

Kerdeman

Interview with ARTHUR KERDEMAN

Holocaust Oral History Project

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Interviewers: Peggy Coster, John Grant

Transcriber: Sue Ross

BY MS. COSTER:

Q WE'RE INTERVIEWING ARTHUR KERDEMAN FOR THE HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF SAN FRANCISCO. MY NAME IS PEGGY COSTER. WITH ME IS JOHN GRANT. AND THE DATE IS OCTOBER 28th, 1991.

WOULD YOU START BY JUST TELLING YOUR WHOLE STORY.

A The whole story starting with what? I'm a survivor of 80 years, so where should I start, with the date I was born or --

Q WHY DON'T YOU START BY TELLING US WHEN YOU WERE BORN, AND WHO YOUR PARENTS WERE, AND IF YOU HAD BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

A Well, I was born in a little place which was the -- at the time when I was born, it belonged to Austria. It was part of Poland. It is in Galicia. It was right on the Russian border. And my date of birth is August 17, 1911. Well, my father came from the Russian side. My mother, I was about a year old when she died, so I never got to know my mother really too well.

Q WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

A My father's name, Charles, in English. And my

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mother's name was Ettie. Tillis was her maiden name.

Q WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE?

A In the original language, the last name was always Kerdeman. It's not a changed name. It has no meaning. I do not know the origin of the name Kerdeman. It appears to be German. But my father was a Russian citizen. And I had two sisters at the time when I was born. As I mentioned, it was in 1911.

And when I was three years old, the First World War broke out, and I got separated from my family. I was on the Russian side with some distant relatives, and during the First World War, we had to evacuate the border. I mean, I don't know the details. All I know, I was in Siberia sometime during the First World War. My sisters were somewhere else.

My father, who was a Russian citizen when the First World War broke out, and he was on the Austrian side. So he was interned in Austria during the entire war to the end of the war. He managed to pick me up and my sisters, and he did not return to Russia. He decided to live in -- stay in Austria. We lived in Vienna. And my father remarried, and I had a stepmother then and a stepsister and later on a half sister. This is my immediate family.

I lived in Vienna from 1918 till 1939. And I went to school in Vienna. And the war -- no. Austria was annexed by the Germans in March of 1938. And in November of '39, this tragedy happened which became known as the Kristallnacht, in November 9, I believe it was. And that's when I was taken prisoner by the German authority and was taken to Dachau.

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Well, how should we continue now? Should I tell you details how it happened?

Q YES.

A Well, all the Jews were rounded up in the entire German country including Austria. First, when they came to arrest me, I was at home. And the ones who really came for me were local police were in charge of doing it. And I was taken with others to the local police station. And then, from the local police station, we were taken to the main police station in Vienna.

Also -- I don't remember at what point. Things are not clear. It's so long ago. But we were also -- I remember we were herded up. We were taken to, I believe it was, a school building. And we were crowded into a big room, jam packed. We couldn't even move. Some people's ribs got broken in that process it was so tight.

But the bad part really happened -- the first bad part that I really experienced happened in the main police station of Vienna where we were beaten and mistreated and shouted at. And at one point, I had noticed a pool of blood on the concrete floor, and I sort of was -- it scared me. And the SS man noticed it, and he made me go down on my knees and hands and dunk my face into the pool of blood.

And then, we were taken from one room to another with bright lights. And it was -- they made it very scary for us, you know. And then, we were separated in groups. Some were taken taken to Dachau, sent to Dachau, and others to some other concentration camps, particularly Mauthausen in Austria.

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And everybody -- after these interrogations, everybody got a card with a letter on it or with a name it on, I believe. Dora, I got a card with the word Dora on it, the name Dora on it. That meant Dachau. And the others, I don't know, that went to Mauthausen got something with an M. And this was the most horrible experiences, these hours spent at this police station with all the beatings, and shouting, and scary tactics.

And then, when we were taken by truck or, I don't remember exactly, or by train, or whatever it was, to the railroad station, to one of the railroad stations in Vienna for transport to Dachau. And when we came to the railroad station, it was at the -- not at the main station building but at the freight loading part of the railroad.

And we had to jump out and on the double run into these cattle cars. And those were who were slow moving, they were beaten and just to get them move to faster. And even shot at them, and some got hit by bullets in the legs. Nothing happened to me.

The last one to get on this cattle car had to help move the ramp. There was a ramp to -- there were no steps or stairs to get to the car, just by ramp. It was just a big plank. And I had to move it, lift it and move it into the car. And the car was jam packed; hardly any place. Couldn't even sit anywhere.

At one point, we had gotten some food to take with us, a piece of cheese and some bread. And it was just horrible. No air; it was very a airtight car. I managed to get to the wall of the car where there were some cracks, and I could get a

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little fresh air to breathe. And I -- but so many collapsed and passed out. Maybe some died. Who knows. We didn't know exactly what was going on.

But I finally managed to slump down to find some space on the floor of the car to sit down to rest, but I regretted that, because when I sat in it, it was wet with urine that people had urinated, man. You know, we were only men; no women.

And finally, we arrived at Dachau late at night and -- well, I cannot remember all the details. All I can tell you is some certain episodes. Well, let's say, for instance, we were -- it was in wintertime, you know, November, December. I was there for six months, I believe, and the weather was extremely cold. And that was one of the worst parts of the camps. We had to march in formation twice a day for head count. And at times, we stood there for hours on end, and people just collapsed sometimes, and they were just removed.

Now, if the groups in this formation, when they marched on, they had to be in complete straight rows and lines. If they were out of step, an SS man came rushing in and beat everybody up and made it hard on us. And I had observed throughout the time that one way to keep these (carters?) in straight formation, it depended a great deal on the four men at the end of these formations. And I, on my own, I volunteered to take, always when we left our barracks, to take on a position on the back, last one in the back on the outside.

So if I was, let's say, on the right side, my left hand was somewhat protected from the man standing next to me,

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but there was no protection on the outside. So my right hand became frostbitten and to the point where the bones were exposed. And to give it some relief, I then switched to the other end so that the left hand got frostbitten, and the bones got exposed on the -- they showed. I could see the bones.

. And they had an infirmary. You could go there on sick call. And what they put on, some kind of a black salve. They called it (ishdeo) salve. It didn't help very much.

But in a way, I was fortunate. I was on the last block of that camp. It was Block No. 30. And the Germans were afraid of outbreak of typhus. And one of the typhus was mostly traced to lice. And it so happened that on the barrack where I was, they discovered lice, so they put us on quarantine. We had to stay in the barracks. And during that time, my hands recovered.

What else can I tell you?

Q DO YOU REMEMBER ANYTHING ELSE?

A Yeah. Let's see. When we were in quarantine, of course, they didn't make life easy for us. We had to work harder while we were in the barrack.

For instance, when they inspected for our equipment, everything had to be absolutely clean. Even the muddy shoes had to be cleaned perfectly. So I on my own had the idea I would shine the shoes, even the soles, the bottom, everything. I was perhaps the only one. And all the others got beaten up, because they found some dirt on the soles or in the crevices of the shoes.

As I mentioned, they had an infirmary. You could

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go on sick call. But that was a risky deal. If you came to the infirmary, you had to stand outside in the cold. If you had, for instance, a temperature and ran a fever, it made it only worse. And then, you had to take off your shoes outside before you entered the area inside.

And problem was that when you came out, frequently the prisoners didn't find their own shoes. They wound up with some other shoes. Some of the prisoners had frostbitten feet, and the feet became swollen. So they grabbed the biggest pair of shoes they could find, because the original didn't fit them any longer. So somebody else wound up with shoes that didn't fit at all, and they were severely punished for that.

