HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

SAM DON

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Hanna Silver
Date: December 8, 1982

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SD - Sam Don[1] [interviewee]
HS - Hanna Silver [interviewer]
Date: December 8, 1982

Tape one, side one:

HS: This is Hanna Silver interviewing Mr. Sam Don for Gratz College on December 8, 1982. Where were you born?

SD: I was born in a little place, in a village, called Ostrykół.

HS: In Poland?

SD: In Poland. And this was a village of about 65 – 70 families and about six Jewish farmers.

HS: When were you born?

SD: I was born January 15, 1927.

HS: 1927. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

SD: It was five brothers and two sisters. The last one was, a twin, a brother and a sister.

HS: So, there were eight altogether?

SD: No, there were seven. The youngest one from me was a twin, there was a brother and a sister.

HS: So, you were very young then when the war started. How much do you remember of the early days of your childhood?

SD: I remember quite a bit before the war. I would say I remember all the way down to since I was five or so. We used to live on a farm. We had a small piece of field seven or eight acres. This goes down to a long, long history of the possession of the farm.

HS: Your grandparents were there already?

SD: Not only my grandparents but my great grandfather. He used to work for a Polish landowner, very, very big landowner and after 35 – 40 years of service, he gave him an award-- a big, big chunk of land. In the deed, it was written that this land could not go over to anyone else, but just by the name of Don.

HS: His family?

SD: Only his family.

HS: And his children and grandchildren?

SD: Right, only the boys. For example, my sister, if she would marry an outsider not by the name Don, she could not have this land. So for that reason, there was a lot of intermarriage within the family.

HS: Within the same family? Important was in the name.

[1]Former name Zalman Domb.

SD: The name, this was in the deed. When it came to my father, there were two of them. It was my father and . . .

HS: And his brother?

SD: His brother, so each one got half of this. Each one got seven-and-a-half acres.

HS: How about you, you were too young to get anything yet?

SD: No, I was working in the fields. The seven-and-a-half acres was not enough to make a living so we used to do all different types of work to supplement the income. For example, in the summertime, we used to deliver milk. About five kilometers from us used to be a colony of children. These children came from Warsaw for vacation.

HS: Like a camp, a summer camp?

SD: Like a summer camp and we used to deliver milk. We also used to [unclear] chips for the summer.

HS: You grew the fruit there and you harvested it?

SD: No, we harvested it but it wasn't ours. We just rented it for the season. And if it was a very prosperous season, if we made a good harvest, we all would go there to sleep at night and see that nobody would steal the fruit. Sometimes there were problems but most of the time it was all right.

HS: What kinds of problems were there? Between you and the other Polish farmers?

SD: No, not farmers. I would say the Polish kids. We lived very, very nicely, the farmers, but mostly the children we had problems. My brother had a big confrontation with one. He stabbed one of the Polish children with a knife and this caused for many, many years bad feelings between the Polish families and us. Most of it was between the children, not between the older ones.

HS: Talking about children, how about the school. Was there a village school?

SD: Yes, there was a school in the next village. I used to go there. It was about two-and-a-half kilometers. I went to Catholic school and there were Catholic teachers.

HS: This was not a public Polish school? This was a parochial Catholic school?

SD: This school was under the Catholic Church. It was a government identified church, recognized by the government, but the church was under the Catholic Church and this is the school we went to.

HS: Was it a good school?

SD: Yes, it was a very good school. It was very strict. The nuns, in the beginning, we had to sit for the religious hour. But since 1935, until the end of the war, we did not to participate in the religion unless we were going to receive [unclear]. In the wintertime usually when it was cold, we would sit in class.

HS: Did the other Jewish children go to this same school?

SD: Oh, yes, all my cousins and my brothers and sisters.

HS: How about the relationship between you and the Catholic children? On the surface?

SD: Not too good. We always had fights. They would say did you go to Palestine, making matches [unclear]. But this was between the kids.

HS: How about the adults? Was there open antisemitism?

SD: No, I don't remember any kind of antisemitic confrontation between the older Jews and the older Polish families.

HS: Did you have dealings with them or did you do your own growing, and selling, or did you deal with them?

SD: No, we used to have dealings. When we were short in certain things, we used to borrow from them. When they were short, they used to borrow from us. Sometimes, like I said before, we used to rent orchards. The orchard we used to rent from certain Polish.

HS: You paid for it?

SD: We paid in advance.

HS: Was it strictly business relationships?

SD: Yes, strictly business. Social business, no, we had no social business.

HS: No social, you had with your other families?

SD: Oh, yes, it was like one family. It was actually family because there was inter-marriage and cousins and second cousins.

HS: So you had a very close relationship with the Jewish families in your village and the ones in the next and the next?

SD: It was like one, it was connected all like one family.

HS: How was your religious life?

SD: Religious life was very strict. We had *Melamed* or Hebrew teacher which he was paid by our village for six families and I believe there was about 30 children, only boys, the girls did not go to Hebrew school. And first thing in the morning, we used to get up very early. We used to get up about 5:30 in the morning and we had breakfast and we went on our way to school. We used to come home around 3:30, 4 o'clock then we went straight to *cheder* and we were in the *cheder*. Friday afternoon, that time there was no work done, everybody was coming home and taking-- there was no shower, so there was a big, big barrel…

HS: A *Wanne*.

SD: *Wanne* [bathtub], like a wooden barrel and mother made the hot water and put the children in the *Wanne* and you got a shower and you got one clean shirt a week and we got dressed for Sabbath.

HS: But you were kept clean?

SD: Yes, we were clean, yes, we were kept clean.

HS: Did any of your men serve in the Polish army?

SD: My brother was in the Polish army and then he was in the Polish war, my oldest brother.

HS: How long was he in there, for the whole war?

SD: Yes, my brother, through the whole war and we never saw him again.

HS: From '39.

SD: From '39, he was called in July of '39 and he was in the war, participated on the Russian front and he was taken prisoner by the Russians. In 1940, we got a letter from my brother. He was in Kiev and everything was fine and he hoped that in the near future he would be able to come home.

HS: But he was then still in the army?

SD: No, no, he was already in-- in 1940, there was no Poland already. Poland was divided between Germany and Russia. My brother was taken prisoner by the Russians, not by the Germans. We were on the German side.

HS: You lived on the German side?

SD: We lived on the German side. The occupied part where my brother was in prison was under Russian occupation, but we never heard or saw him again.

HS: What do you remember about the very first week of 1939, right after the-- let's say September of 1939 when the war started? What do you remember about the very first German invasion? Did you feel it right away?

SD: No, I remember it very good like right now. It was September 1, 1939, it was 6 o'clock in the morning when we heard a big huge blast and we had a plane station, not far from us and there was a factory, a brick factory and there was a mill work over there. I remember my father, *alav hasholom* [Hebrew: rest in peace], said *kinderlach*, we have a war on our hands and this was the words I remember my father said. I believe that it was Sunday, the Germans entered our village.

HS: This was September 5, a Sunday?

SD: September 3. We were under German occupation already. They just passed by the village and some of them stopped for water but there was no type of action or antisemitic or anti-Jews or anything, not whatsoever, maybe because the older Jews were dressed. You could tell the Jews. Especially my father had a beard.

HS: Were they dressed differently and did they have *peyes* [Yiddish: sidelocks or side curls]?

SD: You know they had *peyes* but my father had a long red beard. He was very different than the Poles and he would be recognized right away but all the Jews, except the children, we were outside and we were watching the Germans and some of them even threw a candy, a piece of chocolate or something to the kids and we were dressed almost like the Polish kids and they didn't pay any attention.

HS: In other words, they just marched through?

SD: They just marched through.

HS: And they left everybody alone?

SD: Yes, they didn't bother with any of the villagers. They had established a command about five or six kilometers from us, that's where they had their headquarters. About two days later, they started coming already on bicycles.

HS: As individuals?

SD: As individuals.

HS: Not as an army?

SD: No, no, no, just individuals. The most I can remember is once, there were three at a time but I don't remember after this if they came in a unit.

HS: And what did they do, just visit or find out the news?

SD: No, they just came in and we had in the village, it was called *Hozair* [phonetic]-- in the village we called it like a sheriff. It was what was called a *sołtys* [Pol. village leader]. He was the one in charge of the village. He was the one who would proclaim the news, if anything happened to anyone from the nearest town where we were under. So these three Germans when they came in, they would go to the *sołtys* and whatever type of news or revelations happened, they would come not straight from the Germans, they would come from the Polish *sołtys.*

HS: He gave the orders?

SD: Yes, he gave the orders, correct.

HS: Did they separate the Polish population from the Jewish population or did the orders concern everybody equally in the beginning?

SD: No, we were not separated. We were the same as before. We had Rosh Hashanah [Hebrew: New Year], we had Yom Kippur [Hebrew: Day of Atonement]. It was the same.

HS: And you continued working as usual?

SD: Yes, I remember it was right before Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and we continued as usual, our services and our work. It was almost the same thing but there was fear with inside us. We knew that something did occur and something changed and something would take change pretty soon.

HS: Did you hear any news from other parts of Poland where things had happened?

SD: Yes, we heard from people down in the village that the Germans are closing in on Warsaw and Warsaw is on fire and Warsaw should within the next three or four days, it should be under German occupation but it took much longer. Warsaw was, I believe, about three weeks after they entered to us I think Warsaw did surrender.

HS: Now, how long did this state last where you were left alone?

SD: This changed in December of '39. They came in and they took all the men to work.

HS: Now, who is they, the army?

SD: It was the Germans.

HS: But it was the army unit, the individuals or. . .

SD: No, it wasn't an army. In that command force, there was a commandant or you would call him like a sergeant of a police station.

HS: A commandant.

SD: There were maybe about 15 or 20 regular . . .

HS: Army units?

SD: Army units, and they were the ones in charge now of the ordinance or whatever.

HS: So, your sheriff was kind of on the sidelines then?

SD: Yes.

HS: Or did he work with them?

SD: Yes, he worked with them. The Polish, he worked with them. But they also came in from the commandant and they say he wants all of the men to work and not far from us there was a forest and so we would have to chop those trees, the huge trees.

HS: That meant all men, the Polish and the Jewish.

SD: No, no, just the Jews. That's when they changed.

HS: Then they started to separate?

SD: That's when we found out the first thing that we were different, it was in December of '39.

HS: It was about three months after they started?

SD: Correct. Then they took all the Jews, the men, to work. But …

HS: Was it useful work or was it just that they. . .

SD: No, it was useful work as far as they were concerned. We were cutting down trees. We lived near a forest, a big, huge forest and water. The water, the name of it was Narew, and this Narew used to go in the Bug and the Narew was almost like the Delaware River, the size of it.

HS: Of course they did not pay you?

SD: No, of course not.

HS: Did they give you food or were you permitted to eat your own food that you still had at home?

SD: Yes, as a matter of fact, they told us that we were going to be there between 10 and 12 hours and you should take food with you.

HS: How were you treated?

SD: We were treated very fairly.

HS: You just had to do your work?

SD: We were treated very fairly but there was one incident. One German came over one day and he took the scissors and he cut out certain sections of one man with a beard.

HS: To make him ridiculous looking?

SD: Yes, to make fun of him.

HS: How long did this last? Did the same people, the same commandant stay in the same area?

SD: Well, I don't know because in 1941 we were evacuated from there and we were taken out of there.

HS: But this lasted then a whole year, until 1940?

