

Tape two, side one:

JF: This is tape two, side one, of an interview with Mr. Isadore Hollander, on October 25, 1982. You were telling me about your experience in Rovno.

IH: In Rovno, well I start to see that I shouldn't be caught by the Russians, and I start to find a way of living with the, among the Jews in Rovno. And I did odds and ends to survive, to live. I lived in a room. I worked here a little bit. I worked there a little bit, to make life go and just to stay away from the Russians.

JF: So, Jewish life in this town was relatively undisturbed, then, by what was going on?

IH: Well, it was undisturbed, but not that much by the Russians, not even in Lvov. But as me being already in Russia and escaped from Russia...

JF: You could have gotten into trouble then.

IH: I could have gotten into trouble in Lvov quicker than in Rovno...

JF: Right.

IH: Because the Russian system in those years didn't work very well. If you ran away from one city to another, they lost you. You got to run. You had to run. You have to be able to run, to get away from them. So, the war broke out in 1941.

JF: You lived in Rovno then...

IH: I was in Rovno.

JF: For...

IH: The time period, 19-...

JF: Close to two years?

IH: Well, no, '40, '41.

JF: 1940 to '41.

IH: '41, yeah.

JF: O.K. That was the winter, then, of 1940.

IH: '40, and then I became 19-, till...

JF: Until June of...

IH: June, 1941...

JF: O.K.

IH: Till the war broke out between Russia and...

JF: During that time in Rovno, were you worried?

IH: I was worried, about my home, about my mother, about my sisters. And I was worried, we didn't know that the Germans yet, because we knew that a pact of non-aggression was made between Germany and Russia. So, we didn't expect that things will become in a, such a blitz, and in such a fast hit the way the Germans hit Russia. So we lived.

JF: Were you with anybody at that point?

IH: No, by myself. I, I...

JF: O.K. You had been separated from your cousins.

IH: Nobody. I just made myself life between among the other Jewish community in Rovno, under the Russian government.

JF: Was there any way of getting word back to your mother...

IH: No, no.

JF: At that point?

IH: Since then, no, no contacts, there were no connections with anybody in my family.

JF: And did you have any kind of knowledge, while you were living in Rovno, of what was going on as far as the concentration camps were concerned?

IH: Yes. Well, we knew. News was leaking.

JF: It was leaking.

IH: News was leaking. As a matter of fact, that time before the war, I start to become an active member in a resistance organization, which it was illegal by the Russians, because you know by the Russians you cannot organize anything. But we were trying maybe to organize things against the Germans or work for the Jewish cause. And it wasn't much effort. We couldn't have much effort, and we couldn't do anything too much because we didn't have support.

JF: You were trying to organize against the Russians?

IH: I didn't organize. It was already...

JF: In process.

IH: Had against the Russians. We organized, we tried to organize a resistance in case, with getting the news what's already going on in Germany.

JF: Oh.

IH: So we were trying to see in case whatever it might happen, let us be united and let's have a cause for something to be ready for.

JF: So that you were...organizing in case the Germans did invade.

IH: Right. In the same token, the Russians already start to pick up Jews with calling them capitalists, to liquidate their wealths, their wealth of whatever they built through the years, and send them to Siberia, families, send them out, arrest Jewish people. Anti-Semitism in Russia began to show, in those years even in Stalin time.

JF: Well you were also living among Poles at this point.

IH: Well, Ukrainian most.

JF: Ukrainians.

IH: Ukrainians most.

JF: And what was the attitude of the Ukrainian population towards you?

IH: Well by the Russians, they were afraid. It was still an order that not to call anybody "Jew" and not to, and so, but the Russians, if anybody was like a rich man, they took him away.

JF: What about the Jewish, the organization of the Jewish life in the town? Was that permitted to continue...

IH: No, no.

JF: At all, under the Russians?

IH: No, no, no. Everything was illegal. You couldn't meet ten people. You couldn't meet a *minyan*. It was an illegal procedure. But they weren't that harsh against you yet.

JF: Did you do it anyway?

IH: We met. We met. We had our causes. It was...

JF: Were you able to meet for religious reasons?

IH: Yes, yes. They...

JF: It could be worked out.

IH: It could be worked out. We had a *minyan*, we went to a *shul*, we did. They didn't yet, weren't harsh, because Stalin didn't hit right away because I think the feelings in Russia was Hitler. They still had a Jewish ambassador, Litvin, in the United States and he had still a Jewish son-in-law, Kaganovich, a Jewish brother-in-law, Stalin. It wasn't that, but the rich people who were before rich, they felt already the Russians hurting. War broke out and panic began again. I'm in the same shoes and in the same hole as I was in Bendin in 1939. And...

JF: People started running again.

IH: People start to run. People start to look for survival. People became panicky. I had already a lesson. And I had to start to think, "What shall I do now?" No more running, and no where else to run. The only thing was for me to run east into Russia, if I would have been able to make it. But as soon the Germans occupy, you couldn't run. Because they chased the Russians so bad that nobody could have had a chance.

JF: What was this German occupation like compared to the one you experienced in '39?

IH: Rough, very rough. Right to begin with, in the first place...

JF: Different.

IH: Different. Not like in Poland. With the idea of a destruction. Destruction...

JF: When they came into Poland in '39 you did not have the feeling of...

IH: Not had the feeling...

JF: Immediate aggression?