Q WHO WAS SEVERELY PUNISHED, THE PEOPLE WHO TOOK THE SHOES OR THE PEOPLE WHO --

A No, those -- the prisoners who couldn't get into their shoes and complained about it. You know, they were severely punished.

Q FOR COMPLAINING?

A Yes, for complaining. Or for some of them cut their shoes open, and that was sabotage. You know, they cut their shoes open so they could fit into it. But that didn't happen to me. I was always very cautious to hide my shoes somewhere outside so no one would see them.

Q HOW WOULD THEY PUNISH PEOPLE?

A Well, various ways. And one of the worst was hanging them from a hole by their back, the hands tied to the back, and hang them from the thumbs, I believe, tied up.

Q WERE THEIR HANDS ABOVE THEIR HEAD?

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Another item we got was some kind of soup made with tapioca. And when some higher officials came to inspect the campsite, we got some better meals with some kind of meat in the soup, tripe or whatever. We don't know what went in there. Once we saw a horse-drawn wagon come into the camp, and we never saw that horse and wagon leave the camp, so we assumed the horse wound up in our soup. It could be. Who knows.

Also, we always got some tea. The tea was some kind of -- made from some herbs, herbal tea. Also knew about it, I mean among the prisoners. They said it contained a lot of bromide and will cause us in later years some problems. I forgot what. I think prostate problems.

Well, the food was carried in big containers, in big cans, heavy cans. And it was always a detail who had to run to the kitchen and pick up the containers and then the empty containers take them back. And occasionally I had to be on that detail, too. I'm short, and there were two handles on each side, and two men carried one of these big heavy containers. One grabbed it; one held the other handle. And I'm short, and if I wound up with a tall fellow, the weight, most of the weight was on me to carry.

And when we came into the kitchen, the SS men there, they played tricks. And they turned water hoses on us, because it's cold hoses, cold water hoses. Got us soaking wet and made us run and spill things and got punished for that and so on.

And that group I was with, in my group, there was an orthodox rabbi. He was very religious. He wanted to have

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prayer meetings every morning and every evening according to Jewish orthodox tradition. And in this orthodox Jewish religion, it's required for a prayer meeting a number of ten men. So he always looked for volunteers. It was not permitted to conduct, to have prayer meetings going on, but it was taking a chance, a risk. And I volunteered. I was always a faithful volunteer. Not so much -- I was not such a religious, but just to as a gesture to this rabbi, I always helped him out. And when he was released, he wrote a card to my father -- I still have it -- telling him thanking me for helping him out.

And this orthodox man never ate anything that -- never ate any kind of food that was not -- appeared to be not kosher. Well, nothing was really kosher, but anything containing meat he would avoid. Well, we didn't get too much of meat anyway.

What else should I tell you? They had -- I think I started to talk about it about -- days where we were marched into a quarry to dig ditches. And it was hard work and very scary. And we removed our jackets, and then we laid it next to us. And as we kept digging and moved on, we had to remember to move our jackets along. If we didn't do that, and if somebody forgot and they ran back to get the jacket, he got killed, shot. He was not supposed to run back. So you had to be on the alert, remember to move your jacket with you as you moved on digging.

They had some vicious dogs in these quarries to -- if any man started to run away, the dogs were sent after them. They were -- and the dogs were trained to attack the man by the testicles, by the genitals. Well, of course, I didn't -- never

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saw that happen, but I'm sure that happened.

And the dogs were black dogs with horrifying -- constantly growling and barking and had dark red mouth and fangs. But I didn't see any -- I'm sure that a number of these prisoners, not just Jewish, but other kind of Aryan prisoners, got attacked by these dogs and badly mauled.

And once when I was in the infirmary, in this -- well, whatever they had, that hospital room there, too. And once when I came in, I saw a man lying on a table. He was completely pale and completely undressed. And he had no genitals. They were missing. It must have been a small hole for urinating left. But I couldn't figure out first whether it was a woman or a man. But apparently it was a man that was castrated. He didn't even have the pubic hair in that area. He looked terrible. I mean, I couldn't really -- you were not permitted to look and stare at anything. Otherwise, you got punished.

They also had the -- one of these barracks was used for conducting some research on -- one of these SS men did some medical experiments. And occasionally, we were called out to appear there to be questioned and looked at for medical purposes. I was also one day picked out because of the form of my skull.

Apparently, this one scientist, this SS man, he collected skulls. And if he saw some interesting skulls, he -- the prisoner was earmarked for the -- apparently, I was one of them. But I came in there, and they took my measurements and so on, and everything was recorded. But I never heard again from

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them. But it didn't scare me. You know, was even glad to have a few minutes of being indoors out of the cold. And I enjoyed being whatever time it took to be indoor out of the cold in a nice warm room.

Why don't you ask me some questions now.

Q OKAY. GOING BACK TO WHEN YOU WERE PICKED UP --

A Yes.

Q -- AND JAILED, YOU WERE IN JUST ONE BUILDING, OR THEY MOVED YOU TO ANOTHER BUILDING?

A We were moved from one police station to another from one time into a. I think it was, a school building and a gymnasium where we were crowded and pressed. I couldn't even sit down on the floor, that tight. It was like really tight, packed like sardines.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER WHERE YOU WERE HELD?

A Where?

Q DO YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE PLACES WHERE YOU WERE HELD?

A No. It was local police stations. I know the first one was (Broihausegassa) near where I lived. And then, I don't know. They didn't have any -- then, the main police station, whatever they called it. You know, central police station.

Q HOW LONG WERE YOU HELD IN THESE POLICE STATIONS BEFORE THEY PUT YOU ON THE TRANSPORT?

A It must have been 24 hours. I think one night. I spent overnight in this police station. It is not very clear in my memory, some of the details. Strange as it is, but so many

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things I simply forgot.

When I was released, I was sent back to -- I was put on the train in Munich and for a train to Vienna. It's completely escaped my memory who met me at the train station in Vienna. How did I get from the train station back to my home? I don't remember that. But I walked, or somebody met me there. I don't remember.

Q HOW DID YOU GET ENOUGH MONEY TO TAKE THE TRAIN BACK TO VIENNA?

A They paid for it.

Q DID THEY GIVE YOU ANY MONEY FOR FOOD OR ANY FOOD FOR THE TRAIN?

A No. It couldn't have been a very long ride. Maybe a day's ride from Munich to Vienna.

When I tell people the story about my imprisonment in Dachau, invariably, if they listen to me, the first question is, "How did you get out?"

Well, I told you, at that time, they still let you out if you could prove you could leave the country. And we Jews were fortunate compared to the Aryan prisoners, and some of the Aryan prisoners envied us. They wished they were Jews, because the Aryan prisoners had, some of them, absolutely no chance to get out of the concentration camp. They were not permitted. They didn't have the choice to leave the country. And I know I met Aryan prisoners who envied, wished they were Jewish, strange as it sounds.

And also, I told you they asked me how did I get out. Well, I was able to get out. People apparently expect to

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hear some heroic stories that I escaped, killed some guards, or whatever. No, that wasn't like that. When they released us from camp, when my time came together with others, we were warned, you are going to leave the camp, but do not talk about your experience in camp. And the minute you talk about it, you will be arrested and taken back.

Anyway, they said, nobody will believe you if you tell them all the stories. So nobody, and it was so true, they knew it. Frequently when I told people about my experience, they didn't believe it. You know, when I came to the United States and so on.

