

You were marching from Monowitz by way of Auschwitz. Leaving Monowitz, there were, say, 10,000?

10,000 of the whole camp, yes, 10,000 of us. And then you must have been joined by an equally, if not larger number at Auschwitz.

At Auschwitz, yes. Well, they all had their own way, I dare say, going. I only remember seeing a lot of our fellows and a lot of columns. And I dare say, the SS who had us in hand marched one way and another way.

But we arrived at Gleiwitz after, I think-- Gleiwitz from Auschwitz is a long, long walk on the map. If I'm right-- I might be wrong-- about 90 miles. And we walked all day in the snow, walk, walk, walk, chased along. Those that couldn't, they dropped out, they were shot or they stayed behind.

I remember seeing one running away from my column. And the beautiful white snow showed him up. And the SS took his aim, easy and calmly, went down on one knee, put a gun in his shoulder, shot the fellow. Well, you're not coming home. Another one, I remember-- one dropped out. He pushed him to the ground, took off his boots-- probably had a pair of good boots, I'm assuming. And that went on.

The SS themselves were actually fleeing--

Yes.

--retreating from the Russians as well, weren't they?

Yes. And taking us with them.

So what sort of mental state were the SS in at this point?

A mental state at the-- that if they had done wrong all that time, that therefore, it somehow afraid. And also, I daresay, in the back of the mind, god, our big German country has lost. So the whole lot collapses. They must have had that in the mind. Maybe some of them thought, well, thank god, it's over. But defeat is defeat. It must hurt somehow.

It would have slowed the SS down to take you lot, you 10,000.

But it didn't. It didn't, you see. We had to go on. And those that were still dying, that was all right, according to the Hitler program or whatever it was. The whole idea was that none of us had to remain alive.

And give evidence to the Russians.

Also that. The Russians just the same found things, must have found things. Because when we marched away, the ill ones were still in the hospital. I thought the SS were going to kill them. They had no time to do that. The Russians found them. But I was away, two days away already, from Monowitz. So I didn't see the Russians. But the march to Gleiwitz-- on and on. And my feet begin-- began to give away.

Did you pass Polish civilians on the way?

No.

Because they may well also have been retreating from the Russians.

Could be. Could be. But as I go on with my picture, walk, walk-- I couldn't walk anymore. My-- I couldn't lift my legs. My thighs were aching. And I was locked in with two men on each side. And we were chased along, chased along, walk, walk, walk, march.

And I nearly fell to the ground. And the Frenchman next to me, he says, come on, Leon, come on, Englishman. Hurry up, keep up, keep up. We'll soon be there. And once or twice, I couldn't. But an SS guard came along, I looked-- I made out as everything was OK. And when he went, I slowed up a bit.

But if I slowed up, the bands behind me slowed up and got onto my needle-- in my heels, and so on. And the gap began. And they coming. And then the SS would come along and they go, what's the holdup? And then you were finished. I had luck again. I came to my senses and I got on.

And then we stopped somewhere in a factory where they used to bake bricks. And we were inside for a rest. And we were glad to rest. We got our rest. We climbed up as best as we could and laid down. We were hungry and thirsty, but there was nothing.

We didn't care. We want-- we were dead, dead tired. And we were out of the cold, and out of the rain, out of the snow, and all that. And then we lay there and fell asleep. And then all of a sudden, we were woken up, one another awakened, one and up. Come on, outside again, and march, march.

And then I remember, in the early morning, maybe 2:00 the morning, we passed the first village in Poland. And the little village is called Nikolai because I saw on a pole, the signpost, Nikolai. I'd like to find it on the map. I want-- only once, I've found it on the map, Nikolai.

And we stopped there for a few seconds, halt. And then we had to march into the village. And the first thing I saw was this-- a shoe, a little shoe shop of Bata. And it did so well to me, and foreman said, oh, lovely, the word Bata shoes, I've heard before. Ah, and we're going home. And then I remember seeing an old lady coming to the door and some of our fellows running out of our queue and getting either something to drink or something to eat until the SS come along and chased them away.

And then went on and on. And I see small wagons with horses, ponies with SS on it, running, riding away quickly. And I know they were all running away from the Russians. And then we arrived at Gleiwitz in the evening.

Now, that was a massacre then. Gleiwitz was a camp for about 1,400 prisoners, as I was told. Well, remember, we had a mess of people with us. And we all tried to get into the barracks. It was cold, freezing cold. And the strong ones, of course, got inside. And those that couldn't fight themselves a way in, they were hit back. And there were fighting going on.

