

I'm going to start asking now. I want you to tell me-- just start at the point just before liberation when things were getting very bad, tell me where you were and what the conditions were like, and then just describe the liberation to me.

Maybe I start this way, that I say that 29 of April in Dachau began as a very quiet day. Nothing in the surroundings and in the air indicated that there will be a drama this day, you know. And there were several days like that before-- when I came to Dachau from Hersbruck-- this was a subcamp of a large camp of Flossenburg-- I came to Dachau in the evacuation March that lasted about 20 days.

When we came to Dachau I was lice-infected. All of us were in the same condition. And we waited for several hours, almost the whole day, before we were received by Dachau, by the camp of Dachau. And finally, we have been accepted and signed up or given the numbers and taken the showers.

And after that, I was completely naked. Everything has been taken from me. All my belongings that I brought from Hersbruck-- and my uniform, old uniform. And I was not given anything that was used in Dachau. Instead I had a blanket. I wrap around the blanket, and I stay several days this way. It has one good thing because we didn't have to go to work because we were naked. You know, but we only had to participate in roll call three times a day.

And there was a quiet days, and we lived in area which was called a quarantine-- several blocks that were completely separated from the rest of the camp by the fence. And there was a guard at the fence. And we couldn't get out of that area. But on 29 of April, when I get up and went out outside, I saw that the gate was open, and there was nobody at the gate.

So I took a chance, and I went outside on the main street of the camp. And I walked to the place before the kitchen where usually the roll call were held. I remember seeing, when I arrived, a big tent over there in which there were clothing-- all kinds of things. You know, so I hoped to find that tent. And I did find it, but it was complete almost empty. But still I could find a pair of trousers and a jacket. And I took this with me. And I came back to the block.

And by this time, everybody was already outside, and there was supposed to be a roll call. And we assembled the roll call. And we stood for two or three hours and nobody came. Usually there would be an SS man who would come and count everybody and take the-- I mean, report this to higher authorities. This time he didn't come.

Instead we were ordered to go into the block. And the block was closed. And we were told that we will have to sit inside locked indefinitely. So this is how the day started. And it really-- and the only contact with the outside world was through the window. And when we see through the window a strange thing happening. Because all of a sudden there appeared a German gestapos with canes as a guard. And they were stationed all around, on all corners around this area. But there were no SS guard of any kind.

There were nothing in the air. Usually for many days, there was always a British airplane hanging above the camp, spying over the camp. There were nothing there-- absolutely quiet. And when the 5 o'clock arrive, we were starting to get a dinner. You know, dinner which was one slice of bread and water is all. And at that time, the block shook because fighting began. And it lasted about 1/2 hour-- terrifying fighting. And all the walls were shaking.

And of course, we immediately thought that probably this is it. You know, that the Americans are coming. Because we knew that the Americans are marching toward Dachau. We know this even already when we were marching from Hersbruck-- that they already are coming.

The fighting lasted about 1/2 hour, and then it stopped. And nothing happened again. And it took about another 20 minutes before we heard individual shots-- pop, pop-- here and there-- from all directions. And then I look in the window, and I see there are a lot of people running toward the fences. Prisoners from other block which were not in the quarantine.

And I see that some of them are carrying guns-- rifles already, you know. So we broke through the window outside because the door was still locked, you know. And we started running toward the fences. And we see that this area was

completely already demolished. It took only maybe five minutes to demolish all the fences, all the fences of Dachau.

And then I see at the far end on the corner, you know, American soldier. He was walking, and behind him were other soldiers. He was commanding the guards that were on the tower, the Germans, to descend and to surrender, you know. Those who were too slow to surrender were shot immediately, right on spot.

So I saw this, but I didn't venture outside. Some people already tried to go through the broken fences to the outside. There was a ditch filled with water. You know, I didn't know. I was not familiar with Dachau-- really how to go about. So I went in the other direction. I ran toward the area where I'd been before to the big square in the front of the kitchen where the roll calls were held.

And here I saw another row of the fence. And behind right behind the fence there were already about 50 prisoners of war-- German officers and men-- sitting in the ditch. And I saw these funny little Jeeps, you know, cruising here and there. And for the years, for many years, we always discuss eventual liberation-- how this will happen. And we always wish that there would be an Americans who liberated us. And in those talks, the Americans grew up to a giants. They look like giant people themselves, the soldiers. And the trucks were tremendous trucks-- like trains, you know.