SD: No, in 1940, there were times that they were quiet and there were times that they did let us know that we were Jews and they came and took certain things away from the Jews. Like if somebody had a horse, they would take away the horse or if somebody had a dog, they would-- we had a dog, they shot the dog. They took more often to work from us. And then after a while they too even the younger children, age 10, they took to work. We knew already that we are different than the Polish and it's going big change took in 1940. It was like in and out . . .

HS: '41?

SD: In '41, in January of' '41 or maybe it was in December '40, I'm not sure of the date, that we were told that get all our gatherings together that we are being moved to a ghetto. So, they also told us only take what belongings that you could carry in a suitcase.

HS: How much notice did they give you?

SD: They told us like the day before that the next morning we were being evacuated to a ghetto.

HS: Could you take your horse and buggy with you?

SD: No, no. They had told us the only thing we could take with us was like a suitcase.

HS: And where did you have to be?

SD: Each one had to be in their own house.

HS: And they came in trucks?

SD: And they came, no, they came with horse and buggies and they had some of the horse and buggies belonged to the next village from a Jewish family and they used those. We also had a horse and buggy but our horse they took away-- the Polish army took our horse away so we didn't have any horse at that time already.

HS: How was the reaction of your Polish neighbors? Former neighbors?

SD: Well, the Polish neighbors, they acted like-- like you see a riot over here, like there used to be riots in the big cities and looting was going on.

HS: What did they loot, your stuff?

SD: They looted everything in the houses.

HS: Your houses?

SD: Yes, our houses. While we were still in our yards, we were still there and they told us, we will keep this for you when you come back and you will find this by us.

HS: Were they encouraged by the Germans to take it?

SD: Yes, absolutely. Some of them also just came up saying where you're going, you won't need this anyway so I can take it and this was people that we grew up with and we knew for years and years.

HS: And there was not one who showed at least sympathy or tried to be helpful?

SD: Well, not all of them were there with us, not all of them. There were individuals that will come up maybe later in the discussion what happened because I went back [unclear].

HS: So you were six or seven families and you were at the same time taken to a ghetto and how far away was that?

SD: First of all, there were more than six or seven families because it was not our own village. It was all the villages.

HS: No, your village. You were all at the same time taken?

SD: At the same time. Yes. At the same time.

HS: Then they took the neighboring village?

SD: Yes, all the neighboring villages, the Jews, in the same manner, the way we were evacuated and we were taken to a ghetto that was called Makow.

HS: How far away was it from your village?

SD: I would say it was about 40 kilometers.

HS: Not too far away?

SD: Well, in those days, it was far away.

HS: *Ja*, and how big a ghetto was it?

SD: I'm not sure but I would say approximately 30,000 Jews was in that ghetto.

HS: They must have been from far and away because they were all small. . .

SD: First of all, Makow itself there was a Jewish community.

HS: A Jewish community of their own.

SD: Makow was a large size city. It was not far from Malawa.

HS: About how big a city was Makow?

SD: Makow itself, I don't know, about. . .

HS: As far as Jews are concerned, how many Jews?

SD: I think I would say there were several thousand Jews there and with all the Jewish communities surrounding, I think there were about 30,000 or so.

HS: All the rural communities and the city people from Makow, they were all put in the same ghetto.

SD: The same ghetto. They took a certain section of the city and wherever a Jewish family, for example, had a house, in that house, they would probably put in another three families. Depending on the size of the family.

HS: How about the Polish people who lived in that area? Did they throw them out or did they live with you?

SD: I don't know because when we got there, the ghetto was established already. I have no way of knowing if there were Polish people in the ghetto and they were evacuated because this was a Jewish section itself.

HS: Anyway they made it the Jewish section?

SD: They made it the Jewish section.

HS: Where did people have to work, outside the ghetto?

SD: There were many-- when you're talking about work, do you mean supporting ourselves?

HS: Were you put to work by the Nazis or you had to work somewhere else to get some food?

SD: Okay, I don't know exactly how most of them did but I can only tell you the way it happened to us.

HS: You and your family?

SD: And my cousins and me because we were always kept ourselves together. In my situation, I had a brother older than me and he did right away escape from the ghetto, from Makow.

HS: It was not too hard then to run away?

SD: No, it wasn't too hard. They put a rule up. We didn't have any water in the ghetto. We had to go-- in the beginning, they opened up the gate twice a day.

HS: So you could go for water?

SD: Yes, and after that, they made it only once. My brother escaped the ghetto the first days.

HS: Did he know where he was running or did he just run away?

SD: No, no, he had a plan of what to do because my brother went back to the villages and was bringing in food and for the food he would get like a square of kerosene or salt or any other thing. He would take them back to the farmers what they were looking for and that's how he was trading food for items that the farmers couldn't get, sugar, salt, turpentine or some kind of medicine.

HS: But this was before the wall went up in the ghetto, right?

SD: No, no, the wall was there already.

HS: Was there and he could go back and forth?

SD: He smuggled out. He was a very, very strong-minded individual and he jumped the ghetto and would go out and he would find a few vegetables always bring at least once a week he would go out and he would bring food.

HS: For you?

SD: Yes, for our family and some of my cousins and so on, and later on, he started to go to Warsaw because I had a brother in Warsaw. He was married and he lived in the Warsaw Ghetto so he was making rounds as far as Warsaw and sometimes it took him four or five weeks by the time he came back.

HS: And he had no problem moving around the countryside?

SD: Oh, he had problems. First of all, he spoke Polish, was dressed as Polish and he also had a partner who was a *Polak* [non-Jewish Pole] and in those days, when you brought into Warsaw any kind of food or anything that they needed badly. . .

HS: They didn't ask your religion, right?

SD: No, no religion or anything. They used to bring in-- like they called it in Polish *szpic.*

HS: Oh, *szpic,* lard, lard.

SD: *Ja, ja.* They would bring in this …

HS: Bacon, that's what.

SD: Or they would bring in flour or corn or wheat or anything.

HS: What the countryside has, *ja*.

SD: Produced. And sometimes butter and for those items, there was no price, whatever you wanted actually they would pay you.

HS: So how long did he manage to go on with this kind of trade?

SD: Well, this didn't take too long because I wasn't in that ghetto for too long and my brother went to Warsaw, the first trip, he came back, everything went fine. Meanwhile, the Germans took all the Jews out to work and my father was one of those and me, and we worked on a highway, clearing the highway from snow. The snow was very, very deep. I would say it was four or five feet maybe and frozen and it was very windy and it was very, very cold.

HS: And you had no proper clothing?

SD: No, we did not have proper clothing. My father had a beard and I remember the icicles would be hanging down his beard. My father's hands were frozen and he started to like, cry, and this was the worst thing for me to see my father cry. I wanted to help him.

HS: You didn't help him?

SD: I couldn't help him. Finally, I went over to the one who was in charge over there, he was a Jew and he was in charge there, and he knew about my brother and I told him that I need help for my father and they had like a barrel they were burning with a fire and I asked him if he would let my father stay over there for a while and warm up and if my brother came back from Warsaw, I would take care of him, which he did and after that, we went back to the ghetto and the work continued on a daily basis. [Unclear]. My brother came back from Warsaw already, things changed completely at that point.

HS: Did you not get the idea of running away while the door was open?

SD: Yes, I'm coming to it. I didn't get the idea. I was told to run away because things got worse in the ghetto. There was sickness occurring more and more.

HS: Because it was wintertime. You probably didn't have fuel or heat?

SD: Not only this but there were putting in four or five families to a house. The lack of cleanliness was very, very bad at the time. Typhus broke out over there and my cousin's family, four of them died in one week.

HS: Of typhus?
SD: Of typhus.
HS: There was no medication?
SD: There was no medication and it was cold.
HS: Were there some doctors?
SD: Yes, there were doctors but …
HS: They had no medication.
SD: They had no medication or facilities for them.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

HS: Now when that happened, when the first Germans came to your house?

SD: Yes, I forgot one incident which happened in the beginning when they came in. There were three Germans who came in in the early morning and they came in the house. They knocked on the door and somebody in the family opened the door. They walked in and my father was in morning services. He had on the *tefillin*[2] and he had on the *shel yad* [Hebrew: hand *tefillin*] and *shel rosh* [Hebrew: head *tefillin*] with one on his head and one on the hand and the Germans said, "Hey Jew, you're hiding there and you have gold and diamonds," and he threw it off of my father's hand the *tefillin* and from his head. My father wanted to protect them. The other one hit him with his rifle and my father fell unconscious. The one German gave it over to the next one he should look over them. He looked at it looked at it, and he put it on the floor and he stepped with his boots on it and he crushed it and disappointed he was because he didn't find any gold but he did find just religious prayers which were written in. That's the incident that I left out before. Then, back to Makow Ghetto, my father at that time was sick already. The beard was cut off by the Germans when he was working on the highway, cleaning the snow and my brother told me that as of now, I would have to take more part in it, in supplying and organizing food for the family and his trips to Warsaw which was a necessity-- first of all, my brother was there and also he was making enough money to support our family over here. So, the last time when I saw my brother, he left for Warsaw so I was the next one to go to the villages.

HS: With him or on your own?

SD: No, I went with a cousin of mine.

HS: But he had told you where to go and what to do?

SD: Yes, he gave me some tips. I knew where to go but he gave me some tips in the event we encounter Germans or certain *Polaks*, how to avoid them, when is the best time to go, how to ask for or trade for food from the Polish farmers and so on. So, he gave me some tips. But this was my first time that I jumped the ghetto, a cousin of mine and myself.

HS: Where did you sleep? You didn't go back to the ghetto to spend nights there? You kept on going from doing your trade and then, just delivered the food and then came back?

SD: When we went, we usually went three or four days. By the time we got to the villages, sometimes we had to be in hiding for hours in order to avoid Germans or maybe certain Polish.

HS: They did cooperate with the Germans, did they not?

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[2]Tefillin – set of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah. Worn by male observant Jews during weekday morning prayers.

SD: In my time, I don't know. I assume that some of them did and some of them didn't. There were good Poles and there were bad ones.

HS: How about your experience?

SD: My experience, fortunately, I didn't have any experience with it because I was caught the first time when I got out. I left the first time with my cousin then when I was about four or five kilometers outside the ghetto already-- in fact, it was the first village, we could see ahead of us and I saw over there maybe about 200, maybe a little more, people who were working over there on a field and they were the Polish Germans. They were called *Volksdeutsche*. They were in charge.

HS: These were the ethnic Germans who had been living in Poland.

SD: Yes, ethnic Germans. I was walking with my cousin and we saw so many people and being the first time outside the ghetto and we never encountered this type of thing. My brother never warned me something like this so we went in the same direction where these people were working in the fields. Maybe about 1,000 yards away from there, I heard one of those guards call my name, "Hey, Don, where the hell are you going outside here?"

HS: This was a German?

SD: This was a German. Not only a German, a *Volkdeustcher*, but he was our neighbor and I used to go to school with his children and Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, when we went over there to the synagogue, we used to spend a lot of time-- the kids used to spend a lot of time in his house because his children-- they used to spend time in our house, we used to go to the same school.

HS: You had a very friendly relationship?

SD: A very friendly relationship.

HS: And how did he call you, where are you going? Did he sound friendly or...

