had pneumonia. I was taken to another barrack. I laid in bed. I became very ill. I was not allowed to drink. I didn't feel like eating.

And after a few days, I had a dream. And in the dream, I didn't see my wife and child anymore. And then I woke up. And opposite me in a bunk was laying a Frenchman. His head was bandaged. And he-- before this day, I had been talking with him. He was a Frenchman who translated French films into English and English into French.

So he could converse with me. And I said, I don't want to live anymore. He said, what's the matter? I said, well, I had a dream. And I didn't see my wife and child. And I think they're gone. They're dead. I said, don't want it anymore. I don't want to live anymore.

And he said, no. He said, suppose they are alive, and they come back, and you're not there. What's going to happen to them? And that brought me to my senses again. And I became a little better. I started to eat again. I never saw this man again. And I was about three or four weeks with this in the barrack.

Were you still, at this point, bandaged up from your thigh operation?

Oh, no, a thigh operation was tragic. There was no linen bandage, there was only paper, crepe paper-- white crepe paper, which they folded around you. Well, of course, the wound was open. And I laid there for about eight days with an open wound not caring. You couldn't care. There was nothing.

How well did the paper bandages work?

No good. The least movement, you tore them to pieces. And it was no good anymore. It was-- where the wound was, it was wet, it was. So I didn't have a long time bandage. And I just laid there with the wounds.

Of course, they didn't care. I've seen others coming in with big wounds being operated on. And you couldn't do nothing

about it. And they just died. But I still had my thoughts with me. I was still fighting. And I got through.

Your reason for being there was to do the heavy labor in building up the Buna works. Why did they bother to cure you if you were ill? Why didn't you go straight to the gas chamber? And they could always get lots more men.

Yes, that puzzled me always. But I probably-- towards that time, they already had plundered the countries with people. And of course, they wanted to make sure that the work was being continued.

And I think, above all, probably God was with me to make the thoughts of the SS and of the doctors, whoever it was, close their eyes, close their thoughts that he is a sick man. He won't be good for work anymore. So kill him off. It's different because I got through. As weak as I was, I still got through. So I was ill, but I probably was probably physically still good to look at. And I think it is luck or something like that.

Did you feel safer in hospital?

I did because you weren't beaten up, you weren't bullied that. You just lay there. And you could converse with your mates. And you could sleep hours and on sleep. The tiredness of your labor all those week, all those years, or whatever it was, you could sleep until you were really woke up happier that you had a good rest.

I remember that this was in Monowitz. I'd been there now several weeks in Monowitz. And the doctor used to call us out one by one every morning, every other day. You left your bunk, you came to him, he examined you, and he sent you back to bed, or he signed a card or paper, and you had to leave hospital next day, something like that.

In my case, it was wintertime. And I dread the thought to get outside to work again. So I was getting better from operation. And I was getting better from the pneumonia.

And I used to play tricks like this. Also, I was taught that by some other prisoner. Every evening, you got your temperature taken. And if the temperature was very high, it meant that you were sick. And the kapo had to know why you were sick and what it was because it could be typhus.

So what this fellow told me he did-- when they came around with a thermometer, he rubbed it up against the blanket, which made the surface go up high. And then when they came around and took it out his mouth and they saw it was high temperature, so stay in bed. You're still ill.

Well, I did the same thing one night and thought, well, that's it then. And the male nurse that was taking the temperatures, he said, hey, you ought to have been dead by now. You've got a terrible high temperature. Come out. So I had to come out.

Said, what's the matter with you? Look, he said. So to my luck, another male nurse came out. And he said, those thermometers are no good because I got one here, and somebody ought to be three times dead, the man speaking.

So he said, well, get into your bed, and I'll bring you another thermometer. And so I got out of it again. But all the same, I stayed there about four or five weeks. And then one morning-- I used to play it up like this.

When it was nearly my turn to come out of bed for the doctor, I used to pull the blankets over my head. And I began to sweat. And by the time he called the number and I came out, I stood before him with sweat on my face. And he used to look at me and feel my head. And this is up in the bed.

So he took it probably-- either he knew I was playing him up, or either he said, well, he's still a sick man. Said, back to your bed. And I did this often. But then came the morning that I did this. And he-- I stood him up.

