

This interview was recorded October 21, 1980, for the Oral History Committee of the Holocaust Library and Research Center Associates of San Francisco.

Interviewee: Mr. Julius Drabkin, Latvian Jewish survivor

Interviewer: Monica Frankel

All dialogue following the initial "A" in this transcript is by Mr. Drabkin. Where noted, Mr. Drabkin's wife, Judith, aided in translation.

Q: MR. DRABKIN, TO BEGIN MAY I ASK YOU WHERE AND WHEN YOU WERE BORN?

A: I was born in 1918 in Ukrainia, the 4th of December.

Q: WHEN DID YOU MOVE TO RIGA?

A: In 1921 we came back to Riga because the Jews moved out in 1914 and then the First World War began.

Q: WHEN THE GERMANS OCCUPIED RIGA, WHERE YOU WERE, WHAT WERE YOU DOING AT THE TIME?

A: I was in the Latvian Army two years. I came back from the army in 1941, the first of June, and I looked for a job. The first of July, 1941, the Germans occupied Riga, and I was there.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED IMMEDIATELY UPON THE OCCUPATION?

A: At first, on the same day in the afternoon, the Latvians got from the Germans free hand to do with the Jews what they liked. On the radio you could hear an invitation: "All Latvian officers, all who are Nationals and all who are against the Russian people, all who are against the Jewish people, will be under the command of Officer Kreischmann," a Latvian. Then they said on the radio that all Jewish people must be out of all lines, because there was big lines for food and they threw out all of the Jewish people from the lines. The Latvians knew the people who looked like Jews, like I; everybody could see, so we came out of the lines, and it was a hard time. The first days the German Army and the German SS gave

gave to the Latvians free hand in selecting people. They'd go to the Jewish homes. . .

Q: THE LATVIANS?

A: Yes, the Latvians. They first would go to these people who were maybe communists before the war-- most of them escaped to Russia, but there were those people who had no time to escape and they were killed in front of their houses.

Mrs. D: On the spot.

A: In the street, in the same place, they were killed in that moment. Other people they took in big parties and they brought them to the jail and they were also murdered in the following two or three weeks. I had the luck that they came on the 4th of July to my home; they came in and they took this gold watch and some other things they took away.

Q: WHO WOULD "THEY" BE IN THIS CASE, THE LATVIAN POLICE?

A: Yes, the Latvian Nationalists, they were helping policemen. They had a band, white and red, on their arms. They took us on the streets, maybe two- or three-hundred, and then they brought us to the police office and from there they asked everybody who he was and what he had done. There were elderly people there, and for them this was the last. But we had to go to do some job. They brought us to the places where the Russian soldiers were before they left Latvia.

Mrs. D: To the barracks.

A: Yes, we had to clean up, and in the evening they let us go home.

Q: WERE YOU LIVING WITH YOUR FAMILY AT THE TIME?

A: Yes, I was married the first time and we lived in Riga. The first day I had luck because one way to go home was on one street and the other was by the other street. The name of the street is Gogol; there was a writer, Gogol, and his name is the street. There was a big synagogue and there they caught every Jew, there was maybe 35 or 40

Jews, and they pushed them in the synagogue and closed the door and they put on fire, and with all the people the synagogue burned.

Q: DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THIS, WAS THIS WELL-KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE CITY?

A: Yes, I know because I had friends and my one friend said to me, "Julius, come with me," and I said, "No, this way is for me shorter," and the next day he was no more. Then my other friends told me that he was in the synagogue, burned. Then after 10 days, the German government said now is enough for the Latvian people. In the first days when the German Army came in, the Latvians waited with flowers-- not all-- most everybody, and the banner of the Latvians on the houses were put on. But after 10 days the Germans wrote in the newspaper, "Now is enough. We have only one banner, it is only one country. This will be Germany and you have to put up the German Banner."

Q: WAS THAT AFTER 10 DAYS OF OCCUPATION?

A: Yes. Then the Germans took all of us, the Jews, to labor, heavy work in the wharf or transporting furniture. There was a lot of homes where the Jews escaped to Russia and they had to leave all at home and the Germans took all away, all we had to take, all the furniture. At work, I remember there was a very good pianist, Heller, he was one of the best in Latvia, and he said, "Oh, I never more can play on the piano!" because he wounded his fingers in the hard, hard work.

Q: BEFORE THE GERMANS OCCUPIED OR WHEN THEY OCCUPIED, DID YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT, HAD YOU ALREADY HEARD WHAT GERMAN OCCUPATION WAS LIKE?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: WHAT HAD YOU HEARD AND FROM WHOM?

A: I had heard in the newspapers, I heard from refugees who were coming from Germany in 1938 and 1939 after the Kristallnacht which happened in Germany, and they said a lot of the Jewish nationality are in concentration camps.

Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, before the war. I thought that there would be a very hard time, but when you are young, you hope that maybe it will not be for so long. But that there would be a hard time, I knew this. I heard from several sources: in newspapers everyday something was written from Germany, before. . .

Q: SO LATVIAN PAPERS. . .

A: Latvia was between Germany and Russia; there were basic midway points from Russia from 1939 in Latvia. The government was more with Germany than with Russia because it was against communists.

Mrs. D: No newspaper wrote anything about the Jews.

A: No, not the Jews.

Mrs. D: No Latvian newspaper wrote about the Jews and neither did the Russian papers write about the Jews.

A: No, the refugees told us.