SD: No, it was very unfriendly. First of all, I was bitten by his dog. He let the dog after me and the dog didn't let me run away. He tore a piece of my clothes and my cousin, too. He came over and he hit us a couple times and he said, "Don't you know where you belong, you belong in the ghetto," and he called us dirty Jew, and all different things and he said your good days are gone and I am your master now and you do what I say if you want to live until tonight and so on. And I was taken prisoner by him with my cousin and we were brought to the field that day, night. We got back to that camp and this camp was in Maku, outside the ghetto and I was over there for two weeks in that camp. From this camp, they did send me to a different-- it wasn't a camp, it was a penitentiary and it was Potusk [phonetic], it's called a city, it's called Potusk. In that city, Potusk, I also met a cousin of mine, a girl, and she was also caught and she had probably left the ghetto after I did but I never had a chance to talk to her because they kept women in different cells. I was over there for about three weeks and I was sent to a

penitentiary in Poland. It was a very, very open and they only kept over there hard criminals and the name of that was Plotsk.

HS: This was together with Polish criminals?

SD: Yes, and I was in that prison until December of '42, in Plotsk.

HS: And how was it in there, was it like a regular prison or were the conditions worse than that? Were you separated as a Jew again?

SD: No, I didn't live as a Jew. Nobody knew I was a Jew from the inmates except maybe the Germans. I did not work the same type of work that the older men worked. I was at that time about 16 – 17 years old and I worked inside the penitentiary, not outside and I had a very light job and I worked with a little Polish boy and we made biscuits and this little Polish boy was also serving for stabbing his stepfather and he was very, very fast in his work and as a reward, he got a lot of soup.

HS: Extra soup?

SD: Yes, and he somehow liked me and I spoke his language and I admired his work and all of that and he always gave me soup for bread because he had so much of it so I actually had it very good in there.

HS: So, in other words, the jail was so much better than the ghetto and safer?

SD: Oh, of course. This was in my case.

HS: But there was no trial. You were just put in there, right?

SD: I had a trial, too.

HS: Oh, you didn't mention that.

SD: This will come up a little later.

HS: Oh, you were first put in the penitentiary and kept there without any trial or hearing or accusation or anything?

SD: Correct.

HS: This neighbor of yours just put you in there?

SD: Correct. You mentioned a trial. Yes, I had a trial but the reason why I was out over there was not for food. I went out spying. Against the Germans and I was supplying the Polish underground with news and information and I was also given red and green stars. I did not wear the yellow star so I was up there until December.

HS: Does that mean you were a political prisoner now?

SD: Yes, it was a political prisoner, right. In December of 1941, I don't remember dates but I know it was the beginning of December of 1942[3], they came into the cell and they told me to take your belongings, you're going for a trip.

HS: Did you have any belongings?

SD: *Ja*, I had individual-- you had a sweater. I didn't [unclear].

HS: But you didn't have things with you, right?

SD: No, not like watches.

[3]Correct date is 1942.

HS: Because you were caught outside together, you didn't have anything?

SD: Yes, but we got clothes in Potusk.

HS: So, you had a little something?

SD: Yes, we had a little something. Like we had shoes and we had socks, we had a blanket. They said take your belongings and you're going for a ride. With me in that same cell, there was also an older Jew from Lava and he was about in the late sixties and his name was Meklinsky and he was also with me and there were several other Jews from the same penitentiary and we were brought to a station. It was a short ride and at that station over where we were brought, there was a train and there were Jews in the whole train. In the last wagon, there were some people already, older, with green or red stars and we joined them in the last compartment and we were there about 12 midnight or so, and then we left, and we-- I don't know how long it took, but it was maybe about 20 hours or so and we came into a place and the train stopped on the side and we waited and waited for a long time and then the train started to go again, maybe about half an hour and then we came to place and this we saw was Birkenau.

HS: Oh, Birkenau.

SD: This was when I arrived in Birkenau in December 1942. This was the last time I saw my family and…

HS: Was your family also taken to Birkenau? You did not mention that.

SD: No, my family was taken to Birkenau, but in different stages and not everyone was taken.

HS: What happened to your brother? Did you see him again?

SD: Yes, my brother-- we'll get a little bit later to it, but what I want to say is I had one brother in the Warsaw Ghetto. He was taken September of '42 to Maidanek. My father was taken-- I don't remember the date, but I think he was taken, also, the beginning of '42, to a place, and I forgot the name of the place. I think it's called, yes, Ciechanow.

HS: Do you know when your ghetto was closed?

SD: I don't, no, I don't know when it was closed or when it was evacuated. I only learned all these things when my brother was, brother was taken to Maidanek-- the one from Warsaw, when my father was taken to Ciechanow and my mother and my two sisters and my younger brother was taken to Birkenau. This I learned from my brother when I learned that he was in Auschwitz and he was in a young group that was called the German *Maurer-Schule*, bricklayers. There were 200 of them and that's when I learned that my brother was there and I was already well established in Birkenau that I had enough-- I don't know, how do you call it, protection?

HS: Good connections?

SD: Good connections would be the right word to bring him over to the same camp as I was, but it was not the same camp because when I was in Auschwitz, also next to me was a Gypsy camp where they kept gypsies and other certain nationalities.

HS: But you were separated by wiring?

SD: By a big, huge fence and this fence was most of the time electrified by 550 volts.

HS: So, you didn't go near it?

SD: No, but we kept communication between-- over the wires, over the fence.

HS: So, in other words, in the ghetto, you got along rather well with all the other people, in the Makow Ghetto?

SD: The Makow Ghetto?

HS: Yes.

SD: We did not mingle too much. There was no social life of any kind over there.

HS: But many of them you knew who lived with you together?

SD: We only knew the people who lived in our house and most of them were family or most of the Jewish from other villages which we knew.

HS: That's what I meant, yes. So, you knew quite a large number?

SD: Yes, we knew many, many people.

HS: Did you have contact with people from other areas, from other towns, inside the ghetto?

SD: I don't know because I wasn't there very long so I don't know actually what happened after I left. I assume there would be but I was only there a short time so I don't know.

HS: So, now you got to Birkenau?

SD: Yes, this was December of '42. I got to Birkenau. When I got to Birkenau, I met over there some people which I knew and very few of them did live, survive for too long a period of time, including myself and the reason I'm telling you including myself is because-- do you know a *lifen* [phonetic] is in German?

HS: Yes, a cadaver, a dead person, a corpse?

SD: Correct. Now, I was over there about three weeks and after three weeks, I was already a *Muselmann*. I think you know what a *Muselmann* is. Did you ever hear the expression of a *Muselmann*? The definition of a *Muselmann* was that he almost couldn't support himself on his feet, he probably was skin and bones, he was a skeleton.

HS: Emaciated.

SD: Yes, he probably psychologically and emotionally, he was retreated already. He just didn't want to live anymore. He just couldn't go to work. He was hiding or-- this was a *Muselmann* and people like this were put in a selection and those selections, people like this got an L, tattooed an L, and those people were pushed in, in the barrack, it was called a barrack. In the barrack, the number was number 7. Number 7 contained all those *Muselmann* who had to wear an L, including myself. I had an L too, but I was fortunate.

HS: You mean the tattooed and nail?

SD: Yes, they were tattooed with the L. This is the L, right, and this is our…

HS: ZD, this is for Zalman Domb.

SD: ZD, yes. Z Domb, yes. So, as you can see, the L is made first and later the square that does not fit in exactly.

HS: And what is your number?

SD: My number is 83571. There were no names over there.

HS: Just a number.

SD: [unclear] It was 83571 and that's the only way you knew that they meant me.

HS: So, why did they put you in there? Were you also a *Muselmann*?

SD: Yes, I was a *Muselmann*, very much so a *Muselmann*.

HS: I thought you were still strong and…

SD: Yes, but by 1943 in Auschwitz, there were no strong people. If you survived, if you came in over there like, for example, today and if you lived a few weeks, it was a long, long time over there. Now, I was very fortunate. I would call this a miracle. There's no question about it. This person, who in German was called a *Pfleger*, it's like a nurse.

HS: An aide?

SD: An aide. Well, it was a man. This man-- and there were lines for the tattoos-- this man who gave me the L. . .

HS: The letter L?

SD: Right, the letter L, he used to date my cousin before the war.

HS: He was a Jewish man?

SD: *Ja, ja,* a Jewish man, yes.

HS: He was made to do that?

SD: Right, he was an inmate.

HS: And he was told to put the letter L on everybody.

SD: Not only he, there were several.

HS: Yes, but this was his job to put the L on people?

SD: Right, I was fortunate or a miracle, I don't know, I was in his line and he recognized me and he told me that try to be near the door because there was like herring in a barrel when they pushed you in, maybe it was enough for 500 and they pushed 1500 in there so you couldn't breathe and many, many of them died while they were there. But one thing with the Germans, they were always factual with the numbers. They had to be exactly. Even if you went to the gas chamber it would have to be exactly the number that they put in over there. So…

HS: He gave you advice, be near the door?

SD: His name is Mieric. In Jewish, it was Myer but in Polish, he was called Mieric. Mieric said to me, "Zalman, just try to stay near the door and I'll be able to do something for you. I'll probably be able to rescue you," and that's how it happened. I

did everything that was possible to be near the door. I was squeezed back so many times and I made it back and he had a dead body, which there was no shortage of it, and he pushed me between the dead bodies and he got me out of there.

HS: He exchanged you for a dead body?

SD: Correct. He put me in the-- from there, they made a square circle and they put my initials in it and they told me if you are in a selection next time, if they ask you what this is, you tell them you got that in Plotsk, the penitentiary, and that's how I survived. Going back to Mieric, Mieric came to Auschwitz in June of 1940 when the concentration camp opened up. The first transport of that came only a small amount of Germans, German descent-- no, Germans.

HS: German Jews?

SD: Hard criminals, no, no Jews.

HS: Oh, criminals.

SD: German hard criminals. They were the first ones that came in, I believe, in May or June of 1940.

HS: Into Auschwitz.

SD: In to Auschwitz,

HS: Which was then a concentration camp?

SD: No, this was the beginning of it.

HS: But it was made into it?

SD: It was made into a concentration camp. Mieric came in with the second transport. There were some Jews too already in the transport, but those Jews did not come as Jews. They came in as political prisoners. Now, those people who came in, the Germans and the Jews and the Poles, everything, they were like one family. They belonged to organize the union. They were very, very sacred by them to help each other and they did survive and those who did survive, they were holding close together. . .

HS: They had established relationships to each other?

SD: Correct. They had the best jobs in Auschwitz. They would be like *Blockführer*, *Stubenführer*, or *Kapo*[4] or whatever.

HS: They were their own little team.

SD: Right, they were the clique and the one helped the other ones.

HS: Maybe some were Socialists or maybe they were Communists or Zionists.

SD: No, I think it's a possibility, but I think the misery. . .

HS: Made them stick together, yes.

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[4]*Blockführer* – overseer of a barrack prisoners, *Stubenführer* another term for *Blockführer* from German word *Stube* [chamber] which the interviewee explains in more detail in his next comments. *Kapo*- a concentration camp prisoner selected to oversee other prisoners on labor details. The term is often used generically for any concentration camp prisoner to whom the SS gave authority over other prisoners (ushmm).

SD: It made them out of necessity stick together because they were the first ones over there so they got the first jobs. I was very fortunate that Mieric did recognize me. From there, he did many, many things. Thanks to him, I'm alive today.

HS: He took you into that little circle?

SD: No, he did not take me to the circle. I was never in the circle. First of all, I was much, much too young to be in the circle. Secondly, I could never give orders or kill or do anything like them. Oh, yeah, they killed many, many people. There was…

HS: The Jews or others?

SD: Oh, sure, even the Jews. The *Kapos* or the German *Kapo.*

HS: What do you know about *Kapos* in Auschwitz?