And he said, today, this afternoon, you're leaving hospital. I said, but I'm still sick, Doctor. He said, shh. The SS doctor might come in, and you're finished then, he says. You've been here already too long. So as weak as I was, I got dressed, and I marched out, and got back to my Kommando.

So this doctor wasn't an SS doctor?

No, it was a prison doctor. If a SS doctor would have come in, it would have--

Yes. That suggests that he perhaps realized what you were doing.

Yes. He was working, working with-- yes.

Now, you felt better. You had a somewhat easier life being in hospital. But you had told me earlier about the advice you had when you were first imprisoned--

Yes.

--first in a camp not to go in hospital.

Yes. Hospital meant little food. You had no chance to organize. And if you lay too long, you get ill, the SS doctor might come in and take your cards. And even three or four weeks, if he has to look at you, in the gas chambers. So that-- it was dangerous on one side and good on the other side. Yeah.

And there's one incident that for one way or another, I developed piles. And a Dutch fellow who lives now in Amsterdam, Joop de Groot-- Jopie de Groot, his name is-- Jopie de Groot, he came back out of camp. He used to sleep next to my bunk. His bunk was next to my bunk. And he-- standing me next on roll call.

And I said, I can't walk. He said, all right. I'll take you to the doctor. So there's a doctor standing at the side, doctors due to see to the people that couldn't march out to work. Because after all, you can't send ill people to the work compartment that the white bosses-- what are you sending me here people who can't work? They're invalids. So they were kept behind and see to be strengthened up in their own way.

So I was taken by this Joop de Groot to the doctor. And he said, this man can't walk. And the doctor says, into the hospital. So I went into hospital. And I was there about four or five days until they cured me from that complaint. I always tell him that when I see him, when I go to Holland. I see him. Yeah.

After you had been in hospital, I believe prisoners were allowed some light work for a while before having to go back to the hard labor.

Yes. That's so if you were lucky enough, they gave you a job for a week or so. And you could sit in the kitchen, peeling potatoes for the SS and cleaning the food for the prisoners. Now, for the SS, every potato had to be absolutely cleaned from the peelings. And for the prisoners, it didn't matter so much. You didn't peel potatoes for the prison. They got potatoes and the peel, jacket potatoes.

But if there was spinach or other kind of food, we used to put them once through water. And spinach is usually a lot of sand in it-- once for the prisoners, once for the bath and under. So there was a difference between the food being made for the SS and for the prisoners.

Well, getting back to sitting there, peeling potatoes, you had any chance and nobody was looking, well, or say, eight or a dozen of our prisoners that weren't coming out-- came out of hospital, they were sitting there. And we used to peel potatoes. And when nobody's looking, we had potatoes.

So you were peeling them after they'd been boiled?

Yes, after being boiled, yes. They were carried in with big containers. And then you picked the potato out and took all the peel off, put them down. When nobody was looking, you ate. And you had a chance that-- being in the kitchen, that you, where possible, got another ration of soup. Well, this particular kapo of the kitchen, he didn't like me. He knew I

was English.

And whenever the Royal Air Force bombed Germany, German towns, it was known then through the radio. He used to call me and say, hey, in German, your Royal Air force bombed that and that town again. And he just slapped my face. I said, well, they did the same to Coventry. But every time, they used to be like that.

But we had another kapo, his name is Sicher, a German Jewish kapo, a kitchen kapo. But he was the under kapo, but a good cook. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been there. He used to prepare the-- help prepare the food for the SS. And he was a very nice fellow-- but a young fellow, about 25-28.

And I remember, one day, in the kitchen, the trucks came in with those iron containers, which had been filled with soup and taken to the fields, shared out amongst the prisoners, and then brought back empty. And then they used to say-- the prisoners come outside, and unload a truck, and take the containers into the kitchen.

Well, I remember, that morning or that afternoon, I went out. And one of the fellows next to me, we both got a hold of a container and carried it to the kitchen and back again a different department of the kitchen, where they had to be cleaned, and unloading the truck like that. And several of us were doing that, when all of a sudden, one of the kapos in the kitchen came to me, got a hold of me, and kicked me between the legs. And I fell to the ground.

He said, you were to carry one of those containers by yourself, not the two of you. And I was crying out for pain. And out came this kapo of mine, this German fellow, nice one. He said, what's the matter?