Also, I was -- when I left Europe, I came for the United States eventually. When I left after release from the concentration camp, I left Vienna for London, where I waited several months for my American visa to come through. And I got to London in May of 1939. And I got my visa in August, late August of '39. And the war in Europe broke out on September 3rd, 1939 when Britain declared war on Germany after Germany invaded Poland.

And I was able to get a pass, a ticket, a booking on a ship to leave for the United States. The war had already started. When I came to claim my ticket at the travel agency, they told me somebody got ahead of me and got my space. So they told me they will try to get me another ticket for another boat.

This ship that I was supposed to be on was the first one that got sunk in the war, the first passenger ship. And the people in the United States who had helped me to come to the United States, they thought I was on that ship, and I would

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never come. But I was able to get a booking on another ship, and I left. I came to the United States on September 16, 1939. So lucky that I didn't get -- that somebody took my space on that ship. I forgot the name of the ship. But I have it in my records, the name of the ship that I came on. I must have it, I'm sure.

When I came, I was in the United States only three years. Not yet a citizen. It took five years to apply for citizenship. And I got drafted and through the American Army and got my basic training and was sent back with the American Army back to Europe. And at one time, it was already after the shooting war, I was with the American Army near Munich, and I managed to get a Jeep and drive to Dachau. I wanted to go back to see it.

When I came back to Dachau, first, I couldn't get out when I was an inmate. But this time I wanted to go in, and I couldn't because of typhus epidemic, and they didn't let me in. But I talked to some of the local people in Dachau that I met on the street, and I asked them what they knew about it. And every one denied it. They said they had no idea what was going on throughout the years. And yet, they lived right outside the camp. They must have known it.

And other things that I remember, when we had to stand for hours on campground to be counted in the cold weather, sometimes I found pleasure just to see a nice sunset. Or at one time I heard a flock of geese or cranes flying, you know, all noisy flying over, and I remember that. There was this well-known German poet, a classic, Frederich Schiller, and he

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wrote a ballad in German. It's called (De chronic des Ibicus), "The Cranes of (Ibicus)."

It's a story of a Greek by the name of (Ibicus) who was a poet and a songwriter. And he was on the way to the festivals at (Corinth). And on his way there, he was waylaid by a couple of thugs, and they murdered him. And he was lying there in his last moments, he lamented that there was no witness to this horrible deed. But he heard the cranes flying overhead, and he shouted out, "You cranes are the only witness to what happened to me."

And those two thugs, they went on to attend those festivals. And as they were sitting on the bleachers, a flock of cranes flew overhead. And one of them said to his buddy, (Timoteous) was his name. "(Timoteous), oh, see the cranes of (Ibicus) flying overhead." And people sitting next to them overheard them make that statement, and so they discovered that they must be implicated in this murder. And they got caught and arrested.

Well, anyway my story is this: When I was standing in the campground in Dachau, these geese or the cranes flying overhead, I was surprised I could from memory recite to myself the entire story.

(The operator changed the tape)

A To finish that story about "The Cranes of (Ibicus)," as I said, it came back in my memory. It's a long ballad by Schiller. I was able to, in my mind, to recite the whole ballad. I can't do it any longer.

But when I was during the war, I got my basic

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training in Florida. And then I was shipped first to Africa, and then Italy, France, and Germany. And at the end of the shooting war, I was in Berlin, and I saw the Chancellery, Hitler's Chancellery, all bombed out. And I went to look at it, and I stepped -- and I went down his bunker. And outside, he was apparently burned outside. His body was cremated outside. And I must have stepped on his ashes. There were ashes on the ground all over. And still, the stretchers where the body was carried out.

But anyway, I remember that, strange as it is, again, I heard, while I was walking around there. It was not winter, but it was May of '45. And, again, I saw some cranes or geese flying. So the story of "The Cranes of Ibis" came back to me where I saw everything I have been. Well, it turned out the way it did.

What else?

Q HOW OLD WERE YOU IN BERLIN AFTER THE WAR? WHEN YOU WENT TO BERLIN, HOW LONG HAD THE WAR BEEN ENDED?

A How long?

Q HAD THE WAR BEEN ENDED WHEN YOU WENT TO BERLIN?

A The Armistice was signed in May. I believe it was right afterwards.

Q SO YOU WERE -- RIGHT AT THE VERY END OF THE WAR, YOU WENT TO BERLIN?

A Yes, when I went to Berlin.

Q AND HOW LONG WERE YOU IN BERLIN?

A I don't remember that. Maybe two, three weeks. I took pictures. I got hold of a camera. I have some pictures of

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bombed out Berlin and sights in Berlin.

Q DO YOU HAVE THEM WITH you?

A Yeah. I have it really downstairs in the car. I took it just in case you would ask.

Q YEAH. WE'D LIKE TO GET THEM.

Let me start by asking you: You've talked a lot about the things you saw the guards do in Dachau.

A Yes.

Q WERE ALL OF THEM -- LIKE WERE MOST OF THEM SADISTIC, OR WERE JUST A FEW OF THEM SADISTIC? OR IN GENERAL, WHAT WAS THE TYPICAL GUARD LIKE?

A Some were -- quite a number were sadistic, including that priest that you saw that article. You know, Tutus, he was sadistic.

Q HE WAS? TELL US ABOUT HIM.

A People were afraid of him. He was -- he beat everybody for minor infractions.

Q HOW DID (Father Tutus Bransma), HOW DID HE GET IN A POSITION TO BE CRUEL?

A He was put in charge of some of the groups of Jewish prisons. Well, but anyway, a number of them were sadistic, quite sadistic. They were -- they themselves were prisoners, Aryan prisoners, who were put in charge. But they were quite sadistic.

I'm not talking about those belonging to the SS. Of course, all the SS were sadistic. But not all the Aryan prisoners were sadistic. Some were the most wonderful people I have ever met, and I'll never forget. They were very

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considerate and kind.

Q CAN YOU REMEMBER ANY NAMES?

A No, I don't remember the names. Maybe I have it written down somewhere, but it's too long ago. I don't remember the names. One was a -- in civilian life before he was taken prisoner, he was a carpenter by trade. But he gave us frequently excellent, good advice. Told us how to stay out of trouble and whatnot.

Q WHAT WAS SOME OF THE ADVICE HE GAVE YOU? DO YOU REMEMBER THAT?

A Well, they had a canteen where you could buy things for -- if you had the money.

Q CAMP MONEY?

A Yeah, if you had camp money. Jews were not permitted to buy much or not at all. And one of the things they sold at the canteens was butter and lemon. That's one. And he told me to help the healing process of a frostbite to eat butter and lemon. And I took the chance and acquired some butter and lemon. Now, that was very risky. I hid the butter very carefully under my bunk. If that would have been found, it would have been -- it wouldn't have helped me cure my wounds. It would have been the end of my life. But it helped. It was true. It was quite noticeable, the effects of eating lemon and butter.

Well, also, he told us to keep a low profile. You know, don't make yourself noticeable, if you can, he worded it. This is some of the advise.

Q DO YOU RECALL ANYBODY ELSE WHO WAS GOOD TO YOU?

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A Yes. There was another prisoner, an Aryan prisoner. And he was just a -- I don't know what he was in private life. Also had some trade. He was very fine person.

In talking about the characters of people, even among the Jewish prisoners, there were some impossible people. They were fighting among themselves. There was stealing. And strange as it is, some of them were -- in civilian life, some of them were highly respected people. They were lawyers, scientists. But they behaved like beasts among themselves. And other just plain, ordinary people, they had fine character.

And among the prisoners, there were all kinds of people coming from all walks of life. Among the Aryans, there were gypsies. With me, there was the mayor of Vienna. There were some aristocrats, well-known aristocrats and other well-known politicians or scientists. But the character of the people showed up in this kind of situation. The true character had nothing to do with education or their background.