Mrs. D: Only the refugees who came for a short time from Vienna, Austria, they told us.

A: They told us, yes.

Mrs. D: They were listening to the radio. At night you could listen and hear that this happened because Europe spoke about it, and France-- but also not about the Jews-- they spoke about the German invasion, but not about the Jews; nobody talked about that.

A: After the first of July, 1941, when the Germans came in, some families killed themselves, committed suicide, because they. . .

Mrs. D: They understood what was coming.

Q: SO SOME PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY. . .

Mrs. D: My uncle did it. He was a doctor and he had this cyanide. Later on people told me when I came back that they were led to be shot to this big ditch. But he had gone to the road with my father, with my mother, with my aunt, and he told us all in time, because we went to Russia, we didn't see this. He was coming home and he saw what was going on and he got it out of the way, he was not shot.

He was already an old age.

Q: SO WAS IT SHORTLY AFTER THAT THAT YOU WERE CONFINED TO A GHETTO?

A: The ghetto. In the newspaper was written, it was the 25th of September: "Every Jew has to be in the newly founded ghetto in a suburb of Riga." We had to share our homes. We had three rooms in our home and we had to share with another family in one room in the suburb, and in 10 days, on the 25th of September the ghetto was closed. That means that nobody could leave the ghetto. You could leave the ghetto only with one Latvian or a German person. Before this was also in the newspaper that by the first of August every Jew had to go on this one street to this-and-this house where we had to register. Then we had to wear a yellow star on the left side, on the front, and on the right side. After a week, again in the newspaper it said that Jews are not allowed to go on the sidewalk, only you could go on the street.

Mrs. D: Not on the street, but right on the highway in the middle, that the drivers should see them, all the cars.

A: In the middle, where the cars were going. There were some cases I remember where the cars ran over the Jewish people, especially elderly people.

Q: DO YOU FEEL THAT ON THE WHOLE, THE LATVIAN PEOPLE FACILITATED THE GERMAN MEASURES AGAINST THE JEWS?

A: In the first time, yes. I'll show you why: because on the 13th and 14th of June, the Latvian people, there were Jewish people also, they were sent to cities, deportations.

Mrs. D: Latvians put the whole fault for this on the Jews, that it was the fault of the Jews that the Latvians were deported because there were many communist Jewish people, and the Russians used the Jews to take the refugees out.

A: They wrote in the newspaper that Lenin was a Jew, that Stalin was also from Jews. It was a terrible time, a terrible time. The Latvians-- in every nation you can find such elements who for a little money, for a little

drink, for very little jewels or gold, will murder, and who know they'll murder and will not be punished.

Q: ONCE YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO, WERE YOU STILL DOING THE SAME KIND OF WORK?

A: In the ghetto, before the ghetto was closed, I was sent to the turf.

Mrs. D: This means they sent the people to the moor where the turf is where they just picked out pieces of what is called "brown coal." You just dig it out and when it gets dried then you can use it as heating material. It is not black coal, but they call it brown coal. It is called turf.

A: It's turf, yes. Then I was there four weeks and I had luck in that the underground, the Latvian nationalists, killed 32 people there. Then they said that I had to go to Riga. We would be here for the winter and there was in our group out of all the maybe 60 or 70 Jews, one supervisor, and he said in the winter we'll have nothing, because this was summer: "We will send ten people and you can bring back winter clothes." I went also into the town and then I didn't come back. I got a letter, a document from a doctor that my heart was no good. Then in Riga I had luck that I could work at my profession, and I am a dental technician. We were maybe 18 or 20 dental technicians. We worked in a room. It was hard; you had not to eat so much, but we needed the work, the job. Later we sometimes sabotaged: we'd make the teeth not so good and the soldiers could not go so quickly to the front. There were maybe 10 or 12 German dental technicians. One was a humane man: he said, "Julius, why don't you escape? Why are you here?"

Q: WHAT WAS HIS POSITION?

A: He was in no position, he was also in the army, he was a dental technician. In 1941 the ghetto was closed and there was the big Aktions.

Q: THAT WAS WHEN IN 1941?

A: In '41, the 30th of November and the 7th of December.

Q: WHAT PART OF THIS DID YOU WITNESS?

A: I was a witness for the first and the second parts. In the second part they killed my first wife. Her mother was killed in the front of the house because she was very ill, she couldn't go on. Then after the first Sunday-- I didn't believe all the time that people were killed, because I didn't see this, and then when it was the 30th of November, they said everybody had to go to the ghetto. There was a big gate and everybody-- only men, no women; women had to be home, and kids also. We waited and we waited and we waited and waited, because everyday somebody came from the Germans and he called all the organizations for whom the Jewish people were working, and nobody came. Then they came and we would go to the work and when we came home there was, they made a barbed wire around a piece of the big ghetto and it was also for men. We could not go back to the families. The next morning we-- this was Saturday to Sunday-- we heard crying, the 30th of November. Then I looked from the window and on the main street was a big, big crowd of people: women, elderly men, and mothers with little kids on their arms. Then when they came near our house, I saw that one officer, a Latvian, said for elderly women to come out. I was on the second floor, and from the window-- we could not stay at the windows because they shot us if we looked, if maybe somebody looked from the window at what was happening on the street-- but we looked, and he said, "Against the wall! With your face to the wall!" and they took the gun and shot them in the head. That was the first, and then one after the other. I saw also a soldier take from the hands of a mother, a little baby, they took the baby and shot it. It was terrible. Then after, they said to us that they will be deported to Daugavpils, that there is about 50 miles from Riga a concentration camp for women, kids and elderly people. But it wasn't true, we couldn't trust them. The first Sunday, it was 12 o'clock,

they said the Aktion is finished and all men had to go in the street and take away all the bodies. There was the first Sunday killed in the ghetto 500. Then the next Sunday was the second Aktion-- the 30th of November was the first, then the seventh of December-- consecutive Sundays, it was the same, all the same. Then when I was going to work, the Latvian dental technicians said that they heard all the people were killed near Riga, seven miles away. There was a place in a big ditch. They undressed, they had to be naked. There was frost. It was in celsias 15 degrees; that is farenheit 20 degrees, so cold.