And the prisoner said, well, he's been kicked by that kapo. And so he said to him, you're not to touch my prisoners, my men. He says, if you do it again, I'm going to make complaint. Because you've got nothing to do with that, with what they are doing. And he was a Jew, Polish Jew, strong man, kitchen work. Yeah. All those things went on.

Wait, the Polish Jew was the one who kicked you?

Yes, yeah. It's like the Polish Jew that beat me up. Being a Jew felt a way-- they had made use of their might.

You said that whilst you were on this kitchen Kommando, one of the kapos used to beat you at the times of the RAF raids.

Yes.

Would this have been the only way you knew about the RAF raids on German towns?

No, there must have been somewhere among the doctors or among the kapos newspapers and news by radio that pieces of news slipped by, and we got to know. For instance, in 1944 sometime, I was working on the fields.

And I got hold of a Schlesischer-- Oberschlesischer Beobachter-- was a Polish newspaper in German. And I read in German that airplanes were dropping tanks and all that above Holland. And I didn't want to believe it. But that was the invasion of Arnhem already.

So bit by bit, you got a bit of news. Sometimes, a doctor left a newspaper on his table in the barrack, and the kapo got a hold of it and read it. And he had his favorites, he used to talk about it. And pieces of whisperings came to our knowledge.

In June 1944, you must have been still on kitchen Kommando when D-Day happened, the invasion of France.

Yes.

How did you get news of that?

Well, I was sitting, peeling potatoes, as it was. And next to me was a Belgian Jewish prisoner. And he said to me, did you hear it, Leon? They have invaded France. The invasion has started. And we'll soon be free.

So I said, well, if you can tell me this in a week from today, I'll believe it. Because many things were said, and it was never true. But it was true at that time. This same man, he was beaten up one day after roll call. And I never saw him again. He went into hospital. I never saw him again. Yeah.

How did rumors, whether they were true or not, affect the morale of you and other prisoners?

Very much. I remember being in Monowitz in hospital-- I wasn't well again. And the backlash of the Ardennes, the Americans were driven back, which meant, oh, god, we got to stay another time, a long time in camp. We don't want to do that.

And I with one Dutchman-- he said, I don't want to believe it. I don't want to live anymore. And I used to say, look, it's a military technical thing they're doing. And I wasn't quite wrong. I didn't know anything about it. But I talked to him. I said, look, the Germans are coming up. But the Americans are going around them. And on the other side, the English, and then they've got them. And they cut them off.

But he didn't want to know it. This man was a Amsterdam man. And I never saw him anymore. Because I left hospital, and a lot of people, you don't see more. But I always kept my-- it hurt. It hurt me when I knew that they were being-- the Americans were being driven back again-- god, another month or another year, another winter. But I don't know. I had always hope to get through, while others just gave up. And the Dutch prisoners were very weak. The Polish prisoners were strong. The Dutch--

You mean physically--

--and the French, yeah. --or mentally?

Mentally as well. They were brought up different. They were brought up nicer way, cultural, and had it good always at home. Whereas the Russian or the Polish, they were tough and hard. That's what I noticed. It's also known that the Dutch died like flies.

You described how you yourself nearly gave up at the time when you had that dream about missing your wife and son.

Yes. Yes. Well, I pulled out together again. And somehow, I got out and I started again. And also, medicine, to me, was mixing with the British prisoners of war which used to work near where I was working. And I used to try to get over to them and talk to them. And probably--

Yes. Tell me a bit about that.

Yeah.

You've been telling me how you knew some of the events that were happening during the war. Were there any changes within the camp these times when the Germans were having difficulty in the war?

No, nothing changed. As a matter of fact, we thought they would change and let us live, but they didn't. On the contrary, they made life more miserable.

Well, that could be a change. You could have changed for the worse or changed for the better.

Yes, well, of course, commands-- the orders were given that we had to die. We're not allowed to get out. Because well, I remember seeing that-- and this was at Buchenwald-- they were shooting up-- through the barracks, they were shooting the people out. And they had to come in to be accounted for, and to be marched away, and killed off, especially Jewish people. And they called out all the Jews who showed themselves.

And what I remember, what I saw, that SS were putting probably sticks of dynamite underneath the barracks. Didn't know what they were doing, but what were they poking about underneath of the barracks, and that they were shooting through the windows as the people came running out.