Q You brought some articles about Bruno Bettelheim.

A Oh, well, it's just an article of his when he died just recently. And I just saved it, because he was with me on the same barrack. He didn't me, and I didn't know him. And I was not in touch with him when he was living in the United States. It's just I saved it for my own interest. I just happened to know that he was one of the prisoners in my group.

Q ARE ALL THE ARTICLES IN HERE ABOUT TUTUS BRANSMAN?

A No. These are articles, newspaper articles, done about some of the people that got executed after Dachau was liberated.

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Q DID YOU EVER TESTIFY IN A WAR CRIMES TRIAL?

A No.

Q WERE THERE ANY GOOD GUARDS, WOULD YOU SAY? LIKE SOMETIMES I'VE HEARD SURVIVORS TALK ABOUT GOOD GUARDS.

A I don't believe there were any good guards. They couldn't have been good guards, because they wouldn't have been guards. They were selected to -- just mean people with mean characters were selected for that type of duty.

Q WHAT WAS THE WORST GUARD? DO YOU RECALL ANY WORST GUARD?

A Well, they were all alike; quite mean.

Q THIS PIECE OF PAPER HERE, IS THIS A POEM THAT YOU WROTE?

A I didn't write that poem. This is a poem that somebody wrote about peat bogs. You know, Dachau was built on -- the place where Dachau was, there used to be a peat bog at one time, marshes, peat. And you still could find it there, around there. Not in Dachau itself but around the area. And they used the peat for fuel material, dried peat.

MS. COSTER: Should I go ahead and read it, John?

MR. GRANT: Yes, please.

MS. COSTER: HEIGHT WOULD MEAN A SURE DEATH FACING GUNS AND BARBED WIRE GREET OUR VIEW. BUT FOR US THERE IS NO COMPLAINING. WINTER WILL IN TIME BE PASSED. ONE DAY WE SHALL CRY REJOICING, HOMELAND DEAR, YOU'RE MINE AT LAST. CHORUS: WE ARE THE PEAT BOG SOLDIERS. WE ARE MARCHING WITH OUR SPADES TO THE BOG FAR AND WIDE AS THE EYE CAN WANDER. HEATH AND BOG ARE EVERYWHERE. NOT A BIRD SINGS OUT TO CHEER US. ELKS ARE

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STANDING GAUNT AND BARE. CHORUS: UP AND DOWN THE GUARDS ARE PACING. NO ONE CAN GO THROUGH.

A This is a translation from the German. I don't remember the German words.

Q IT MUST HAVE BEEN A SONG. DO YOU REMEMBER THE TUNE?

A No.

Q WAS THERE VERY MUCH CREATIVITY THAT YOU SAW GOING ON, WRITING, OR SINGING, OR MAKING UP SONGS, POEMS?

A No. We could in our spare time amuse ourselves with playing chess. We made up some -- made our own chess boards and figures. That I remember. But there was -- the only other thing I told you was these prayer meetings that I attended. I don't remember any kind of creativity.

Q WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT RABBI WHO HELD THE PRAYER MEETINGS; DO YOU KNOW?

A That rabbi I mentioned, I don't know what happened to him. I don't know. He came to the United States, I believe. He was a well-known name. Tavorski, Rabbi Tavorski.

Q THIS IS A LIST OF YOUR RELATIVES?

A Oh, yeah. Apparently, yes. I wrote to them about an inquiry to the agency inquiring about if they would know any of those. But these newspaper articles tells you about execution.

Q YEAH. WE'RE GOING TO MAKE COPIES OF THEM, IF THAT'S OKAY WITH YOU. THAT'S A LIST OF NAMES?

A Yeah. Bettelheim is not on it. And I believe -- I'm not too sure -- this Kurt Adler was the San Francisco

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Symphony conductor, Kurt Adler.

Q OH, YEAH, KURT ADLER?

A Yeah. I believe that's him. He was in Dachau.

Q WHEN YOU ARRIVED IN DACHAU, WERE PRISONERS LINING THE FENCE SHOUTING OUT NAMES AND PLACES TO SEE IF YOU KNEW ANYONE?

A No. But I myself had tried to maintain -- find them and get in contact for any of those who came in and also who left. For my own, I maintained a contact with the outside world. So any of those prisoners who came in and those who left the camp before me, if I possibly could, I asked them to pass on some information to my relatives.

Q DID YOU EVER FIND OUT IF THEY SUCCEEDED IN DOING THAT?

A Not really, no. I don't remember that.

Q WHEN YOU WERE AT HOME WHEN YOU WERE PICKED UP, WAS YOUR FATHER TAKEN WITH YOU, OR WERE YOU THE ONLY ONE?

A My father was not at home. I was at home. My mother was sick in bed. It was my stepmother. And one of my stepsisters was at home, but they just took me.

Q WHO CAME TO GET YOU? HOW MANY SS OFFICERS CAME?

A It was just -- I don't remember -- either one or two local policemen who were -- had the duty to do that.

Q DID YOU KNOW THEM?

A No.

Q HOW DID THEY TREAT YOU WHEN THEY PICKED YOU UP?

A Well, just like officially. You know, police. That's what they had to do. Come with us.

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Q DO YOU THINK THEY HAD ANY IDEA WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO YOU?

A Yes, I did, because we knew right away. I mean, it became known right away this is taking place.

Q DID YOU TRY TO HIDE?

A No. Couldn't hide. I couldn't. I was never courageous or whatever. And we were very poor. We didn't have any money. You know, sometimes it take courage; sometimes it takes money. I didn't have any of it.

Q YOU WERE 28. WERE YOU MARRIED AT THE TIME?

A No.

Q DID YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND? WERE YOU PLANNING TO BE MARRIED?

A No.

Q WERE YOU ABLE TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY AT ALL?

A In Dachau?

Q WHILE YOU WERE THERE OR WHILE YOU WERE AT THE JAIL BEFORE THEY TOOK YOU THERE.

A No. Once I came to Dachau, we were permitted to write home. I showed you the correspondence. And I know one postcard, the first postcard, it was the small postcard, it took me more than an hour to write it, because my hands were so badly frozen.

Q DID YOU HAVE TO WRITE WHAT THEY TOLD YOU TO WRITE?

A We were told what to write and what not to write. Yes, basically we got some instructions. And the letters were censored. They were not just -- each and every letter was

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censored.

Q DID THEY EVER BEAT ANYBODY UP BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY WROTE?

A Because it was --

Q OF WHAT THEY THE WROTE OR TRIED TO WRITE HOME?

A I don't know. It's possible. I would say most likely.

Q WHAT WAS THE MOST COMMON PUNISHMENT?

A Solitary confinement and hanging up from the tree, you know, from a post. Yeah, that's just plain beating.

Q DID YOU LOSE YOUR ABILITY TO FEEL FROM WHAT YOU SAW AND EXPERIENCED IN DACHAU?

A Did I lose --

Q YOUR ABILITY TO FEEL, LIKE TO HAVE COMPASSION, THAT SORT OF THING?

A No. You know, I told you about this German poet, Schiller, who wrote that. There was another well-known poet, Goethe. In his lifetime, he once went on a trip to Italy. And he was thrilled by what he saw, by the beautiful countryside. And he made the statement -- well, what did he say? I've forgotten. I guess Naples. He was impressed by Naples. To see, it's worse to go and see Naples than die.

Q IT'S WORSE TO GO AND SEE NAPLES?