SD: My *Kapo*, I only got nothing to say but praise. He was an angel. He was a German. I don't remember his last name but his first name was Otto. He was a big, tall man and he was like an angel, not only to me because he and Mieric were very good friends, but everybody which I knew would like to work for him.

HS: And he was not Jewish?

SD: No, he was German. He was a German hard criminal. He was from the first ones who arrived in Auschwitz.

HS: Then they made later ones the supervisors for the Jewish who came in, is that correct?

SD: Yes, they were the *Kapos*. You know what a *Blockführer* is? Or *Stubenältesters*?

HS: Yes, the elder, yes.

SD: The *Stubenältester* was, I would say the foreman over a dozen. A regular *Stubenführer*, he would only like clean the floors and make the beds and help with the food. *Stubenältester*, he was over all of us.

HS: He supervised them?

SD: He supervised them, correct.

HS: Did you get a little extra food here and there?

SD: Oh, yes, I had food-- after a while, I had food that I gave away food. I made connections through Mieric that I made many friends in the "Canada." I don't know if you ever hear the word "Canada." "Canada" was a *kommando*. When I say *kommando*, I'm referring to every work group. It was called a *kommando*.

HS: A *kommando*, yes.

SD: The "Canada" *kommando* was one of the best to work because first of all, psychologically and emotionally, it was the best to sustain yourself, to help you stay alive, it was the best. They were the ones when the transport arrived in Birkenau, they were there after the Jews left the wagons and they were not permitted to take nothing with them. This "Canada" *kommando*, they sorted clothes, gold, silver, diamonds, food, shoes, all of it. That's what they worked in that *kommando* and there was a lot, a lot of smuggling through the camp with the knowledge of certain Germans when they were

near the gates and when the orchestra was playing marches when we were going to work and coming to work.

HS: These were Jews, people, who did not have to go to work that were just playing the music?

SD: They were playing the music, yes. Anybody who was a musician, good musicians, they played in the orchestra. There was always an orchestra. So with the knowledge of certain Germans who worked at the gate, that would search, they knew if we had anything, so they would make nothing out of it because. . .

HS: They let you sneak in something?

SD: Yes, because we were bringing into the camp, diamonds and watches or vodka or silver or perfume, those kinds of things and this was distributed to all different types of *Lagerführer*, *Blockführer*, and *Kapos*.

HS: Kinds of bribes?

SD: Bribes and those *Kapos*, they bought off certain Germans and high officials, too. There were many, many times that I made deliveries to outside the camp in the morning. I would go into the "Canada" and I would pick up the *Blockführer* would give it to me and I would bring it the next morning to work and give it to my *Kapo*, Otto. The guards or the sergeant or whatever, the higher ups, they would get certain presents for their wives or their girlfriends or whatever so there was a lot of smuggling going on over there.

HS: What kind of work did you do at that time?

SD: I was working-- it's called [unclear], excavating grounds but I had nothing to do with excavating. My job was to distribute ice picks, shovels, hammers. Those which were broken to pick up those and bring them back. There was a certain small-- I don't know what you call it.

HS: A shed?

SD: A shed, yes, where they had some inmates and they would pick some men.

HS: This was much easier than working, just distribute things.

SD: Because we were inside when it was very cold over there and it was raining. We were inside in that shed and there was a bough with a fire and they had chicory coffee and we had a lot of Polish civilians working with us and they would bring in sometimes, food or occasionally, they would even give an apple or something like that which was unusual.

HS: So, in other words, I don't hear any mention of mistreatment. Were there beatings?

SD: I had the treatment the first three weeks but I was almost ready to be. . .

HS: In Auschwitz?

SD: Yes, in Auschwitz. After the first three weeks, I was ready to go to the gas chamber and if it wasn't for Mieric, I would be in the gas chamber. But it's not over, I had my share later. Mieric was my angel over there. He did a lot of things. He brought

in my brother to him. But it did not work out the way I wanted it. My brother-- I think I'm going to skip this for a while because I'm going ahead. It will come in a few minutes. Mieric himself-- did you ever hear of a *Sonderkommando*?

HS: Yes.

SD: Mieric himself was put into the *Sonderkommando*. The *Sonderkommando* was a little camp within the big camp in Auschwitz. In the camp where I was, there was built. . .

HS: A separate. . .

SD: A separate lot where they kept the *Sonderkommando*.

[Tape One, Side Two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

HS: This is tape number two for Mr. Sam Don. So, about this *Sonderkommando*, this special commando within the camp Auschwitz, this is where your friend, Mieric was?

SD: Yes, he was in that camp. From this camp, no one ever got out alive.

HS: Because they knew too much?

SD: They knew too much and not only that, they never could come in contact with any other person except those who worked over there. I made contact with Mieric by writing a note and just putting a piece of stone on it and I threw it over the wall and he would send me messages to his colleagues and so on. He was over there for a while because when I left Auschwitz, he was still there. But I learned later that the *Sonderkommando*, he was exterminated in the same group and he was-- they took him in the group and they kept them for a certain amount, three months or four months or maybe a shorter time and then they would exterminate that group and they would take a new group and that's how it was going on. One time, I came-- I don't know which one it was but there was an uprising in one of those crematoriums.

HS: In the *Sonderkommando*?

SD: Not in the *Sonderkommando*. In the *Sonderkommando*, when they were taken out to work in the crematoriums itself, their job was to burn those corpses into the ovens. And the *Sonderkommando*-- I'm not sure if this was the one where Mieric was or a later one, they did cause an uprising. One of the *kommandos* was set on fire-- one of the crematoriums they also destroyed, one of the ovens, but it held very little significance as far as stopping the. . .

HS: The process continued nevertheless?

SD: The process continued over there. Going back…

HS: Did you hear anything about an underground, a working together of people trying to break out? Did you hear of anybody breaking out, making it? Escaping?

SD: Yes, I have a letter just received from a friend of mine from Israel which we were in camp.

HS: Together?

SD: Not in Auschwitz. I met him someplace else. But when he was in Auschwitz, they built a bunker in 1943. I believe it was, late, late '43, and there was a dozen people that escaped out of this bunker and when he learned that the Germans discovered, that they might have a hunch that there was a bunker over there, he escaped the same day. He didn't want to return to the camp. There were three of them that escaped. But after several days wandering between villages and forests and all they were captured by Poles and they were brought over to the Germans and they were brought back to Auschwitz. The punishment that they had is too long a story. It probably would

take me an hour in itself. But if you want to read the letter that I just received, I would be more than happy to read the letter if you want.

HS: This man you just mentioned from Israel, he ran away and made it?

SD: No, he didn't make it. He ran away, three of them and after several days, they were caught by the Poles.

HS: And sent back to the Germans?

SD: Correct. The Poles captured them and they handed them over to the Germans. The Germans brought them back to Auschwitz and they were went through a severe, severe punishment. There is so much to tell about this that it would probably take me an hour to go into the details but I do have the letter if you want to read it later, you are more than welcome.

HS: The fact is that he did survive.

SD: He survived …

HS: He went to Israel.

SD: Right, he went to Israel and he lives in Israel right from the War of Independence.

HS: Do you know what happened to the two other-- did they survive, too?

SD: Yes, they were also in Israel. Now, I'm going to go back to my brother. My brother came back. I'm going to identify him. My brother's name is Avrum. When he came to Auschwitz, through those connections which I had made already thanks to Mieric, and this was not all for goodness those people who brought him over, but this was all to be paid off in bribes and eventually, actually, those bribes led to the death of my brother. The continuation was going on that I had to support the *Blockführer* from the Gypsy camp which was next to mine. His appetite never ended. It was always you had to pay him off all the time. If not, I was always getting threatened if I wanted my brother to stay alive, my brother will be tortured and all this, I better see that he gets what he wants.

HS: This was the Gypsies?

SD: No, no, this was in a Gypsy camp.

HS: It was a Gypsy camp?

SD: But the *Blockführer,* I mean the *Lagerführer* helped to bring my brother to this camp he should be next to me.

HS: And he did?

SD: He did. Not only he, but several other people helped out to bring him over there but several other ones, Mieric was good friends with them, him, he did not know. He came way after Mieric-- the *Lagerführer*, from the Gypsy *Lager*. In the Gypsy *Lager*, or the Gypsy camp, there were families, not men by themselves, they were all families.

HS: Together?

SD: Female, children and there were even some of them Russian women workers. My brother was in that camp over there and I smuggled certain things to that

"Canada" and gave everything, threw over the wires to the fence and he would give it to the *Lagerführer*. In the process of doing this, I had many other people to buy off. I had almost anything I wanted to get in the "Canada." Mieric had very, very good friends, two of them from Warsaw. One was named Pincus. He was a Polish Jew but he lived in France before the war. He was a devil. He was the angel of death before he went over there. He killed many, many inmates. He also had another one. His name was Monniek.

HS: How do you spell that?

SD: M-o-n-n-i-e-k. His name was Monniek, first name. He was also from Warsaw. He was an assistant *Blockführer* to Pincus and those two, they were very, very good to the people. They came in the same transport. Monniek knew him before the war in Warsaw and when I came out from that block where I was supposed to go to the gas chamber, but Mieric made me the L, Mieric sent me to his block to Pincus and Monniek and I was over there several weeks doing nothing and they gave me anything I wanted, food and kept me in good clothes and they kept me inside because in those days, the winter was very, very cold and actually, I came to myself by that Pincus. At the same time it shows you that he was…

HS: Brutal but good to you?

SD: But if he was good to me, not because of me because of Mieric. I have to go back to my brother and then I'll pick up the history of what happened to my family. After I got my brother, the last time when I saw him was when he left for Warsaw to the ghetto and the second time I saw him was approximately, approximately probably it was by June of '43. At that time, I could never talk to him for a period of time because when he came into the camp, sometimes there were people that escaped and so many people that escaped, the fence was electrocuted.

HS: Electrified?

SD: Electrified, right.

HS: Electrified. It was the people then who were electrocuted.

SD: Right, electrified. Like usual, I would always take something to the throw over the fence, to my brother, so this was in the beginning. The first day when I met my brother, we were sitting over there. I was sitting in the back of my barrack and he was sitting in the back of his barrack and we were maybe about 30 feet apart and in between was the big fence.

HS: Electrified fence?

SD: Yes. Correct. We didn't know where to start and we got very emotional and he never knew what happened to me and I never knew what happened to the rest of the family. So, he told me that my brother in Warsaw, Shloma, he was taken with his wife in September of 1942 to Maidanek. My brother who was in the Russian army-- as a prisoner of war-- Polish army-- we never heard anything further. My father was taken to a city, it's called Ciechanow.

HS: From Makow? From the ghetto?

SD: From the ghetto, yes. He was taken to the city of Ciechanow and he worked in a labor camp and he assumed that he perished over there. When, date, we don't know. My mother and my older sister in between and Avram, my brother, they were taken to Auschwitz on the train. Avram, my brother, he jumped the train. Actually, he didn't jump the train. The train didn't even leave the station. He got away before it.

HS: Before the train took off?

SD: Correct. And he said the last words he heard from my mother he said Mom was crying and that she said, "In this dress I was wed, and in this dress I am going to *Kiddush HaShem,"* in a tone like it was Yom Kippur. My younger twin brother and sister, they were all crying, but they really actually didn't know what was really going to Auschwitz is, but they knew they are going not for better, but they are going for worse.

HS: I'm wondering, how much did you know of anything else? You knew when you were in Makow, did you know what was going on in Auschwitz? Did you get somehow word about other places? Or was there no contact?