And I stood there. And I nearly got in. And then I couldn't. And I walked away. I didn't feel up to it to be taken under their feet and watching this. I didn't feel like it. So I walked away. I thought myself, let's wait till later on.

And I saw something, a pieces of wood laying. And I sat down on that. I pulled a blanket around me. And I closed my eyes. I was dead, dead tired. I wanted to sleep. And I sat there. And it was icy cold. And then it went quiet.

And I nearly fell asleep. And I thought myself-- my thoughts took me back to right in beginning, Birkenau, where one of our Dutchmen froze to death. And I came to him-- I came to again. Oh, if I sit here, I'll be dead tomorrow morning. I don't want to do that. I promised my father, I'd come back. So I had to come back.

So I got up. And I walked over as best as I could. I was stiff from the cold. I walked to the barrack and look inside. And they were all snoring away, dead tired. They were four or five on top of one another, like a load is-- I don't know what, full of people-- men.

And I climbed through the window. And I let myself drop onto them. There was no hitting. We were too tired. We were asleep. And I got my sleep. Then the next morning, I woke up, and we all got out in the barracks who wanted to get out-- had to get out of the barracks or what and ever, had a wash. There was still too many people for this little camp.

And then the call went out. Those that couldn't walk can remain in the camp. Oh, that was good. No more walking, no more marching, the possibility stay alive. The Russians are coming. That's what I thought and others thought.

So I said to the doctor-- you had to present yourself first to the doctor. And he had seen me several times in Monowitz. And he said, are you going to stay here? It's your own responsibility. I said, I can't walk, and I'll be shot. He says, you stay here, it's for your own spot. Only I think you ought to go.

Well, I didn't want to. So he sent me to a barrack where all the wounded once went-- sore hands, sore heads, and I-- my legs. And more and more were coming in there. And in that barrack, I found an old mate of mine from the street where I used to live-- Judah Felomon. He was a street photographer in his way of making a living. And he's standing there near a fire, the stove, on which he was toasting some pieces of bread.

I had to talk to him. And his hair was tied up, bandaged. He was wounded one way or another. And I asked him, what's going to happen to us? And what do you think? Are they going to kill us off or what? Anyhow, we had a little talk about it. And then I walked away.

And within matter of half a minute, there was a lot of shouting going on. I looked around. And they had pinched his piece of bread from being toasted. That's how life was.

Now, I had found in Gleiwitz in the SS barracks-- or in one of the barracks-- a beautiful silver spoon, beautifully engraved. I put it in my pocket. And I found a razor and a shaving brush. I thought myself, well, that can be used if I got to shave people. And I earn a bit of food with it. So my mind was still very much in the camp. For me, they were tools to earn food.

Then all of a sudden, a man jumped on me and got a hold of my throat. And he was going to choke me. I don't know-- didn't know what it was all about. And we start fighting. At last, he let loose. And one of the fellows who-- one of the prisoners who separated us, they start talking.

And then it was a Greek prisoner who thought I'd stolen his piece of margarine. I hadn't seen margarine for weeks. And I thought he was trying to get a hold of the spoon out of my pocket, the silver spoon, somehow. I probably had shown it to someone. So all that went by. I was saved again.

And I was wandering there in the barrack all day. And all of a sudden, the window opened. And a SS officer was there with a leg of a chair, dare I say. And he banged it on the window shelf. He said, shh, shh, silence. So we all went quiet. There's several hundred of us in there.

He said, all non-Jewish Germans, come outside. So several of us went out, non-Jewish. All non-Jewish French, non-Jewish Dutch, non-Jewish so-and-so. And only Jews remained then. And then he-- I said, well, what about me? I'm English. He said, oh, you been a-- you're a Jew? [GERMAN]. I says, yes. And he closed the window.

Then I start thinking, that's funny, only Jews in this barrack. The others, he let them go. What is he going to do to us? So I made up my mind to get out of that barrack. And I went through the door. And there was a SS guard with a gun. He pointed a gun to me. So I pushed back. Then I tried the other door, the same thing. I said, no, that's no good what they going to do with us. I want to get out.

So somehow, I got out through the other door. And the gates, the barbed wire gates around the barrack was locked. And there was a SS guard outside. And in addition, I could see some of our men of our barrack who I used to work with-- and amongst them, the kapo who used to live in our barrack.

