Tape two, side one:

NP: Natalie Packel, interviewing Eli Rock, on June the 11th. This is side one of tape two, and we continue.

ER: A week later, after all these reports had gotten back and after Truman had directed Eisenhower and Patton to inspect the camps, one of Patton's, each General in each army had General's staffs, I think they were called, of top officers who were the immediate aides and assistants of the commanding General. So Patton, as head of the Third Army, had a group of such officers and after this memorable visit by Eisenhower and Patton, and where all the, and after the criticism, this officer spoke to me. And he said, "We are General Patton's people. I am one of those. He is being hurt by what is, these reports are. And couldn't you issue some official statement, in your role as this American in charge of this American program in Bavaria, that things have greatly improved in the last week or so since the visit by Eisenhower and Patton?" And I couldn't do that, of course. I said, "Well, I'll think about it." But it would, I mean the whole Jewish position was that the army's efforts were woefully inadequate considering the mammoth nature of the problem. I mean these, the extermination of European Jews. And these were among the few survivors. And for me to issue some sort of a statement that things are better or they're O.K. and I wouldn't be comfortable with, I couldn't do it. And it would ruin me with my home office, I'm sure, in New York. So I hemmed and hawed. I never did that. But that was this, the environment. They, these military people, as I say, this one guy who came in and this long, lean Texan who was a West Pointer and was a great fighting officer--I don't remember, as I say, what his rank was, or his name--and just said, "I don't want to ruin my career over this thing. Tell me what I can do and I'll do it. I'll do everything that I can." And, so there was concern by the army. And I had mixed feelings about it because I knew these guys might go on and die fighting Japan.

NP: In this interview you have spoken of the job of the Joint Distribution Committee, the job of UNRRA, as you describe, a major player. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS...

ER: They worked through us. We were really HIAS in those early days. We had an immigration, on our staff I had in Bavaria somebody who worked on immigration. And I don't remember that HIAS had anybody in Europe in those early days. Now, I haven't reached the Berlin part of my experience. I came back in late 1945 and agreed to go back and, under the persuasion of Joe Schwartz. And he sent me this time to Berlin where I was co-director in effect of the JDC program in Berlin and where I stayed until early '47 when I ended my career with overseas JDC and came back to the States and ended up working in the JDC New York office for another four years on these matters which I talked to you about. But that fourteen months in Berlin were much more satisfying in a way, in certain ways, than were those frustrating five months at the end of '45 in Bavaria. We were able to do more in Berlin. We were able to bring in more supplies. We were able to help the

people, particularly with their tracing relatives and immigration needs. We set up a program in our Berlin office for that sort of thing. I just wanted to illustrate earlier the problem of people finding each other. And this is the story I've told quite often. We had a tracing office in Berlin. And we would be in, we had the advantage of being able to communicate directly with the JDC office in New York which then could carry out our requests. And one of the problems was people in Germany, survivors, finding out who their fellow survivors, if any, were in their families, and getting in touch with family in the United States as well as in other countries. But the, a lot of people had relatives in the United States who often didn't know whether these relatives--they were cousins or nephews, whatnot--didn't know whether their relatives in Europe had survived, and were anxious for word about that. And in turn, the people who survived were anxious to find relatives in the States who could help them by sending over money perhaps or helping them immigrate and to stay with them when they got to the States. And so this was why we couldn't, and we, though we brought in more supplies, we still could not, well, it was really never the Joint Distribution Committee's competency or responsibility to furnish the basic supplies for these various DP camps. There was an UNRRA, and it was an international responsibility. But we could supplement in various ways, and again, we did the tracing, which was so important. And one day our, Larry Lubetsky who was in charge, who was himself a survivor, had put up a notice. Somebody had come into his office, in our Berlin office, and asked for help in finding a relative in the States. Larry found that relative and he put a notice up on the bulletin board, "Chaim Grossman, or Mr. Grossman, we have found your relative in Chicago. Please come in." Now this was weeks after, or maybe several weeks after, the relative in Schlachtensee, which was the big Jewish DP camp in Berlin, had come in and asked for this help. So now two weeks later or so Larry puts up a notice on the bulletin board in this DP camp saying, "Chaim Weinberg, or Mr., or whatnot, or Mr. Weinberg, that's it, will the individual who had asked us to find his relative in Chicago please come in? We have found that relative." And he puts this notice on. And somebody comes in to the office and says, "I'm so glad to hear that I have my relatives, I have relatives in Chicago and you have established this contact with them. But how did you know I was looking for them?" And Larry said, "Somebody with your last name was just here a couple of weeks ago." And he said, "That had to be my brother!" And this was the first time he knew his brother had survived. The brother, meanwhile, had moved on into Bavaria, because Berlin was just a place that people came to on foot and whatnot, to the American sector of Berlin, because of, or the French sector, but there was this DP camp in the American sector. The British were trying to discourage this because they knew a lot of these people were going to end up in Palestine and they didn't want that, of course, in those days. So we had an operation in Berlin where the people could, who were brought in late at night on the back of trucks by the *B'richa*, which was this great, great organization. And I...

