

ORIGINAL

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Bauer,
Alex

Interview with ALEX BAUER
Holocaust Media Project
Date: 12/10/84 Place: San Francisco, CA
Interviewer: Howard Felson
Transcriber: Robert B. Manners, CSR

Q. WHAT WAS YOUR NAME AT BIRTH?

A. Shandor Bauer. Actually, Bauer Shandor. In Hungarian the family name is the first name, and what is the first name here comes second. So my name was Bauer Shandor.

Q. WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

A. I was born in Hungary, in a small town in Hungary called (Komadi) on May 25th, 1922.

Q. BEFORE WE GET INTO YOUR STORY, WILL YOU TELL ME WHAT MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY YOU LOST?

A. We lived in a small town. After I reached the age of fourteen I got away from home, went to school in Budapest, and so my contacts with my family became a little more sporadic. I had my father, mother - actually I had three sisters and three brothers. Besides me, there were seven children in our family. During the war and in the Holocaust I lost my mother and father in Auschwitz, an older sister in Budapest - she was shot by the Hungarian Nazis. A brother, older brother, disappeared. After the war, two sisters, two brothers, and myself were left, we survived the ordeal.

Q. WILL YOU START IN AND TELL ME --

A. The thing about how did I get there?

Q. -- WHERE YOU WERE LIVING, SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR TOWN AND MAYBE YOUR --

A. I lived in a small town on the eastern part of

Hungary, near the Rumanian border, in a little town of about 10,000 people, had perhaps something like - a Jewish community of about three or four hundred families. Orthodox, naturally, as most of the Jewish people in a small town. I lived there with my parents, going to school as a child until I turned fourteen years old and I went to school in Budapest, to a Jewish normal school. By the way, the grammar school was also a parochial school, Jewish School, that I attended in my home town.

Q. WAS YOUR FAMILY ORTHODOX?

A. Orthodox, yes. Although, not very religious. In Hungarian, the Orthodox - my mother kept kosher, and we used to go to synagogue Shabbat morning ^{my father} and, naturally, all the High Holy Days. And later on we didn't go every Shabat morning and my father wasn't very religious. But our house was kosher all the time.

Q. WHICH LANGUAGE DID YOU SPEAK AT HOME?

A. Hungarian. The Hungarian Jews spoke Hungarian. Yiddish wasn't really that widespread in Eastern Europe, and just the very religious Hassidic people spoke Yiddish. And I never learned Yiddish at home. My parents spoke it sometimes. When they didn't want us kids to understand something, then they spoke Yiddish, or German, between them ^{themselves}. But we never learned it.

Q. DID YOU CONSIDER YOURSELVES HUNGARIAN?

A. We considered ourselves Hungarians, and Jews. We were reminded constantly by the population that we weren't like the other Hungarians. Anti-Semitism was noticeable, you know, since my childhood, all the time. And things were tolerable,

though, in the '20s, and maybe even in the early '30s. And with the rise of Hitler to power, since Hungary was an ally of Germany, slowly, from 1932 on, the suppression became more and more noticeable. Anti-Jewish laws were brought into effect. Economic, mostly. But the Jewish people, they stayed at home, even as the war started, under more and more severe restrictions. The older people and children stayed at home.

People of military age, they were drafted at that time, during the war years, earlier years of the war, into military forced labor groups. Like my older brother, Jews weren't regular soldiers, but they were in these forced labor units and they were terribly treated.

Hungary entered the war on the side of Germany in 1941 - the fall of 1941, or shortly thereafter, I don't remember, after Germany invaded Russia. And then Hungarian troops were sent to the Eastern Front and with them these Jewish forced labor units. And my brother was in one of them, my older brother, and they were treated terribly. Nevertheless, he ^{that one} managed to survive this.

At home I was one of the fortunate ones. Although I was of military age, I was one of the fortunate ones - a few Jewish kids that was accepted to college. And I was a student at that time and they apparently didn't bother, there were so few of us, to pull out of college the Jewish students. So I was going to school until 1944 when the Germans invaded Hungary. I won't say "invaded," I'll say "occupied" Hungary.