IH: I...didn't have the experience. But being in Rovno I had my experience and I told the Russian Jews, the Polish, the Jews in Rovno, I says, "I am already experienced." I said, "I lived already that time through. Other than now, it's our disaster." Well, a lot of people didn't believe right away. You know, this is all kind of people. You're living among people, you have all kind of opinions. It came, within the next two weeks, a ghetto full, already in Rovno. Because they had already ghettos in Poland, before. So the Germans were already experienced. They had a test. They had already their, their army came in with

a set-up, a commissioner already, “This is this. This you’re gonna do it right away.” So their experience was already handy, that they could, they didn’t have to form anything. “This is what we want, and this is what we’re doing.” So I was between amongst in the ghetto, in the Rovno ghetto, and life became [unclear].

JF: The ghetto in Rovno, then, was established within two weeks of this...

IH: Within two weeks of the occupation there was a ghetto, immediately, and it didn’t last long.

JF: Were you able to work at that point?

IH: I was a laborer, a slave, by the Germans. Work...

JF: Outside the ghetto?

IH: Took us out, trenches to build against the Russian bombardment and do this and clean up town. And there is a lot to talk about, but I, certain things I cannot mention, and I will not repeat. But it didn’t last long, unless I say that we began to form, when I felt that the news leaks out, that we began to form a little resistance. And we picked up ourselves, close to ten people, maybe a couple more, and we ran from the ghetto into the forest.

JF: These were ten men?

IH: Ten. We had a woman between us, and we went to the underground.

JF: You went to the underground.

IH: Yes. This was the place, the only solution. A matter of fact, to begin with, we had Polish soldiers, which they helped us to situate in the underground. Yes. Maybe for their sake, maybe for their safety, to have more confidence and more company, they helped us.

JF: Polish soldiers helped you?

IH: Polish soldiers which they escaped yet from the Germans, during the war with Poland. They were still in the resistance, some of them. They didn’t wear the uniforms, but they were left also on the Russian side. When we came into the forest, we met a lot of resistance. We only had to watch ourselves just for three people—for the Russians, and for the Ukrainians, and for the Germans. This was our lookout.

JF: So the Polish resistance at that point was...

IH: Well, they had...

JF: Was supportive.

IH: They had already partisans, the Polish. Yeah, and they’re not supportive [?], they helped us, they situate us in the forest, in the underground.

JF: So, were you then part of a Polish resistance group...

IH: No. No, no, no...

JF: Or a Jewish...

IH: No, we didn’t want to unite with them. We always stayed over there. I didn’t trust them. We didn’t. We always had to be separate. We’re hunting for our food separate. We knew from each other.

JF: When you went to the resistance in the forest, had you connections with a group at that point?

IH: Nobody yet. Nobody. We were...

JF: You just ran.

IH: Our group...what the Poles let us into the forest.

JF: You had a connection with this Polish group in order to get out?

IH: With the Polish group, yes, to...let us into the forest.

JF: I see.

IH: Forest, because matter of fact, two days after our escape from the ghetto, the ghetto was liquidated.

JF: Oh.

IH: It was very fast. In Poland in Bendin when the ghetto was liquidated the last in '43. And in Rovno it didn't last long, because see, the German had a strong opposition over there, the Russians. Even they chased them.

JF: How long, then, were you actually in...

IH: Till '19-...

JF: Rovno before you escaped to the underground?

IH: About a month or two.

JF: Oh. And then what happened with this resistance group, this...

IH: Nothing.

JF: Underground?

IH: We...didn't do anything. We just...collected certain ammunitions for our protections, because we used to send out at night time people to collect food.

JF: Did you join up with an already existing group?

IH: No, no, no. We...

JF: It was just the ten or so of you...

IH: From the ghetto.

JF: A new group.

IH: From the ghetto. As I said to you before, we already had the leak out of Germany what's happening, so when we start to form certain ways to get ready. But we never knew what's going to happen that fast. We never expected it that Germany will attack Russia that size, that quick, because they had a pact.

JF: The pact.

IH: The pact. So who knew about how fast this will happen? But feelings from leaks out from the German side what they're doing already to the Jewish people, young people in mine age, 25, 30, 19, 18, and there were youngers, we couldn't still try to persuade elderly people. Because if one was an older man and he was religious, he waited for God or you know, help. And he couldn't have the same effort as a young fellow and say, "Well, I'll go with you." A lot of elderly people did later try to hide out by the Ukrainian or hide in people's... But being in the forest we have only one way of survival,

living in the ground in a bunker, covered up with trees, with grass, and see that life should go on to survive whatever it come out. And in the same forest, later on during the war time, Germany and Russia, maybe about five, six times the Germans occupied and the Russians occupied then the Germans occupied, you know, fighting, chasing one and each other forward and...back. And we were in the ground but we couldn't show ourselves day time, you know? We had to go out in night time, go into forest, to town, countryside and see to survive, to bring food. So it was a disaster, dog food, hunting for other food, anything we could have gotten to make survival.

JF: So the war itself was going on around you.

IH: Right above me. Right above our heads.

JF: In the same area, in the forest where you were hiding?

IH: Right. Now before the end of the, before the end to the German surrender for Russia, before, before, I mean after Russia started to succeed in the war against Germany, we already became stronger with more people, and there will be time to help to destroy German property and odds and ends.

JF: That was after the war turned, you...

