

You mentioned in passing that Danish police were with you at Buchenwald.

Yes.

Were you actually in daily contact with them?

Yes. They were wounded also. They were laying in the bed next to me. And they received parcels, either from home or from the Red Cross. But they had parcels. And several times, they gave me their bucket of soup to me. I didn't get any of the parcels, whatever was in it, bread or something like that. But they just gave me the bucket of soup. And they told me they were police opposing the Nazis in Denmark. And they were sent to Buchenwald-- several hundred of them, as they told me at that time.

Had they been there for some time? Or had they just come as you had?

No, no, they were laying in bed when I arrived in that ward and got into bed. Yes. Yeah. But I didn't understand the language. So I didn't have a lot of conversation with them.

Would you have spoken with them in English?

Oh, yes.

German?

Yes. There was-- next to me, on my other side in bed, there was-- I think it was a Czechoslovak man who had knowledge of a lot of languages and also English-- and, of course, German. And I told him-- we got in conversation, one another, English and German.

And I said to him, I told him who I am, Englishman and so on, and so on. And I said, would you like to do me a favor? You understand the English language and the German language. If I tell you what something in English, you could translate into German, and write it down.

I said, because I want to send a letter to the political department in Buchenwald and tell them that I'm really wrongly imprisoned in the concentration camps. And now that I'm in Germany, Buchenwald is Germany, I want something done about it. That's the way I thought-- very, very stupid of me.

It means that when I thought those things and said this to this man, that in some way, I had faith in the SS, that they would review my petition and they could do something about it. So I start telling him in English my name, where I lived, my wife's name, my child that was taken away out of Westerbork, and my British nationality. They had no right to keep me here.

And now that I'm in Germany, I would like to be-- my case would like to be reviewed, and that I would be sent home. How ridiculous I was thinking. But I did think that, really. And he wrote it down in German. I said, thank you very much because I was going to give this to the prisoner assistant of that ward who saw me daily.

The nurse?

The nurse, the male nurse, this man who was a communist, and ask when he came in to take temperature. Every evening, they did this. And he came to me. And I gave him this letter. And I said in German to him then, please hand this to the political department.

And he opened it. It was a folded bit of paper, must have got a hold of this from the desk of the doctor or somewhere. But anyhow, it was written on paper. And he read it. He stood away from the bed and he read it. And when he finished, he turned around to me. And he came like this with his finger-- you and me.

Drew a line across his neck?

Yes, finished, dead. And he took a hold of it. And he tore it up. And he took it away and put it-- and I was disappointed again. But I suppose, he would have taken this there, he would have been killed. I would have been killed. Because we were proof. I was told the world. Well, there, I was saved again, my ignorance.

And I had done this before-- now, I'm telling you this-- in Monowitz or in Auschwitz. I had given-- written-- I got a hold of a pencil somehow. And I wrote on a bit of paper the same thing-- who I was, I was wrongly here as a prisoner, and my wife, and child. The whole lot, I put on paper and gave it to one of the boys, one of the prisoners there who had a chance to meet a British prisoner of war as he was told me.

And this prisoner of war could give it to the Red Cross, who came to visit the British prisoner of war. That's how I was thinking. I've tried everything to get out of it. Well, I never heard any more about it. I doubt whether he ever gave this letter.

You said, you wrote to the political department.

Yes.

What made you think there was such a thing?

Well, way back in Monowitz-- no, in Auschwitz, when I was taken to the medical department, and they experimented on my body, and this SS officer said to me, I can't help you with your nationality, I'm only here to supervise the medical practices here, and you got to get in touch with the political department. Of course, the political department must have been, say, one or two SSES who's got to do with the nationalities. And I thought that was in every camp, one of those.

You said, you did that partly because you were in Germany now--

Yes.

--Buchenwald. How did you know you were in Germany?

Well, Buchenwald is in Germany.

Yes, we know that. But did--

I mean, Weimar-- Buchenwald was near Weimar. And Weimar is in Germany. I remember it from school.

Yes. So how-- had you seen a sign or something?

No, I was-- I heard that. We heard other prisoners coming in to visit some-- probably somebody's mates laying in bed. And we had-- we heard talk about it.