A Naples before you -- and afterwards, if you die, it's all right, as long as you have seen Naples before your death. I mean, he was --

So when I came out of Dachau, I thought of what Goethe said. And I said to people, "I don't regret that I was

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in Dachau as long as I was able to survive." And I said, instead of saying Naples, to see Naples and die, I said, "to see Dachau and live." That was worse. I don't know if you get the connection.

Q I'M NOT SURE. COULD YOU EXPLAIN A LITTLE MORE?

A Well, when people ask me after I came out -- what was it that you asked me, whether I developed some feelings?

Q IF YOU LOST YOUR ABILITY TO FEEL.

A Well, I don't know why in response to what you asked. I said when people ask me what my reaction was of being -- having been in Dachau, I remembered what similar something what Goethe had to say about seeing Naples. I said to see Dachau, it was worse. And I don't regret it as long as I was able to live through it, to survive. In other words, see Dachau and live. Instead of seeing Naples and die, see Dachau and live.

Q BUT YOU DON'T REGRET IT SINCE YOU LIVED?

A No. I did not regret that it happened to me.

Q WHY NOT?

A Well, it happened not to me. It happened to others. And I was glad I was a witness to it. And that's why I don't regret it. And I don't mind talking about it to you and to others. But as long as I was able to come out of it alive and well without -- of course, it must have left some marks on my life and so on.

Q CAN YOU THINK OF ANY?

A I don't know. I think I became -- I don't know. I am sure it must have had some effect on my personality, but I

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cannot analyze it exactly. But it stands to reason anybody who goes through, comes out of Vietnam or out of Dachau or -- it had some effect on people. I didn't sit down to analyze it that accurately.

Q WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST DAY AT dachau LIKE?

A That I don't remember. I guess scary.

Q DID YOU TRY TO SMUGGLE ANY MONEY OR JEWELS THROUGH PROCESSING?

A To smuggle it when?

Q WHEN YOU WERE ENTERING INTO DACHAU.

A You can't smuggle in anything. It would be suicide. But what for? Did anybody -- did you hear of cases where anybody succeeded in smuggling? And for what purpose? To bribe the guard? I don't know. Have you?

Q YEAH. I'VE HEARD OF CASES OF PEOPLE WHO DID.

A Were there some who could do it?

Q YES, THERE WERE OCCASIONS. THAT WAS WHAT THE ORGANIZING WAS ALL ABOUT.

A I don't know. I had nothing anyway. I was very poor.

Talking about smuggling, well, I was very poor. When I left, when I was put on the train to leave Europe after Dachau, you know, and I just had among my belongings some -- mostly some papers, school papers, that I thought I would need, would come in -- would be useful to me later on. That's about all I had. Hardly anything to wear.

But my mother gave me a silver fork. That was the biggest item, valuable of any value. And I hid it somewhere in

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my trunk. The trunk was not with me. It was on the different car. But before we left the border from Germany to enter -- stop?

Q YES. HE'S GOT TO CHANGE THE TAPE AGAIN.

A When I left, the most valuable piece I had with me among my belongings was a silver fork. I don't know whether it was sterling silver, whatever. And I was not even permitted to take this much out, you know. And on the train leaving Germany, before the train left the border to enter Holland, the Nazi guard came through and warned us to be sure we don't have anything of value with us or nothing that we are not permitted, we wouldn't be permitted to take out with us, you know, like documents or reports that were not permitted.

And when he announced that while I was sitting and told us that, I got extremely scared. I was thinking of that silver fork. And anyway, as we passed through the border, and people, passengers on the -- with me on the same compartment told me they thought I was going to pass out. I turned extremely pale when the SS guard came through, you know. And we were so relieved that we had left, crossed the border, and we were in Holland.

I mean, this is in reply to you, smuggling, whether I was able to smuggle things into Dachau. The only smuggling I did, smuggling a silver fork out of Dachau. I don't even know where that fork is anymore; somewhere lost. It was not that valuable.

Q WHAT WERE THE ROLL CALLS LIKE?

A Roll calls were terrible.

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Q HOW LONG DID THEY LAST?

A Well, they lasted sometimes hours. Should have lasted maybe half an hour, but it went on maybe for a couple hours at times. And these were miserable experiences, and particularly marching down to the roll call grounds. I told you, it created quite a problem if the prisoners were out of step and not out of line.

And also, I was in a way very fortunate. I told you that the barrack where I was on, it was discovered that there were some lice in it among those prisoners. And we were put on quarantine for, I don't know for how long. Maybe a week, maybe more. And it helped me great deal. Everybody in that group who was -- stayed in the barrack didn't have to go out.

It was during that time particularly that one of the prisoners had escaped. He was an Aryan prisoner. Apparently, the way he did it, a worker from the outside, an electrician, had come in to do some repair work, and an Aryan prisoner stole his coat or his -- he dressed up in civilian clothes, in other words, and managed to escape that way.

And it was discovered and immediately, practically right afterwards, found out. And because of that, the roll call then lasted throughout the night, and many just froze to death. And I was fortunate that it happened at the time when I was with the group that was in quarantine. So -- but that was one of the worst experiences. I believe it's mentioned in that book, that episode. You know, not this one, the --

Q THE SMALLER BOOK?

A By Karst, "The Beasts of the Earth."

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Q DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE "BEASTS OF THE EARTH"?

A Well, all I can say, it's written by an Aryan prisoner who was a -- he writes under a concealed named. It's a soldier's name, and he had quite an important government position. He was, I think, a journalist, or I forgot. And here he was about the same time when I was there. And he writes his experience. The way he writes, it's not any different from the way I told to friends when I came out of Dachau, exactly the same experiences, the same impressions, or practically.

Q IT'S CALLED --

A He was Aryan, so I had, as a Jew, a somewhat different kind of experience.

Q WHAT WAS DIFFERENT?

A Well, Jews were treated differently. Maybe worse in some ways; maybe not.

Q CAN YOU THINK OF ANY SPECIFIC DIFFERENCES?

A Well, Jews were the outcasts in Hitler's time. They were just -- nonJews were gypsies who were put in the same category. But as I said, at least at that time I still had the privilege to leave the camp, if I could, if I was able to prove I could leave the country, whereas Aryans could not. So I mean Aryans -- maybe I shouldn't have said it that Jews were worse off. And not always, really, but --

Q THE BOOK IS CALLED "THE BEASTS OF THE EARTH," RIGHT, BY GEORGE M. KARST, K-A-R-S-T. AND IT WAS PUBLISHED IN, THE COPYRIGHT SAID, 1942.

SO HE WAS A HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL IN THE

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GOVERNMENT BEFORE HITLER?

A Yes.

Q AND THEN HE ESCAPED TO THE UNITED STATES?

A He did not escape. I don't remember how he managed to leave.

Q BUT HE GOT OUT BEFORE --

A He got out.

Q OKAY. THANKS.

HOW DID THE GUARDS DRESS? LIKE IT WAS WINTER. HOW WOULD THEY DRESS VERSUS --

A Oh, they were dressed very well; military uniform. I mean the SS, yes.

Q AS OPPOSED TO WHO ELSE? WERE THERE OTHER GUARDS?

A Well, those who were put in, they were not really guards. They were in charge of some of the prisoners. You know, they were not really guards. They wore the same kind of uniform.

In this book here, there are also pictures from Dachau.

Q OKAY.

A Shows you, for instance, a big roller for road repair, a heavy piece of equipment that we had to roll, push. Or not push, pull.

Q HOW LONG DID IT TAKE THEM BEFORE THEY ASSIGNED YOU A JOB?