Of course, that was near the very end. But still at Monowitz, the Germans were having some difficulty because, of course, they were fighting on two fronts. And they had a problem with manpower. Was that reflected in any way in the SS or German officers you saw?

No, I didn't notice then changes with the SS. We knew-- well, where I was working with my Kommando, or in my Kommando, the trains used to come by the trucks, filled with tanks and airplanes. And on and on, it went.

And then the next day or two days later, I saw them coming back from the east, had been in battle with the Russians. They were burned out in pieces and shot-up airplanes. And that used to be medicine to us. And then the following day, again, a new lot going there, all newly-made or newly-painted. So it was going, and coming, and going, and coming.

We still didn't have a lot to do personally with the SS. And of course, the kapos, they must have been thinking, well, I've misbehaved towards the prisoners. What's going to happen when we're free and they recognize us? But it didn't come into our minds. The main thing is we were still keep on-- trying to keep on living in the same old way as before.

This is late in 1944, I should think, at this point.

Yeah.

You saw the trains with the military equipment. Were there still also trains of people?

No, I--

New prisoners?

No, I didn't see trains with people coming in. No, I didn't see them. But what I remember now-- that it must have been around about that time they brought in the Hungarian Jews, well-dressed men, probably the day before, two days before, taken out of the homes. I could see them standing there-- not many, say, 100 or so. And they're all beautifully dressed yet.

And I'm looking at them. And that evening, there was-- for our food was spinach soup. And in that same potato cellar where I used to work there, they were standing there. And there were nine of them looking down at the nine buckets of spinach soup. And they weren't going to eat it. I had finished mine. They weren't going to eat it.

And my mates and myself said, eat it. It's all right. They said, no, we're not going to eat it. So others said, they weren't hungry. So I said, do you mind if I have it? And they said, OK. So I took nine lots of spinach soup, took all the spinach out, and left the liquid with-- I come to think of now as the wrong way of doing it. But I ate a load of spinach all at once.

And what happened to the liquid?

I just threw it away.

Oh, with all the vitamins?

Yes, and that's why I did it wrong. Yeah. The same thing happened with the olives I told you about. But I got a good appetite. When I don't eat, I'm ill.

Did it make you sick to eat all that much spinach?

No, no. It probably send me to the lav the next day. And talking about the lavs, the outside lavs, of course, they're small wooden huts with about a dozen round holes. And you had to sit in there. And then the lot dropped down. And once so often, that had to be emptied by us.

And we had to queue up, I remember, on a Sunday morning, when I did a march out to work. But we were rounded up and come and empty this lot of dirt. And we all had to queue up with buckets, small buckets or big tins from food or something made into a bucket. And then one or two of us stood with a shovel and shoveled it falling. You had to take it elsewhere and put it in the ground, where it could run away. Yes. What haven't I done?

I think you were locked into the lavatory at one point.

Yes, it's coming into my mind now. Yes, they came those-- that morning, in that-- the reason could have been that I was in the-- inside the camp and didn't march out to work because, probably, we had a few days off from being in hospital. So what could we do? Just wander around the camp. When I say we, I say, in my case, about a few dozen-- 30-40 of us.

But wandering around the camp, see if we can organize something. But I wasn't thinking of organizing. And I found myself then way back in a little wooden hut, which had 10 so-called lavatories. They were round holes, with wooden covers. And on the covers were only holes. You could sit on them.

And we just sat there, a couple of-- a few dozen of our men, talking, and thinking, and not knowing what to do. And we were looking forward to 12:00, quarter past 12:00, when we would hear the first gong go. And then usually, it is food dealt out. Your ration of soup is dealt out in the camp. So if you had a chance, you went to your barrack. And you got your ration of soup. And if you were lucky, you rushed to another barrack, and perhaps, you could get another ration.

Now, that morning, we all were sitting there and waiting for the time to pass by. Then came the time that we opened the window. And some of the fellows leaned over, and jumped out, and went to the barracks. Or one by one, but you were not allowed to do that because the kapo had locked you up in the morning, had locked the door. You couldn't get out through the door.

You were locked into the lav?

Yeah.

Why was that?