SD: No, I did not get any contact that was going on outside the penitentiary where I was. Now don't forget, I spent over a year between Makow and Plotsk, I spent in the penitentiary in a cell where there was no outside communication whatsoever.

HS: Did you ever know what was going on in the rest of the world?

SD: No.

HS: Did any word come to you by rumor or by radio?

SD: No, the only-- the first time when I had come back and knew what was going on was when I was already in Auschwitz and I working on the [unclear] and there were Polish civilians. They were not prisoners. They came in.

HS: A work force?

SD: No, they were not a work force. They were engineers and they actually…

HS: They were planning?

SD: They were planning, and electricians, and they were planning that project so this was the first time when I heard that the Germans invaded Russia, the Germans were at war with Russia.

HS: Until then, you had no idea?

SD: No, the Germans invaded Russia in June of '41. I didn't know that. What was going on in Auschwitz or Maidanek or destruction of Warsaw Ghetto or anything else, I had no idea. I was behind in the cell and I never came in contact with anyone.

HS: Did the Polish engineers and workers, the civilians, did they know what was going on?

SD: Yes, they knew. Not what was going on in details, but they knew more or less what was going on. Some of them I assume had radios underground, some of them belonged to certain Polish underground and they traveled from place to place and I assume they knew what was going on but not in detail. Of course we were not told

anything in detail but on occasion, they would-- one of them, they would tell us certain things that were going on in the world.

HS: Did they know what was going on inside the camp?

SD: Oh, yes, sure. Even if they didn't know, they saw it. The chimneys, like any other factory, you would have in a big city…

HS: Did they know they were burning human beings there?

SD: Oh, yeah, they knew they were burning human beings. They knew the transport, people were coming in. They knew there were people coming in and no one was coming back. Empty trains were going back to different cities and they knew what was going on, no question about it. They would see in the flames, four or five feet above the chimneys. You could see the smoke, hundreds and hundreds of feet. I'm not assuming, I know they knew it and if they didn't know it, they didn't want to know.

HS: It didn't bother them?

SD: No, not at all. But they knew it was there. No one, not even a blind person could not miss this because you would smell what was going on and the smoke.

HS: The sweet smell?

SD: Yes.

HS: Did you see any children in Auschwitz?

SD: No, I didn't see any children in Auschwitz. Those who worked in "Canada," they saw children but I never got in those types of situations, but I was told when the people came in. I saw two rabbis with beards and they were from Salonika, Greece. I saw that myself. The Germans kept them as a model or maybe I don't know what was the reason, but they were there for a period of time.

HS: Was there any religious instruction or praying or whatever that you know of while you were there, that there was here or there a rabbi who got a few together?

SD: Yes.

HS: There were some kind of services?

SD: Yes, there were services. I don't know whether it was a service. I don't recall what kind of holiday it was. Everybody was over there, especially me-- like you were a young teenager, one thing was in your mind, survive, survive, survive, so you weren't interested in the services or whatever.

HS: You were?

SD: You were not. To a youngster, like me, I was not interested in attending services whatsoever.

HS: What kept you going? What gave you that certain extra spark?

SD: What kept me going was one thing, my name. My name was taken away from me and was replaced with a number and with encouragement from Mieric and I was placed-- I was fortunate because of him and I was placed in a situation that I had enough food and I was not abused physically and mentally and I had a chance for better survival than the average-- the ones who came to Auschwitz, the average person.

HS: How long did you stay in Auschwitz?

SD: Well, too long. Now, we're coming into the real thing that happened. I was in Auschwitz from…

HS: '43?

SD: No, I was in Auschwitz in December of '42 to August of '43. On that particular day, August '43, I remember-- I don't remember what date it was, I don't remember dates at all, but approximately the time and month.

HS: How would you know the date if you didn't have calendars?

SD: Yes. I was sitting with my brother. We did every night since my brother came over there to the Gypsy *Lager*. I never missed one night. I shouldn't have talked to my brother, we shouldn't have seen each other. That night, I had a bottle of vodka wrapped in a towel, a rag, whatever it was, I forget, and this was for his *Lagerführer*.

HS: The bribe?

SD: The bribe. That particular day, there were certain inmates that escaped. Outside, not-- when they were in work, they escaped from work.

HS: They did not come back, they were missing for the roll call?

SD: Correct. All the *kommandos* who came back to go to camp-- they were counted every day. Each *kommando*, whoever belonged to his block, each one went to his block. When I came in, I went to my block and we stood in camp waiting for an *Appell* [roll call].

HS: The roll call?

SD: Yes. We were waiting and waiting and waiting and several people were missing in the *Blockführer Stubenführers*, they were running like crazy to see if anybody was hiding in the cells, in the barrack. There was a lot of people-- they had over there a washroom in this barrack in the camp. In German, it's called a latrine. There were a lot of *Muselmann* that were hiding there. There was a washroom, a lot of them and they were searching everywhere to see if anybody was missing there. Nobody was missing over there except the dead was lying there and they were accounted for. So, we were waiting and waiting for hours and the fence was electrified at that time. My brother, he was never afraid. I don't remember him ever having any kind of fear. He was always go do it. I'm more or less like my brother. We waited a long time already and I couldn't talk to him so more or less, we had to give signals by hand and I had the bottle under my striped jacket. I showed him that I got something for him and he signaled that I should go ahead and do it. I was the last one in the row to [unclear] to the back of my barrack when it was time for the *Appell*. I looked around, I didn't see any guards around there. I just saw the *Blockführer* and *Stubenführer*, which I knew every one of them, they knew what I was doing.

HS: That you had the vodka?

SD: They didn't know that I had the bottle of vodka but they knew what I was doing every day, every day. I just jumped to the fence and about one meter before the

big, huge fence, there was a single wire and there was a little sign on it and it said in German *Vorsichtig – Lebensgefahr* [careful – danger].

HS: It was electrified.

SD: Electrified and I ignored that and I just went and I threw the bottle and the bottle with the towel was hanging on this wire. It did not go over. My brother-- the wires were a bit far apart and my brother jumped to it to get the bottle and I only heard, "ooh!"

HS: He was electrocuted?

SD: Electrocuted, and I heard the machine gun. [unclear] They were all around then.

HS: The guards?

SD: Right, and the machine guns started, went off two times and everybody started running in the back , they were all around and came back and they were all around over there and I don't know if I fainted or what. I don't know what happened. There was a girl, a Russian girl, with my brother. I assume it was his friend he knew over there. I only heard her voice in Polish and she said, "Abram *kochany*, Abram *kochany*." Abram is a name and dear. This was the last time that I had any contact with my brother. I was taken away from there and I was taken, there was a block 11 and this was called the *Politische Abteilung* [political division]. I was taken and questioned on who gave me the bottle, for whom was the bottle.

HS: The Germans questioned you, right?

SD: Yes, on the *Politische Abteilung*. They took me away from my barrack.

HS: The commandant?

SD: No, no, this was the Gestapo. It had nothing to do with them. They were just the original guards from the camp. We didn't have Gestapo in the camp. They were the original guards, Germans and Ukrainian guards. There were higher officials but they were not Gestapo. They were the SS. But they took me and they handed me over to the Gestapo which was the *Politische Abteilung* and over there, they started questioning me, where did I get the vodka, who supplied it, for whom was it, how many times I did it, who was involved in all of that and I only kept saying that I found it and it was laying, it was laying and they said for whom was it over there and I told them it was my brother. They wanted to know where I found it and I said I was hungry and I was looking for bread in people's bunks and in one of those bunks, I found a bottle and I took it and that's where I got it. Then they called me liar and they hit me a few times in the face and they said, well, you know what you could expect by us if you won't tell us the truth. If you tell us the truth, I promise you nothing will happen to you, you will go back to the same place, to the same work and everything will be alright. Of course, I knew what would happen to me either way and I did not want to involve any other *Kapos*.

HS: That helped you so much.

SD: Not only helped me so much but even if I would mention one word, I would not have to go back to the same camp, even if I would go to another camp, they had enough influence that I should be killed in a different camp. Not the Germans, just the inmates, the *Blockführer,* the *Blockführers* in different camps so I was taken to the *Politische Abteilung* and they couldn't get nothing out of me and they took a lash and they gave me 25 lashes. I had to count myself. When I got to 10 and I stopped counting.

HS: You passed out?

SD: I passed out and they threw a bucket of water and started again and again until I was half dead, maybe even close to death and they took me away from there and the next place, when I woke up, was a place called in [unclear][5], called the Jawischowitz, a coal mine, a camp.

HS: This was in Poland?

SD: In Poland. This was in 1943 and this would be like the end of August or the beginning of September.

HS: '43?

SD: '43. This was the last time I had any contact from Auschwitz and the only thing what I heard from one of the inmates that Mieric was…

HS: Shot?

SD: No, he was exterminated in the gas chamber with the rest of the *Sonderkommando*.

HS: He died because he was doing too much.

SD: No, that's the way they did it. Not only him, the whole *kommando*, not only him. It was his *kommando*, they only did what they did.

HS: With the corpses?

SD: Correct.

HS: After they had enough, they burned them too.[6]

SD: Not that they had enough, they kept them over there for two, three months or four months. Then, after this, they were afraid that somehow or other they would pass through information to other ones and they just eliminated them. They were just put in the gas chamber and they gassed them and they went up in smoke like those hundreds of thousands the rest of them had.

HS: What did you know about guards? Which guards were the best and which were the worst or was there no difference? You had Polish guards, Latvian, and Ukrainian? What kind of guards did you have?

SD: I had three kinds. I had Ukrainian, I had the German and we had Hungarian *Volkdeutsche*.

HS: Ethnic Germans from Hungary.

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[5]Possibly Silesia.

[6]The *Sonderkommando* was exterminated every few months so that there were no witnesses to the atrocities that the Germans committed.

SD: From Hungary. I would say that the guards themselves-- I would say the Germans were the best, in my eyes.

HS: With the contact you had?

SD: Yes. The Germans were the best, the Hungarians the next, the Ukrainians were the worst.

HS: Did they abuse all of the inmates?

SD: The Ukrainian guards where I was-- they were only with us on the outside of the camp. They were guarding us where we were working, but inside the camp, I did not have any Ukrainian guards. They were German guards.

HS: And they did not abuse you as badly as the others?

SD: Yes, they abused, but not as badly as the others. Some of them, I was once on that [unclear] on my *kommando* and there was a guard that was there and he hid these rations over there and he took out some bread and he hold it in his hand. He walked a few feet and he looked everywhere around and he turned around and he threw a piece of bread to me, and this was a German guard. There were Germans, of course, that they hit you.

HS: Were there guards from the army or were they also from penitentiaries?

SD: No, I think they were special guards, which they were too old.

[Tape two, side one ended.]

Tape two, side two:

HS: Guards that were too old to fight in the army and they were sent for guard duty?

SD: I would assume that was the reason. Most of the guards which I had, I think they were in their late fifties and sixties and over so I would assume that this was the reason that they performed a function for the German *Reich* and at the same time, they relieved the younger ones to be in the army.

HS: How long did you stay there, in Auschwitz?

SD: In Auschwitz? I left Auschwitz in August of '43, after the incident where my brother was electrified. I was taken to a coal mine in Jaworzno. I was in that camp in Jaworzno until 1944. I believe this was in February or maybe the end of January 1944.

HS: Did you have to work in the coal mine?

SD: Oh, yes.

HS: Were there all inmates?

SD: No, we were inmates.

HS: And regular coal miners, too?