And he was a decent man. I used to shave him, and he was quite all right. He was a German, but he was a decent man. Because he was a prisoner. And he wasn't a kapo in our barrack, but he was a kapo by some work outside. But he knew me. I knew him.

And I called out to him. First, I called out some other people there. But they didn't take notice. Then I called-- I saw him, I called his name. Carl, Carl. And after a while, he looked around. And I must have made a lot of noise. And then he came.

And I said, I want to get out. So he says to the SS guard, what's this man doing in here? He's a good worker. He's got to come out. So the SS guard said, he can't walk. So I said, I can walk. I can. And I walked and jumped up.

And my luck again, he undid the chain. And I was out. As I was out, I was face to face with another Rotterdam friend of mine, who I knew-- I used to work with. I didn't see him after that. I said, we see one another in Rotterdam. He didn't come back.

Well, so once again, I was free. And then we stood on the platform in Gleiwitz, waiting for, as I said, a load of trucks would come along-- trains. And we waited all day. And the SS were giving big pieces of sausages and big half-- big rations of bread. And we get-- got only a little piece of sausage and a little piece of bread.

So I said, well, probably, they're going a long journey. They got to do a lot with that. It takes long to finish all that. And we were cold. And it was freezing. And we were rubbing one another's back. And we were standing on the platform our feet. And we didn't know what going to happen next. And the SS guard didn't know neither, standing just amongst us. And then towards getting dark, a load of trucks come along.

You mean a train.

Trains, yes, open trucks, cattle trucks. And the commander is giving, everybody in the trucks. Well, the strong ones, they climbed up. They were inside the trucks. And those that couldn't, they had to do it slowly. And I was one I couldn't do it quick. So here and there, the butt of the gun in your back until you were all in there. And they were all in there.

The platform was empty. Thousands of us were in those trucks. Now, slowly, the train start to move away. Now, you can imagine, we all stand atop one another. So the strong ones said, we'll organize this. We'll make it right. They said, let's all sit down and spread your legs. So we all spread our legs. And the next one also got in between the legs. And the next one got in between his legs and so on.

Well, you can't sit like that. We couldn't. We can't do that. And it was a load of people standing up. So we got up again. And we stood there again. Then we tried standing next to one another or sitting next to one another. They didn't. They said, well, do as you like. So we dropped three, four, five atop one another. In our truck, there was-- it must have been about 140, 145 people as they counted.

Well, so I sat between two Dutchmen-- a friend of mine from Monowitz, Byron Dienstag. He was shorter, a little shorter than me, but well-set and strong. And the other Amsterdam man on the other side, I don't remember his name. Of course, I didn't know him so very well. And I was sitting there.

And I was ill. I wasn't good at all. I knew I had a temperature. And I was beginning to talk of anything. But one of the things I remember I said to my friend on my left, I said, Byron, when you get home, go to my father's address. And I gave him the address. I said it.

And like today, if I die tomorrow, I said, I'm alive today, tell him that I was still alive that and that day. Because I promised I'd come back. In any case, he'll know, then, that I did get out of the camps and that I still lived at that day. He said, yes, that's all right. And I must have repeated that often in my temperature view. And he said, yes, I'll do that for you. I'll do that for you.

So we sat there, days went on, was snowing, cold. The train stopped, the train went, train stopped, train went. And then if I remember, it was the morning that all in turn had to get out and get some snow in a metal container so that we got-- everybody got some snow to eat. There was nothing to eat.

So it was my turn to get down. I could hardly because my legs weren't listening to me again. But anyhow, I didn't want to say no. I went out. I was bending down and shoveling with my spoon snow into the container, was nearly full, when I saw the Wellington boots next to me. And I looked up, SS officer.

Bum, what are you doing here, you pig? Swine, shit bag. So I look up, I said, well, I've got to eat that. There's nothing to eat. Give us something to eat. He said, what eat? Get up. So he pulled me up. He said, help carrying your comrades. And I looked around. There's a row of our prisoners carrying things. I didn't exactly see what they were carrying.

He went away. And I quickly climbed up the truck. And I handed over the bucket with snow. And with that, he must have seen me. And he pulled me down again. He said, I told you to help carrying you. So I feel, I better do it now.