These Danish police again--

Yes.

--if I can ask you a bit more-- did you have any opportunity to talk with them about their experiences or work in Denmark?

No.

You said, they were involved in resistance.

No. All what I could make out is that they were Danish police. And they must have opposed the Nazis in Denmark and were taken prisoner and sent to Buchenwald. They were non-Jews. Non-Jews, they were.

Were they separated from you or treated differently from you?

No, no. In that ward, we all-- we just-- when our soup was dealt out, it went from bed to bed. They were treated the same way as us in what I can remember and what I've seen and could see. Only they had more food. They had their parcels coming in. They were allowed parcels, whereas we never had parcels.

Were you ever allowed letters-- I mean, cards, something like that?

Not the sort of letter you wanted to write, not in Buchenwald, not in Monowitz, not in Auschwitz. But in Birkenau, in the beginning, we-- I remember, the-- we were all in a barrack, a lot of our men in a barrack. And the word went round-- you can write home. So we all got a card given.

And on that card, you can only put-- and if you couldn't write German, somebody who could write German had to do it for you. We arrived here safely. Work is all right. Food is very good. And we're healthy. So you could put on that card the reverse of what was really taking place.

Well, I had told my father, if ever I be taken away to a concentration camp-- in this case, we only knew of Auschwitz-- that if I send him a letter or a card and on there was-- everything was good, reverse it 100,000 times. Because that-- and as it happened, he got this card.

Because only few of these cards were taken to post. There were thousands of cards. And I think they were all put on in a box. And one SS, whoever who did it, took one handful and posted them. But my card got through. And my card is in the Wiener Library. And on there, it's written. That's the only time you had post, never no more after that. Never no more after that.

You said, when they were threatening to amputate your feet, you said, don't do it because it's only chilblains. And for another thing, the Americans are coming.

Yes.

What made you think that?

Well, all those whispers were going. And we knew we were going towards the end of the war. Somehow, we got to know. Yes.

Well, you had heard the Russians coming when you were in Holland.

Yeah, but we was a long way from Russia and from the Russians now.

Yes.

We had traveled two days from Auschwitz when the Russians arrived in Auschwitz and five days-- that's a week we were away from the Russians. And what we could hear from other prisoners coming in and out, the Americans were coming in. And also, I remember that in Buchenwald-- in Monowitz, when the Americans were trying to get into Germany and they were hit back-- hitting back at the Ardennes, so they must have been coming. Of course, I didn't know they were coming within a matter of hours or a matter of months. But I said this, more or less, to make them see, make this man see that something might happen if he took my toes off or my feet off.

Did you have any evidence other than rumor? I mean--

No.

--hearing or seeing aircraft?

No rumor. Later on, later on, yes, when I was taken out of this barrack. I must have been about three weeks or more in this barrack. And my feet were, to my luck, almost normal. The swellings were gone. But one big toe on my left foot, which was amputated later on in Paris after liberation, was swollen. And if I knocked it on the edge of the bed or something, dirty matter came out.

But somehow, they had enough of me in there. And I was going to be sent out of the barrack, out of the hospital barrack. And the evening came. And I was worrying myself. I got to go out in the cold in the winter. And who knows what's going to happen.

And they took a temperature of me, say, what, about 6 o'clock or so. And he looked at me. He said, you've got a temperature. What's wrong with you? I said, well, I've got a pain in my ear. And he looked. And he said, god, he says, erysipelas. That's very catching. He said, out, tomorrow morning, out, quick, out.

So I've almost said, out, quick, out, what's wrong now? But I was-- a kind of a happy feeling went through me. I was ill again. And I could go into hospital. So I was loaded on a small burrow the next morning after they put some paper bandage around my foot. I was taken to another barrack, where hundreds of men were suffering from erysipelas. Erysipelas is a medical term. It means--

Yes, it's a streptococcal inflammation.

Is it?

So I came into the barrack. And I remember sitting on a bunk there, on a seat, wooden seat. And a Russian doctor was there. He came over to me. And he looked at me. He looked at my ear. And he looked at my foot. The paper bandage was already coming off, crepe paper. And he started talking to me. And I mentioned to him that I'm an Englishman.