NP: Could you tell, tell me...

ER: I'm gonna tell you in a minute...

NP: All right.

ER: About them.

NP: *B'richa*, B-R-I-...

ER: B-, B apostrophe, R-I-C-H-A. And Yehuda Bauer has written a book about them. And anyway, Berlin in the year 1946, when I was there, was in the middle of a Russian sea, and Berlin was a four-powered city. There was a Russian sector of Berlin, a French sector of Berlin, a British sector of Berlin, and an American sector of Berlin. And we were, our office was in the American sector of Berlin. But we could move through the other sectors. But certainly the British would not have allowed us to carry on our program and the Russians couldn't--they just didn't care. But we set up a little operation in the French sector of Berlin, called Wittenau, W-I-T-T-E-N-A-U. And that was on the edge of the city, in the...

NP: Edge of Berlin.

ER: Of Berlin, in the French sector of Berlin. Now, this wonderful organization called the *B'richa* was working at a vital task at that time of finding surviving Jews in the Russian occupied zone of Germany and in Poland. Now the *B'richa*, were consisted of former members of the Jewish Brigade in the British Army. The British had recruited Jews in Palestine to fight with the British against the Germans, which of course the Jews couldn't wait to be part of a, I mean after, this was late in the war, or no, I mean, well, the Allied armies didn't into Germany until after the invasion on D-Day, and so much had taken place before that. And as I say, most Jews had been killed but there was a tremendous, tremendous need to find the survivors. Many Jews had gone into hiding. Many of them had placed their children with gentile neighbors as babies, as they were being deported. Gentile friends. And with so much, and so so few survivors, there was a tremendous emphasis--there would have been in any event--on finding those Jewish survivors and those children that were now in occupied Poland. And there were also many Jews, a large number, maybe a couple of hundred thousand, who had survived the Nazis. And they were living in the eastern part of Poland. And as the Nazis moved across Poland they fled into Russia, where they were interned but their lives were saved. There were maybe 200,000. And that was the biggest group of survivors. And they now came back after the war. They came back to their homes in Poland, where they found that the antisemitism was as strong as ever. And there had been this horrible incident in a...

NP: Kielce?

ER: Town...

NP: Kielce? Where the pogrom...

ER: Kielce, yeah, yeah, what's the word again?

NP: Kielce.

ER: Kelce, Kelce, K-E-...

NP: K-I-E-L-C-E.

ER: Yes, yeah.

NP: The pogroms at that time.

ER: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Post-war.

ER: That's right. And Jews--these Polish bandits who had been bandits under the Nazis and who still could not get over their antisemitism, and they would stop trains and take men off the trains and ask them to lower their pants to indicate whether they were circumcised, and they killed them. And it was, I mean, the hatred. You could understand why you couldn't put Jewish DPs in the same camp with Polish DPs. I mean, all these, after everything that had happened, for the Poles *still* to be giving vent to their antisemitism was horrible. And anyway, one group, a large number that had survived, came through Poland, or realized that they, the Jewish communities were a graveyard; nobody was there anymore in these various Jewish towns and they just kept coming. And they, some of them, a large number, went south from Warsaw and got to Czechoslovakia and went into Bavaria for the UNRRA programs in Bavarian camps. But a substantial number at one time, this really is [unclear] came west to Berlin and they were brought in by, on the backs of trucks at night by *B'richa* people who had found them and, or, I mean they found children that had been placed with Christian Polish families as their families, as their, the parents were being deported. And these were nice people. In some cases they adopted and converted the children, but in many cases they had taken good care of them *and* they perhaps saw some chance for financial remuneration. They didn't want to keep the children. And they would turn them over to the *B'richa* people. And between these various sources, the *B'richa* would put people on the backs of trucks and come into Berlin, into the French sector of Berlin, late at night, because they didn't want to be caught by the British occupation authorities. And there was this camp, Wittenau, in the French sector of Berlin, which we maintained. That was a major function of the JDC. It was a necessary place. It didn't hold large numbers of people, but it was a place a truck coming in at night could deposit its people and then the next morning in broad daylight we could transfer them to the American sector of Berlin and they'd be lost in the traffic and what not and the British would not interfere with it. Whereas if we did this late at night when cars were not even permitted on the highways, the British would surely intercept them.