Well, you're not going out to work. And you're not going to mess about in the camp. He felt like doing that. So I look out of the window and I saw nothing. And then I climbed out. And halfway, I was on the ground, I had to jump back again because, in the distance, I saw this kapo, the camp kapo. So I walked-- jumped back inside and sat down.

And I thought myself, any minute now, you see the face of the kapo coming in front of the window. And we looked down, as if there wasn't many left of us in there. And he looked into it, his head through the window. And he says, where are you all gone to? Where are you? Where? We didn't answer. We did-- we were stupid. So he went away.

And then it was my turn to get out of the window. And I did. And I got to my barrack. And I got my ration of soup. And I wandered around the camp for half an hour. Couldn't get anymore elsewhere. And then I went back to the lavatory and climbed inside, and sat, and waited.

But this kapo had a good memory for faces, as I was told. And he said already in the afternoon, when he saw the lavatories at home was empty that you get him at half past 3:00, 4 o'clock, when there's a roll call inside the camp. And well, everybody in the camp, then, at that time, about half past 3:00, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, special roll call, everybody's got to come outside. So we did as well. And I did.

And by god, he picked some of our fellows who he knew had escaped out of the lavatory. And I was amongst them as well. But I worked myself backwards. And I escaped his hitting out and bullying. Yeah. That was that. Well, the next

day, I just marched out to work again.

I think, one day, you actually missed a roll call-- almost missed a roll call. How did that happen?

Well, the barrack I was sleeping in, I was sharing my bunk with Young Perez. Perez was an Algerian French champion boxer, world flyweight champion, who had fought our Jackie Brown way back before the war. And he became very pally with me. And he spoke a bit of broken English. And I talked to him. And we were very pally.

But he was working in the kitchen, had a good job there as a cook or something. And the SS had a favor for athletic people, like my friend, Lane Saunders, who way back in Auschwitz had become under kapo in one of the barracks because he was known as a first-class boxer, you see. So Young Perez worked in the kitchen.

And he had promised me oh, so often to come to the kitchen and get an extra bucket of soup. But the days went by, evenings went by, and nothing happened. And I was going to be-- I was beginning to be a bit disappointed.

And I remember, one evening, I woke up in the night. And he had his arm-- and he had thick arms, well-developed, muscled arms across my throat. I was nearly choking. And I woke him up in his sleep-- all in fun and friendliness. But then came the Sunday morning. I didn't march out to work. So I stayed in the camp. And I went to the kitchen. And I waited.

And somehow, I got to see him when he came out. And he went in again. And I shouted out, Perez, soup. Oh, yes, he recognized me, of course. And he called me in. And then he brought me almost to the rim filled bucket of a kind of sweet soup-- wasn't a green soup. It was kind of sweet and thick. I had no spoon. And it was boiling hot.

So I stood away in a corner, the bucket to my mouth. And I was sipping it bit by bit, enjoying it-- not much because the door opened. And in came a kapo. And what he said was this-- the roll call isn't right. We all got to wait. And we're standing there. There's one missing. The hell this and the hell that. Oh, dear, dear.

Then he looked around, he caught eye of me. And he looked at me, he said, hey, what are you doing here? You don't belong here. And he got a hold of my soup and kicked me outside. I went through the door. And I looked left and right. And there was silence over the roll call, everybody standing there, waiting, waiting. One is missing. And who's that one? Leon Greenman. My god, I thought, how stupid not to think about the time.

So I waited until the kapo, the camp kapo, his back was towards me. And I run to my position. And I stood. And the fellows behind me inside said, oh, you, Englishmen, you, Leon, you going to become-- oh, you going to get afterwards. I thought myself, well, what could happen? Fate.

Then the SS sergeant was-- every barrack had an SS sergeant who used to account for the amount of people that were in the barrack. And the counting started again. And of course, it was OK. Well, then it was into the barracks. And I went into the barracks. I never heard no more about it. I escaped a good hiding. I escaped bullying.

How many people would there have been that he was counting that he had to make sure that were there?

In my barracks there, 1,000-1,200. But over the whole thing was 10,000 of us, the whole camp-- 10,000 of us.

But on that incident, 1,000-1,200 people. So it would be difficult to make sure if you had the right number anyway. Well, he looks five, and five, and five, and five, and five. And your own kapo's got to see to it you stand in five. And you stand quiet and looking straight forward. You're not even looking around, still like a statue. So he can see it. And he counts. And was only four there. Where's the other man? And the kapo might cop out by the SS.