IH: The war turned into the Russian stronghold. We already had more power, more ammunition was collected, you know, other incidents. We had more people already. We became already more powerful to strike against Germans.

JF: How many people, then, did you have in those years?

IH: When I went away from them, we had already about 45 men, 45 men in power.

JF: And it was after what point, about what year, did you start to do some sabotage?

IH: 19-...the end of 1942.

JF: And what kinds of things?

IH: Destroy German bridges, help to destroy. Maybe I wasn't involved much in the dynamiting and those things, but it was a help. Anything anybody helped was done. And so there was more courageous people than I am. I was a little bit maybe naive or too young, to have to take a rifle to go start to shoot, to kill. But yeah, if it came to it, but you have to do it.

JF: Now when you were organized to do the sabotage, were you linked up with any other resistance groups?

IH: No, no, no, this, we became, yeah, well, then we had connections. Then we start to learn to which forest this group is in, which forest this group is. But we start already to get more knowledge from each other and we start to...

JF: There was more communication between...

IH: More communication between the groups, the partisans, the underground.

JF: Were these all Jewish partisans, or were you also connected to the Polish groups?

IH: Well, then only we fought with a few Polish groups, yes. We fought together in communication, but not together. We never trusted to be together with any Poles or any Ukrainians.

JF: So you would communicate through the Polish groups or the Ukrainian groups, but you would not fight with them.

IH: No. We never trusted that. We always wanted to be on our own and carry out on our own. We had to run, maybe, from one spot to the other to get change of location. It is things that you cannot recall many things what went on. We lived like pigs. There were no facilities, no, you know, that wasn't pleasant, and it's not pleasant to repeat sometimes.

JF: When you were living as a partisan, was there any effort or any interest on the part of the men in your group to having any kind of religious life?

IH: Yes, yes, well, we believed, we still believed that God, we had...we said prayers sometimes. We used our time according the time and the month and the year. We knew when a holiday was. We did a lot of things in religious ways.

JF: What happened when there was a holiday, for instance? Can you give me an example?

IH: Well we said, on Yom Kippur, we fast. We didn't eat a whole day. We didn't have what to eat, but we didn't eat. We knew. We knew when it was a holiday. We knew any time it was. On *yahrzeit* I said *kaddish*. I remembered my father's *yahrzeit* and I said *kaddish*. We had, we made a *minyan* and I, and everybody else did. And other people, you know, were free, free believers. If they didn't believe, then no one interfered with the other's life.

JF: Were there any women in the group?

IH: One woman was to begin with. This woman, she had to go with her husband. They was a young married couple. And then we joined more. It helped, you know, preparing, cooking and not too many.

JF: But these were all generally men between their late teens and what, early 30s or...

IH: 30, to the younger age, younger age. Not...in the middle 40s or in the middle, late 30s. Only younger people which had a little more courage and were more courageous.

JF: What about the native population...the civilians who were living in the towns around you? Were they aware of your existence? Were they helpful in any way?

IH: They were, a lot of them were, they did, were aware, but they didn't know the hideouts. They didn't know about where we were. We couldn't trust. We had people going out—they looked like gentiles—between the Jews, going out to hunt for food. And they had connections with Poles in certain places, with Ukrainians, to deliver the food in exchange for gold or for whatever it was. And this was, but one didn't know from the other where we're coming from and where we're going back to there. And this was all always performed at nighttime, all in the middle of the night the most.

JF: Where did you get the goods or whatever that you needed to trade for food?

IH: Well...

JF: Was there foraging that went on a little bit?

IH: It's a lot to talk about. It's hard to explain. Jewish people find a way how to get out. Our past history tells us. We had...

JF: To survive.

IH: We had a way how to survive.

JF: Yeah.

IH: We fight, and we, the only thing is unity. As long as we're united, we survive. One individual can do nothing.

JF: When you were in connection with these other partisan groups, were you able to find out how the war was going, and what was happening in western Europe?

IH: Well, we heard the news. Yeah, we had the news. We had news, a lot of news. We had, first of all, the war between Russia and Germany. This was the most, our...

JF: That was your biggest concern.

IH: Concern, important things to us. Then the news, then we didn't have enough time to concentrate what happened on the other side, but we knew that already death camps are existing.

JF: You knew about the gas chambers...

IH: Yes.

JF: And the death camps?

IH: We knew already what Hitler did. We knew already the preparation for the cause. And already Hitler, the minute they start to fight with the Russians, already he builded in Lublin the Majdanek camp. And this, you know...

JF: You heard a great deal about Majdanek?

IH: I was in Majdanek. I wasn't in camp, but I was after the war. Now when I come to the story after the war diminished with Hitler, Russia began to chase Hitler back and the Russians occupied. I didn't want to fall into the Russian hands and tell the Russians that I was in the underground and I was this and I was there. So I went into Lublin and in the same place, in the Majdanek concentration camp, we was in the same barracks the Polish Army formed, the Polish Army.

JF: This was in what year?

IH: '43 already, when they headed back. And they began '44. '44 when they start to chase back.

JF: Wait. The Russians started pushing the Germans back.

IH: Back. In '43 they start ups and downs. And then they became the power with the help of the United States on one side and the other Allies in pushing back the Russians [he means the Germans]. I went out on the freedom and I wasn't on the, I was on the free already, out. And we started to live, you know, we start to breathe the air.