A They didn't assign you any job, not us. We were just ordered for some detail. We had to shovel snow or dig in the gravel pit. It's just -- it's not an assignment. It's just

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at random from day-to-day.

Q HOW WOULD THEY CHOSE THESE DETAILS?

A I don't know. Just at random.

Q WHAT WOULD HAPPEN? WERE YOU EVER NOT CHOSEN FOR
DETAIL? WHAT HAPPENED ON DAYS IF YOU WEREN'T CHOSEN?

A There was no such thing. There was always something. If not particular work, just marching around up and down the grounds on the double.

Q ON THE DOUBLE?

A Yeah. You know, just keep moving. Even shoveling snow we did was not done with a justified purpose. You would shovel snow from one place and shovel it back again. Just load up the wheelbarrow and dump it, and then somebody else will pick up the same snow and dump it somewhere else.

Q WHEN YOU WERE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY, DID YOU
EVER TELL ANY OF YOUR ARMY BUDDIES ABOUT YOUR TIME IN DACHAU?

A I don't remember. I must have. As I said, while I was in the Army, I managed to get some time off and got a jeep to drive down to the camp from Munich. So I must have told somebody I wanted to go and see Dachau, because I was there. Yes, I'm sure I told them.

I didn't talk much about it basically. I knew people didn't believe it when you told them, just exactly how the SS men told us when they released us. You may tell everybody once you're outside. Nobody will believe you once you're outside of Germany. But while you're still in Germany, you were not permitted to talk about it. But once you're outside of Germany, nobody will believe you. So I didn't, and I

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found out that was so true.

Furthermore, it was particularly to the end of the war in the Army, I had noticed that some of the American troops became influenced by the German population. And they were -- some of them became anti-Semitic, some of the German soldiers.

Q GERMAN SOLDIERS?

A No, no. The American soldiers became anti-Semitic. They were influenced by the -- they were resentful. They resented the Jews, that they had to fight the war for the Jewish cause. That's the way some of them saw it. I met a number of them.

Q AND THEY DIDN'T HAVE THIS ATTITUDE BEFORE THEY WERE EXPOSED TO THE GERMAN POPULATION?

A I guess not. How would I know? I guess not. Maybe some were always anti-Semitic. I don't know. But this is what I observed. I came across some who were -- who didn't like the idea to have been in the war fighting a cause for the Jews. It was not even Negroes, Negro soldiers. They were the same way.

Q ANTI-SEMITIC?

A Yes. I remember once I tried to hitchhike a ride. I got on the truck that a black soldier was driving. Asked him to give me a ride. We started talking, and he found out I'm Jewish. He told me to get off. It surprised me.

Q DID YOU SEE MANY PEOPLE DIE IN DACHAU?

A Well, I did not see many die. You know, even in everyday life, people die all the time. How many do you see die, or how many do you see actually being born? We don't see

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it, but it happens all the time.

And the only thing I remember, some were in very bad shape. Some who couldn't move. They couldn't even go to roll call anymore. They were lying on the cots, and I saw maggots crawl over them just as though they were already dead. And I saw a number who went insane. They lost their mind. They went berserk. And any of those who couldn't keep up the spirit, who were despondent, those died very soon, very quickly.

Q HOW WOULD THEY DIE?

A Well, they became sick. I mean incapacitated; couldn't move anymore. And if they were beaten, because in the mood they were, they were not able to recover from the beating.

And even during the war, during the fighting war, I didn't see anyone being killed and die. I remember when we moved, when they moved us, particularly during the night most of the time, in the evening hours. And when we passed through countryside, whether it was in France or Italy, I could smell the stench of corpses. I don't know whether they were people or animals, but it was a horrible stench. It must have been lying all over in the fields and didn't see it.

The only one, I saw a dead SS man, was at Hitler's Chancellory after the fighting war was over. In the yard there, I saw one of a dead -- apparently, according to the uniform, he must have been a high official SS man. He was -- they had dug him up. He was lying against the wall. The wall was riddled with bullets, and this corpse's -- he was dressed in his uniform, but there were maggots covered all over him, crawling all over him. I didn't know who he was.

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I read a book by a British historian, Trevor Roper, and he wrote about the last days of -- his book was titled, "The Last Days of Hitler." And he wrote about the sights that I have seen in the courtyard of the Chancellory. I wrote to him, and I asked him -- I had a picture of that dead body I had taken, and I sent it to him and asked him whether he knew who it was. And he replied to me he didn't know who it was. He doesn't know; never saw him. But talking about dead bodies, that was one dead body I remember seeing.

Q WHAT WOULD THE PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY WENT INSANE?

A What would they do? They would mostly shout and behave in a strange manner. And they had to be restrained, and they were taken away. I don't know what happened to them. Most likely they got killed. They just disappeared.

Q YOU SAID THAT IF YOU DIDN'T KEEP YOUR SPIRITS UP, IT WOULD BE WORSE FOR YOU. HOW DID YOU KEEP YOUR SPIRITS UP?

A I don't know. It's just my mentality. I told you, for instance, I would be standing in the cold in the campground admiring a sunset, or looking at a bird, or reciting poetry to myself. I don't know. Not to be afraid. People, when we had to take showers and then dress ourselves outside and come out after the shower back into the cold, so many worried that they would catch pneumonia. They worried about it. I didn't worry. Just don't worry. I don't know how to explain it, but it was not easy. But I cannot say I was in a good mood, but it's -- I mean, I didn't keep up my spirit to a point where I was in a happy mood. No, definitely not. But tried to survive and not to worry about it.

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Q DID YOU MAKE ANY FRIENDS?

A Well, only one person, because his brother married afterwards -- it so happened he was -- his brother became my brother-in-law, so we became friends.

I have here a postcard that a group of these former inmates wrote me saying that -- they were not really friends, just a similar postcard. But they all signed that letter or that postcard. Here you see it was mailed to me when I was in London from a group of people, from a group of these -- some of them were with me in Dachau, and they were released, too.

Q DID THEY ALL MAKE IT OUT OF GERMANY AND AUSTRIA, TOO?

A Did they what?

Q THE PEOPLE ON THE POSTCARD, DID THEY ALL MAKE IT OUT OF GERMANY AND AUSTRIA? I MEAN, WASN'T IT THE CONDITION THAT THEY LEAVE?

A What were the conditions?

Q WASN'T THE CONDITION FOR THEIR BEING RELEASED THAT THEY LEAVE?

A Yeah, I suppose so. I don't remember. Some were about to leave. See, that it's written June of '39. And I don't -- not every one of them were prisoners. For instance, this note here is from my father, but a couple of them were. Now, this Carlo, his brother became my brother-in-law. But I met him in Dachau. I didn't know him before.

Q AND THOSE ARE ALL LETTERS?

A Letters that I wrote home.

Anyway, this Carlo -- Carl was his name, Carlo --

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he was -- he and his brother were born in Italy, Carl Freund. And once when I was in Dachau, I saw him on a stretcher being completely invalid. He looked like a dead man, a corpse. And yet, amazingly, I couldn't believe it. He had survived this situation. And he stayed in Dachau even more longer than I did. But eventually, he recovered, and he was released. But he was in a terrible shape at one point. I didn't think he would -- I thought he is going to die the way I saw him. But it's amazing how some people manage to survive. And he died only three years ago at age 89 here in the United States in Chicago. Before he died here just a couple months earlier, he was visiting here in San Francisco with his wife.

Q WHEN YOU SAW THE BODY WHERE THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENT HAD BEEN PERFORMED, THE MAN'S BODY --

A Oh, yeah.

Q HOW DID YOU HAPPEN TO BE GOING INTO THE INFIRMARY? WAS IT --

A For my own reason. I didn't go with him.