And here I am seeing a little Jeep. This was really funny, you know. And of course, I look around, and I see thousands of people gathered on the square. And I see thousands of national flags-- looked like everybody was prepared for that occasion and was carrying in their pocket a flag of some sort-- Polish, and Russian, and Czechs, and French, and Italian.

Wait, wait, wait.

Yeah.

We have to reload.

Yeah.

Camera roll two. is up-- slate two is up.

OK, John, go back and start when you came into the big place where they held a roll call.

Yeah, yeah. So I came to that after the incident with Jeeps? Right, OK. So I notice all around me thousands, thousands of flags of all nationalities that were, at that time, present at Dachau-- Polish and Russian and Czechs, Italians, French. And when I took a walk along the main street, I saw many blocks decorated. It took probably only minutes, you know. All the decoration must have been already waiting in storage somewhere in secret.

It was drizzling-- rain drizzling-- during that hour of liberation. But as the time went by it cleared up, and the sun began to set down. And there was a glorious sun setting, but there were also a very dark clouds on the east. This was-- you know, east, that's communism. That's what I always remember later on. That this was a warning. You know, that this freedom is not complete. You know, this is only personal freedom and not the freedom of my country.

When it became dark, in between the blocks there were hundreds of fires-- fires it hit up and all those who venture outside the fence, and who manage to bring some foodstuff were cooking a supper, because we didn't get anything to eat that night. And joyfully, we went to-- when it's around probably about 10 o'clock in the evening-- we went to the blocks and to sleep.

But we couldn't. And maybe about 1/2 hour later, again, a big detonations broke the silence above Dachau. It was a SS division that was marching from Munich to take back Dachau from the Americans. The Americans were only a small unit that were patrolling in that area. And when they found out that there is a Dachau in the neighborhood, they took advantage. I mean, they took on themselves the job of liberating the Dachau. You know, and they were not really equipped fully to protect camp and the prisoners.

So I understand, and we were told later on the next day, that the orders were already given to wake us all up and send us up north into the area where they were many American forces. Of course, they stop the advance of that SS division shortly before the Dachau. And we could stay in the camp until the next day.

And it was several days later on that make history-- some sort. First of all, the next day we were given too much food to eat. Everybody got a 1 pound pork conserve and a loaf of bread. Some people who ate that got immediately sick. Consequently, there was dysentery in the camp. There was a lot of dead people. And of course, typhus was one of the reasons that decimated the camp population.

I understand there were about 16,000 people died after the liberation, you know. This is tragic. I too got sick. I got typhus. And when I get out of it, there was no more former prisoners in the camp. They all were moved to Freimann.

Before we go on, did you see any revenge on the SS? Did the Americans kill any SS other than when they first--

Yeah, those who resisted in any way were shot immediately right on the spot. And there were corpses floating in the ditch, I mentioned, that was around the fence area-- German soldiers that were dead. And a lot of Germans Kapos were caught, denounced by prisoners and caught by them immediately and arrested.

There were tense moments from the very beginning, because they camp-- from the next day, was under the authority of the Americans. And they consider us almost like prisoners again. We couldn't get out, because they were afraid that most of the prisoners are sick, that we will infect the population outside. So they kept us in. Yet, they didn't know how to handle this population. Therefore, so many people died.

So when you got typhus did they take you to a hospital?

Yeah, they took me to the American hospital. And the nurses were the-- how you call it? They have a special name, that unit that--

Army nurses?

Army nurses, yeah army nurses-- but there are a lot of people who died in that hospital.

OK, let's go on to leaving the hospital and going to the DP camp.

As I say, you know, when I get out of the hospital, I get out of in a funny attire, you know. I was given a SS jacket, prisoner's trousers, Albanian hat, you know, and a Russian boot-- winter, I mean, winter boot. And the time was the middle of June. I came out this way.

And of course, a few days I stayed at Dachau. So I signed up to work for-- there was a lot of workers, you know. There was a kitchen functioning. The blocks has to be kept in order. But the day came when they rounded us up, all of us, and without much discussion and so, they loaded us into the military trucks, and drove us into the countryside to a DP camp. This is how I went to [PLACE NAME], which was right in the boondocks-- nowhere, no roads, no railroad, nothing. Everywhere the nearest railroad was about 10 kilometers from this place. It was absolutely in the fields.