JF: In other words, the partisan group broke up.

IH: Right.

JF: In about 1943.

IH: That's it. That's, well soon the Russians chased the Germans out and the Germans never turned back. I start but I still wasn't, didn't want to fall in into the Russian hands.

JF: Now, why did you go to Lublin? What had you heard?

IH: I heard that in Lublin is forming a Polish Army [organized by the USSR], which it's going to fight against Hitler, a Polish Army, the present Polish Army. And I seek to go to Lublin, which I passed a few Polish towns that I was a Jew, the first Jew in certain little towns. And I remember having here a neighbor, a friend of ours from that town, and I'm telling her how I picked up the Jewish *siddurim* and the *chumoshim* from the ghetto part where they used to have a laying-out a spread. And I used to burn them, bringing to the certain place and digging out a grave. See, they were burned, half-burned. So we dugged a grave and we buried them.

JF: You buried them.

IH: Buried them. And I tell this lady, it was Mizoch [phonetic], a little town. Well then I enlisted myself in the army.

JF: So the army was forming the barracks of the old...

IH: In the barracks of the Majdanek.

JF: Of Majdanek.

IH: We slept on the same bunk beds where the people were there in the concentration camp.

JF: Was there any evidence left in Majdanek?

IH: Yes. Evidence! The ovens were still there. And there was a *big* ditch with people covered with lime, that the Germans didn't have a chance to burn them. And it reminds me of an anti-Semitic remark from a Polak, when we stood by that ditch and we looked at those people. And he said, "See, all the Jews are in here." And I showed him and I picked up the cross from that ditch. And with that cross I showed him that it was nun's clothes from a nun. And then...I, how you call it, the habit.

JF: The habit.

IH: The habit. And I said, "Is it Jews? Or it was meant for you too?" And he had to shut his mouth.

JF: He knew you were Jewish.

IH: Yes. Well, I didn't hide that I am a Jew. Well, in that Lublin the war came to an end and they were ready to send us out.

JF: So you trained then on the grounds of Majdanek?

IH: I was trained with anti-aircraft, in the Polish Army. No shoes.

JF: What was the relationship—you told me this one instance—generally, what was the relationship between the Jews who enlisted in the Polish Army and the non-Jews?

IH: Well, at the moment I didn't think of any relationships. But on the other hand, I was on the lookout.

JF: You were still suspicious somewhat.
IH: I was, I am suspicious up to the day, and until the day I'll die. I don't trust the name goy.
JF: But at that point you were united against a common enemy.
IH: I had to be united for the only purpose that I want to take revenge.
JF: Uh huh. Against the Germans.
IH: Against the Germans. And the second, I watch myself for the Russians.
JF: Was there any discrimination as the army was forming?
IH: It was. It was discrimination, but not very well open. It was, I was a Jew. I was recognized as a Jew and I was proud to be recognized as a Jew. I wore the eagle on my head, with the Poles, and I went to a six-months school, to learn anti-aircraft.
JF: Where was the school?
IH: In Lublin. They just trained us separate from the other ones, because coming back, the little education I had before the war helped me, and I enlisted. After six months we were ready to go into the fight, first line.
JF: This was in 19-...
IH: Already in 1944.
JF: '44.
IH: '44. We were sent up to the Warsaw front when the Germans and the Russians, we were under Russian supervision with the Russian officers.
JF: In the, at the Warsaw front?
IH: In the Polish Army but with the Russian officers, right. But I only wanted to wear the Polish uniform, not the Russian uniform, for that, for certain reasons. And at that time I was already twice in Warsaw, crossing the Vistula and going back, chased back and going back, when that uprising was from the Polish Army in Warsaw¹ and the Russians told us not to cross the border. Stay back. So the Germans killed the Russians the way they did with the Jewish ghetto. And when the Poles didn't want to help the Jewish ghetto in that time, so the Russians didn't want to give a hand to Polaks. And they held us back. They said, "No, don't cross no more. Stay here."
JF: Until the Germans took care of the Aryan side.
IH: Care, took care of, right. And after that we crossed and I was behind Warsaw 50 miles. And I was also in bunkers living as a soldier.
JF: Did you, then, see Warsaw after the destruction?
IH: I, not very much. We didn't have a chance. We were right away transferred behind the lines. But then I came into Warsaw. We was only 50 kilometers away from Warsaw that one day we went to Warsaw just to visit Warsaw, as soldiers. From the bunkers we had furlough for a few days, you know. So we went into Warsaw with a couple

³This is a reference to the Polish resistance in Warsaw in August 1944, which the Russians failed to support.

Polish soldiers and one more Jewish soldier was with me. He was a sergeant. And we went into Warsaw and we visited Warsaw.

JF: What section were you in, the Aryan side or the Jewish side, the ghetto?

IH: Well, I went to the Jewish Committee in Warsaw. And already we met Jews. I met already, I already confronted Jewish people from concentration camps.

JF: Who had alr-, this was...

IH: This was already...

JF: Who had already returned to Warsaw?

IH: Apparently people from certain camps, that they were freed by the Russians. The Russians freed camps before the Americans. You know that?

JF: About what year was that, or what month was...

IH: '44, '44.

JF: About what month? I'm sorry.

IH: At the end of '44.

JF: The end of '44.

IH: The end of '44. But it wasn't yet the end of the war. Still are going on too, because the end of the war was in May, 1945, and it was the surrender. Well, we met already and it happened that...