Q: THIS WAS THE SECOND AKTION?

A: Yes, the second.

Q: AND THIS WAS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY?

A: Yes, there was the first and the second, but the first was not so cold. The second was in December; the seventh of December was a very cold day, I remember. There was one woman who escaped, she survived and she is now in Israel.

Q: IS SHE THE PERSON WHO DESCRIBED THIS TO YOU?

A: Yes, every year when we came to the place she told all.

Mrs. D: She knew Russian very well and she didn't look like a Jew. She said that she's a Latvian and she started screaming and a soldier said, "If you are a Latvian, then take this coat and get away from here, and she took the coat and waited until everybody was already shot and then they took her to a little town as a Latvian woman. No one knew that she was Jewish and she got saved.

A: She was from my town, she was a friend of my sister; they were together in school, Ella Goodman.

Mrs. D: She had a Latvian name.

A: But there was another woman who escaped from the place. She was not shot, she was only wounded a little in the arm, and there were other people, and then in the night-- they waited until it was dark.



Mrs. D: She was standing very close to those piles of clothes and she got under the clothes and she remained. While everybody was shot she was there in the pile. When she didn't hear anything she started creeping away and she came on foot, she arrived back to town, or she came to a farmer's house. She spoke Russian very well and she said, "You don't know who I am and I don't know who you are, but maybe you can help me," and they were religious and they helped her.

A: She is now in Israel. I forgot her name, she is a survivor.

Mrs. D: Her husband was also a survivor. She told us.

A: Then after that, was the last Aktion, the 12th of December. There was a very terrible man, Danskops; two times I was under his gun. I don't know why he said, "I will shoot you, you will not to back to the ghetto." They took from our working place, the German soldiers went with us and took our clothes, so we had nothing. One man got a little away and said, "Danskop, what do you take, what are you doing?" Danskop took out his gun, and Danskop said, "I know you, I will remember your face. You will not dare escape." But when I came to the ghetto he was not saved. The 12th of December I saw Danskop take a little kid by the feet and against a big telephone pole killed him. They killed and shot on the left and the right, whatever Jews were in front of them.

Q: WAS THIS AN SS PERSON OR A LATVIAN?

A: A Latvian.

Q: WHAT WAS HIS POSITION?

A: He was an officer, Sturmbannfuhrer. The Germans, for the big Aktions came the chief of police, SS Politzi, and they were all the Baltic states. I heard his voice at the trial in 1945, they captured him. He said, "I helped the Jewish people, because when the big Aktions were done, I went and looked for who is not killed and I gave the last shot in the head."

Mrs. D: And he said, "I helped them because I had another plan.

I wanted to chase them." He said this before he was executed. He was executed on a big square where everybody could watch it after the war, he was hanged. They said, "What have you to say?" He said, "Well, I have to say that I had another plan: I wanted to chase them into the surf, into the moor, where people would drown. I wanted to chase them into the swamp, but it was already frozen, and I couldn't do this, so I had to shoot them." He didn't regret anything.

A: No.

Mrs. D: He was hanged with his men.

A: Yes, we all went and looked in Riga; there were 12 hanged.

Mrs. D: Julius was at the trial.

A: Yes, I had an invitation.

Mrs. D: But, they got him (Danskops).

A: Well, after then was a little quiet. Quiet. Everybody had lost relatives or wives or daughters.

Q: COULD YOU SAY HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE LEFT?

A: 35,000 were killed and only in Riga in the ghetto from the men were 4,00 remaining, and from the women there was maybe 250.

Mrs. D: In two nights they killed 35,000.

A: 35,000.

Q: IN DECEMBER OF '41 IN THOSE TWO AKTIONS?

A: Yes.

Q: AT SOME POINT ALONG THE LINE WERE THERE ALWAYS NEW JEWS BEING TRANSPORTED IN?

A: Yes. After those Aktions, in January, the big ghetto there was empty and then came transports from Germany because the Nazis didn't like for the German people to see that some Jews are killed. They felt that in the Baltic countries like Latvia and Lithuania that they had a good position, because the Latvians were against the Jews, certainly in Lithuania also, in Estonia, and they made their concentration camps. And in Poland; Poland was the biggest, with Auschwitz and Theresienstadt,

Majdanek and the Warsaw ghetto, and they evolved. Then came from Germany the Jews. I told you earlier that the biggest parties were killed, how they came from the railways. You saw that film, "Holocaust." In '41 there was not gas-- they cornered them and they shot them, big groups, and then they shot them. The survivors came to our ghettos and they also went to the work. There were some families where either the man was German or the wife was German, because they'd go with the husband or with the wife also. It was terrible: they had nothing to eat. They had nothing. They told us how they came: the Germans said in five minutes they had to be out! They were standing in one shoe and one suit, and an overcoat sometimes if they came in the winter. It was a terrible winter; it was 40 degrees below zero in '41 in the winter.