So they come along. And I got a hold of-- they were carrying bodies. I had also to carry a body. And two or three men carrying bodies-- they were blue, yellow, green, dirty, dead, frozen men with beards, unshaven. Our fellows had been-- died in the trucks-- not a few, a lot of them. And then we had to carry them to the last wagon.

Now, the last truck was a oval one, big one. And in there were all the bodies, piled up nicely on top of one another. I never saw so many heads and feet. So I did this a couple of times. Everyone to himself was bloody murder.

Then I looked around and I didn't see the SS guard. I thought myself, that's enough for me. And I walked down the other truck. And by chance, I found my truck. And I climbed in and I came back. I sat myself down and said, I'm going to tell you something what's happening outside. I says, that, and that, and that. Well, we couldn't take no notice. You couldn't do nothing about it.

Did they save your snow for you?

No. I got in and I said, well, where's my snow? Ridiculous, really, because snow melts. And there is none. So it was snowing. And on the blankets, snow was falling down. I said, give me a few spoons of snow. Keep off it. Snow. I said, it will go. I was stealing. So I didn't get no snow.

Why did they bother to take the dead prisoners with them?

Proof for the Russians. And probably, I don't know how they did it, they were taking them back probably. There's things I still don't understand why they did it until we get some high official or SS man who could tell you why we did it because of that. I don't know why they did it.

But I think too-- they couldn't leave the bodies lying there on the ground, many of us, hundreds of us. They couldn't. So they took them along. Well, then came, in the same journey, which took five days, one night, I woke up. And I couldn't take my feet-- my one foot was under the arms of one of the fellows.

And this was a Rotterdam man who I knew in Rotterdam, a friend of my father's, lived in the same street of mine-- Jaap Teibaum and his son, Jopie. See, because some of the Dutchmen still stuck together. And as it happened, they were near me.

So I says, Jaap, leave my foot be. He said, no, he says, leave it like that. I said, put my-- let my foot free because I can't feel it. It's aching. So my friend Dienstag, he said, don't be silly and leave the man's foot free. And his son said, go on, Dad, leave the foot be. The foot is not harming you.

So he let go. And then he got up. And he said, you always make trouble, you people. He said, I'm going to get out of the train. And I'll be home before you.

Jaap Teibaum said this?

Jaap Teibaum. And he walked across our bodies and climbed out of the train. And I never saw him again. His son was still all right. But I didn't see his son either. He must have died coming into Buchenwald after that. Byron Dienstag is also no more alive. All my pals are gone who I knew, all of them were gone.

Did people try to stop Teibaum?

No. No. A truck is as big as that. So if that happened, and you walk over there, and you feel miserable-- well, I felt-- I was sick. I was ill, the temperature and all that. So you don't know what's going on, really on, around you. And I see him climb out and drop down when the train stopped somewhere. And they must have saw him and shot him. But he went mad in the end, you see. He went mad.

I understand you were on that train for about five days. Can you tell me about your arrival at Buchenwald, please?

Yes. I probably did mention to you about the hot soup and the bread thrown into our wagon during the journey.

How frequently did you have that?

Only once, one evening, in the dark. They threw over 25 full loaves, round loaves of bread for 100 and-- over 140 people. And the weak got nothing. And the strong ones-- of course, they did. But my friend, Byron Dienstag, he got up and came back with a chunk of bread in his hand and a chunk of bread for me because I couldn't stand up and fight that.

And then there was one evening that they called out how many people there were. And we had to share, then, hot soup three men to one bucket because our bucket where we used to have our soup out, we used for-- call of mother nature's and then slung out of the train. So there were very few containers left.

And I remember, I got up, I wanted something hot to drink. And I stood there with one man. And he let me put my mouth to the bucket. And I took one little sniff of soup in my mouth. It was too hot. And I just went back again. So I was unfortunate to get that. I felt it was nothing given to us.

Well, the train went on. And it was a terrible journey because so many died. Every morning, four or five were taken out of every truck. And some of our prisons had to do that.

Where did you think you were going?

We had no idea where we were going. We didn't know. We just went and we stopped. And we went and we stopped. And we came somewhere. It must have been Czechoslovakia, getting into Germany. And one morning, early morning, 7 o'clock or 6-7 o'clock-- people were walking over the bridge.

Of course, our train went under a bridge very slowly. And people started throwing their sandwiches into our wagon as the train went. But then the SS started shooting. And then they didn't throw anymore. Not that I've seen there, but I see the little packets coming over into the train moving along. And this went on.