NP: Excuse me, if I may, *B'richa* means "flight."

ER: Yes.

NP: Was this a legal or illegal operation?

ER: It was probably illegal as far as the British were concerned. The Russians and the French, I mean there were so many people wandering around there was, really there were no controls. They didn't, couldn't care less. And they were wonderful guys. We got to know them. And as I say, they came to Berlin and we supplied them with food and what not. But this was a...

NP: And were they all from Palestine?

ER: Yeah, yeah, the *B'richa*...

NP: They were all from Palestine, the *B'richa*.

ER: Almost all of them were Palestinians who had been in the British Army...

NP: Jewish Palestinians.

ER: Jewish Palestinians, and who then gave the British Army uniforms to concentration camp survivors, who were then brought back as British soldiers to Palestine, and this got people into Palestine. We had no qualms about doing this, because the British were trying to prevent any kind of migration to Palestine. And the one thing that was unacceptable in these early days was trying to prevent these people from finding relatives, from migrating and what not. And so the *B'richa* turned over its uniforms. And then these guys came back to Palestine as British Army soldiers. The *B'richa* guys stayed on. Some of them had already been in the British Army for years and had been in battles and what not, and hadn't seen their families for years. And now they were here in Germany maybe for another four years, doing this work, without seeing their families. And they were wonderful. I remember looking up a few, I became so enamored of these guys, and their idealism and their courage. And we would see them in Berlin and we would help them in any ways that we could. Max Helvarg, our supply guy, whom I have a picture of here and who has died--he died quite a long time ago...

NP: What was his name?

ER: Max Helvarg, H-E-L-V-A-R-G. He was our supply guy in Berlin. He made sure that the *B'richa* guys got plenty of supplies. Max also, this was when the Palestinian Jews were fighting the Arabs for their lives and survival in the late '40s, and, or middle '40s, and Max would also get some revolvers and what not, without my knowledge [chuckles] and smuggle them to the Palestinian Jews. A wonderful guy. And we became very close friends.

NP: Without *B'richa* where would so many...

ER: That's right.

NP: ...displaced persons be? I...

ER: Oh, I don't know. I suppose that in time, I mean, the Poles were glad to get rid of the Jews. The Russians--but it was a question of time. I mean, nobody, who the, some Jews had gone back to Poland. They went back and they found that life was much easier in Poland than struggling for an existence in Palestine, say. One guy once said, "How can I make a, as a Jew, can I make a living off of other Jews?" He was, you know, a business man, a trader. He sold. And so a good deal of the original Jewish community came back. I don't know, in the population of Poland, at best, it can only be a small fraction. There were like three million Jews in Poland before the war. I mean it was a tremendously large community.

NP: Incredible.

ER: And they dispersed, but most of them were killed. And where, how, you know, how we get the number of six million. And, but anyway, so we got, the *B'richa* people were bringing people through Berlin at night at this one camp, and then the next

day they'd go into the UNRRA camp under Harold Fishbein, who was the director of the UNRRA camp and whom I have a picture of there.

NP: F-I-S-H-B-E-I-N.

ER: Yeah, yeah, and he was the brother of Morris Fishbein, the head of the American Medical Association in those days and kind of a controversial figure who was against what they thought was socialized medicine. Anyway, Harold, who has long since died, and I, worked together on a lot of these things. And there was recently a reunion in Lancaster, just a few months ago, of people who were in Berlin, Jewish survivors and what not, who were in Berlin in 1946, or their relatives. Because that was 50 years ago. So unless they are pretty high up in years, and there weren't many that I saw in Lancaster that had little children in those days, but they always remembered that, and there were 40 people or so who had been in Berlin in '46 and we had this reunion. And now one of the people I got to be very close to in those days was Rabbi Friedman--oh, what's his first name? I know it as well as my name--who was chaplain there in those days who had, he was succeeded by Mike Abramowitz. And...

NP: He was chaplain in the camp?

ER: For the army.

NP: For the army, in Berlin?

ER: Army, in Berlin.

NP: In Berlin.