Q: WAS IT IN THE GHETTO OR WAS IT IN THE CAMP THAT YOU HAD GLIMPSES OF KRAUSE?

A: The ghetto, the commandant from the Riga ghetto was Krause.

Q: YOU SAID THAT YOU HAD SOME GLIMPSES OF HIM AND THAT YOU WITNESSED SOME INCIDENTS?

A: Oh, yes, it was '42, it was a little later. He liked to see when there was surgery in the hospital. We lived also on the street across from the German ghetto and I didn't stand at the window because I knew sometimes they shot the people in the window when they saw somebody, the guards.

Q: YOU JUST ALWAYS STAYED AWAY FROM THE WINDOW?

A: Yes. So a little farther on we saw a little boy.

Q: FROM THE WINDOW YOU WERE WATCHING KRAUSE?

A: Yes, in the summer of '42. Everybody knows that little boy, Painterman. Krause said, "Painterman, come here, open your mouth!" He took candy and he gave it to him. Another boy saw that the German uncle gives candies so he came. Krause said, "Open your mouth!" and he took a gun and he shot him in his mouth. Oh, he was a terrible man! I saw him one time on the street and in the line

from the job; we came with the German soldiers who brought us everyday to the work and from the work. We saw him from four feet away; his eyes were like glass. Terrible.

Q: WAS THERE ANYTHING ELSE OF HIM THAT YOU WITNESSED?

A: Another time we came from the job and there was a commandeur-- the headquarters of the Germans was located there, with Krause and the commanders, the Germans, all who watched our ghetto. It was the guard from the ghetto and he was on the second floor and he looked from the window. Then I saw him hold something in his hand, and in a moment was a shot and a man six meters behind me in that moment was dead, shot in the head.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE DOING THE DENTAL TECHNICIAN WORK THAT YOU DID EVERYDAY, HOW FAR WAS THAT FROM YOUR GHETTO; WHERE WERE YOU TAKEN TO?

A: Two-and-a-half miles.

Q: AND THAT WAS A HOSPITAL FOR GERMAN SOLDIERS YOU WERE WORKING IN?

A: Yes, it was German soldiers. Then after Krause we had a new commandant, Roschmann.

Q: WHEN WAS THAT CHANGE?

A: It was '44.

Mrs. D: Krause was caught by the communists.

A: Yes, and there was change in the beginning of '43. The first time, everybody said that Roschmann is not so bad-- it was only in the first days because he was also very bad, very bad: new rules, new rules, new rules everyday of some kind.

Q: WHAT KINDS OF NEW RULES?

A: Well, you had to know the rules that everybody had to give up all jewels and money. When somebody from the guards could find a Jew with more than five marks or gold or jewels, he had to be shot.

Mrs. D: He had permission.

A: In the morning at 6 o'clock I used to everyday rise and shave, and at the time I was shaving I opened the door

and heard, "Rouse! All on the street!" I was standing in underwear, without pants in the front of the house. One German officer said, "We heard that in the ghetto are guns and other arms. Please tell us now who has a gun, and it will not be so bad. When we find one gun in your house, all will be killed!" Nobody said a word. We stood one hour and the soldiers went through all the rooms, the apartments, and nothing was found. Oh, they took some things away, but they were not important. That was in 1942, the 30th of October, in the morning. Then as were going to the job and we saw by the big gate there was a lot of people and nobody was going out, except very slowly, and then a few or so, while every commando shouted, "Come out! Come out! Come out! Come out!" Then after that we all went to the big gate and then was the selection. We had luck: from our workers, every team member was not very elderly; those who were with us said we are dental technicians and we went out. We felt the whole day something was happening because there was maybe a hundred people on the side standing.

Q: THAT WERE PULLED OUT?

A: Yes. We were very scared the whole day that something would happen. When we came home that evening the gestapo had found in the ghetto guns and other ammunition. Therefore we had to do push-ups. In the ghetto was a Jewish police squad because in the ghetto also there had to be order rules and regulations, and therefore there was a team of 40 men. There were cases when the Jewish policemen helped Jewish people from the ghetto to escape. They helped to bring in the ghetto guns and other ammunition. Therefore they all were killed, executed. The execution was the following morning at 12 o'clock. The commandant, Roschmann, said that all the Jewish people had to come to one place, and when they came to this place in every corner was a machine gun and when they came to the place from the four corners. . .

Mrs. D: They didn't know about it.

A: Nobody saw, and only two escaped. One was found after a week and the second after one year, so all the 40 were killed. They were good boys. One, Israel Zoervich, he lived with us in one room. Well, you see, there was every time something: trouble and troubles with Roschmann. In 1943 we heard that the ghetto will be liquidated; there will be liquidation from the Riga ghetto.

Q: WHAT MONTH IN 1943?

A: 1943 in the summer, and there was founded a concentration camp, Kaiserwald, also a suburb from Riga, because near was a very nice place. Kaiserwald was where the richest people lived before the war in cottages, near this place. The first Jews, they alone, the Jewish people built the barracks. They took carpenters and then they built the first and second and third-- there were five or six barracks, big.

Q: WHEN WERE THEY BUILT?