Tape two, side two:

JF: This is tape two, side two, of an interview with Mr. Isadore Hollander, on October 25th, 1982. Address: 27 Henley Road, Overbrook Hills, Pennsylvania, 19151. Phone number, 649-2419. Mr. Hollander, can you continue after your experience in Warsaw, in '44.

IH: Well, in Warsaw, and then I went back to my camp location and we got the news that we are going out on the first line into Lodz, to...

JF: This is at the end of 1944, now?

IH: Well, it, right, the beginning already in 1945, that we are getting ready to go into the front to the, to Lodz, Poland. And they moved us up to Lodz. And it happened that I was the first Jewish soldier to Lodz.

JF: What did you find?

IH: Well, I didn't find too many Jews yet, because all the people from the eastern part of Poland, extermination. I started to think about where was east and west. East, Germany was east. The eastern part of Poland was in the German territory, concentration camps, which didn't come in too many yet, because the war was still going on. But we found quite a few Jewish people in Lodz. And we stationed in Lodz for two weeks. And being a Jew, we got a lot of information about Poles which they became *Volksdeutsche*, German, tried to help the Germans destroy the Jews. And we found out about them, the *Volksdeutsche* people. And the time came for revenge, which it was illegal procedure to do it...

JF: Because you were technically part of the Polish Army.

IH: Because I was technically part, and I had a little bit power. I wore a uniform. And I found more Jewish soldiers already, in the army. I found Jewish officers in the Russian Army which they were trusted already and they already knew the problem what Hitler did. And they start to feel with us, the Russian-Jewish officers, giving us a help. And I think a part of those anti-Semites during the war time helped Hitler to destroy the Jewish population in the Russian ghetto on the land where the Germans were occupying. I think I started to feel better that I can take the revenge, which we did. I think that cause was carried out, carried out very well, that I can remember what I did.

JF: You feel good about that.

IH: I feel good. What I could have done it. What I did and I hadn't done, to take revenge.

JF: You, how many people were involved in this?

IH: Well, we were in the army. We went out every night, for a little bit pride. We were a little bit, we had a list. We had by Poles giving us lists of all those names.

JF: The Poles helped you with this.

IH: The Poles helped us. But it wasn't Jews. But I had a list. We found a tailor, a Polak, he helped us, gave us a list of the...

JF: These were civilian Poles.

IH: Civilian, but they used to help the, they used to cater to the Polaks because they say, "We are better Polaks. We are with the Germans."

JF: So they were angry at them.

IH: And they were very angry. They were glad to give us details. Because they as civilians couldn't do much. All right, and they, then the Germans, but we had the opportunity with the help of Russian-Jewish officers and connections, that they helped us to do what we wanted.

JF: How many people? You went out in small groups or...?

IH: We went out just two, three soldiers at night. We didn't carry anything, not a rifle. We had anything what we are doing with us. And I had to close my eyes. I tell you the truth, as a Jew I was very disturbed to do what I had to do. But...

JF: You didn't use a gun, then, to make it quiet, to keep it quiet?

IH: We did use guns.

JF: Oh, you did use guns.

IH: We did use guns, but I had to close my eyes and ask God for forgiveness what I have to do, because of being a Jew. It was a hard bite. It was the very worst, worst thing in my life, what I had to do, and see what I'm doing. Then after I got used to it, as the war went on to the end...

JF: But you felt committed to doing this?

IH: I...yeah. That was my commitment.

JF: Yes.

IH: That's why I enlisted myself. I wasn't, I didn't have to enlist myself...

JF: I see.

IH: To become a volunteer to do, but I did it because of revenge. And I wanted to do it. And I did it.

JF: And did it feel satisfying to you?

IH: I felt satisfied. As it went on, I felt satisfied. And we didn't touch no civil people. We didn't kill no German civil people. As the war went on, we finished with Lodz, we went in farther, into Stettin, into Germany. And I became a little bit more known by the Russians as a Polish soldier, that I can read a map and I can try to lead them. And I had become a little bit better taking care. I wasn't for a while in the first line. I was with the officers in the back, helping them, reading maps, carrying them. The Russians behaved themselves abnormal, with raping German women and hiding German women. And the way they carried it out was a disgrace, to see it.

JF: The Russian soldiers did this?

IH: The Russian soldiers, the Russian officers. The Russian, not Jewish.

JF: What about the Poles?

IH: Well, the Poles...when I came into the German territory there was no Poles there. Already German people, and you know, they went into panic. It reminded me of 1939 when we went into panic.

JF: But when you went into German territory, you were not with any other Polish soldiers?

IH: Yes, Polish soldiers. Yeah, we were in the Polish Army.

JF: You...

IH: Well, the Polish did the same thing.

JF: That's what I mean.

IH: They robbed, but they didn't behave themselves as much brutal.

JF: The Russian soldiers were...

IH: Yeah but we had the orders. We couldn't do it.

JF: I see.

IH: We weren't allowed to do it.

JF: I see.

IH: But the Russian soldier...I mean, Polish soldiers went out too, but the Russian soldiers were brutal.

JF: And the Russian soldiers were not under directives not to do that.

IH: They were. Stalin, I mean, gave out orders not to touch the civilized population, the one without the uniform, but the revenge was there. The Russians are...

JF: The first line [unclear]...