ER: And he was succeeded by Mayer Abramovitz who was a rabbi in, now, in, he's retired, in Florida. But Herbert Friedman, who later became the head of the United Jewish Appeal, and was also, is now the director of the Wexner Foundation in New York, and Herb Friedman was the army chaplain there in those days. And he was later, he was transferred elsewhere during that year and he was succeeded by Mayer Abramovitz as the army chaplain. Well, there were, their job was to serve the army. But of course the Jewish soldiers who were in Berlin at that time, the chaplains, were much more interested in these Jewish survivors who were coming through Berlin. And they, each, there were stories of events that I just, now General, there is a different General in Berlin. And Clay, General Clay was in charge of the army in Berlin. And he just looked the other way as we were smuggling people into Berlin and, survivors, and he knew the British objected to it. But he was a wonderful man and as an illustration, in October of 1946 it was Rosh Hashanah. And there were services in Schlachtensee, this big DP camp, Jewish DP camp. And they put up a big tent, or they already had that tent and there was a stage. I guess they'd used this tent. It could hold about 500 people or more. And the, Harold Fishbein had used it for putting on plays and things to help the morale of these survivors. And it was a hot day. And we got to the *Yiskor* services, part of the service, where you say prayers for...

NP: *Kaddish*.

ER: *Kaddish* for the individual survivors, individual relatives. Now normally one says a prayer for his father, or an uncle maybe. But that would be all. In this prayer--

and maybe this is normal--you go through, well at least in those days, and it was an Orthodox ceremony, prayers were said for one's father, one's mother, one's brother, one's children. And the prayers were started. And everybody in that room practically was a sole survivor. And they started to weep as the individual prayers were said, and brought back to mind what terrible losses they had suffered. And it was an enormously emotional scene. One could not help but weep. And I looked at General Clay, and he was weeping. And I just thought what a wonderful man, to be so understanding. I mean, an army general, not like Patton, but he was maybe a military government I think type of general, so it was of a different stripe, yeah.

NP: Humanitarian?

ER: Well he had a different, you use different people I guess for that. But we needed for the fighting, generals like Patton. But that was a scene I'll never forget, 50 years ago.

NP: Most memorable.

ER: Yeah.

NP: These displaced persons were really guardians of fragments of their culture, whatever survived. Was there a cultural renaissance that you, in the theater or music or anything?

ER: Oh there was theater and music. We helped a couple of young guys, and I met one of them at this reunion in Lancaster. He's a successful business, a retired engineer consultant. And he had mentioned, I heard him tell somebody that he had been there in Berlin in '46 and he had set up, when he was 16 years old, some kind of little business with another 16-year-old kid, in Berlin! And I mean, he had been in Auschwitz. He'd lost his family. He and this other 16-year-old kid were there in Berlin without a family and what not but they--the survival, the reconstruction, the rebuilding your life instinct was so strong. There they were setting up a little business, which I didn't know about, in that camp. And they went out into the larger city and did a little bit of business from [unclear]. Oh, he told me and I forgot. So, it was really something to go back 50 years when they did it, and...

NP: Yes, indeed. Do you keep...

ER: In Germany...

NP: ...together the organization of Berliners that met in Lancaster?

ER: There is a notice I received from somebody, and it's called, maybe I have it here. 1946 survivors, Jewish survivors of, or 1946 Jewish Survivors in Berlin. And, or displaced persons in Berlin. But let me give you...

NP: I know you have a luncheon appointment and...

ER: Well that's all right. I've still got time.

NP: You just tell me and we will...

ER: Let me turn over to some of the things that I have. Now one is, this is--I was on the Board of Directors of *The Jewish Exponent* when I came back to Philadelphia. And this is, and I have remained here ever since, and this is dated 19-, October 29th, 1971. And

one of the things I was instrumental in was starting a little supplement to *The Exponent* called "Fourth Friday." Now that has long since gone out of existence, but I felt, and a couple of other people felt, that *The Exponent* was just insufficiently intellectual. They were just not getting the young members of the Jewish families, the educated, sophisticated people would not read *The Jewish Exponent*. It just didn't have the literary stuff. Anyway, for a short period we, I think primarily pressured *The Jewish Exponent* committee into starting something called "The Fourth Friday." And it did try to publish better stuff than you got just in *The Exponent*. And one of the things that we succeeded in getting published was this article on Dr. Joseph Schwartz, which I have copies of. Now Joe Schwartz was the-

Tape two, side two:

NP: ...side two, with Eli Rock.

ER: Dr. Joseph Schwartz was director of the JDC in post-, even in, of overseas, the overseas program of the JDC, the European program of the JDC in Europe, in the, and he worked behind the lines even before the end of the war. He performed a memorable, memorable service. And as I mentioned earlier he persuaded me to go back. He was my boss. Arthur Greenly was--and another guy who, and Jake Trobe, were supervisors. The, Herb Katsky, Jake Trobe, Arthur Greenly at various times were my supervisors when I worked in Europe. But Joe Schwartz was over all the head of the whole European program. And he had been operating before the end of the war underground to try to help Hungarian Jews and what not.

NP: Arthur Greenly?

ER: No, Joe Schwartz.