A: They began in July of '43 and they finished in the end of October. We came to the concentration camp of Kaiserwald the 11th of October, 1943.

Q: HOW MANY WERE YOU, WAS THE WHOLE GHETTO TRANSFERRED?

A: The ghetto was liquidated.

Q: AND EVERYBODY WENT TO KAISERWALD?

A: Yes. You see, as I told you in the beginning, there was 4,000 men and 250 women, and when we came from the ghetto to the concentration camp of Kaiserwald there was only 2,500 people, and there was everyday two or three killed-- two or three or four or five-- everyday; somebody was killed or they committed suicide.

Q: HOW WAS KAISERWALD DIFFERENT FROM THE GHETTO?

A: Kaiserwald? Well, in the ghetto there were homes, there were places to go, You could make your meal at home, and we stole from the Germans bread or a little meat and we cooked. We were nine men in two rooms; the first time we were in one room nine men, with one bed we slept.

Q: BUNKBEDS?

A: Yes, but after then there were not so many people, they were killed, so we had more places and we got another room and we were nine, and everyday we changed jobs. One day I was a cook and then someone else was the next day. It was organized a little. We tried to steal what we could.

Q: WHEN YOU WERE IN THE GHETTO DID YOU ALSO GET RATIONS?

A: Yes, there was, we had cards and we got very little, yes.

Q: DID IT CORRESPOND TO THE WORK YOU DID?

A: On the job we got a little to eat because we exchanged; we had clothes and we exchanged them for a little butter or bread, so we had something to eat. But in the concentration camp, Kaiserwald, there was no possibility, not so much possibility because everyday they controlled. In the ghetto they also controlled; sometimes they checked us by the gig gate, but it was seldom. One time in the month they checked, and if they found something-- somebody was killed for a piece of butter or for a big piece of ham or something else. But in the concentration camp in Kaiserwald they checked us every single day. But you still found some ways how also to exchange something, but the food was bad.

Q: WHAT WAS A TYPICAL DAY'S FOOD, WHAT DID IT CONSIST OF?

A: A soup-- if you can say that it was soup-- from water and some potatoes, maybe. Sometimes there was a little piece of meat, but it was seldom. An onion; now and then a little more than half a pound of bread and a quarter pound of butter a week-- this is what we got in the ghetto. In the concentration camp there was already meals: you got a little piece of margarine, also a little more than half a pound of bread a day, coffee without milk, a quarter pound of sugar a week.

Q: WERE YOU DOING THE SAME WORK THERE?

A: Yes, through 1944 in the summer, and then from our team escaped one doctor and then we had to stand against the

wall two hours on our knees, with our hands up.

Q: THAT WAS BECAUSE OF THE ESCAPE OF THE JEWISH DOCTOR?

A: Yes, a Jewish doctor, and they took one or two from us and killed them.

Mrs. D: They said for one escape they'd take ten and killed them.

A: Ten, but this time for us they didn't want to, they brought us out of the concentration camp. Then we had to work everywhere. Ships we had to unload with ammunition, with food. With the food we had luck: we could steal something, sometimes a little bread or meat.

Q: THIS WAS WHEN IN 1944?

A: This was in 1944 from July, and the 6th of July, 1944, there was a big selection. Then the Russian Army was near Riga, maybe, and to Yergo. It was maybe 17 miles away, but it was only a division of tanks and then the Germans knew that they lost the war, in 1944 they knew this. Then it was the sixth of July: "All men out! All women out!" The women were also boarded, there was two barracks of women and four for men. More of them came to us from Lithuanian Jews; from villages; from Hungary.

Q: WAS ALL THIS IN THE COURSE OF THE YEAR?

A: In '44; you know that in Hungary the Jews until '44 were not touched, weren't attached. Then they came in, part of the Hungarian Jewish women; only women came to us. Then every time somebody was killed, new people came, and new people and then they said, "Everybody in line, you have to go in line, everybody!" And everybody had to go up to that one German officer, a doctor, a German, and you had to say your age, your profession. When I went up, I said I was 25 or 24 year old, a dental technician. They said, "On the right!" One was a barber, he was 31 years old: "On the left!" And we knew that right it was life; left, death. Then there was waiting for us big cars, closed, and there was gas.

Mrs. D: They had gas inside the autos and they killed them.

A: They were special cars and they killed them in the autos.



Q: DID YOU WITNESS THIS?

A: I know that they were sent inside. I don't know the-- I know, I remember, there was big-powered barrels and there was written "Cyclon B."

Q: SO YOU SAW THE BUS AND YOU SAW THE BARRELS?

A: Yes, but then I didn't know, but now I know what "Cyclon B." is. When I saw this I didn't know what it was.

Q: DID YOU BELIEVE THAT THAT SELECTION WAS MADE BECAUSE THE GERMANS FELT THAT THE RUSSIANS WERE NEAR?

A: No, they had to; the program was to kill all the Jews, but you know how the process. From Eichmann, we see that Himmler said that after '44 they have to stop to kill the Jewish people. But, Eichmann didn't like this; with the Hungarian Jews also this was so. I think that therefore this selection was because the Russians were so near Riga. And the men, our part, it was so-- "Right! Left! Right! Left!" But with the women, there was a Dr. Krebsbach, I well remember him, he was so friendly. He said, "My dear lady, please, I believe you go left and you will be with your daughter together. And you, my darling, come on the right." And so at the selection everybody felt that something was wrong because they didn't like that maybe they will rebel against them, they were also a little scared.