SD: Most of the people who were in Jaworzno worked in the coal mine and the mine was several thousand feet deep. We had Polish engineers that worked with us. I remember on one occasion, one of the engineers gave me a drill to drill into the coal and it was maybe 15 feet, about four inches thick and after I was finished with the drill, they grabbed a little slowly out and it was full of dust and everything else and I wanted to-- there was a package of dynamite that was to go in over there and I was ready to take the dynamite and fill it in, not because he told me so or I did it before, I don't know the reason why, maybe I just wanted to show him that I know how to do it but I didn't know the consequences for touching it even or looking at it even so when I had the bundle of dynamite, he shouted at me. He said, "Freeze, don't do that, freeze." He grabbed me from the back before, and he just put his hands at the end of my throat and with one hand, he just took the dynamite.

HS: The dynamite away.

SD: He said, "Are you crazy? Do you know what would happen to you if there would be a guard right here?" But fortunately, there were never any guards near us around over there.

HS: Were they above ground probably, so you couldn't run away underground?

SD: There were several guards down there, too, but not to guard us. They were for different reasons, to speed up the coal [unclear] and this was one of the reasons. From there, 1944, all of a sudden, the middle of the night, we were awakened by guards and we had to get dressed and we are leaving the camp immediately, now.

HS: How large a group was in that camp, roughly?

SD: I would say this camp was about 20,000.

HS: 20,000? And they were all men?

SD: Yes, all men. I also remind myself there was a father and a son in that camp and one of those nights we heard a big scream, a shouting, and there was a fistfight between the father and the son. The son had a piece of bread and he put it behind his pillow. He didn't have a pillow. He put it behind his clothes and it looked like the father knew about that and he took away the bread from the son and there was a war going on over the piece of bread so you can imagine how life was there that a father could take it from a child.

HS: Over a piece of bread, yes.

SD: Not for a piece of bread but the father took it away from the son the piece of bread so you can imagine what the circumstances were there.

HS: How was your food?

SD: Bad as bad could be.

HS: In the mine?

SD: In the mine, it was bad as bad could be.

HS: And this was the hardest work possible in the mine?

SD: In one way, it was true but it was supplemented by warm. You weren't exposed to the freezing winter outside, so you had warm weather most of the time except when you were going back.

HS: And your barracks, did you live in barracks?

SD: Yes, we lived in barracks similar almost to the one in Auschwitz but not as big. There was no heat except the *Blockführer* had a deep, huge oven.

HS: A belly stove, that uses coal?

SD: Correct, because there was plenty coal and as a matter of fact, they used to bring in pieces of coal.

HS: Was it the brown coal?

SD: No, it was black, big huge chunks, five maybe eight pounds a piece, big chunks.

HS: So you were told you would leave tomorrow?

SD: No, no, it wasn't tomorrow. It was one night. The guards came in and the *Blockführer* and *Stubenführer* told us to get, "*Aufstehen, aufstehen*." They said we're leaving the camp, we're leaving the camp right now. Within 15 – 20 minutes, everybody was outside, there was no *Appell* [roll call], there was nothing. They told us to line up in three and to start to march out. I was the third barrack. There were barracks in three sections and in the barrack, also, in the front, was the officer or the administration [unclear] or whatever you called it or whatever and in the back was all the latrine and the washroom in the back of the camp. I was in the third barrack, the last one, to be evacuated and this was by foot. We stood over there already and the first people to march out-- and there were many, many people-- were the older ones and they couldn't,

they were just unable, incapable physically to walk, to come with us. Those people were shot on the spot.

HS: In front of everybody?

SD: In front of everybody. I couldn't put the number on them but there were hundreds of them that were shot right on the spot before leaving.

HS: Everybody who was too weak to do the walking?

SD: Yes, physically, they were not capable of not only walking, they weren't even capable to get dressed and get out.

HS: Exhausted?

SD: Yes. As a matter of fact, about five or six years ago, I got a letter from Germany. I remember it was from Dusseldorf and they came across my file that I was in Jaworzno in there were a certain massacre and if I remember and if I could identify the names of who were in charge of that camp. I did answer that letter and after 36-37 years, that time when I received the letter, it was impossible for me to remember names.

HS: You may not have even known the names of the guards. They didn't introduce themselves and say, "My name is…"

SD: No, they didn't ask for the guards. They asked for the *Lagerführer*, the higher officials over there, but I did not remember. I remember one, for example, how he looked like and his behavior and so on but I just couldn't say his name was so and so. So, I answered them this letter that I was there and I witnessed this massacre and also, what happened after that, where they took us.

HS: Were they put on trial? Were you under the impression that in Dusseldorf that they put them on trial?

SD: I assume they had some kind of reason to ask me. They were maybe trying to put them on trial or maybe they were pointed out or refused or trying to get more information and they came across my file and they wanted I should supply information which was impossible for me to give them the correct information. From there, that night, we walked to another camp and it was called Jawiszowice.

HS: Also in Poland?

SD: Also in Poland. Also a coalmine. And from that coalmine, I was over there about three months only. I would say in the beginning of spring of 1944…

HS: Was it about the same conditions, hard work and little food?

SD: Same thing, almost like a duplicate. The only thing that we got over there, a little more maybe, we used to get some food from the civilians.

HS: Did you have any contact with outside civilians except the ones who worked inside the camp?

SD: No, except the ones inside.

HS: But no other outside regular population?

SD: No.

HS: No contact?

SD: None whatsoever, because we were guarded pretty good over there because there were villages around there and Jawiszowice wasn't a big camp.

HS: Were there Polish guards or German?

SD: No, there were German guards but the people who worked there, the civilians were Polish.

HS: Did they tell you a little bit how the war was going?

SD: Yes, they would drop a hint.

HS: Did it give you a little hope?

SD: Yes, every little hint you had gave hope. Another week, another week.

HS: It was sustenance?

SD: Yes. Some of them also used to help us out with food, the civilians. I was over there for, I would say maybe until March or so, in this camp. I would say no more than three months. In this camp, it happened almost identical to the way it happened in the other camp. But in this camp was my [unclear] now. First of all, there was a very, very big snow at that time. The Russians were closing in on Auschwitz. The Germans wanted us to-- they evacuated that camp and it was the same procedures that it was in Jaworzno.

HS: Get up and leave?

SD: Yes, except this time, there were more younger people. Some people were shot in the camp, too, but it wasn't such a big massacre as in Jaworzno.

HS: Most of them were younger who were stronger?

SD: Younger, stronger and maybe the people didn't want to take the risk and so on in the camp but on the way from the camp, there were many, many people shot. A friend of mine was shot to death. He-- because it was night, we marched at night-- and he ran off the side.

HS: To a ditch?

SD: No.

HS: The side of the road?

SD: No, it wasn't a ditch, it was like a little road that went in the forest but it was straight and there was a lot of snow and he was like into the snow, a pile of snow, and he was hiding over there and…

HS: Did he try to escape?

SD: Sure, yes. The guards just went over to him and shot him. Another one was over there, we went through a village and there were quite a few prisoners. They went into one of the-- I don't know what you call it, where you keep your horses.

HS: A stable.

SD: A stable was over there with hay…

HS: A barn.

SD: A barn, and that's where they went in over there and they were hiding. They were also shot right in the barn and there were many, many of them that were killed during that process to the place.

HS: Did you have any idea roughly, how far away from Auschwitz this was? Far away or not so far?

SD: I don't know because the first time when I left Auschwitz, I was taken to the *Politische Abteilung* and it was only a couple kilometers and when they took us to Jaworzno we went by truck.

HS: So you have no way of knowing?

SD: I have no idea, but it wasn't too far away. We are talking about maybe 60, 70 kilometers or something like that.

HS: Just to have an idea. So, what happened then when they told you?

SD: Well, after that when we came to a small town and they divided in groups. I came to a small town and it was called Ohrdruf.

HS: Again, a few thousand people?

SD: Oh yeah, there were more than a few thousand people. I'd say there was about 12,000, maybe more.

HS: Who marched all over?

SD: Yes, maybe more, but they divided it in groups. My group was the first one to be taken out when we reached a place in Germany.

HS: What was the name?

SD: It was called Ohrdruf. I believe this is in East Germany near Weimar or some place, in that vicinity.

HS: Near Thuringen.

SD: Thuringen, some place around there. There was a small camp, a very small camp and that's when I met my friend, the Israeli friend that I told you before, he came to Auschwitz and he escaped. In this camp, I met him and his name is Bolek, Guy and he was in this camp already and he was working in the kitchen and I landed up in the kitchen, too, the first time. I don't know the reason why, but I did land up in the kitchen. This camp, I was over there until late summer or so.

HS: '44?

SD: Of '44, late summer of '44, maybe it was the end of July, beginning of August.

HS: This was good for your food?

SD: Yes, this was a camp that I-- this and the next one was I think the two best camps I had been in.

HS: How long did you stay there?

SD: In this camp, I stayed there until about the end of the summer, late summer and from there, they took us to another camp and it was called Crawinkel[7].

HS: So, it was in Germany?

SD: In Germany. In Crawinkel, I was over there and I was working in a mine. Making mines. The whole camp was almost like a bunker and the factory that we were producing the mines was under the ground.

HS: In other words, you were not mining coal but you were building a factory inside…

SD: No, the factory was there already built and there were inmates who were producing, manufacturing mines, not a coalmine but explosives.

HS: You mean bombs?

SD: No, not bombs.

HS: Oh, mines, *Minen*.

SD: Yes, *Minen*, yes. We were working on them and those *Minen* were underwater *Minens*.

HS: Underwater mines?

SD: Yes. My job was to color them. There were certain ones I would make red, some of them green, just put color in them and the next one from me take this and he would pack them in cartons.

HS: For transportation?

SD: For transportation, yes, I think they came four to a case or some number and this was also a good camp. We were very well treated. We weren't beaten.

HS: This was important work to do probably.

SD: Yes, of course. We were not abused, we were not beaten and in this camp, if you remember a while ago, you asked me if I ever received medical treatment over there. In that camp, we were taken to work from our barracks. Our barracks, by the way, were not in an open field. We were in a forest, the same place where the *Minen* factory was but we were a distance about three-four kilometers away from that. Now, on the way to that camp to work in the morning, in Germany, there's big huge trucks you probably remember. There was a front car, the motorcar and then they had one or two or maybe three…

HS: A convoy?

SD: A convoy. They would hang one next to each other. I was in the last car and the road was very full of potholes, very bad in the forest. It was not a regular paved road. It was just plain dirt.

HS: A rural roads.

SD: Right. I was in the corner of the car and I heard an airplane and I picked up my hands like this and I wanted to see the plane, not because I knew what plane it

[7]Buchenwald/Dora-Mittelbau subcamp.

was, I didn't know but as soon the chauffeur heard the plane and he made a sharp curve into the woods.

HS: To hide?

SD: To hide the truck. That particular time, he swung the truck, I fell out from the corner of the truck and I landed on my shoulder and my ear and I was in a cast. I wouldn't say a cast, it was a splint and I believe since that time I started having problems in hearing and it got worse and worse and…

HS: You didn't have to go to work? You were treated in the barracks?

SD: I was working in the barracks. I didn't go to work but I was working in the camp.

HS: With one arm?

SD: Yes, with one arm. I was washing dishes. Not actually dishes, they called them the *Manishkes* [phonetic], where they carry the food or water, the rations.

HS: Canisters?

SD: Canisters, yes, that's what I used to do. Well, anyway, it seems at that time my ear was going from bad to worse.

HS: Did they treat you?

SD: No, just the arm. I had it up for a couple of weeks.

HS: And it healed?