IH: That...kind, first line, hungry after a woman. And they that type of a people, in general, that type of a people. I learned very much about Russian life. And...

JF: I'll bet you did.

IH: And it is all true in my...filming, in my head, that runs true. Very much I learned. And they were brutal. A matter of fact, I had to be an interpreter, to talk to the woman, and which my conscience never permit me as a Jew to touch a German woman. I would never think of it, to have guiltiness to be with a German woman. But I had to do it because I had from a Russian General, from a Russian officer an order. "Talk to her, lead me to her, bring me to her." And I used to stay outside and wait for them till they come out. And they were very brutal. Very brutal. The same thing what the Germans did to Jewish girls. They picked out the nicest Jewish girls of the town and they all had a good time with them and they killed them.

JF: So the Russians did the same thing after...

IH: The Russians did the same thing. They could have gone 50 men to one woman till she was dead.

JF: Oh my God. Very brutal. It was a very bad, a very bad memories about that.

JF: Yeah. I can see that.

IH: And as life went on, I was in the first line and the war ended.

JF: Were you fighting at that point?

IH: I was on the first line. In that time we were like back, and then they switched us to the first line back. You know, it's like...

JF: They rotated you.

IH: It's hard to explain how a war goes on. It was an offensive and you attempt. After the offensive if you're alive they send you back for rest three, four days. They send another group into the offensive. That's the army system. And we fought till, then they transferred us down to southern Poland, into Sudeten. And by the time we came there we didn't have fight any more, capitulation of the Germans. I have certain pictures that I took that, shaping up and decorating our cannon with flowers and sitting there.

JF: This was at the tail end of the war that you went out to...

IH: At the tail end of the war. This was...

JF: To Sudeten?

IH: The end, and from there they shipped us already to a army camp in Poland. They called it Leszno.

JF: How do you spell that?

IH: Leszno. L-E-S-Z-N-O. Leszno, Pozen, near Pozen, near Poznan, where now it goes on all those things now. And we were in a army camp and they offered me very things to stay in Poland. They want to give me farming. And in the same token I found out about my home town.

JF: What did you find out?

IH: I got a furlough. First of all I got a furlough. And by the other token I got connected with one of my cousins, which is now in Brazil. And I learned about another of his, one of his brothers living also in the army. And my cousin was in the army. As we got lost, during the time, we connected. And so, and I came home to Bendin for furlough, after the war.

JF: What is that word that you're using, "follof?"

IH: "Follof" is...

JF: Oh, Furlough!

IH: Furlough.

JF: Furlough, oh, O.K.

IH: Furlough, it means, a pass.

JF: Thank you, yes, O.K.

IH: To go, furlough, to go.

JF: O.K.

IH: And I came home, and we, I located mine wife, with her sister.

JF: You were married?

IH: No, not there. I...wasn't married. I...

JF: You weren't married at that point.

IH: Located my now, my, now my wife.

JF: I see.

IH: I located her coming home from a concentration camp.
JF: Did you know her before that time?
IH: I know my wife. We're related.
JF: I see.
IH: We're related.
JF: So you, that's when you happened...
IH: I knew her. I knew she is six years younger, but she don't, she didn't, to me, no matter to me because she was six years younger.
JF: I see.
IH: But I found her with her sister. I found one of my other cousins which his wife is now in Philadelphia. They have two children and he passed away a few years ago, seven years ago. He was home already, and we start to find family, we start to look for family and that's what we found, a little, an uncle I found, another cousin, he lives in Niagara Falls. And we began to concentrate.
JF: Did you find out about your mother?
IH: No. I know my mother was gone. I know my sister was gone.
JF: You never found out specifically...
IH: I, never, because I knew, this is it. I tell you, I didn't search, because the news, which came from other people which they were in the same camp, was related to me that she is gone.
JF: So none of your immediate family then survived.
IH: No. I was left with no...
JF: The step-sisters or the...
IH: No, nobody.
JF: No one.
IH: Nobody. And I never searched, because I knew that this is, was it. I wish I can maybe still somebody will pick up themselves and maybe, because a lot of people went to Sweden from camps. You remember that Graf Bernadotte used to help people...
JF: Yes.
IH: Taken out through Denmark and...
JF: Yes.
IH: It was a big help, which I found later a second cousin in Sweden...
JF: Do you still...
IH: Who communications. No, we lost communications.
JF: But did you have any hope that perhaps somebody had gotten out?
IH: I, hope, hope, I have now hope.
JF: You still hope.
IH: I hope. I hope. But I found a lot of youth right after my mother and I am saying *kaddish*. I keep her *yizkor*, you know, and for her parents. And I was in the army. I went back to the camp and I was promised things to stay in the army and which I afterwards

I again had foreseen the Russian rules of Poland, you know, Communistic ways. So I was trying to seek a way how to get out of Poland.

JF: You couldn't resign from your position in the army?

IH: I did. I was freed. But I didn't get a pass to leave Poland. I escaped in my uniform.

JF: You escaped from Poland in your uniform?

IH: In my uniform, but I have already a release from the army. But I had to change my clothes on the borders, which I took my wife to be, with her sister, with my cousins. And we smuggled to Germany, through Czechoslovakia. We were in Czechoslovakia for a while, in Bratislava, in a town. And every morning we went to Prague. And every morning we went to see in the Jewish, was already a Jewish, they called it in Jewish *Gemeinde*, that Jewish Council formed. And on the walls we were seeing signatures. "I am so and so. I was here. I'm going there."