So we-- in broken German, he said to me, English, England, England? So he called out, Albert, to the other doctor, who with another man came up he was a doctor and this was by the name of Albert Kongs-- Kongs.

Albert Kongs was a doctor from Luxembourg who had been arrested because of his resistance movement, something like that, I was told. He came over. And he started talking English to me. And he knew then all about me, told him how or what. He said, never mind, he said, you're going to stay here until the end of the war. We'll see to your foot. And we'll see to your face.

He said, go on. Now, get into bed. So I went into bed. I crawled at the third. There were bunks again, three on top of one another. I got into the top one. And as I was laying, I was laying on a dirty sheet, sheets which had been there for months. And everybody had been in it.

So I climbed down again somehow. And I went to the doctor, who was still standing there talking. I said, is it possible to be for a clean sheet? So he looked at me, he said, look, now, those sheets-- the washing hasn't come in yet. He said, you're still here. And I realized, I was still a prisoner. So I climbed back again and just lay down on the sheets and the blanket.

This ward was more like the prison barracks, then, rather than the other, which had beds?

No doubt. Yes, it was different again. I was back into the bunks, the wooden bunks, like a barrack. And there were hundreds of men laying there. I remember, there was a man from Belgium. He had-- his eyes were swollen outside. He was blind. He couldn't see. He couldn't see.

And I talked to him. Flemish is Dutch almost. And I helped him eating, give him his soup to eat. He was very thankful.

He told me, when you get to Belgium after liberation, come and see me. And he gave me a pair of blue gloves later on, as the eyes opened up somehow. And he got a little better.

And he didn't want to live. But I talked and talked. And I fed him. And the friendship made him realize, there was more than just dying. After liberation, I went to his place, but no one knew who he was. I don't know whether he came back or not. Then I remember that--

Before you tell further about the other patients, was this Dr. Albert Kongs the one that had been in resistance?

Yes. Let's say, as they told me, he had been in resistance in Luxembourg.

What did you find out about that, about his resistance?

Nothing. I didn't. I only knew, he was a very kind man to me. He came every morning, telling me the news, how the war was progressing. And then I got moved to another part of the barrack. And I laid underneath in the bunk in the bed.

And I came to lay next to Oscar Rothschild. Oscar Rothschild-- Rothschild was a German Jew from MÃ¼nchen-- I think it was MÃ¼nchen-- who had-- he told me all this. He had, with his parents, a clothing shop, men's clothing shop in-- I think it was MÃ¼nchen, he mentioned. And he had been-- he escaped from Germany to Holland. And he was taken up by the SS in Holland and sent to various camps.

And he landed in Buchenwald. And he was in the bunk next to me. And he was skin and bones. And he went worse and worse every day. And we talked. He could talk Dutch because he had been living in Holland some time. And told me, he had a clothing shop in Groningen and so on, and so on. But he suffered with dysentery. And I took him many times to the lavatory and brought him back again, cleaned him up, a shocking business.

And then one morning, he said to me, take my piece of bread and get me some ginger cake, gingerbread, from the Frenchman over there. The Frenchman was a non-Jew. He was laying in a bunk, also ill. I said, look, Oscar, if you do that, your dysentery gets worse. And he didn't want to listen.

So I had to do it. I took his piece of bread to the Frenchman while the kapo wasn't looking. I crawled out of bed and walked over to the Frenchman, told him a bit of bread. Of course, bread was gold in the camp. And the Frenchman had a parcel. And he had-- he cut a piece of ginger cake off it. And I took it back to Oscar. And he ate it.

Well, I lay there in bed. And every morning, the doctor came around and told me some news. And when I noticed the kapo coming in, I stuck my head under the blankets and lay very quiet, like most of us were. I was laying near the windows. And he came along, the kapo, look in the beds.

And of course, he must have saw, well, they're all dead, laying, or half-- nearly dead. There's nothing but-- nobody moving, covered with the blankets. Then he passed by. And I played this game every morning. I didn't want to get out into the open because I felt that I was on the way home. So I wanted to play it so that I stayed in. In any case, I wasn't strong to march or to work.

I think there was an Italian prisoner named Levi in the hospital at that time, was there?