Mrs. D: They wanted everybody to be quiet and silent.

A: Yes, quiet and silent.

Mrs. D: All by the rules and regulations.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH OF THE TOWN'S POPULATION WERE KILLED FOR THAT SELECTION?

A: For this selection there were about 460 people in with this one. Then after then there was one selection; we had a commandant, he was very famous, Sauer, the commandant from our Kaiserwald, he was a Hofsturmbahnfuhrer. He came one day; we worked in Riga on one street and we saw Sauer. One of our dental technicians, the place where he was sleeping, one guard found a little money and gold

ring and a Jewish book. They didn't understand what it was. They thought it was a book from communists, but he was very religious. Sauer came and started crying, "Feldman!" He said, "Yes." "Please come with me!" I looked at the door and Feldman said, "Please Herr (unintelligible name), I don't like when somebody is behind my back, even when it is itching." He said that. But Sauer saw it was nothing, and nothing happened to him. He is now in Israel. Then in 1944, the 25th of September, we were brought to work in Riga on a ship and the ship was brought to Stutthof.

Q: WAS THAT EVERYBODY IN THE TOWN OR WAS THAT JUST A GROUP?

A: No, no, there was one part, it was transported on the sixth of August the first time from Kaiserwald.

Q: HOW MANY?

A: The chief, main part was the 25th of September, and then the last part was the 11th of October, and on the 13th Riga was liberated, two days before they transported us out. In Stutthof it was terrible. It was terrible, it was a concentration camp. There were big ovens and gas chambers and everyday was going through the ovens 400 or 500 people. It was not like Auschwitz-- in Auschwitz there were 10,000 sometimes a day. In Stutthof my number was 96,870, I remember the number. There were no elderly people and women. There was an epidemic of typhus and everybody looked like a corpse because the portions there were a piece of bread, a little margarine, and water that was not so good, coffee without sugar.

Q: WERE YOU STILL BEING WORKED?

A: No, nothing; there was work, I worked, but no protective equipment. I had such work I had to take big pieces of wood, logs.

Mrs. D: Carry them from one place to another.

A: And they'd make a tall man go to the front and a tall man go to the back and a short man go in the middle, and then somebody followed that whipped us. Then you'd take the

same pieces and brought them back. Now and then they whipped everybody, and all the barracks were very small, with short beds, from one meter was the bed. We slept in the beginning three: two in one direction and one in the other direction.

Q: IN THE WIDTH OF A METER?

A: Yes, three men, and three levels.

Q: HOW MANY HOURS WERE YOU FORCED TO WORK DURING THE DAY?

A: To sleep we'd go at 10 and at 5 o'clock in the morning we had to rise. Then I was in Stutthof from the first of October to December. Then they brought us near Danzig and I was in a little camp called Burggraben. Then I'd go to the work and they liked to make us to help to build submarines. The war was finished and they trained us to build ships.

Q: WHEN WAS THAT?

A: That was 1945 in January.

Q: AND WHICH CITY WERE YOU IN?

A: Danzig. Then from Danzig when the Russians came nearer they took us, and I had maybe a fever of 100 degrees, I had also typhus and my friends took me under the arms and we walked three days and three nights.

Mrs. D: To march, to walk.

A: And we came to a little camp, it was also in the east from Germany, Riben.

Q: YOU WERE MARCHED FROM DANZIG TO RIBEN?

A: Yes, to Riben, and we stayed in a stable on straw and there every second day we got one piece of bread, and every second day soup, that was all. When we stayed in the stable we were 120, and 20 survived from them from 120.

Q: HOW LONG WERE YOU IN THAT CAMP?

A: There I was one month.

Q: SO IN A MONTH 100 DIED OUT OF 120 WHO STARTED?

A: Yes, from the 20 survivors, after died also 10 after that.

Mrs. D: Because they were hungry and started eating.

A: They started eating. "Don't eat! Don't eat!" The Russian soldiers gave. . .

Mrs. D: They saw that they were skeletons.

A: They gave ham and such things, and I know I only ate toasted bread. The nurses, the Russians made for us a hospital.

Q: SO IT WAS AT RIBEN THAT YOU WERE LIBERATED?

A: Yes, at Riben. We went then to the town and the Russians came and brought us back because we could not eat, we had no strength.

Q: WHEN AND WHERE WAS IT THAT THE RUSSIANS LIBERATED YOU?

A: The Russians, the 10th of March, 1945.

Q: IN RIBEN.

A: Riben, yes, I was liberated. Then in Riben I was in, they made like a hospital and I was there two weeks and then I went to the bigger hospital. They took my two fingers because they were frozen. Then in June I came back to Riga; before I was in camp by the Russians for seven days. They infiltrated us, maybe looking for spies, and so I think that what happened then after the liberation is-- you see, the Russians, they didn't trust us because an officer said to me, "Ah, Juden, you are alive and all your family is dead. Maybe you are living because you are a spy for the Germans. . ."

Mrs. D: They called him a traitor. The people who survived they called traitors.

A: "And maybe I will send you to Siberia," he said. But, you see I had luck and I survived.

Q: MAY I BACKTRACK A LITTLE BIT? WHAT WAS THE CITY THAT YOU MENTIONED THAT YOU WERE TRANSFERRED TO AFTER STUTTHOF?

A: Burggraben.

Q: HOW LARGE A TRANSPORT WAS THAT?