Q NO. I KNOW THAT.

A Yes.

Q BUT IT WAS THE INFIRMARY AND NOT THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENT BUILDING?

A I don't know whether some experiments were conducted on him. I don't know. Whether it was done there or not, I have no idea.

Q SO YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS?

A No. I just heard about it, like they had done some

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studies on malaria. And there were other -- during the war, I came across some cases where I was with a team investigating some of the people, some of the Nazis, who conducted medical experiments. And we looked at the tank where prisoners were immersed into that tank that was filled with ice and cold water. In one of these articles that I have here, somewhere in the newspapers it tells you about it. I can show it to you.

Q WE'LL GO THROUGH THEM AND MAKE COPIES.

WAS THAT WHEN YOU WERE WITH THE ARMY INTELLIGENCE THAT YOU --

A Yeah, that's right.

Q CAN YOU TALK A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THAT?

A Well, I was just an enlisted man. I was in the Army G2 6th Army group headquarters, Army intelligence. And I did mostly interpretation and translation with some technical teams. And we went to, for instance, to sites where they produced airplanes underground. We looked at some of the designs of the airplanes that the Germans came up with.

I remember one of them was even a woman scientist, a German. And I really didn't get too much involved in it except that I had to help out in the translation and interpreting discussions. I did it. I used to know -- besides German, I used to speak French very fluently. And there were meetings of French, and American, and Germans. That's what I did, sat in some of these sessions and discussions, conference.

Q WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE DOCTOR YOUR GROUP WAS INVESTIGATING WHEN YOU --

A The name of the doctor, I don't remember him.

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Q DO YOU RECALL WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

A No.

Q AND THE EXPERIMENT WAS TO SEE WHAT?

A From what I understood, I saw that tank somewhere in there, a basement of some home.

Q HOME?

A I guess it was, I don't know, in some home, I guess.

(The tape was changed at this point.)

A Well, you asked me about names. At one time or other I used to know names, but I forgot. It's already 50 years or so, almost 50 years since that time, 45. To be more accurate, 44 years only from this wartime experience, maybe 48 years.

Q SO THE TANK WAS IN THE BASEMENT OF A HOME, YOU THINK?

A That's what I remember, yes.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT THE EXPERIMENTS WERE TO DO?

A To the effects of cold, to the effects of cold temperature on human bodies. They did it for the purpose of their Army in Russia. What happened if a pilot was shot down into freezing water or to the snow and how to survive, how to revive him. So they tried all kinds of different techniques, including taking these prisoners that they immersed in cold water and to revive them used woman, pair them up with women, you know, who were not in normal condition. But just a contact with women, you know, females, Gypsy women or whatever.

Q WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "NOT IN NORMAL CONDITION"?

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A Who were normal, not in a cold condition, but paired them up, a frozen man with a regular woman. Put them together and have sexual contact or whether that would revive the man. Anyway, they experimented to see whether that would help of how long it would take take.

Q DID YOU READ A LOT OF THE DOCUMENTS THAT THE NAZIS PRODUCED ABOUT THIS EXPERIMENT?

A No. I did not read any such documents, really. I didn't get to, to do that. Not during the war and not after the war. Even what I have with me, I may have read some of it and forgot already. It's so long ago.

For instance, looking through this here, I noticed leafing through the pages, I have some notations in my handwriting in pencil that I passed on to somebody to point it out to them. So I must have read it, but I don't remember it anymore.

Q WHEN YOU WERE TAKEN TO BE ON THESE WORK DETAILS WHEN YOU WERE IN DACHAU, WHAT INCIDENT MOST STICKS IN YOUR MIND OF ALL OF THE MARCHES AND THE WORK DETAIL?

A The worst one was the day I was taken to this quarry, that pit to dig. It was very frightening the way these guards behaved, shouting and threatening all the time with guns ready to shoot, had to move on. Some had these vicious dogs with them. And it was just the entire atmosphere that they created, the frightening atmosphere. That was one of the worst I remember.

Q WHAT WAS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE IN DACHAU?

A Well, what can I say? It was -- you had to get up

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early in the morning and get ready for that parade ground, march out there, come back and get some breakfast, which was tea with some bread, and then put to work, whatever it was. If there was no snow to shovel over, just march up and down and, you know, on the double.

We had to pull heavy equipment, a roller, a very heavy roller. And I think it was made out of concrete or -- this book here, there's a picture of it. Basically, that's what it was. And then, as the day passed, we had to -- let's see. I don't even remember whether -- I guess before we got some supper, we went to -- we came to the parade ground to be counted and stand there for hours on end in the cold weather.

Sometimes what was worse was if it was freezing rain, you know, wet weather it was. And that was in wintertime. But I understand in summertime it was even worse to be in the heat. I was not in the summertime, but from what I heard, it was even worse.

Q YOU KNOW, YOU SAID YOU ATE THE HERRING, THE SALTED HERRING.

A Yes.

Q DID THAT MAKE YOU MORE THIRSTY, AND DID YOU GET ENOUGH WATER?

A I suppose it must have gotten me thirsty; drank the tea.

Q COULD YOU DRINK WATER ANY TIME YOU WANTED?

A No. When we were out in the open in the parade, no. We couldn't step out to get a drink of water, no. We had to wait until -- we couldn't even relieve ourselves while we

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were on the detail. But some men had a problem, that problem, bladder control. They wet themselves. If the Nazis saw the puddle from the urine, well, they beat up the prisoner.

Q WHAT WERE THE SANITARY CONDITIONS?

A Well, it was, I would say, not the worst. Well, you know, I told you came from Vienna. We lived in poor conditions. People, when they hear about Vienna, they all think it's a beautiful town. It looks beautiful, but Vienna was full of fleas and bedbugs, and sanitary conditions in Vienna were very bad.

For instance, many of these old apartment buildings, they didn't have any running water. In each apartment, they had maybe one faucet in the hallway. It was not a clean city. And I must say, in Dachau it was cleaner. There were no bedbugs or no fleas. Of course, occasionally they found some lice, and that was beneficial to us. But they tried to keep it clean.

It was not -- where we slept, I think we slept on straw, on burlap sacks that was stuffed with straw. We had to keep our mess kits meticulously clean. We got some soap for cleaning it for ourself and the utensils.

You know, just before I came to Dachau, in civilian life, the Nazis were already in Austria and Vienna. But I developed some bad rash, an eczema all over my body, terrible. I had to be hospitalized. They couldn't even cure me. I was discharged because the Nazis closed down that hospital. I suffered quite a bit. And the minute I came to Dachau, my problem suddenly disappeared. It was a derm- --

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Q DERMATOLOGY?

A Yes, dermatitis or whatever. So it's strange. But you see, I was always underweight in civilian life. And believe it or not, eating all this herring, I managed to put on some weight.

Q IN DACHAU?

A Yeah. Well, that doesn't tell -- it only tells you in what poor conditions I lived in at home. And maybe because of my tough life in civilian life, I was preconditioned for being able to survive these harsh circumstances.

Q WHAT WERE THE BARRACKS LIKE?

A Oh, they were bunk beds. I think two tiers or three tiers, I believe. And I always preferred to be on the top tier.

Q WHY?

A Why? Well, in case someone, if I would be on the lower tier, above me would be an inmate who had -- couldn't go to the bathroom in time and urinated and would drip on you, something of that sort. They had some windows in the barracks on the higher level just -- and I got a little more -- that stayed open, and I got a little more fresh air this way. I mean, that's the way I preferred it.

Q HOW MANY MEN SLEPT IN A BUNK?