And the fifth evening, I reckon it was about half past 5:00, 6 o'clock, it stopped in a camp. And then after a few minutes, we heard people, the boys or so, mentioned Buchenwald. Well, the strong ones jumped out of the trucks. And there were many dead ones laying in my truck. They didn't move. And the weak ones were helped down. And I was helped down.

But I had very bad feet. They were swollen up like elephant feet. And there were a dirty matter and funny colors. So I couldn't walk very well. And as I stood there, the side of the truck, I was held down by a man, a prisoner who was dressed in a dark green coat. Later on, I was told they were the camp police.

And I stood there. And I saw my friend, Byron Dienstag. And I called out to him, whether he could help me to walk towards a wall or the side of a barrack, where I could stand up. And he did that. That's the very last time I saw him.

As I stood there, I tried to make my way towards the door of the barrack where we were standing outside. But there were so many of us standing there trying to get in that the door opened, and one of the other camp police in green uniform, he had a club in his hand. He opened door. And he started lashing out his stick so a few hundred men walked backwards.

And I came to lay on the ground. And they stamped on top of me. I called out, help, help. And they somehow got a hold of me and picked me up. And then all by myself, I crawled almost to the door. And the door went open. And I was let

inside.

And I stood there. And one of the prisoners there-- I daresay a kapo, under kapo-- he told me to undress, take your striped uniform off. I was dirty from top to bottom. I didn't know what was happening to me. I was inside. I didn't care anything what I had in my pocket, my silver spoon, or what I had tried to take along as a souvenir, or a razor, or a shaving brush. Nothing could matter more to me.

I just took my jacket off and I dropped my trousers. And there I stood, naked. And I set myself down on a chair that was standing there. And I looked around. And what I saw was this-- the ground was covered by slowly-moving bodies, bone and skin, heads like skeletons, slowly moving.

I remember, I once was, as a child, in a fish market. And I looked in one of those zinc boxes in which were a lot of eels crawling to and fro. And here were human beings crawling, trying to get to a leaking tap in the corner of the barrack. And I watched one of them pull themselves up on the edge of the sink and let the drops of water go into his mouth. And then he sank back, let go, and he laid on the ground.

And then some other prisoner came along and took him, carrying him along the ground, into a corner. And I looked up. And I remember, I saw a hairdresser, a barber standing there, clipping hair of other prisoners. And I talked to him. And he made himself known that he was a Dutchman. He had a hairdressing salon in Maassluis, Holland. I was taken away as a prisoner.

And I said, the people are drinking water. Wouldn't that be bad for their health? Which, of course, my mind was fixed on drinking water in Birkenau. It would be bad for your health. So he said, no, let them drink. They're as good as gone. So don't refuse those few drops of water.

And then I tried lifting some of those skeletons up. So they could put their head, their mouth underneath the drops of water. But I could only do that a few times. I was too weak myself.

Anyhow, I sat back on a chair, and waited, and asked the hairdresser, what is going to happen with us here? Are they going to kill us off? Are they going to put us in the gas chamber? So he looked at me and said, there's no gas chamber here in Buchenwald. And if they were going to kill you off, why should I have to cut the hair, clip the hair of the prisoners? So that satisfied me a little.

And when I was waiting, say, half an hour or so, a prisoner came along and told me to follow him. Somehow, I followed him. And another few who could still move about followed. And I remember, went into a big bath with little water. About six of us went in there. And we laid there in the water. And I was glad because it would take some of my dirt off my body. And then we were withheld out of the bath and laid on the floor to dry.

Was your bath cold?

Warmish. But I remember, Lysol kills. It's a disinfection. So I liked it. No soap whatsoever, you just lay there and let the water get over you. Well, when you're-- after a little while, you were taken out of the bath and laid on the floor.

By whom?

By prisoners, former prisoners who were there seeing to it. I guess nobody knew exactly what was happening. Well, I didn't know, anyhow. I just went the way the wind went. One thing I remember, I was out of the cold, out of the misery, I was inside. Of course, I was ill. I had a temperature and all that. But my brains were still fairly well.

And then we were taken on a barrow to another barrack. And we were all spread out on the floor-- a huge lot of men, hundreds of them. And when I was laying there, another column of men came in and went downstairs to the baths, to have a bath, the same things, I daresay, as I had.

And amongst them was my friend Jacques de Wolf. He lived in The Hague. But I met him nearly every day in

Monowitz. And I called out his name. And he looked around. And he saw me and he called out my name and only went with his-- in the queue. And I didn't see him until I got back to Holland later on.