A: That was a transport of 400 people.

Q: AND WERE THOSE PEOPLE ALL DESTINED TO WORK ON THE SUBMARINES?

A: Yes.

Q: WAS THAT ALL MEN?

A: On there, only men, yes.

Q: WHAT WAS BURGGGRABEN LIKE?

A: Burggraben was a little place, also barracks, no big barracks, 21 barracks.

Q: WERE THE CONDITIONS WORSE?

A: The conditions I would say were the same. It was a little better maybe at Stutthof, because there were Italians, also French people and Dutch, and they gave us a little smoke or a piece of bread and so we had contact with other people, but it was very bad.

Q: SO WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN DANZIG?

A: In Danzig we had to help them to bring big hammers and material and cement; we had not so much.

Q: DID ANYBODY IN YOUR FAMILY SURVIVE BESIDES YOU?

A: I have a sister, but she was not in the ghetto, she was here in the USA. From my family, no. My mother was killed in Latvia where I was living before Riga. My sister and the son of my sister and sister of my wife survived. My sister survived in another camp. She survived in Toron.

Mrs. D: She escaped afterwards when they felt that the front was getting nearer and nearer. They escaped from the camp and they went to some Polish farm place and the farmers had left and they hid in the stable. They waited until they were liberated and then she came back.

Q: WELL, MR. DRABKIN, TO CONCLUDE WOULD YOU LIKE TO COMMENT-- I'M CURIOUS AS TO HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ATTENTION THAT'S GIVEN TO THE HOLOCAUST NOW AND HERE, BECAUSE I'VE NOTICED AND PERHAPS YOU'VE NOTICED THAT THERE'S MORE ATTENTION GIVEN TO IT IN THE LAST FEW YEARS.

A: Yes, it is very good, it's good. "The Holocaust" I saw, the movie. Such a movie is good. And such a movie is good in that new people see this and understand it has been known to happen. This is important for young people, because they don't like to hear about this.

Mrs. D: They don't believe it.

A: They don't believe. There are stories that the Jews are guilty, that nothing has happened and it is all a lie, a big lie.

Q: MAY I ASK YOU ALSO BEING AS YOU MOVED HERE FROM LATVIA, OR RIGA, A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, COULD YOU CONTRAST THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE HOLOCAUST IS DISCUSSED HERE TO THE DEGREE TO WHICH IT IS DISCUSSED THERE?

A: Yes, the Russians, nobody, I never heard that they give interpretations that the Jewish-- sometimes they wrote and they have very official that the Soviet people were killed, but never information that even Jewish people were persecuted.

Mrs. D: No, they said they were Soviet people and all kinds of people killed. It is right all kinds of people were.

A: Europeans were also killed, maybe not in selections, in the Holocaust. For me it is difficult. My youngest son is now in Los Angeles.

Mrs. D: Well, I would add something more if you will allow me. After all of this and he had survived it and after all his suffering, and after now paying attention to it and noticing this, we must first of all say thank you to Israel which got us out of the Soviet Union. The second thing is we would very much like to visit Israel which we have not had the opportunity to do.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE INTERVIEW.

The following supplementary interview was conducted Dec. 20, 1980.

Q: MR. DRABKIN, AFTER OUR PREVIOUS INTERVIEW YOU MENTIONED THAT THERE WERE TWO OTHER PEOPLE WHO WERE PROMINENT IN THE RIGA AREA WHO WE COULD DISCUSS MORE ABOUT. COULD YOU PLEASE TELL ME WHO THESE PEOPLE WERE AND WHAT THEIR POSITIONS WERE?

A: Sure. There is Viktor Arajs and the second is Herbert Zukurs, and it is impossible to speak about what happened in the Riga ghetto and not remember the names of these famous killers. You have only to think about the first and something shivery and grizzly is in your feeling, in your body, because Viktor Arajs was the chief over the

executive commando to killing the Jews, and he had opportunities that he could do what he liked with the Jews. Even the first time, 1941, not only I, other survivors, saw that he would do all he could to do a 100 percent well and good killing of the Jews. When Viktor Arajs or the other, Herbert Zukors, came in the ghetto, then always were killed some people or hanging. At best they were shot. They found always something, some reason-- they were not guilty, but the reason was that they had exchanged a piece of bread for a pair of gloves or something.

Q: HOW OFTEN DID THEY USUALLY APPEAR IN THE GHETTO?

A: They came maybe more often, but I saw them personally two times, one and then the other. They came once a month, sometimes twice a month, sometimes once in two months, because they were not always in Latvia, they were in Byelorussia and Ukrainia where there were ghettos where also they had their dirty jobs to do. Arajs was a personal protege for Reichsführer, from the SS's Himmler. I remember the first time I saw Arajs at the place where people were hanging. When somebody was executed they called all the people from the houses, their beds in their homes, so they should watch how it was, the process of the hanging. There was a young man and they incriminated him that he exchanged a skirt for a piece of bread. The second time I saw Arajs with the terrible commandant Krause near the ghetto commandoteur, and they stopped a policeman.

Q: THIS WAS ARAJS AND KRAUSE TOGETHER?

A: Yes, they stopped a policeman and said, "Here is one Jew. You check him."

Q: WAS THIS A LATVIAN POLICEMAN?