JF: Notes, you were seeing.

IH: Notes. And we found that my cousins were in Prague and they went to Munich, which they are now in Israel, our cousins. And we start to move. Then we went to another city, Bratislava, and from there we went and we got out, out of Czechoslovakia illegally, into Germany, Bavaria. She was already with me, and her sister, and one of my cousins, which is now in Brazil.

JF: How long did this trip take you, to get out of Poland into Germany?

IH: Well, we left in Poland after Yom Kippur. After Yom Kippur we left Poland, after the high, after the Jewish holidays, after Succoth we left Poland. We ran away from Poland. A matter of fact, one cousin in Brazil, which is in Brazil, he was still in the army and not released. So we took a false document to Kielce. And if you heard about that, Kielce was a pogrom. We went to Kielce in the middle of the night. We took him out, put him on the train. And already clothes was waiting in Katowice for us and they were already in Katowice with another cousin. And we came into Katowice, and we changed his clothes, we gave him false documents, and we all left Germany together. We all left Poland together. And we came into Germany. And in Germany we stopped in a town. When we crossed the border we took a truck with wood and were, he took us into town. And we met already people, Jewish people. We are talking Jewish people. And he says, "Where are you going?" I says, "We want to go to Munich." He says, "Why are you going to Munich? We have a DP camp right here in this town." It was Degendorf.

JF: Degendorf?

IH: Degendorf, Bavaria.

JF: How do, what is that, D-E-...?

IH: D-E-G-E-N-D-O-R-F. Degendorf, *Ober* Bavarian, Upper Bavarian means. It's *Ober* Bavaria. And we have in, as soon as we walked into that camp, they told us who was there, and we already have our friends from hometown, from Bendin, being in that camp, the DP camp. One name was Gutman. I think he's not living any more. He lived in

Israel. I saw him ten years ago. A...relative to me through my sister, mine, a brother-in-law to my brother-in-law, was in camp. He was, his wife already was diminished, I mean, killed. And he was there already. And they took us in in that camp and we started to located ourselves among the other people and I started to become a part of the camp. And I worked on the police force in the camp, in the DP camp. And on February the third, 1946, we got married. And we sat and married the way my wife wished ourself, and she had a married [unclear]. We didn't have anybody to give us away, but it was all [pause], people, strange people, you know? Friends, strangers. And...

JF: Let me ask you something about the DP camp. Were people able to talk about what had happened to them during the war?

IH: Well, we talked. And I'll come to it, because this was the beginning in that camp that we only were three months, four months, till we got married. It was a organized very well wedding. Her sister, the same day of the wedding, my wife was very much surprised, getting a telegram, finding two brothers in Canada, living, which they left Poland. [A woman in the background says, "1930."] 19-, one left 1930, one left 1936, or it was '35. And we're still on good relationship with them. They're still living over there. And we got married and we tried to join the community as Jewish people in camp. And we had certain gatherings. We started to keep up *yartzeit* and we started to demonstrate. And manifestations again, whatever it happened, we began to remind our past in the camps.

JF: In what way?

IH: *Yizkor*, talks, speakers. There was left a lot of educated Jewish people among us.

JF: But you talked about, in groups...

IH: In groups.

JF: What had happened?

IH: We talked in individuals and we talked in groups, everybody contributed their problems.

JF: They shared their experiences?

IH: They shared their experience. We talked. But we start to live life. We had dances. We formed theaters. We had...

JF: Yiddish theater?

IH: Yiddish theaters. We had cantorial concerts. We had start to bring life back to survival. We formed *kibbutzim*. I was in the *Haganah*, working for a short time, helping for the cause. I did a lot of things my wife never knew, and, till she found out, she stopped me because she, her hopes were for emigrating, to see her brothers, to get together in life. We start to correspond between ourselves. It was a help through the UNRRA, to get her brothers, you know, to connect with the Joint Distribution, you know.

JF: Wait, it was through UNRRA that...

IH: With UNRRA they connected the brothers, because she...

JF: Oh, that you found the brothers at all.

IH: Yeah, she had only in her memory a street in Edmonton, Alberta, a street! And we start to give to the agent, to the American, you know, agents, to the UNRRA people...

JF: Yeah.

IH: Names.

JF: To locate them.

IH: Hollander, Philip Hollander, or Morris Hollander. And they were in Canada, in Edmonton, Jasper, Jasper Avenue. We didn't...know what. But it came to a certain time that we were connected.

JF: Let me ask you something. The talks that you had, the sharing of the problems as you described it before among the people in the camps, do you think this was helpful...

IH: Yes.

JF: In establishing...

IH: Yes.

JF: The new life that you...

IH: Establishing in Israel. This was helpful. Because we start already with the cause for Israel, for Palestine. [his wife: "*Aliyah*, for going out."] Palestine *aliyahs*, sending ship and kids to Cyprus.

JF: But in talking about what had happened during the war, by sharing those experiences, how did that affect the people in the camp? What...

IH: Well, we were affected already. It didn't hurt us any more. We were trying now to connect the past problems with the...

JF: With the future.

IH: Future.

JF: So what did it do to talk about it? Did it help relieve...

IH: It helped us...

JF: You?

IH: To relieve, and unite us. And thinking about a future that we shouldn't remain in Germany, one thing.