But then I've seen it that one or two were missing. Oh, and the uproar-- you stand there for hours until they do find him. If they don't find him, you stand for hours before you go in and have your meal, if you call it a meal. But that moment, I escaped it. Yeah.



Some people actually tried to escape, didn't they?

Yes, if you were lucky enough to escape. But how could you do it?

Well, exactly. I don't know if they would be very lucky.

Yeah, well, they-- some of them-- as the saying goes, some of them did escape. I didn't know the people who escaped. It's like this, as they say, as I have heard, you could escape by hiding yourself in the camp. There must have been an occasion that two men hid themselves in a load of wooden planks on the field. They prepared it days beforehand. And they got underneath there. And nobody could find them, even the dogs couldn't find them. They searched for days. And then they gave up.

But look, here, how are you going to escape? There was a occasion that British prisoner of war offered me to come along with them and march out of the camp. And they would see to it that they would get me further. How could I do that? First of all, you got very short-clipped hair. Secondly, you don't look this thing anymore in your face. And you don't walk no more as you used to. You are frightened. Suddenly, you can't talk the Polish language.

So you get into the village, you knock at the doors, and you can't make yourself understandable. And the people had been told, anybody in a striped uniform, they're criminals, they're murderers. So don't lead them into your home.

So how can you escape? If you knew the Polish language and you had other clothes for the moment, if you could get a hold of them, and probably make your way away, OK. But then it was still a long way to get out of it. I never thought of it. I only thought, keep going. Health-- try to keep your health and strength and get out the right way.

I didn't want to die by the gun. And I didn't want to die by being hung. But I pitied those who did, were found, and they were marched back. And I remember marching in of an evening. And then there's a little trolley. And on the trolley is a man. And on-- around his neck is a board, I'm again here-- [GERMAN]. And they-- he had tried to run away. Then he got caught. And he was hung, you see. And that's another way of fighting for your life. But you lose your life that way. So in my mind--

When he was there with the board around his neck, was that while he was still alive?

Yes. They caught him.

And then he was hanged later?

Yes. And then everybody had to read it, you see, going by again there. And then the SS, they stand there, they're laughing, and they call out, come on, call out. And he says, [GERMAN]. And again, back-- I'm back again. I'm back again. And then they hang him.

When people tried to escape, I think they held these hangings in public, did they not?

Only we were the public.

Yes, before all the prisoners.

The prisoners, yes. We all had to come out. We all were accounted for after work or on a Sunday. Everything is in order, everybody's there, right, bring up the prisoners.

So they bring out those that are going to be hung, two or three. Only once, I saw 12. But several occasions, one or two. And then it is quiet. They bring the man up or who it was. And they get the loose-- noose around his neck. And they're done away with.

And then you're thinking so well, thank god I'm not the one. But you take pity with the man. But you can't do nothing.

You can't. Only the hate gets bigger. And yeah, you can't do nothing. The machine guns are aimed at you. They could kill 1,000. It makes no difference. So you wouldn't do it again.

And the last boy I saw hung was in September '44. I think it was '44, September, sometime in September, a young Frenchman. And to look at his face, he didn't even know what was going to happen or what he was there for. But they hung him.

Probably, he sabotaged at work or tried to run away. I don't know. That was the last one I saw. And if I think back at the two men that were standing there, ready to-- with the noose around the necks, and they called out, let us live. We will work. We will work. Let us live. No, no, no pity. And they were hung. Yeah.

Who actually did the hanging?

The kapo of the camp.

So it was the prisoners--

The prisoners.

--who did it.

Oh, yes. And the SS looked at it. Oh, yes. You never saw an SS get a hold of a loop, noose, or something. They had the camp commander. He had to do it. And he did it. And if he didn't die quickly, he pulled your body so the noose went tight around you. Yeah. Yes. And you got used to those things. And you saw yourself saying, the lord, it's not me, and one thing, another.

I presume they held these hangings where you would all see them as a deterrent--

Yes.

--to keep you in line.

Yes. Yes. Look about those 12 men I saw hung when the SS--

Would you say it was an effective deterrent?

Yes, well--

Because people still kept doing things wrong.