A: Yes, they were the Hilfspolizei, the helpers for policemen. The Jew had nothing, but the Nazi said, "Go with him away," and after ten minutes I heard a shot, because the cemetery where the Jewish people were shot was not far from the commandoteur, and he was also shot without reason, only

because there was Arajs and when Arajs was in the ghetto somebody had to be killed.

Q: YOU HAPPENED TO JUST BE PASSING, YOU WERE ON THE STREET DURING THIS INCIDENT?

A: No, I was far away in a labor house.

Q: YOU WERE ABLE TO WITNESS THIS FROM A WINDOW?

A: Yes.

Q: COULD YOU TELL ME WHAT ARAJS WAS DOING DURING THAT HANGING THAT YOU WERE TELLING ME ABOUT?

A: Ooh! He was standing and looking so, watching, speaking with the other officers, Latvian and German. He was a very young and handsome man. I have his photo-- I get now sometimes Latvian newspapers and there were photos from Arajs. They wrote that Arajs was a couple of months ago sentenced by the Supreme Court in West Germany to lifelong prison. You see, lifelong prison is good, but it is a little too late, because more than 30 years he was free, but I hope that he was not always so happy because he had to be always very alert. Even after the Jewish agency took Eichmann in 1960, 1961 or '62 in South America, then every Nazi was very, very afraid that he would be captured.

Q: THOSE TWO TIMES THAT YOU SAW ARAJS, ABOUT WHEN DID THAT OCCUR?

A: It was 1941.

Q: SOMETIME DURING THAT YEAR OF 1941?

A: Yes, and Zukurs I also saw.

Q: WHAT WAS ZUKURS' POSITION?

A: Herbert Zukurs was a pilot for the war, a pilot in the Latvian Army and he was famous by the Latvians because. . .

Mrs. D: He was a war correspondent from Oaris.

A: There was a little island, Gambia, in Africa, and the Lativans thought that Gambia was mybe 300 years ago a Latvian colony, and he had a little plane before the war and he was famous because he flew to such a far away place. But during the war he showed his true face.



Q: WERE BOTH ARAJS AND ZUKURS LATVIAN?

A: Yes, both of them. The first time I saw Zukurs was when he was with two German officers in the ghetto, also not far from the house, and this day also were killed two Jews, not guilty. The second time I saw Zukurs was on the 12th of December on the same day when I saw Danskops. It was the last day of the Aktions, because the first was the 30th of November, the second was the seventh of December and the last was then not so big, but a very bloody, very cruel Aktion. Everybody who was in his way he rammed with a gun, and he ran and shot from the left and from the right every Jew who was in the way.

Q: THAT WAS IN THE GHETTO FOLLOWING THE AKTIONS?

A: Yes, the 12th, and then it was stopped.

Q: THE 12th OF DECEMBER, 1941?

A: Yes, then was stopped all the Aktions, but then after that still Jews were killed and killed, but such big Aktions there were not anymore because the Germans needed some slaves to do the jobs also, because the elderly people-- not all, but most-- were killed, and the young people they needed for the jobs. Then I heard only that Zukurs was in Byelorussia and Ukrainia and so I didn't see him anymore. From other people I heard that they saw him. One time I saw him when we were going to the job across the street. That's all that I can say. The fate of Zukurs: fortunately for us Jews, we had the satisfaction ten or twelve years ago to read in the newspaper, and then I heard a voice from the USA on the radio in Russia, that Zukurs was caught by an agency from Israel. Under these policemen in the agency was a Jew from Latvia, from Daugavpils, and his parents were killed personally by Zukurs during 1940. Zukurs is all.

Q: DID YOU SAY SPECIFICALLY WHAT ZUKUR'S POSITION WAS, I'M NOT SURE IF I HEARD IT.

A: He was an officer. He had no position in the ghetto directly; he had only to do killing of Jews, supervising.

But directly in the ghetto he was not located. Araj was also not located in the ghetto.

Q: THEY WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT WHOLE AREA?

A: He was too big with position to be located in the ghetto.

Q: SO THAT SECOND INCIDENT THAT YOU DESCRIBED ABOUT ZUKURS THAT YOU SAID WAS A FEW DAYS FOLLOWING THE SECOND AKTION IN DECEMBER '41, HE ENTERED THE GHETTO THAT DAY AND JUST STARTED SHOOTING PEOPLE?

A: Yes, that was the finish. They killed them after the big Aktions. It cleaned the ghetto; that was the last day.

Q: SO THAT WAS PART OF THAT ORGANIZED AKTION?

A: Yes, organized, and after that they stopped, it was no more.

Q: IN THAT FIRST INCIDENT WHERE YOU SAW ZUKURS, COULD YOU SAY SPECIFICALLY WHAT YOU SAW GOING ON?

A: No, I saw him also with two German officers and they were speaking. It was before the first Aktion and I believe that Zukurs was also involved in the organization from the first and the second Aktion in the ghetto because they came looking in the ghetto to see how to organize all this.

Mrs. D: Mass murder, how to organize it.

A: Yes, how to organize the killing, with the men. Then came the transports from Germany, from Austria, and some people came from Holland also, you see. He was part of the organization.

Q: SO YOU FEEL THAT WHEN YOU SAW HIM THAT DAY THAT HE WAS THERE AS PART OF THAT PLANNING PROCESS?

A: Yes, planning process.

Q: THANK YOU VERY MUCH. IS THERE SOMETHING THAT YOU'D LIKE TO ADD?

A: Yes, I'm glad that I could help some with my recollections.

Q: THANK YOU.

END