Yes, yes, yes. He came walking in. He was small, thin, slim man, black hair, black, beady eyes, white face. And he had a white gown over him. Him-- probably came-- probably from the showers or from the bath. He was walking to his bunk. He had his bunk given to him. And he laid it across where I was. And we got pally with one another.

He came in. And he told me, he has stomach trouble. And he laid over across me. And we somehow converted. Not much-- he was a Catholic, he told me, Catholic. And in the beginning, he only had a little of his soup. And the rest, he gave to me.

And days went by. And I saw this man slowly dying. And then we used to converse, Oscar and me and this Italian. Then

he didn't talk anymore. And there was one day, I watched him. He was almost dead. And I watched him. He was looking at one thing. His eyes were staring at one thing. Up comes his arms, slowly, just moving about, trying to fight off god knows what it was-- death or whatever it was.

He had a little smile on his face. And I looked at his eyes, they were still shining. And I watched him. I want-- I wanted to see him so I could see later on when I'm free what-- how the people-- how they were killed or how they died.

And then took only a matter of minutes-- I'd been watching him for hours-- half an hour, a quarter of an hour, or 10 minutes, and then his arms went down on the blankets, they stopped moving, his smile disappeared. Somehow, his eyes were glassy. And then he was no more.

And if that happened, you had to call out. And the doctor came along and examined him. He was dead. Kapo came along. And two prisoners that painted his number on his chest, big numbers on his chest-- they did it with all the prisoners that were dead. So wherever they took them, from a distance, they could see that number. Because the number on the arm was very small.

And they took him in the sheet. Two men got a sheet at the back, two front. And they took him out. It's the last I saw of Levi Olivi. The kapo came in, look in his bunk, and lifted up a bit of broken pillow. And his strap was there, his lattice strap with-- which he had when he walked in. I said, may I have his strap, kapo? He looked at me and said, all right, have it. So I got his strap. I still got it.

Strap for what?

A leather strap.

A belt?

Belt, yes.

If he was Catholic, why was he in concentration camp?

I don't know. I don't know that.

Because it sounds like a Jewish name.

Yeah, but he didn't-- he told me, Catholic, Catholic. That's what I understood. And the soup was dished out. And the kapo said, you have his portion of soup. You've been looking after him. I remember this, near the bunk of mine, there were others who had been looking many a time, trying to grab his food. Of course, we all were hungry. Well, that was the end of Levi Olivi. And I didn't see any more of him.

Then the days went on. And I think, I shaved the doctors and the kapos. But Oscar Rothschild was getting worse and worse. And he had to get into another bunk near the window. And Oscar always used to say to me, I'm going back to Holland. I'm going to get back to Holland. I know, he said. I said, I hope so.

Then comes the day that Dr. Albert Kongs says, we all got to leave Buchenwald. We got to empty the camp. I said, well, I can't walk as I should walk with marching. I can't. I said, my feet are aching me.

So I said, can't I somehow take the place of somebody else? Give me the number of this Italian man who had died the day before and so-- and take my number, put my number-- I had died. And I don't know what I was saying that for. But I wanted to remain in the camp. The doctor said, no, that's no good changing numbers and all that. That's-- you don't need to do that. He said, but we all--

Everyone had to go or only Jews?

Everyone. Well, according to the doctor, the camp had to be emptied. That were the orders from Berlin or something like that. And I remember that I said, well, I'd rather jump out of the window and do something else. I can't march. And they shoot me.

Because I had in my mind that-- what they did on the march from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz. If you couldn't march, they shot you because you're holding up the troop. So he says, well, even I got to go, he said. I don't know what's going to happen. Well, it didn't come as far as that. It didn't come as far as that.

I remember that during the stay in Buchenwald, in the hospital barrack, I got a little better. But I hid myself under the blankets to make out that I was very ill. So there comes a day that I'm-- there is no kapo about. So I get out of my bed. And I hear a lot of noise.

And I get to the window. And I look out of the window. And I see between the barracks, so the street between the barracks is covered with-- loaded with people, with fellows walking towards my barrack. Some were carrying guns and loud calling.