And so of course, we complain about it. Because our real destination was Freimann. And this is where all our-- my friends were all the prisoners from Dachau. Here in different camp were the people who were gathered from the farms, from the German farms, and brought those who are forced laborers. So we--

OK, you're just getting into the DP camp out in the boondocks. And tell me what you then did to rebuild your life.

Really, you are not doing anything, because the whole camp was in the process of organization, you know-- of building up. It was a former military barracks. And it had to be adopted to house families and children. And there were a lot of children in that camp. So there was some work has to be done in order to occupy the children and teach them. A school has to be open. You know, there got to be some instruction written for how this whole business should be conducted.

So I was involved a little bit in those things, while there are others just sit and didn't do anything. And their only excitement was to get a permission because all the movements were controlled by the army. There was a-- at the gate of that new camp, there was a MP sitting. And he would not let out anybody unless you have a permission that entitled you to go out. And this was the only excitement to get a permission in the office. And then go and travel to Munich, let's say, which was about 15 kilometers.

Otherwise, there was just a-- it looks like any UNRRA establishment where the people sit idle, do nothing.

Tell me where had the children come from?

The children? It looks like a lot of children came with the people who work on German farms. Looks like they were born in that town where they were brought from-- the countries like Poland, like Russia, like-- of course, this camp was primarily Polish, you know. But there were few other than Poles too. But most of them were Poles. But so they just get born-- were born on German soil during the war times. Just the same way there were a lot of children who were born in concentration camp-- in women camps.

You know, women always have represent a special problem. Problem that I don't know much about it, but when I read the books about the women camps, there were all kinds of specific problems. Because these were women. You know, thousands of children were born in concentration camps. So I imagine the same thing happened also in the situation where of forced labor.

And in this camp, were people trying to go back to Poland or not?

Not only that they were trying, they were really forced to go to Poland. The UNRRA policy was to repatriate all the people who are available, who were at that time on German soil. You know, the existence of the UNRRA camp was for the purpose of the repatriation. But as the time went by, we were getting a strange messages.

For example, Poles were contacted by the government in exile-- resided in London. And the agents who used to come and talk to us, they were talking about new war. Everybody in this times was expected that there will be a war with Russia. Because nobody in their right mind after liberation thought that this is the end of the war. You know, we expected war with the communism. You know, and since this didn't come, we start looking for places to go for immigrate, while the UNRRA in between was trying to repatriate us to other countries-- to Poland.

And Russian, for example, had to go also to Russia. You know, and they were sent mostly to Siberia immediately by the Stalin, and so forth. So this was a dangerous thing, repatriation. It went so far that the UNRRA promised those who would go back to their countries of origin, extra food, supplies. And they were really giving it.

Of course, you know, they are not giving anything worthwhile-- usually some potatoes and flour and nothing like a threat or anything-- water no-- only some very primitive foodstuff. But anyway, they were giving people some supplies just to make them go back to Poland.

Tell me about being asked to identify Germans.

One of the reasons why we had to move out from Dachau was that the American authorities were planning to bring to Dachau all they arrested SS. And in a few months, there were several thousand of us as the inmates of Dachau. And once a week we were brought by trucks to Dachau, and we are seated in the outside of the fence area. And they were parading in front of us, in circle. And whoever was lucky and identified, immediately MP re-arrested the man and put him to the side for trial. And I was not able to identify anybody because, you know, I was not familiar with the SS that were in Dachau. They were strange people. But anyway, I participated. And it was quite a show. And it was once a week.

And tell me about traveling around Germany in those first few months. How did you do that?

When I get out of the hospital, my biggest desire was to go and see the Bavaria, especially mountains-- Alps. Because I come from the area near the mountains in Poland. So I understand mountains. And I love mountains. So very early when I still was living in Dachau, I went by train to Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which is a distance about 101 kilometers. And the first ride took me 12 hours.

There was a situation where the train was so overloaded, that uphill we had to get out of the train and walk along the train because it couldn't pull. The locomotive was too weak to pull all the masses of people, you know. So when I arrived in Garmisch, I went to this to Zugspitze station-- you know, the highest mountain in Bavaria is Zugspitze. And there is a train that go up the mountain.

So I wanted to get to that train, and I was waiting in the ticket office. And I couldn't get a ticket because it was reserved for the Americans only. And here they come-- truckloads of the American soldiers. And I notice one soldier. He was a prisoner artist from Auschwitz, who through the evacuation, landed eventually before the camp was liberated in Buchenwald. And Buchenwald was liberated about two months before Dachau was.