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Summary

Ernst Weninger was born on July 16, 1925, Bergstrasse 20, in Lackenbach, Austria.

Life in the village used to be different. They had Jewish neighbors with whom they got along well. The names of some of the Jewish people were, the Lederer family, the Wieselmann family, who owned a store down the street, and the Jewish doctor, Galanthalder (sp), who was known to be a good doctor. Weninger played in the local soccer team; its players consisted of Jewish and non-Jewish boys. They all had a good relationship with each other. His brother, who died in Stalingrad, dated a Jewish girl for more than one year before he went to the front. As children, he and his friends used to go into the synagogue and sit through the prayer services. Their parents did not object to that. Also, the Rabbi didn't mind as long as they wore a head-cover. Weninger believes that the reason he wanted to go into the Synagogue was out of sheer curiosity. On one day, he remembers, hearing the sound of the blast that destroyed the Synagogue. Afterward, people didn't talk about it. Weninger has no recollection of what happened with the debris and the ruins.

Sometimes, irregular Hungarian troops would be marching and singing through the town's streets. The locals seem to have been ok with that. Before Hitler's rise to power, Weninger recalls seeing groups of Nazi men walking the streets without showing any kind of hostility towards the Jews. Once Hitler became chancellor, though, things changed fundamentally. From then on, the Nazis felt empowered to shout out their messages in order to make sure they were heard and seen accordingly. Nazis were living in Lackenbach; some of them used to play in Weninger's soccer team. On one day, Weninger's next-door neighbors, who were Jewish, knocked at his door, saying that they were forced to leave Lackenbach. They knew about the persecution of the Jews, and soon after, Weninger's Jewish neighbors were gone, as were all of the Lackenbacher Jews, taking with them whatever they could carry. The stores and homes left behind were either looted and destroyed or taken over by the town's people. Weninger asserts that there was no way for the locals to resist the Nazis and to help their Jewish neighbors. Weninger does not remember ever knowing about the persecution of the Jews.

It was unavoidably that he Lackenbacher leaned towards accepting Hitler. However, Weninger alleges that his family consented with Hitler and the Nazis out of necessity. It became a status quo, with no other possibility left. Weninger joined the HJ. Other than that, Weninger does not remember anything he did at the HJ other than the words to two NS songs, which he's able to sing out loud in its entirety.

The Sinti and Roma lived a rather primitive life on the outskirts of Lackenbach. They were ok. Sometimes they would come to his home and ask for food. He never talked with them directly. Weninger had no idea about the hostile treatment by the Nazis towards the Sinti and Roma. All he remembers is that they were taken to the holding camp Schaflerhof and forced to work on road construction. The people in Lackenbach were not necessarily upset about how the Romani

were treated. They put up with it, out of necessity. Weninger believes that the camp was still in operation when he joined the Wehrmacht in 1942.

Together with troops from the Sudetenland, Weninger went from Hollabrunn, Austria, to northern France; he insists that he was not involved in any combats. First, his rank was flag officer; then, he was degraded to work inside the trains. The train conductor's name was Habsmaier (sp), who was also his supervisor. He was a good comrade, not a Nazi, a nice man. Weninger has no idea against whom they fought nor who their enemies were, or why there was a war. All that he knows now is that this is how it was (*without being prompted by the interviewer, Weninger erupts into singing the song: "Wir kämpfen für Deutschland; Wir kämpfen für Hitler, der Rote kommt nicht mehr zur Ruh..." We're fighting for Germany; We're fighting for Hitler; The reds will never come to peace....*) He doesn't know who the "reds" were meant to be.

While he was in Russia, he felt welcomed by the locals. They were not hostile against him. Sometimes he went to their houses and was offered food. Weninger never went to active deployment and was never injured. He was tattooed under his upper arm with his blood type A. He has no recollections of having ever seen Jewish prisoners or a concentration camp or heard about the gassing of the Jews.

Weninger ends the interview with a song that he sang while being in the Wehrmacht. He remembers the words to the entire song.