A Well, one man to each, I think. Not together, separate. But they were close together, you know. As a matter of fact, I think when I was on troop ships during the war, it was even more crowded and worse, the bunks on troop ships.

Q HOW DID YOU KEEP WARM ENOUGH?

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A Well, I don't know. It's just we got some blanket. But we were always exposed to cold. Got used to it, climatized. If you sit here long enough, you get used to this warm condition. You don't think so?

Q I'M NOT SURE ABOUT THAT.

WERE YOU ASSIGNED BUNKS, OR COULD YOU SLEEP WHERE YOU WANTED TO SLEEP?

A That I don't remember. Most likely we were assigned.

Q DID YOU HAVE CAPOS, THE OVERSEERS THAT WERE PRISONERS?

A Oh, capos, yeah, of course.

Q DO YOU REMEMBER YOURS?

A Yes. And I told you, a couple of them were very nice. Others were very mean. And one of them was this Tutus who was mean. And amazingly, he spoke a beautiful language.

Q BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE?

A Yeah. His German was excellent.

There was another one. I forgot the name. People feared him quite a bit. But when he shouted and spoke, his German was just beautiful.

Q SHOUTED AND SPOKE BEAUTIFUL GERMAN?

A Yeah. Educated, but he was brutal.

Q WHAT DID HE DO?

A Well, shout and beat and --

Q WHAT KIND OF PRIVILEGES DID THE CAPOS HAVE?

A Privileges, capos?

Q YES, WHAT KIND OF --

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A Oh, I don't really know. Maybe they got a little better food or more food. I would say that would be basically the case.

Q DID THEY DEMAND FAVORS FROM --

A No. How could we?

Q NO. DID THEY DEMAND FAVORS FROM --

A Did they demand favors?

Q FROM THE PEOPLE THEY --

A No. We couldn't offer them anything, no.

Q YOU KNOW HOW YOU SAID YOU GOT YOUR BUTTER AND LEMON JUICE?

A Lemons.

Q YES, BUTTER AND LEMONS.

A Yes.

Q HOW DID YOU DO THAT? YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY MONEY, DID YOU?

A Yes. We were permitted to receive some money from home. You see those receipts on top, on top there?

Q THESE?

A These are money order receipts. I think seven and a half marks per, I don't know, month or whatever. Fifteen marks, fifteen marks per month, I guess.

Q BUT I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT JEWS WEREN'T ALLOWED TO BUY AT THE STORE.

A Well, no. So I may have asked an Aryan prisoner to get it for me.

Q DID IT TAKE ALL YOUR MONEY? WERE THE THINGS IN THE CANTEEN EXPENSIVE?

Kerdeman

A Yes, very, very overpriced. They sold also gloves, or I don't know what other items. Not much. Maybe a comb or -- I don't know.

Q DID YOU EVER SEE ANY SMALL CHILDREN IN DACHAU?

A Small children, no. But I remember, and even in that book it's told, the impression when we were standing on the campground or being counted, we could hear in the distance children's voices. And it was so exciting to hear it. But that's all I know about children.

Also, I knew those children shouting, laughing, they were not -- they were the children of the tormentors, but still it was nice to hear children.

Q DID YOU WITNESS PUBLIC EXECUTIONS?

A No. Not by the Germans and not by the Americans.

Q WHAT ABOUT EXTERMINATION FACILITIES?

A Extermination facilities, well, I saw them, but I didn't see them being used, the ovens. Also, in the shower rooms, I mean, there were -- actually could be used as exterminating facility. You know, from the shower heads they could put poison gas in these, and I guess it was done at times. But I didn't see otherwise. I mean, I saw this oven that I was told was a crematory oven, but I didn't see them in use. They may have used them at other times; not when I was there. Certainly, afterwards, after my time during the war.

Q DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY REASON TO SEE SS QUARTERS, LIKE PREPARING OR SERVING THE SS MEALS OR ANYTHING?

A No.

Q HOW ABOUT THE SS TORTURE CHAMBER?

Kerdeman

A No. I didn't see any of that.

Q WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT THE COMMANDANT, ANYTHING?

A No. When he appeared in Dachau, people worried, you know. But they had some high officials come, and I am almost sure I saw Heinrich Himmler once. I mean, from what I recall. It's vague really. I never met Heinrich Himmler, but when I saw pictures afterwards and reports of Heinrich Himmler, I am almost sure I saw him without knowing at that time who he was except some high SS man.

Q DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE WAS DOING IN THE CAMP AT THAT TIME?

A No. They just came. Occasionally you saw them. And whenever some such groups came, for some reason we got a little better food. Maybe they had with them some foreign dignitaries, too. I didn't know. They had to make it appear to be not as terrible as it really was.

Q WHAT DID YOU TALK ABOUT WITH OTHER PRISONERS?

A That I don't remember. Mostly what I tried to find out, what was going on on the outside, about news from the outside, what did they hear. You know, news, underground news, what is going to happen, have you heard something. What did you talk about others when they had to tell about their chances for getting a visa somewhere. That we talked about and how soon and whatever.

Q WERE THERE ANY JOKES THAT YOU RECALL?

A Jokes, no. It's too long ago. You know, perhaps I did know some. Didn't stay in my memory.

Q HOW DID PRISONERS TREAT EACH OTHER?

Kerdeman

A Well, as I said, amazingly, some were -- behaved like beasts. And what I found so interesting, that people coming from a better background, I mean with higher education or better social level, they were -- some of them were terrible. And ordinary people, they were wonderful. That I hope served even in my army career. The nicest people I remember were some hillbillies among soldiers. The finest characters, hillbillies. But that's talking about the Army, and that was no different.

For instance, an Army buddy at one time, and I had to share a tent with him, one of these hillbillies. He couldn't even read and write very well. I had to read to him the letters he received from his wife back in Kentucky. Well, whenever he received a package, he would never open it until I came in, I was in the tent, and open it in front of me and offer me something.

19 Or I remember one time we were on the march, all dirty, sweaty. And when we were ready to go to sleep that night in the pup tent, he had disappeared. He went to find a stream to wash his feet. He said he didn't want to offend me with his odor. Others, educated fellows, they were not that considerate, not that nice. That was the same true among these prisoners in Dachau.

Q WERE THERE ANY COLOR, ANY BRIGHT SPOTS? WAS THERE ANY COLOR IN DACHAU, ANY BRIGHT SPOTS?

A No. Except nice weather some day. That was a bright spot maybe. Some good news from home, that was bright spot. What else? Some rumors of -- they were mostly wrong rumors, but better conditions or --

Kerdeman

Q WERE THERE ANY EXPRESSIONS OF HUMOR?

A Not that I remember. Well, we were talking about this Tutus. He was mean. And well, I mean, it's a joke. We used to say, "Oh, (Tutus way.) Oh, it does hurt when Tutus came around." (Tutus way,) you know, it's in German language. It means, oh, does it hurt when he is around. Oh, it's hurt, Tutus. It's (Tutus way.) Well, that's one little joke.

Q DO YOU RECALL ANY CAMP THEATERS?

A Theaters, no.

Q SINGING?

A Well, maybe among ourselves. I don't remember. I think so. There was some entertainment, yeah.

Q DID THE GUARDS EVER FORCE YOU TO SING WHEN YOU WERE ON YOUR WAY TO WORK DETAIL?

A Did they force us?

Q TO SING ON YOUR WAY TO A WORK DETAIL?

A I think so, yeah. Marching songs or something. But now that you mention, but it's very vague in my memory now.

Q DO YOU RECALL ANY SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN INMATES?

A No, except what I told you in the shower room.