And I realized they were prisoners who had been taken away by the SS into the woods or into the barracks, locked up as the whispers went. And they were strong. To me, they look all strong and man-- not only Jews, everybody. I don't think there were many Jews. There were a lot of non-Jews there. And they were somehow set free.

But in the morning, that same day, in the morning, I had looked out of the window and saw no SS in the guard houses-- no SS, no-- nobody with a gun, only a little airplane circling over the camp. And I realized that something was taking place.

And then in the afternoon, what I just mentioned, those people were set free somehow. They got out. And they were marching through the camp. And Oscar Rothschild asked me, what's going on? And I told him what I saw. And I said, I think we're free. We're free. And we both were happy about it.

And then there comes the day that the kapo says to me, come along. There's the clippers, the razor, shaving brush, soap. I had to go to another little barrack through a passage, smelled and stink was terrible of the dysentery and awful smell. And he said, there are those men here. Clean them up. Clean them up.

They had beards, long beards or short beards, hair on their heads, hair between the legs, hair underneath the arms, skinny ones, half-dead. Well, I was in the room. And one by one, I put them on the chair, clipped the hair, clip the hair from underneath his arms, full of lice, clip the hair from the lower part of the body, full of lice, bunches of them-- terrible. I don't have to shave them.

So they were cleaned up. Some of the men couldn't even sit on the chair. They fell over every minute. I was doing this job all by myself, all day long. And I counted 42 men who would have died, probably, within a matter of days if it wasn't for the Americans being now in the camp or coming into the camp.

The floor was like a thick carpet, all hair. And the lice was crawling all over-- a terrible thing. Well, I think most of those died just the same. And then I went back to my own barrack, to my own--

What was the point of that? Was that--

The kapo was afraid that the Americans would have told them, look at those men, you look what they look like, and they probably would have copped out. I think that was the reason. Of course, if the Americans wouldn't have been there, those people would've been just dead. And they would have been cremated, finished with.

Before you tell me about the liberation, I think there are other-- some other things about Buchenwald. Buchenwald had actually been built one of the earliest camps, which you may not have known at the time. I don't know if that would have made any difference. Could you see any difference in atmosphere at Buchenwald and the Polish camps?

Well, you must remember, I was in a hospital barrack. I was a sick man. I wasn't out working. I could move about in the barrack. Of course, it wasn't in the hospital barrack where I was-- there wasn't a lot of beating going on. There was no need for that. Most of us were too ill. A lot of us died.

So what could they do with us? So I didn't see the beatings going on. Treatment was little-- after all, you were there to die to the very last-- the kapos, and the doctors, and everybody attached to it. And the SS, they must have been worrying themselves sick because they knew now that they had lost the war. And the Americans were coming and the Russians on the other side.

So I don't know, actually, what's going on in their minds. And they had lost. And what was going to happen? So there was a little bit of a chaos. But long before this, what I'm just telling you now, every morning-- now, there was one day that a young fellow came along with a paper in his hand.

And he went from bed to bed and asked, who is a Jew? Because the headquarters in Buchenwald of the SS was connected with every barrack. Every barrack had a loudspeaker. And every morning, I heard this. The kapos see to it that all the Jews are outside on roll call.

So some of the Jews had to leave the barracks. And they called us every morning. And then I heard whispers, they don't want to come out of the barracks. And there was-- that morning, then, when this young fellow came from bed to bed with a paper. And he marked who is a Jew.

Well, my stepmother was a non-Jewish woman. So I held on to that. I thought myself, it might help me. Who knows? God knows. I said, so I leaned over my bunk and I said, half a Jew. So he marked half a Jew and so on. I didn't hear any more about that.

But on and on it went. All the Jews have got to come out of their barrack onto the square to be counted-- and of course killed off, if it come to that. He didn't mention that, but it was so.

Then I saw the barrack opposite me, where I was in the barrack. I could see through the window one evening that the SS was doing something lower to the ground of the barrack. The barracks were made of wood. Later on, I guess, it was dynamite they were placing there for some reason. Later on, I was told that orders are given from Berlin that every barrack had to be blown up. I don't know if that's really true. But that's what I heard.