SD: It healed to a certain extent but I feel it now when I put a heavy weight on it or certain weather changes. I feel it till now. But my hearing was completely gone.

HS: Your hearing?

SD: My hearing, yes. Right now, I don't hear from this one at all. This ear, right here, is completely deaf.

HS: But you fell on the other ear?

SD: No.

HS: Oh, that's the one.

SD: I fell on my right ear and my right shoulder and I had this for about two weeks but my ear got worse. I went to many, many doctors but the main nerve is dead and there's nothing they can do.

HS: And a hearing aid has not helped because the nerve is dead?

SD: Yes, correct. The hearing aid would only transfer [unclear] would probably make only noise but I wouldn't get any hearing out of it. From that camp, we were taken to Buchenwald and I was in Buchenwald-- I think I came about the end of the year.

HS: '44?

SD: In '44, the end of the year, more or less. I came to this camp. In Buchenwald, we did all different types of work. We didn't stay too long on a job. There could be inside cleaning or working on a highway or we were working in a factory from transportation to loading trucks.

HS: But you were always in a work unit?

SD: Yes, all the time. I was over there in Buchenwald until April of '45.

HS: That was the end?

SD: Not for me. It wasn't the end for me. I stayed over there until 1945 and this was in April of 1945 and we were evacuated, 3,000 of us. Most of them were Russian prisoners of war and all those who had green, red, black or any other kind of. . .

HS: Not yellow stars?

SD: Not yellow stars, and I was among them.

HS: You had green and red?

SD: Green and red.

HS: You had that from way before?

SD: From Birkenau.

HS: They never took it off?

SD: Never, never, we always had the same thing. So, when they took us, 3,000 of us, and this was about the beginning of April, maybe the first week in April more or less, we got our rations for three days. They gave us a half of bread and they gave us three pieces of those German cheese-- I hated the smell of it.

HS: The ones that smell?

SD: Right, I hated the smell.

HS: It's like the Limburger here.

SD: And they gave us a little marmalade and this was supposed to be for three-day rations. We were brought into a train, we were marched to a train in Weimar and we stayed on that train for about seven or eight hours.

HS: A regular train or a freight train again?

SD; A freight train.

HS: A cattle train?

SD: A cattle train. We waited on the train and we came-- finally, we took off already, and we came to a place in Sudetenland.

HS: You remember where?

SD: Yes, I remember where but this was before-- before I say the name, something happened. We came to a place in Sudetenland and there was a little station over there with two tracks and that station, the train pulled up on a side track and it relayed it over there in the cattle box over there. The location where we were was like a small type of forest in open field in a forest. It wasn't open completely and it wasn't like a regular forest and while we were waiting over there, an airplane circled our place.

HS: Overhead?

SD: About 15 - 20 minutes, nobody knew-- even the guards did not know what was happening, why are we waiting. In about 15 - 20 minutes, a German *Luftwaffe* train was passing by and the train passing by was the one that we were supposed to continue our journey because we were going back to the opposite direction. As the train

approached that location, planes were coming out from all the directions. There were dozens and dozens of planes.

HS: Did you recognize what kind of planes?

SD: Oh, yes. They were British and American planes.

HS: And they were flying low?

SD: They dived in.

HS: To attack the German train?

SD: Right. Now, we were over there, I would say the whole battle took place in about 15 minutes but this was a living hell.

HS: Because it was so close?

SD: We were caught in fire. We were getting fired in two directions, from the beginning. The first few minutes and after that-- the first fire that we got, we were bombed by the planes. We were getting fire from the German *Luftwaffe*, we were getting it from the machine guns. In each car cattle was a machine gun. The guards each had one. We jumped from that train to take cover wherever place and we were running away but you couldn't run far. The bullets were everywhere. Fire was everywhere and confusion was everywhere and the planes disappeared. Fire guzzled in, explosions were everywhere and the screaming and the shouting-- people without hands.

HS: You're talking now mostly of the German train, not your train?

SD: Our train just the same because we jumped our train. We were running for cover. And another thing that made it so, what I mentioned before, there were a lot of Russian…

HS: POWs?

SD: Yes, in our transport, and they were wearing those uniforms, the Russian uniforms. I don't know if this had anything to do with the bombing-- I don't think so but maybe it didn't help for us. So, we were caught just the same as the German *Luftwaffe* and everybody else. After the planes took off, there was living hell and people were crying and shouting. Some people were begging the guards to shoot them.

HS: To shoot them because they were suffering so much.

SD: Yes, and it was very, very-- the worst thing I witnessed during the war in one slaughter. The train was knocked out, the tracks were-- there was no way of transportation. Many of them ran away, the inmates.

HS: The Russian POWs and the Jews?

SD: Yes, some of them.

HS: And the German soldiers?

SD: No, not the *Luftwaffe*. The German soldiers they took up there, wherever it is, but we left before the German soldiers, because their train couldn't go anywhere. There was no tracks or anything like this.

HS: So, you ran away?

SD: No, I didn't run away.

HS: The others I mean.

SD: Yes, some of them did. I did not want to be a hero because the behavior of the Germans was so, you could read on their faces that something is wrong. I went through almost five years and I did not want to be a hero in the last minute or so. So, I thought I'm going to take my chances and stay in line. They took us together, wherever it was-- those 3,000. I don't know if there were about 8-900 left, those who could march. Those who couldn't, they were shot.

HS: By the Germans? By the guards?

SD: By the guards, yes. But the *Luftwaffe* had nothing to do with that. They were mean to the guards just the same as to us. We started off to march and we came in, I would say it was a very short trip by train or car but we walked about a day and we came to a place, a city called Komotav[8] [phonetic] in Sudetenland. That Komotav, we made camp, so to speak. We took a rest.

HS: With your guards?

SD: With our guards. I witnessed over there that we also had over there some Greek prisoners with us. They actually took-- they ate cannibals, they took the dead bodies. . .

HS: There were no provisions for you?

SD: None whatsoever. They actually were planning to eat. . .

HS: The dead. Only the Greek did that?

SD: They were speaking Greek. If there were other ones, I don't know, but some of the inmates must be from Greek too, because I didn't know what kind of language it was and I figured they were Greeks. Guards were in the same position that we were.

HS: They had nothing to eat either?

SD: They had nothing to eat.

HS: But they kept on guarding you?

SD: Yes.

HS: And gunning you down?

SD: Right. The one guard took, I think it was four or five of us and I was one of those and we went to the villages to get some food and they told us not to steal, knock on the door and ask for it. If we didn't get any, we would go to the next one. The guard did not go with us to the door. He was maybe a couple of hundred feet away from us. He was watching us from there.

[Tape two, side two ended.]

[8] Komatov – possibly the town of Chomutov [Czech spelling] which is located 66.5 km west of Terezin/ Theresienstadt.

Tape three, side one:

HS: This is tape three of Sam Don.

SD: Those Germans, I don't know if they were natives of Sudetenland or they were from Germany. We spoke German to them.

HS: They gave you some food?

SD: Certain of them gave us food, not too much, but if they had it they shared it with us. We came back to the same location and we stayed overnight over there and we proceeded our journey again.

HS: Did you know where you were heading?

SD: No.

HS: Did the guards tell you?

SD: No, we were not told where we were going.

HS: Did the guards know where you were going?

SD: I assume they knew because they brought us to the promised camp.

HS: Promised land.

SD: Promised camp. As a matter of fact, it was supposed to be their model camp for Germany.

HS: Theresienstadt? To Terezin?

SD: *Ja*. So, we walked from Komotav and the next day, every three or four hours, we would stop because not only we, but the guards themselves were weak.

HS: They were weak too.

SD: They were weak and most of them were older people and…

HS: And still you didn't have provisions?

SD: No, no provisions. Now, I was watching this week or last week the "Blood." Remember the Hitler Youth?

HS: Oh, yes, "Honor and Blood."

SD: "Honor and Blood." I was watching that and there was one scene that I probably will remember until the last second of my life, we came into one village over there and we were asking for water, to give us water and there were about eight or nine of these young kids wearing those brown shirts and those swastikas…

HS: …swastikas on the arms.

SD: …swastikas on their arms and wearing them at their belt like an officer and they had little bayonettes in the sides…

HS: Little daggers.

SD: Little daggers whatever you call them, and they ran into homes and brought out water with bottles of water and they were going to give it to us and before we even got water, we were so happy to see the water because we-- just anything, a drink of water, nothing.

HS: You were dehydrated, you had nothing?

SD: Right, we didn't have anything in such a long time. To our surprise, instead of giving us the water, they were just marching along us and they just took the bottle with the water like this and they were flinging the water on us just like that.

HS: And not giving it to you.

SD: Until the last drop ran out of the bottle and they smashed the bottle.

HS: And they didn't give it to the guard either?

SD: No, the guards they were all behind us because sometimes they would stop and talk to a certain civilian, a German, maybe he got some food or whatever. The guards never stayed with us walking. They used to walk with us to the camp. They were not afraid we would run away now. There wasn't any place, besides anyone who couldn't walk or couldn't keep up, there was no help for him-- he was shot.

HS: Did they still keep on shooting?

SD: Sure, there were so many people…

HS: Did they run out of ammunition?

SD: No, one thing they had plenty of ammunition. They didn't run out of ammunition. So, you only needed one bullet per person. It was enough. They had thousands and thousands of bullets.

HS: But they had to walk, too, just like you?

SD: Yes, but those thousands of bullets were not carried by one person.

HS: There were many guards.

SD: There were so many guards and when those guards over there, when they were bombarded at the station, most of the people that they had to transport were killed but those guards, those who were alive, all of them walked with us towards Theresienstadt.

HS: So you had a large number of guards?

SD: I would say twice as many as we usually had. There was no one in charge actually. It was like everybody on his own.

HS: But you still kept marching to Theresienstadt?

SD: We still kept marching to Theresienstadt. The trip took us three weeks from the day we left Weimar, by the time we got to Theresienstadt, it took us three weeks.

HS: It was now the end of April?

SD: This was the end of April. This was, I would say, maybe the end of April. I remember that we were there a very short time and one morning, about 5 o'clock in the morning, we heard something very, very heavy, like a motorcade, very, very heavy.

HS: Tanks?

SD: Tanks, Russian tanks. The Russian tanks started to roll in which was 5 o'clock in the morning approximately. It was May 8, 1945.

HS: And you never forgot that?

SD: Never. This was the end of my-- my liberation but the funny thing. . .

HS: Did you stay for a while in Theresienstadt? You must have been physically not very well after all these ordeals? How long did it take you to recover?

SD: As a matter of fact, it didn't take me long to recover at all. Just the thinking, the liberation, what happened-- the breakdown of the German machinery…

HS: Did you stay in Theresienstadt immediately after the liberation, for the next two days?

SD: The first day I went with the Russians. Not only me but all the young people.

HS: You went along with the army?

SD: Yes, I went along with the army and we got to a place, I think it was called in Czechoslovakia, it's call Teplitz-Schoenau.

HS: Teplitz-Schoenau?

SD: Yes.

HS: Yes, I know very well.

SD: We got as far as over there and we also-- there were three of us and over there, we stayed in Teplitz-Schoenau, we went into a German house and it was a very-- it was like a castle that had a wine cellar or whatever you want to call it and in that wine cellar, there was a German hiding and that German was a very, very high ranking official.

HS: Nazi?