All right. If you have got nothing to lose and your brains are like that, you've got nothing to lose, then you say, well, I'm going to try it. But I got the picture already from beginning to end. I can't make myself understandable. I don't look the right thing.

When I said to the British prisoner of war, how can I march out with you? There is no uniform-- khaki uniform to fit me. I don't look the thing. They would pick me out straight away. And they'd kill me. They'd shoot me. They'd hang me. So I never saw the sense in doing it. But if you were courageous enough to do it, then you do it. And you take that chance. Does it happen? OK. If it doesn't, well, you're finished. You won't come back.

No.

I never felt as courageous as that.

Though some of the prisoners, of course, were Polish. And they, therefore-- could they escape, they at least would be

able to speak, which you wouldn't.

Yeah, they could say then-- if I would be-- if I'd be in England, I'd say, open the door, please. I'm a prisoner here. I'm not a criminal. Help me to escape. Then the woman or the man would say, come in, and I'll help you. But you can't-- I couldn't do that there. No. Of course, the people there in the towns and in the villages, they must have been also afraid for the SS. Of course.

To what extent did you ever see the local inhabitants of the towns and villages?

During my apprenticeship, being imprisoned, I seldom saw civilians, but standing, watching, or standing on roll call, and yes or no watching a hanging taking place that behind the barrack, where the gallows stood, they made their own gallows. I could see them behind the barrack, say, about 20 or 30 yards away from where I stood, behind the barbed wire, whatever it was. I could see somebody riding a bicycle going by-- free, one of those men out of the village.

If you could see him, he could see you. So they must have known what was there.

Yeah, but I never saw him-- saw the man, as I see it now, look around and know. Probably on the other side were SS guards, maybe. And you go through. And you don't look this way, maybe.

Even a bird outside on the other side of the barbed wire-- I used to sit down sometimes near the barbed wire, eating my piece of bread. And I couldn't spare a crumb of bread to give to this sparrow on the other side. And I said to myself, you're free. You can fly. You can pick up something else. But I can't spare a piece, not a crumb of my bread. That's how it was. Life is beautiful. But you've got to fight for it.

Did birds fly into the camp?

Yes, but not often. They must have flown in between this-- the barbed wire, into it. But what was it for them? And I don't remember it, of course. Most of the time, we were out of the camp. And in the camp, it was in the evenings. And you never took notice of that, only that morning, I just-- this come into my mind.

I think you told me previously that, as time went on-- this, I guess, would be end of 1944 or so-- some of the SS guards were replaced by rather older men.

Yes. This was in Monowitz. Say, a week or so before we left Monowitz, we were still marching out to work. And god knows what we had to work. We were digging big, square holes in the ground, almost as square as this room here. What they were for, I don't know, maybe that oncoming tanks had to fall into it or something.

And I remember, I was with my shovel, I was busy. It was cold, January. And I took a rest. Sometimes, things, they were-- let's rest a minute, it's so quiet around here. And I was by myself. So there was no one up on top watching. That's what I thought.

Usually, we have one of our men there, making out as if he's working and looking around. And then those had below or wherever they were in the dugouts, they took a rest until he saw an SS or a carpenter, said, work. And then we start working until the kapo and SS come along, and they look. Then he walked on. And he said, all right, rest. That's how we played.

Well, in this morning, I was staying there. And I took a rest and wondering, thinking, I dare say, well, what's going to take place? The Russians were coming and all that. And I looked up. And I saw the Wellingtons. And my eyes went eye to the Wellingtons.

And there was a man there, I think about 60 or more old, not large and not small, in uniform. I think the uniform was much too quick-- too big for him. And he said, [GERMAN]-- rest. Oh, that's funny, SS telling me to leave it. So he started talking to me about something. His sons had been in the war or are in the war and don't know where. Then he took his pipe out of his pocket. And he says, [GERMAN].

Come to think of it now, very, very slippery, he was thinking. He expected us to have tobacco. Well, as it happened, I had found, say, a third of a cigarette somewhere on the ground sometime. And I had it in the back of my pocket. And that was a little bit of tobacco.

And I don't know, it come-- probably, I felt pity for the man or what. And it only took not even five minutes or something like that. And I got no tobacco to smoke. And he's showing his pipe. I could have said, well, I got none, bugger off or something. I wouldn't say it.