JF: It helped give you strength.

IH: Strength. And that's where we started to smuggle out people, *aliyahs*, children, to Palestine. It gave us courage. We formed a navy brigade in Degendorf.

JF: A navy brigade?

IH: A navy brigade in Degendorf. And they had a ship, an old German ship, on the Donau. And they trained. A matter of fact, I lost a good friend over there. He drowned.

JF: The name of the ship was...

IH: We didn't, I don't know. I don't know the name.

JF: Oh.

IH: The man who formed this, I...can't recall, it was Stillman, whatever it was, he is a big man in Israel now.

JF: Now what did the navy brigade do?

IH: Train, for...navy, the young kids, 21, 20, 19...

JF: Yeah.

IH: Trained them as sailors.

JF: In order to get Jews to Israel?

IH: To go to Israel, to get used. This was...formed in Degendorf, in that camp, a navy brigade, on the Donau River. That boy came from Russia, and he enlisted himself and he drowned. But he is still there in the grave in Germany. I have a beautiful picture of that boy, because I knew his sister, his parents I knew, from before.

JF: So there was a German boat that was used...

IH: A German boat contributed...

JF: By whom?

IH: Well the German, the German had an old boat on the river. It wasn't a...war boat, but it was a boat from another [unclear].

JF: Did they know what you were going to use it for?

IH: Well, maybe if they did or if they didn't...

JF: They didn't care.

IH: They didn't care. They care less. But they were cooperative. That government, but this was with help with the American...

JF: O.K.

IH: If not with the Americans, the help wouldn't be there.

JF: Right.

IH: It has to be the honest way.

JF: Yeah.

IH: Well, we had a lot of Jewish-American officers, you know, in the government, Jewish people, in the American government. We have to have all the connections for those things. I remember I was taught karate and jiu-jitso. You know, for purposes. I was young. I was on the police force in the camp. But...[Mrs. H.: This was to be able to keep the camp in order.] My...wife was seeking for a future not to remain in Germany...

JF: You...would have gone to...

IH: And to see her brothers.

JF: To Palestine?

IH: I would have gone to Palestine. I was registered to Palestine. My wife's sister was already, sent the visas from two brothers to take her sister. And I was already married. And I was registered to the United States and to Palestine. And Palestine was a risky situation for me. But it came up, United States. And I went to the Consul and I was already awaiting the visas. They know that I'm coming. So my wife became pregnant,

which we avoided to have a child on the German territory...especially us. I don't care who else, whoever did or didn't. But me, I didn't want to have my child on the German soil.

JF: But you felt comfortable in getting pregnant when you knew that you were leaving.

IH: Well, I knew already. Well, a matter of fact, at the edge of her pregnancy, we got our papers to leave, which our child, our three children were born in Philadelphia, thank God. So...

JF: Why did you come here?

IH: Why? That it came up, that to come in here. It didn't came up for... [Mrs. H. interjects that Canada didn't let in the married couples] Then, that married couples was complicated. And then this was a different, there's a little story involved, but it's not warranted to talk about. I don't care. I have my own, I made my life the way God gave it to us. Coming here, we're not sorry. Being in New York, I was six weeks in the HIAS, taking care of us, sheltered very well.

JF: What month and year was it, then, that you came?

IH: 1947, December the 25th, Christmas Eve, December the 24th, Christmas Eve, we arrived.

JF: And you were with HIAS for six weeks in New York?

IH: For six weeks in New York, taking care by the United Service, Jewish Family Service. And it came out an order that they don't want to have all the immigration, the immigrants, gathered in New York, that they have an order to spread all Jewish families all over the United States. A matter of fact, I had to go to Milwaukee, which I hesitated, because I had some distant family in New York, from my parents on both sides. And the final decision was made Philadelphia.

JF: So you went to Milwaukee first?

IH: No. I didn't go.

JF: Oh, you didn't go there.

IH: No. I...opposed. Not that I refused. If I had to, I had to, you know? But they were very nice, and they cooperated. And I came here to Philadelphia, which the Jewish Family took care of us.

JF: The Jewish Family Service?

IH: Service took care of us for a while, which we were very grateful. It was one of the biggest helps, up to date I think. And I thank God I am now on the Passover League in the Jewish Family, a member of the board. And I think I paid my shares back.

JF: I'm sure you have.

IH: And I'm still finding ways how to help the Jewish cause, in the vicinity. I'm involved in many, a lot of activities, which it works for the Jewish cause. My wife is involved, belongs to ORT, belongs to other organizations, to the *B'rit Sholom* movement. And I am a member the *B'rit Sholom*. I am a member of Independent Young Men, a member of the Association for the Holocaust, Jewish Holocaust Survivors. And we are

doing the best. Our children are also married. We have eight grandchildren. We're proud of them. We're proud of my family. My son, the youngest, just became a chiropractor. So everything wound up with all the *tsuris*, with all the bad experience in life, went up to a happiness. But we have to seek it should continue the way it is, you know. Fight for unity. [Mrs. H.: "The most wonderful country is America."] And America was good to us. [Mrs. H.: "That is, besides Israel."] Were good to us. America was good to us, what we're seeing and hearing, we know what's going on. We know with whom we're dealing. We know who...the atmosphere surrounding us. But, we still believe in good. We still live in good. We still live in free. And the main cause, that we can help our brethren.