But there, I was laying on the floor. And there was a man sitting at a table, some 20 or 30 yards from me. There was a big barrack. And one of his assistants, also all prisoners, they went from man to man laying on the floor. And he had to call out your name. And you got a number. So when it was my turn--

A different number?

A different number.

When it was my turn, I was laying there. And the man in front, the assistant, was looking at and touching those men. And then he came to the man in front of me, who didn't move. And I did move. So he called out-- I had to call out my name. And I got a number, 120,000-- 120,931.

And then the man in front of me moved. And then the assistant said, oh, hold on a minute. He said, this one here is still alive. So he-- I got 130. And they moved to him. It was 120,930 he got. I dare say, he lived five minutes, and then he was gone. But I got 120,931 Buchenwald number.

The man at the table was putting that in his books or on his register. I didn't hear or think no more about that. And then loads of us were loaded, again, onto a kind of trolley or a barrow. And we went to another barrack. And there we lie.

Why did you have a new number?

Well, that's how it was done. Our Auschwitz number wasn't talked about no more. I dare say, we were a new lot of prisoners coming into Buchenwald. I never went-- I never thought more about it. But it is so.

To keep their records straight, did they also take down your Auschwitz number?

No, they didn't ask for my Auschwitz number. No. But from hearsay, Buchenwald had, I think, 68,000 registered prisoners-- of course, thousands were not registered. They were killed off somehow or whatever.

When the Americans liberated Buchenwald, there were only about 21,000 left. There were very many stories about how people were killed off in Buchenwald. But I wasn't in Buchenwald all my prison life. So I don't know exactly if that's all true. I dare say it is true, killing people, hanging them up, beating them to death, and all that.

Were you tattooed with your new number?

No, I wasn't tattooed with any number.

Or did you have a label or something?

No. Later on I got on a kind of a card, they had the number. But it's a little bit vague now. I know, when I left Buchenwald, I had a card. And on my card is my Buchenwald number, and my name, and so on. I still got that. Or it's in the library, Wiener Library.

Yes. So you were taken--

To that barrack

--still naked to another barrack?

Yes. Yes. And we had to crawl into the so-called bunks or beds. Well, they were compartments of about that height. How high would that be? 30?



18 inches?

18 inches, yes. On top of one another, it was about one, two, three, four lots like that. And underneath went those that were so good as dead. They were helped in there. I went into the second lot. I was still alive and movable. And the third lot people climbed by themselves-- and the fourth on top.

And we had to lay in there, one with the head outside and the other with his head inside. And his feet came in out next to the head. And the third one went in again with his head out. And the next one, the feet inside. And that's how we laid.

If you want to try to sit up, you couldn't properly sit up because you'd knock your head against the bunk above you. And as I look across, all those compartments were full, full of prisoners, the same way, laying like that, just like loaves of bread at a bakery shop. Well, we laid there.

Did you have blankets?

No, no, no, we just lay there naked. And nothing was done yet to us-- no doctor, nothing, no food until the following day. Following day, hot soup was brought in with the metal containers and shared out in buckets. And that was very welcome to me and to the others.

But next to me was a man who had a hole in his cheek, if I remember. And he told me, he was shot there or something. And as he ate the soup, it just came away from his-- through his mouth.

So I told him, lay on the other side, gave him room to lay on the other side so that the soup could stay in and that he could swallow it. It's very hot soup. So he had to do it slowly on. But he couldn't finish it all. And what he couldn't finish, I had after I had finished mine.

So were you eating lying down?

Lying down, just-- no spoons, just put the bucket to you and try to swallow it like that. And then you gave the bucket back when it was empty or something. I don't remember. There was no room to put it next to you. I don't remember that.

Then the next day, about a dozen doctors came in, all in a hurry. And then they searched everybody. And they nearly missed me because I want to-- I was thinking, what are they doing, examining people and some are going-- being taken out and all that? And then I called out, I've got some wounds as well. And I did have wounds on my feet and my hand. And they accepted me.

And I was taken out with some others, also on a trolley, to another barrack. Well, in that barrack, we went into bed. I counted 26 prisoners in that ward. And it was the best ward and the best bed I had since my coming to Birkenau. There was a sheet, and there was a blanket, and there was a pillow.