And so I thought-- put two and two together. They were dying-- trying to dynamite the barracks sooner or later. But what I did see in front of me one morning, the people didn't want to come out of the barracks. They knew-- they felt that liberation was near. So I saw the SS, two SS with revolvers in hand, shooting through the windows into the barrack.

And then the doors opened. And Buchenwald barracks had steps on the outside. And the doors opened from the top. You come out and walk down the steps. And then you were on the ground. The first dozen or so rushed out, down the stairs, fell. And hundreds after them, they trampled upon them. And then they were marched away.

And then I saw on the ground five or six on both sides of the steps men laying. They were dead. They were tramped upon. They were finished. I didn't hear no more about it, what happened to those people. They marched away. They usually took them to the woods and killed them off.

But they didn't shoot into the barracks where you were?

No, they didn't shoot into the barrack. My barrack was still recognized as a sick barrack where the ill were laying. And if you died there, well, they took you away, and you were cremated. Then comes the day. That's--

Before you go on, the male nurse in one of the hospital's barracks in Buchenwald, you said, was a communist. I understand that there were quite a lot of communists in Buchenwald. Did you know anything about the structure of the prisoners' committees in Buchenwald camp?



No. There must have been underground-- there must have been a radio. There must have been a resistance. But I had no connection with that whatsoever. It didn't come my way. And that was only meant for a fit man, I think. A sick man couldn't do nothing.

Did he talk to you at all about the advance of the Russians?

Who? No. No, nobody talked about that. The advance of the Russians, I could see for myself and feel for myself. I had been working the-- near the railways where those wagons went with material tanks and airplanes coming back, being shot up, all burned, and then fresh tanks went.

I was thinking you could have given him information which might have been of interest to it.

No. What, to the doctor? No. No. This was known. Everybody could see that. All of us could see that, what was taking place, to and from the front. But in Buchenwald, we didn't hear anymore about the Russians. But I'll tell you, talking about the Russians-- there was one day in Buchenwald that for some reason, one of the Russian male nurses-- he was a young fellow, probably about 18-20, big fellow.

And he used to come into the barrack, into the ward sometimes. But this day, he came into the ward, and he took away the blankets from our bodies and had a look. And then he-- from bed to bed, he went. Then he came to me. I dare say it was so-called lice inspection or what it may be.

And he saw that I was circumcised. So he said, in German, broken German, you're a Jew. Ooh. And he pulled up his nose. I said to him, there is no antisemitism in Russia, is there? So after those years in the camp, here I got to deal with a Russian prisoner who was antisemitic. And that hurt for a moment.

This suggests that you had nothing to wear. You were just naked in bed. Is that it?

Yeah. We probably had just a top on the-- just a top, a slip, or something. Yeah.

How much in evidence were the SS or any other Germans?

In Buchenwald?

Yes, in Buchenwald, at that time, when everyone believed the Americans were coming.

I didn't see no SS come into the barrack. I didn't notice SS coming into the barrack like in the other camps. And I was inside the barrack. So I couldn't see what was happening outside-- only those SS that shot into the barracks and hearing the voices.

And I remember hearing the voices that the chief SS had promised the Americans, he would hand over Buchenwald camp to the Americans when they arrived. And nobody would be harmed, which was, of course, a big lie. It never came to that. It never came as far as that.

What do you mean?

Well, they were still taking prisoners away and doing with them what they wanted. And of the morning, early in the morning, I heard the Kommandos walking out, marching out to work. Buchenwald was near Weimar. And Weimar had an ammunition factory. They were making guns there and so on. And prisoners were working in there on the guns.

If you heard this speech over the public address system that they were going to hand over the whole camp to the Americans, that means the SS themselves admitted that the Americans were coming.

Yes. Yes. And I was very pleased when I heard that. But you see-- but you couldn't trust the Germans. You couldn't trust what they said. But we were pleased they were realizing it. And they didn't keep-- didn't stick to the words. But it

was music-- in my mind, it was music. They realized that the Americans were coming.

Were the SS still patrolling and manning the watchtowers?

Yes, before-- until whenever I looked out of the window, yes. But until the day when-- on April the 11th, about half past 1:00, when I looked out of the window, I didn't see anybody in the towers. And then I was told that they had escaped the SS commands and all of them who were attached to were-- had escaped.