SD: I assume, but he was not in his uniform. He wore the German pants, he didn't wear any jacket, he just had a civilian sweater and like an undershirt. That's all he had on him. There were all three of us and we talked it over to each other what we should do with him and the Russians, in the beginning, they didn't care what you did with them, especially the first day or so. Nobody was looking what you did but anyway, we said we were going to take a little revenge on him but we didn't have anything but one thing we had plenty of was empty bottles, wine bottles, beer bottles and it came to a point that he was-- his scalp-- blood was coming out and one of us said if we continue like this, in the next couple minutes, we would kill him probably and the other one said so what, do you feel sorry for him and at that time, each one had a little disagreement, an argument and each one took a bottle and threw it and we walked away but we didn't kill him and after that, I went back to Teplitz-Schoenau. Not only me, but all three of us. We stayed over there for about a couple of days and from there, I went to a place called Usti nad Labem.[9]

HS: Usti nad Labem.

SD: Aussig, Germany, right. I took away a home from a German and there was-- Usti nad Labem is the same way like Camden and Philadelphia, it's caught in the middle of the city, the Elbe.

HS: The Elbe, the river, it's a wide river.

[9]Usti nad Labem – Aussig in German.

SD: Right. So, one part was Chekoff and the other one was called Esti. Chekoff was the rich section of the city.

HS: There was a castle, too?

SD: Yes, many, many of them. I also took away a castle from there and I made my permanent home over there, temporary. In Usti nad Labem, I met again that Bolek, the one who was in Crawinkel in the kitchen with, the one who lives in Israel now. He was married over there in '45. I met two more inmates from Theresienstadt which were married, that day. I'm still friends with them up to today. As a matter of fact, one of my friends lives in Florida a long time already. His wedding anniversary was going to be first because he married on New Year's Day.

HS: They went then to Israel, they didn't stay in Usti?

SD: No. They stayed in Usti nad Labem for a while and he was in the Czech army and after that, he went to Israel and he was in the liberation of the 1948 war. I also had a friend that he was in the Czech army-- air force and he was learning. . .

HS: They joined them after '45?

SD: The Czech army?

HS: Yes?

SD: Yes.

HS: They had not been in there during the war?

SD: No, they were in camp.

HS: They were in camp with you. Where did you meet your wife? She was in camp, also?

SD: Yes, my wife I met in 1946 in Germany in a displaced person camp called Heidenheim.

HS: Yes, in Heidenheim. In which camp was she in?

SD: She was in Heidenheim.

HS: No, before, during the war.

SD: She was in Stutthof, and she was in Neustadt, near Stutthof over there and she was also in Auschwitz but a very short time. My wife was in camp-- she came in 1944 or so. She was same time as [unclear]…

HS: …and how many of her family survived?

SD: Only three, Lily and Ludwig, her brother, but she has over here, they came in before the war, she has uncles and aunts over here and they went to California. This is the end of the story.

HS: You wanted to tell me the story about the Christmas you had.

SD: Oh yeah, yeah. The question was in 1942 when I arrived in Auschwitz in such a short time I became a *Muselmann* after I was in Plotsk in the penitentiary, which I didn't have it too bad over there. This was correct. The reason why I became a *Muselmann* was not so much for the three weeks that I was in Auschwitz. The main reason for making me a *Muselmann* that I became a *Muselmann* was Christmas day, 1943

and New Year's, Christmas Day, 1942 and New Year's 1943, the Germans they needed some kind of entertainment and we were the actors. We were acting for them.

HS: Was this in Makow?

SD: No, no, no, this was in Auschwitz. Unfortunately, we were the actors. We were acting in Auschwitz not on a stage some place and that act that we provided, the fun for them, it was tens of thousands of inmates were marched outside the camp [unclear] and we were placed in a shape as an egg.

HS: An oval shape?

SD: Yes. A huge oval, and we were about four to five kilometers, the shape of an egg around with inmates.

HS: You were such a long line and you were about three or four apart?

SD: We were three in a row.

HS: And it stretched out over several kilometers?

SD: For about four or five kilometers. When we came to a certain point, there were inmates with shovels and they would have that dirt taken and we had to hold by the hands of our jackets and they would throw that dirt.

HS: The dirt in your jacket?

SD: Right, and we would have to continue, not walking but [unclear] mush, mush, running all the time. Anytime somebody fell, about 200 feet or so, there were one of the guards with a German shepherd, and if the German didn't put a bullet into the one who fell, the dog would finish him off one way or the other way. That day, there were thousands and thousands of inmates that never made it back. There were thousands and thousands of them that came back to the camp and the following day, they were not capable, not only to go to work, they were not capable even to get dressed, to get out of the barrack because we had to get up 5 o'clock in the morning for the *Appell* and stay out in the freezing weather.

HS: Did you have any treatment for those who were wounded?

SD: No, nothing, none whatsoever. There was no treatment and those who were wounded and who were clear of mind yet, they avoided to ask for any kind of treatment.

HS: Because they didn't want to tell them that they were not all right.

SD: Right, if anybody went for treatment, they put them in that category of *Muselmann,* and he went up in to the chimney.

HS: Where were you? How did you hold up?

SD: I did hold up very good to a certain point of the day and later on, I started to give in slowly and slowly but my determination to regain my name, the encouragement what I had from the penitentiary and so on and probably, I had an advantage because I was young and I could take the punishment more than the older ones and so, I survived that [unclear] on Christmas Day. When I was going to work every day, I would try to stay out of trouble and to avoid any kind of abuse or [unclear] to get as much rest as

possible, whatever. Here it came to New Year's. New Year, we had the same repeat, identical as Christmas Day.

HS: Again, with the dogs and…

SD: The same thing. New Year Day, this was the day that made me feel a *Muselmann* and that finished me off and if it wouldn't be for Mieric, that angel, who I told you about it, I wouldn't be sitting here right now and I would be there with the millions of other ones where they went. This is the part that I left out. There are many, many other stories-- you could sit and talk for days actually to hear every one.

HS: How long did you stay in Heidenheim? Until '46?

SD: Heidenheim, no I was first, I was in Usti nad Labem. I stayed in Usti nad Labem.

HS: But this was on your own, there was no camp.

SD: No, no, it was after the war.

HS: But you were just on your own?

SD: I was on my own, yes. When you hear the story, you see the reason why. I went to Prague and I met on the station a mother and a daughter from near Warsaw. I don't remember the town and somehow, I don't know, they came over to me and they asked me something and I don't remember and I asked them where do they want to go, where they were from and so on and they were from Poland, from a concentration camp and they did not want to go back to Poland. If I knew any kind of Jewish community here outside Prague, in Sudetenland and so on. I told her where I am and that I had a house and there is several survivors over there. None from Czechoslovakia, they were mostly from Poland and a couple Hungarians and if she wants to, she's welcome to come with us in this huge castle. So the mother and the daughter came with me to Usti nad Labem. I also met my friend again over there, Bolek, in Usti nad Labem. I also made a couple of friends in Theresienstadt which they also lived in Usti nad Labem, so I somehow I made my home, more or less, than that.

HS: Had the Germans left already?

SD: Oh, yeah, there were no Germans.

HS: The Germans were all driven out?

SD: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, they were all out.

HS: It became a ghost town.

SD: A ghost town. Usti nad Labem…

HS: There was nothing there, only a few ducks and gypsies.

SD: Not only Usti because I used to go from Usti to Aš[10]. If you ever heard of Aš?

HS: Yes.

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[10]Aš Czechoslovakian spelling, Asch German spelling.

SD: Aš – Selb. Selb was the German side and Aš was on the border. I became--I picked up a trade what I wanted to do from Makow Ghetto. I became a smuggler and I smuggled cigarettes or little stones from Czechoslovakia to. . .

HS: From [unclear]?

SD: From there.

HS: Semi-precious stones?

SD: Yes, no, no, no, no, no, those that you make for fire in the lighter, fire lighters.

HS: Oh, those.

SD: Those. They were very, very hard to get anywhere. I became a smuggler and from there, I was still in Usti nad Labem and I met somebody over there in Aš and I like made my second home over there in Aš on the border. When I got to Germany, I think there was a camp over there in *FunkKaserne*, in Munich.

HS: It's a barracks.

SD: A barracks, where the displaced persons were over there. I was a while over there and I met somebody which I knew in Auschwitz and he was in a party, in the Betar, the Revisionists…

HS: Oh yes.

SD: …and he told me how good it is over there and they teach you this and you get food and they are teaching you…

HS: A trade?

SD: Not a trade, like a military…

HS: Training?

SD: Training. I went over there and I participated one evening with them and I kind of liked it.

HS: How large a group was there?

SD: There were about 70 or 80 boys and girls and I liked it right from the beginning. The reason I liked it more yet was because my brother, my oldest brother, the one who was in Russia in prison, he belonged to the Betar before the war, and he had his uniform on and I remember, so maybe this was more reason yet that persuaded me. I wanted to join and after I joined that. So I became involved in the Betar movement and I used to bring people from Czechoslovakia to Germany, people who wanted to go to American zone or to Israel. There were *pogroms* already in Poland in those days. There were people coming from Romania, Hungarian and Ukrainians, all because Czechoslovakia was the only eastern block-- it was still a democratic country in those days, and the people itself were very, very fine, nice people, the Czech people, excellent. And that's how I wind up to be in this Betar and I worked on the border for a while and the first time when I came to Heidenheim, that's when I met my wife.

HS: So, when did you come to America?

SD: First of all, I didn't want to come to America at all. My mind was the direction toward Israel and I didn't find anyone from my family. We were looking.

HS: You didn't go back to your hometown, did you?

SD: I went as far as Warsaw right after the war but I was told over there by the people that I should not go in that village because I might be killed and there was no transportation, they are going to see you there and you can't take back your land so you would probably be dead. So I took the advice and I never went to my village and I went back to Czechoslovakia. From Czechoslovakia, I stayed over there until Masaryk-- they say he took his life but he was executed by the Communists in '48.

HS: He jumped out the window?

SD: Yes, he jumped out the window, that's what they say. At that time, Czechoslovakia turned out to be in another satellite of Russia and I left Czechoslovakia for good and I came into Germany. I was in Germany, in Heidenheim, but I was already dating my wife even if I was in Czechoslovakia. I was there for two or three weeks and I came back to Vienna and stayed for a while and I went back.

HS: And you had to wait for immigration to the United States for quite a while, didn't you?

SD: No, we didn't waited long. I didn't wait that long because for me, I didn't want to go to the United States and when I agreed already to go, my wife had the affidavit to come over here to [unclear] in Germany, in Heidenheim. It's called in German, *Aktions*, like a marriage certificate.

HS: The application, the marriage license.

SD: It wasn't an application, it was a marriage certificate.

HS: [unclear] *Uhrkunde*?

SD: Something like that. But we were married over here, we didn't live [unclear, laughs]-- we were single but when we came over here in June of 1949, we were married October 23, 1949 in Marshall Street in a synagogue.

HS: And you have been living in Philadelphia ever since?

SD: Yes.

HS: You have two children?

SD: I have four children.

HS: Four?

SD: Yeah. One is 32 and she lives in Florida and I'm a very proud grandfather of a little grandchild, a girl, 13 months old and I have a son who, he's 28 years old, married. His name is-- he's named after my father, Shmuel Chaim, Sidney Don. I have a daughter and she's 23 and she's working for a Bank Leumi in New York and her name is Renee and she's 23 years old and I have a younger daughter. She's 20 and she's going to Vassar College and next year, she's going as an exchange student to Japan.

HS: This is a very happy ending, to a very sad...

SD: Yes, to a certain extent, a very happy ending. But…

HS: Thank you very much, Sam.

SD: You're quite welcome.

[Tape three, side one ended. Interview ended.]