So some of us were Jewish prisoners, some of us were non-Jewish. We had the Danish police there, who had been taken away from Denmark. We had Czechs laying there all amongst us. I counted about 26 people, and one to a bed.

And then we got the camp doctor, I dare say, one of the doctors coming around from man to man. And he looked at the feet. And whoever he saw with the bad feet, [GERMAN]. [GERMAN] meant cut, cut, cut the feet off and all that. We all were taken down. The names were taken down, all the numbers were taken down, whatever. And this didn't happen until a couple of days later on. The ward was stinking with the smell of rotten feet.

Well, I saw someone go-- being taken away, coming back with no feet, or one foot off, and all that. And I remember my turn. And I prayed and I begged, don't cut my feet. They're just chilblains. I have them every winter. And they heal again. Don't cut them. I'm a British subject. And very shortly, the Americans will be here. I don't know where I got all the words from.

And this assistant looked at me. The assistant was a communist who had been about a dozen years already in prison. And I don't know. He listened to me. He said, but you're a Jew. I said, yes, but that makes no difference. I prayed. And by gum, instead of cutting, somehow, he put plenty of Vaseline on my feet, and I went-- he took me back to bed again. There was no other medicine.

And when I was laying in bed there, he just slanted over me. There was a bunk. And there was in there a young Dutchman, a boy no more than 17 years of age. And he used to give a boxing demonstration in Monowitz, I remember. And this fellow came from Amsterdam. His name was Oppie Perels-- red-haired boy. And he had his feet cut off.

But before it was done to him, we were talking and arguing about-- he said, I'll never see my parents and my sister again. And I said, well, I hope to see my wife. He says, look, I'm sure I won't see my sister and my parents anymore. I said, how sure can you be? So we argued about it. And then he said, now, you tell me, how did you see your wife? How was it the last time?

And I told him, I came into Birkenau, and they were loaded on a truck and taken away. He said, stop. He said, so that's how it happened. Those people that were loaded on a truck, they went to the gas chamber. And they were killed off, he said. I know, because I worked near and I saw what was happening. I said, well, it may be so. But I hope to see my wife and child back. But he was very-- he was right, somehow.

Then it was his turn to go down or some-- in another barrack to have his feet cut off. And he said to me, if you can, shake my bed up a bit so when I come back, I'll lay a bit better. And I shook his cushion up. I couldn't do much myself. And I went back to bed. And then in a little while, they brought him back.

And he woke up out of his-- after the operation, he started crying, crying, and shouting, screaming, what they done to me? What have they done to me? Well, he quieted down then. And we were there some days then.

And I remember that I heard whispers that the SS had stopped a train loaded with parcels sent to us by the Red Cross. But then all of a sudden, one day, parcels did come in. But the SS had taken the cigarettes out of it, the chocolate out of it, and all the good things. And what did they leave us? Tins of sardines and biscuits.

Well, we all more or less knew what dysentery was. So if you had that oil, sardine oil, it might bring on dysentery again. But there-- it was food, so we ate it. And we had our morning cup of imitation tea or coffee, what it was-- imitation. And we had our piece of bread, the usual thing which you get in a concentration camp.

Before you tell me more about that, when Oppie Perels told you what he thought might have happened to your wife and son, which you didn't wish to believe at that point, what did you think about that?

I thought it was terrible, alas. I should think it was not true. I mean, my mind-- I must have been stupid thinking that all those millions of people there must be somewhere. All what I knew is if they were too weak to work, they went to the gas chambers. But healthier people were arriving from a country there to be killed off, I didn't want to believe it until a long time after that, when I got back to Holland and I went to the Hague.

And if I wanted to get married or started courting seriously, I would have had to have black and white that I wasn't married anymore, that my wife was in the war. So I went to The Hague. And the Red Cross, they produced papers and gave me papers that my wife and my little son had been gassed, killed at Auschwitz in the gas chambers. So I had to believe that.

And when I ask them, how many people came back from that transport of that and that date that left Westerbork, he said, only two men got back, according to our papers here. And you are one of the two. And the other one is Leon Borstrock.

I didn't-- I had to accept it. But I still hoped that I would see my wife and child-- perhaps that they were liberated by the Russians, perhaps they had been sent somewhere else, and they'd come out. But then as time went on, I realized it was so. Well, getting back to--

But whilst you were actually at Buchenwald, you didn't allow yourself to accept what he had told you?

No. No. I didn't accept it until I got back to Holland.