And later on, I heard that the Americans were after them. But when I left the barracks two or three days after that and I came to a barrack of the SS, where the Americans were now stationed, the next day, they were away. They weren't there anymore because they were chasing the SS further into Germany.

Can you tell me about the capture of the camp by the Americans?

Yes.

This April the 11th, 1945 was the same day that you had seen some people let out of camp and that you had seen an airplane circling, is that right?

Say that again.

The day that the Americans--

Yeah, the 11th, yeah.

--came into Buchenwald, was that the same day that you had seen the airplane circling?

Yes, the same day. There was no SS. It was very, very quiet in the camp. As I looked out of the window, I saw no--

What sort of plane?

A small airplane, a small-- very small airplane.

But you didn't know the plane's nationality?

No. I didn't know, but I guessed. It was quiet. And somebody told me, maybe it was a spy plane from the Americans.

So how did you see them arrive? What part of their arrival did you see?

Well, as I saw the people coming towards my barrack, they were liberated, and we realized the camp was free. And then was getting on for-- this was about 4 o'clock. So we guess we're free, we're free.

But they were to make sure-- around about 6 o'clock, the loudspeakers announced, everybody stays where they are. The camp is free. But you just stay where you are. And look out for those faces who are new to you because some of the SS have taken some of your uniforms and put them on, try to escape.

Who made that announcement?

Some call. And I think it must have been a German, one of the prisoners, in contact with the Americans. And if you see a strange face, hold on to him. And I did see a SS, still in SS uniform, being marched away by some of our prisoners-- not many, one or two. So they must have caught them.

And I think I was very lucky one evening, a very dark evening. I had wandered out of the camp into the woods on the road to the woods. And I was calling out. This was after I had met a lot of American soldiers inside the camp. And I

called out. And where am I? Where-- I couldn't come out. I didn't know which way to go.

And in the distance, I saw-- it was not quite dark-- some man. From nowhere, he appeared. And he pointed his finger to me. And he called me over like that. And I didn't go. It could have been an SS come along, and kill me off, and take my uniform. Well, then came the day that we've been proper liberated.

Did the liberation happen with shooting?

No.

Or was there a surrender with a white flag?

No, I didn't notice that. I didn't notice any of that. I was still inside. But anyhow, there was announced, the camp is free. Everybody stay where they are. And yeah, well, then we could do what we liked so, somehow. And I remember that I didn't go out straight away. A few days later, one afternoon, I went-- I left the barrack, the ward.

And I went into the grounds. And I saw an American Jeep with an American soldier in there. And I went up to him. I talked to him. And he was surprised to hear me talk. And then he said, you want some biscuits? I said, yes, please. And as he opened the back of his Jeep to get some biscuits out, there were hundreds of hands around me. And they all grabbed the biscuits. And I had nothing. But then back again--

Two days, you said you were in the-- you stayed in the barrack.

Yes.

What were you doing at that time?

I was just wandering about in the barrack and wondering, thinking. And then one day, the Americans came in.

Had you been fed in those two days?

Fed? Yes, we got our pieces of bread and soup. The kapos were still there. But we were proper hungry. We were proper hungry, yeah.

So the Americans hadn't done anything about feeding you?

Not yet. So from nowhere, the Americans arrived, about eight or nine big chaps come in. And they're at the door of the barrack. And then my kapo said to me, you speak the English language so talk to them. So I went to them. And I said, I'm Leon Greenman. I'm from London. And what can I do for you? What would you like to see?

They said, well, we've seen it. And it was a terrible smell. I said, you you have seen nothing yet. So don't you go. Come along. And I pulled the first one. And the others came along. And I took them from bed to bed, pulled away the blankets, and showed them all the living skeletons. I said, make pictures of that. Tell the world about this and that.

So I was talking. I was free. I had a right to talk. And I want to get my own back to the SS. And then after half an hour or so talking, that's-- then they left. And then the following day, it must have been, I made my way out of the barrack. I went to the American commander, told him who I was. He said, you can't leave the camp yet. Come tomorrow and see me. And we'll see about it.