NP: Joe Schwartz, I'm sorry.

ER: Joe Schwartz was in Europe before the end of the war and, well, I was too. But I mean, earlier I--and behind the Nazi lines, and he'd go back and forth to help underground communities in various places. Just, I think I referred to him as a kind of Scarlet Pimpernel kind of character. Anyway, he came to Berlin on behalf of the Allied Jewish Appeal in 1971 and I wrote for *The Jewish Exponent*, or what was then what we called "The Fourth Friday," an article about Joe Schwartz. Now...

NP: I would like to have a copy. The Archive would.

ER: I made copies. I made copies. And I'm trying to find, in the first page [pause; noise] Now this is a summary of this article that was published by the *Jewish Digest*, condensed from *The Jewish Exponent*, all right? You...

NP: Thank you. Thank you.

ER: You can, that is the only copy I have of that, so if you could make copies of that and...

NP: And send it back to you.

ER: Yeah.

NP: O.K.

ER: Yeah. And this is "The Fourth Friday" [pause]. Now this is an excerpt from Yehuda Bauer's book, which refers to some of the work we did.

NP: Thank you.

ER: And I think I'll need to have that returned.

NP: Both of them, O.K. [pause] I will be in the Archive next Tuesday, and so I will copy everything and...

ER: Sure.

NP: Send it back immediately.

ER: All right, now this is in very poor condition. This is the first page of the

article I wrote about Joe Schwartz, continued on page seven. This is "The Fourth Friday" and here's page seven, and there was a page eight, which I was trying to find yesterday. This is page seven. Well I guess, no this is let me see, the first page.

NP: Would that be the page, this page here, right here?

ER: No, wait. No.

NP: No.

ER: No, wait a minute. What page is this? [pause; mumbling] Why don't we just turn it off.

NP: Certainly. Is there anything more that you would wish to add to the interview itself? You returned in 1950? Or your, you terminated...

ER: Well I returned to the States in '47.

NP: '47, and then with the Joint...

ER: And then I worked for the Joint for another three-and-a-half years, in New York, on these two areas, one being the Jewish claims from the people who had survived the ghetto...

NP: Yes.

ER: ...and the other, my major role, was to, there were some legal matters that I may not remember that I dealt with.

NP: That's O.K. That's all right.

ER: But the major function was helping to set up the Jewish restitution program, where particularly for heirless Jewish property, and in helping to set up this successor organization, which could then claim the unclaimed heirless Jewish property and which used it for Jewish purposes. Now I worked closely, that was a very satisfying kind of job, because we were successful for a while. We don't know how much we could never find, that the Germans kept, but we...

NP: I've seen, excuse me, have seen some press on the Swiss bank accounts.

ER: Even recently, yes, yeah. I don't, I never had any, and this is years later. But it's an indication of how difficult recovering Jewish property has been. They are still finding it in places like Switzerland that, because families were wiped out and nobody could claim, nobody knew about some of these assets because the whole family had been wiped out. And...

NP: Right. And I understand, you know, the original name was not the names on the account and...

ER: That's another, you're right. You're right, that's another problem.

NP: And so how to identify...

ER: Yeah, yeah. It's amazing that after, all these years after Hitler we're still finding effects of this total destruction what the various courses of damage that flow from something like this when you wipe out a whole community, including possible relatives and heirs who cannot know what the property was. And so the people who confiscated the property have often kept it. And we know there was, there were outbreaks of antisemitism

when people came back to Poland and wanted their houses. And they were, those houses were now occupied by other Poles who were angry at the Jews, who dared come back and reclaim this property. I mean it's...

NP: Elie Wiesel himself has often said that...

ER: Yeah, yeah.

NP: ...that you know, when he returned to his hometown...

ER: Yeah, yeah.

NP: Peered in in his window and saw people...

ER: Oh, really?

NP: ...in his house with the furniture.

ER: Ah, so you know that story.

NP: Extraordinary feeling.

ER: But let--go ahead.

NP: Your testimony will be used for generations to come.

ER: Really? Well I hope so!

NP: For scholarly research, and I guess history is just now being written, and more facts are being revealed. And every testimony is most important. And we thank you. We will send you a copy of this if you wish.

ER: Yes.

NP: And later on, as we have it transcribed, the transcription itself. And I thank you.

ER: Now Gratz is running this whole program?

NP: Yes, uh huh. I have some information here which I can leave you, about the Holocaust Oral History Archive at Gratz.

ER: Yeah. Now, I may find some stuff here that I'll want to send you. Do I have your address.

NP: Let me take this...

ER: Just write it on this. Just write it on this.

NP: All right, thank you.

ER: Let me just- [tape off]