

Until 1945.

So most of your time there was spent working in the Messerschmitt factory?

Factory, yeah.

First you built the roads?

First we built the roads for the first two weeks, and then they called all carpenters. And good thing that I said that I am a carpenter. He look at my hands, and he slapped me. And he says, you son of a bitch. You're telling me that these are carpenter's hands? I said--

Checking if they're calloused.

Yeah. And I said, well, I am a student. I was a student before I was arrested, and I didn't have hard work in Auschwitz. So I couldn't have any calluses on my hands. However, I am acquainted with all the carpenters tools. He says, OK, then we take you, but if you show me any ignorance to handling the equipment, I will kill you personally, he said.

Who-- was he-- is this a kapo or was he SS?

No, no. That was SS, SS officer.

So I was directed to the [NON-ENGLISH] for Messerschmitt, which was a small aluminum box, and duty was-- it's on a conveyor, and I had to make approximately 60 holes in one minute.

You had to drill them in?

Drill them in, yeah, through the jig. So many guys were afraid to break the bits, and once you broke the bit, you got 25 lashes. So I became famous because I learned how to sharpen the bits and to work long enough to be allowed to break it. You had to perform already certain work with every bit before you could break it.

I see.

So after that, on May 1, 1944, in Flossenburg, they allowed us to play ball for the first time, and that was--

Football?

That was like soccer, yeah, like soccer, but only by hands. Instead of kicking the ball, since there was not enough room, we also had two goals and operating with our hands.

Would you please believe me that I became a star? And because of that, I received a better position to be again in a store issuing the tools every morning and collecting them at the end of each shift, and that was also very good because I had one more dish of soup just to maintain my physical strength for the game. Germans were betting on me, how many goals I will shoot.

Really?

And we were allowed to play only Sunday afternoon.

So you'd throw the ball to one another?

Yeah, yeah, and just the same thing, you operated with your hands the same as with your feet.

I see.

And would you believe that-- this is something I never expected, and we had definite knowledge that Germany is losing the war because, for the first time, they allowed us to have some kind of entertainment. That was their national holiday, May 1-- what do they call-- NSDAP, right? Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei.

And from this point on, it was a little bit better. They added sugar to our morning tea, so you can imagine, huh? Now, two things happened. First, after an unfortunate uprising in Warsaw, the first prisoners arrived from Warsaw directly to Flossenburg, and second thing happened--

This was after the Polish uprising?

Polish uprising, yeah. So in September of-- Polish uprising was August 1, 1944. In September, first group arrived from the uprising prisoners. And the second thing happened-- the plague of typhus. So I experienced, as I mentioned to you, bedbugs in Pawiak. I forgot to tell you about fleas in the hospital in Auschwitz, tremendous fleas, that you could cry because you couldn't catch them, and they were biting you all night long.

And here lice. To receive a set of shorts and shirt, you had to exchange these two items for one portion of bread. Bread was like money. You could buy anything with the prisoners' daily portion of bread. I tell you what the value of bread was. One kommissbrot, the German military schwarzbrot-- that was similar to our pumpernickel, black pumpernickel. It was also like square, so divided into four portions. One bread was one beautiful white-blue diamond. That was the same corresponding value.

So after that, I-- many, not only Polish, but also Czechs and German prisoners were dying. Germans in camp were occupying always some functions, whether they're in charge of the barracks, or in charge of your work kommando or whatever. However, there were also Czechs in Flossenburg. In Auschwitz, the majority were Polish, about 80% of Poles. Here, however, we had about 40% of Czechs, maybe 35% of Poles, and other nationalities, including Americans, the fliers who were shot down. They were there but a very short period of time, and they were immediately executed.

Now, to finish my story, I was there until, again, April 21. We started moving in a group of 5,000 surrounded by, again, Ukrainian SS.

You were being marched out?

Marched out. And they told us they will try to move us south toward Dachau. But because, we later learned, the Third army was moving so fast, they were pushing us toward southeast from Flossenburg. And therefore, after passing about 60 miles in three days and out of 30,000 prisoners, they killed 15,000. Whoever couldn't walk, he was shot in the ditch with dum-dum bullets.

And they were all found after a liberation by the Third Army members, General Patton's army. We had possibility of getting taken care of immediately by the American Red Cross hospital, field hospital, and I went with my friends, tried to go as far as possible west.

And we arrived to Erlangen near Nuremberg. Erlangen was not bombed, was an academic city with a university there, and the first camp for refugees was formed by the US army.

Were you liberated just one morning?

Yeah, I was liberated on the third day of our evacuation march with a beautiful, beautiful, never-to-forget situation because we were concentrated on the mountain. And we have seen on the other mountain-- we have seen first American tanks, and together with us there were Soviet army members who jumped on the Ukrainian SS guards. They shot them, killed them instantly, and with the guns, they started moving toward the American troops.

And since that was some kind of a horseshoe area, we were trying to go into the valley and then come up the mountain,

making ourselves a shortcut. And were there, three of us, and we found a group of SS soldiers armed to their teeth. And we almost got killed. It's unbelievable, right there. You sense you had freedom in the air, and you could be killed in the last moment. That was my fourth time when I faced the gun.

And good thing that my friend spoke German, and then we said that we are Germans from Silesia. We want to go home now. So he said, only, as Germans, don't tell them that we are here.

I see. Sure.

Yeah, sure. And my luck was that, when I arrived to the first group of the tanks, the commanding officer of the 1st-- I think that was 1st Division of Third Army, and most of them were Poles from Buffalo, New York area and almost every second spoke Polish, broken Polish, but they knew Polish language.

So I told him in Polish who we met on our way here. So he said, OK, you will see what's going to happen, and they shot immediately first warning, like a rocket, down to the valley. And after a few moments when no white flag arrived at the main building, like city hall or something like that, then he says, look what's going to happen now. And all these tanks, maybe a dozen of them from all around the area-- they started shooting everything that they could reach.

So they were being held in a little town in this valley?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So finally, after that first salvo, finally a white flag appeared on the steeple, and therefore that was the end of military action in this area.

So later on, as I mentioned to you before, I was able to join the American Army, and after five years of serving with labor service companies, I arrived to New York.

Five years employed by the US Army?

Army, yeah, from September 1945 to September 1950.

So you're liberated what month?

I'm liberated in the end of April, April, I believe, April 24, 1945 near [? Chamb. ?] It's very close to the German Czecho-Slovakian border.

I didn't tell you many, many details. When I was in the bunker, I was facing the experimental block number 10, to tell you about-- this is--

Well, do you have time to tell me that?

Well, I could mention only one detail, that we were witnessing how they took one prisoner, and this happened to be one of the member of Polish Lwowska Fala, which was some happy hour on Polish radio before the war. And he was Jewish, and he was a fantastic comedian. He was a star of Polish radio before the war. So he was taken one morning to this experimental block.

That was block 10?

Block 10, yes. And they removed one testicle from him, and when he came back, we ask him, oh, what did they do to you?

Well, he said, that first they had a special machine to ejaculate him when he was a normal person with two testicles, and then after that, they removed one testicle. And then after three weeks, they called him for another ejaculation just to compare how human sperm can work and be used with one and two. But with women, we have seen something. They were working, but-- and this will be described in my book.

You were able to see them during the experiments?

Yes, before they closed the windows, yes. They realized later that we were watching. We were the witnesses, and they bricked up the windows. But for the first two weeks of December, I could observe that, and after two weeks, the masons blocked the windows completely.

I see. On women they were doing similar kinds of experiments?

Yeah.