Before you were able to leave the camp, during that first day or the first couple of days, when the Americans had come, can you recall your emotions?

Oh, yes. I was pleased.

How did you believe it? How did you know you were free?

By seeing them. First of all, the quietness in the camp-- no SS about, no bullying. This quietness-- I didn't see a kapo. They probably were also hiding themselves and talking what they had to do or what not to do. And then-- well, this calling-- when I saw the man with guns, our men with guns and all that, I realized, we're free.

Only one thing-- we were afraid that the Germans might come back. But then again, we thought, well, the Americans are here. Surely, they wouldn't allow a thing to happen to us. And so it went.

And then I realized. I went out and saw the commander. And he said, there's no hurry to go. Come back tomorrow, and we'll see about your papers and all that. When I went the next morning, they weren't there. There were not a lot of Americans there. Those from the day before had moved up. And I was told, they're chasing the SS.

All right. So I didn't make a hurry then. I knew I was then with friends and nothing to hurry. Then came the day that I wandered about. And I got into the barrack of the SS. They were decent barracks, decent beds. And the Americans were laying there in bed, in the uniform, talking, wondering. And I walked up to one of the beds. And I had a talk with him.

And one of the young Americans says, I don't know what I'm here for. I don't know what I'm doing here. I said, well, soldier, I said, you're saving a lot of people. You saved me. Said, if you wouldn't have been here, tomorrow, I would have been probably finished off. Said, you saved a lot of. And they realized it then. They realized that they saved a lot of people. They did, by being there.

Well, I got back to the barrack. And the Americans opened the gates. And we were free. We could leave the camp. And what did-- I didn't. But what did the others all do or a lot of them did? They went to the villages around Buchenwald camp and stole a lot of things-- chickens, and radio sets-- and probably molested the women. They had a good go.

And then I heard that when everybody was back in the camp, through the loudspeakers, no one is to leave the camp. The gates are locked. It wasn't the meaning of the Americans to set you free and go robbing people in the villages. So no one was allowed out. For me, said, what? I didn't do anything of those things. And I want to talk to the people, the Americans. I want to-- these are my people. They got my languages.

So somehow, I got my way to the barrack where the Americans were. And I said, look, I am so-and-so. And I didn't do any of those things. I want to move free about. I want to leave my barrack to talk to the Americans.

And yes, I got a paper. Leon Greenman is allowed to come in and leave the camp. I still got it. It's in the Wiener Library and was signed by a sergeant or something like that-- or captain. So the American guard at the gates, they let me go by. They knew me, that I come in and out.

And then I was asked whether I could get up some amusement for the American soldiers. And I told them I could sing. And I would try to find somebody, some musicians.

And yes, I found some people who could play a saxophone. We found saxophones amongst the things the SS didn't take along. There was no piano, so we had to do with a fiddle, and saxophone, and probably drums, and a bit of singing. And we gave the Americans in one of the barracks-- or a lot of Americans came along. And we gave some music and some singing. And then we went--

Can you remember what music it was?

Well, the fiddles were playing their kind of music. But it's difficult to say how or what. I can't remember what, but we did do some singing, some playing, and all that.

How did you feel about that? Was that a celebration of release? Or doesn't that sort of deny the suffering and the problems that you had and were still having?

Yes. But we didn't feel the sufferings for that moment. We were free. We were alive. There was nobody to hit us, to beat us, or to bully us. We didn't have to work. And we were longing to go home, to meet the other people we had left behind, and so on. That was the main course in our thoughts, to get back to the country where you come from. So any pain or so what you had or what-- or thoughts, they were pushed to the background for a moment.

How had the liberating Americans organized food, and clothing, and medical attention?

Well, I remember that the Americans, when they were there and they saw the living skeletons and the people in bed in my barrack-- and also probably in all the other barracks-- they start feeding us with a too thick soup, not watery like we used to have. And the stomach of the people couldn't bear it. And a lot of them died.

They gave us bread-- not pieces, small pieces of bread, a good portion of bread. And people couldn't eat it. I remember seeing-- I still see it, heaps of bread laying near the door, being swept away from the beds, chunks taken out, and laid there, heaps of it. I told the Americans, you're feeding the people.