And I went, had-- my hand went to back my pocket, and got this bit of cigarette out. I says, yeah. And just by chance, I could reach up to him. It was very deep. Oh, danke, thank you. That incident, I remember. So he was there to guard us and me. And that's what happened. Sometimes, the better of your nature gets above you.

Is it not odd that he would think you would have tobacco?

Yeah. You see, the prisoners got-- now and then, they got coupons to go to the canteen and exchange them for 20 or 10 or 20 canteen cigarettes. They were rubbish. But I didn't smoke, in any case. But for that, you could get a little bit of food in the camp.

Oh, well, then he had reason then. You might have had some.

So he must have thought, probably-- and it also could be that he was transferred from somewhere where people were still coming in with tobacco or whatever it was.

But why wouldn't he have tobacco? Wouldn't the SS have their own?

Yeah, before we run out. And that-- probably at that time, those weeks or so, there was nothing coming in. Could be, could be.

Well, I would think, actually, the SS ought to have been in quite a state at that point, in January 1945.

Yeah, of course.

Because I think you could actually hear the Russian guns.

Yes, I heard the Russian guns for a long time. And whenever you saw the burned out and damaged material coming back into Germany from the Russian front, it was good to us. But the next day or two, when fresh stuff went going out, I would say, oh, that's bad. They're still fighting back, you see.

How did you know that you were hearing the Russian guns?

Oh, you could hear them.

Yes, but how did you know they were Russian?

Well, see, the Russian front. And we said to one another, that's the Russians. Who else could it be? And whispers went on that Russians were fighting back. Somebody must have got hold of a paper and put the news out.

You said, you had looked up and seen Wellingtons.

Yeah.

What were they doing?

No, not Wellington bombers.

Oh, Wellington boots.

Boots.

I see.

Sorry, no, I never saw or heard airplanes that called to bomb the camp. But I didn't see no mess of airplanes. No, Wellington boots, yes.

Now, it was early in January 1945--

Yes.

--when, I think, you were told to prepare to leave.

Yes. It must have been about 15, 16 of January, 1945.

Yes, I think, actually, it was even a bit earlier than that--

It could be.

--that Buna was evacuated.

Yes.

But in any case, how were you told?

Well, first of all, for weeks, they were going on, already, that all the Jews had to-- no, that wasn't-- it was Buchenwald. No, we had an order given that we should not-- we're not marching out to work anymore. That is January, still in Monowitz, yeah.

Yes.

And '44 in January.

'45.

'45. And so we stayed in the barracks. And we were told to get ready for a journey, a march. So in my case, we laid there on the beds. I got my feet-- I covered my feet with some-- two sleeves of a coat I found in the barrack. I pulled the lining out, and put them around my feet, and put my boots on.

And I laid there on the bunk, all of us did. And we were wondering what was going to happen next. Well, we laid there all day and the day after that. And I think it was the third day when the march came outside, everybody outside. And we rushed outside. It was snowing. And there was a lot of snow on the floor.

And there was a wave of triumph amongst us. We're going. They're losing. We're going. Hopefully, we're going the right way. And we marched off into Auschwitz camp, where I'd been formerly, with-- kept the arms locked into one another. And we arrived in Auschwitz. And we saw thousands of others the same as we are.

How did that feel to come back to Auschwitz?

Lovely, because it-- we was on the way back.

Well, but you might have been on the way to the gas chamber.

Could be, but somehow, we didn't feel that. We didn't feel because-- well, I didn't realize, then, that a gas chamber had-- that they could do away with thousands of people in one day. We didn't know that then. Now, it's known, they could put 1,000 and kill them several times a day. But we didn't know that then. And we were dressed and all that.

So we were to march. And we marched. And we came into Auschwitz. And I met there seven columns-- several columns, also my old friend, Lane Saunders, he was there. I talked to him a few words. We'd see one another in Rotterdam. And then we stood there not long. And then, I think the same day, we marched on to Gleiwitz. Now, that was a terrible journey.

Did you have any extra food or other supplies for this march?

No. No, not leaving Monowitz. I don't think we had any extra food. We had our rations, and that was it. And we marched on to Alt Gleiwitz. And that was the unexpected thing of natural murder and murder by the SS. Because the journey was such a terrible thing. And what follows--