By that time the war was going pretty bad for the Axis, the Russians were pushing from the Eastern Front towards

Poland, Rumania, Hungary. And the Hungarian Government sort of thought it to be prudent to possibly get out of the war and sue for^{se} separate peace. The Germans got hold of this idea and they occupied the country on March 19th, 1944. I remember the day very well, it was a shocking day. And at that point all the freedom that the Hungarian Jews enjoyed until that time suddenly ended.

Q. TELL ME, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, HOW YOU REMEMBER IT?

A. Well, I was, as I say, going to college in a city called Szeged in the southern part of Hungary, near the Yugoslavian border. Yugoslavia was occupied by then by the Germans and, naturally, Austria and all the surrounding countries. And when the Germans appeared there in the same March, suddenly all the real serious restrictions on Jews were put into effect, even the next day.

Q. WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEFORE THEN?

A. Before then? The Jewish people just lived like any other people. There was really no serious restrictions, except some economic ones. You couldn't - well, you couldn't own land before, either, I am not even quite sure I can recall what the details of the restrictions were, but they were economic in nature and they did not have that serious effect, you know, on the average guy. I'm sure there are documents that will tell you much better about that than my recollections will tell you.

Q. IF THERE IS ANYTHING THAT YOU REMEMBER PERSONALLY, OR THAT HAPPENED TO YOU --

A. At that time?

Q. YES.

A. I still did go to school. The occupation occurred on March the 19th, but we kept on going to school there until June.

During this time; In about two or three weeks' time after the occupation, all Jews were required to wear the yellow badge, the Star of David. They weren't allowed to leave the city, traveling was cut off, so I could not go back home and see what happened to my family. Communication was pretty bad - you know, telephone wasn't like it is here - and you communicated by letter, which was very slow. Everybody got suddenly very scared, we knew something terrible was about to happen, but we didn't know what.

Yet, surprisingly - this was spring of 1944 - we Hungarian Jews lived there in this country in the middle of the war. We knew that a big war was going on, but we didn't have the faintest idea what was happening at that time to the Jews of Eastern Europe. Never heard the word "Auschwitz." We did not know about extermination camps or anything like that.

When the Germans got in things got changed very drastically. As I say, we had to wear the yellow badge. All Jews had to turn in all radios and cameras - we weren't allowed to have cameras or radios any more. We were in the city, though we had relatively free movement, freedom of movement, we heard that some of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community one-by-one disappeared. They were arrested and they were taken to concentration camp. And what "concentration camp" meant, we didn't know. It was just something bad. We hadn't any idea what it was.

And the Germans were very clever, they kept us pretty much in the dark. Like we never knew what was happening in Poland, either. Everybody was trying to guess what happened to these people that were taken away. And a little while later, I don't know how long later, some post cards kept coming back from these people, just sort of pre-printed postcards "We are all right," and "Don't worry about us." The things were post-marked from a town called (Waldensay.) And everybody was frantically trying to figure out where (Waldensay) was. Nobody could find it on any map. And the people guessed it was a town in Switzerland, but nobody really knew. And these people were already in Auschwitz or on their way to Auschwitz. So they really managed to fool us.

And we were fooled so badly that later that year we ourselves marched into Germany. We were told that we were going to go to some family camps where we are going to meet our families. And so we, like sheep, sort of marched into these ^{traps} camps. We didn't have any idea what was awaiting us.

So basically, though, until June of 1944, Jews still lived in their home. And in the spring and summer of '44 the Hungarians, under the orders or the urging of the Germans, started rounding up the Jews everywhere in the countryside and all the smaller towns, except perhaps in Budapest where it was a little bit more difficult, into ghettos. They were moved into ghettos. And the younger people of military age were drafted now, all of us, into these forced labor ^{camp...} companies.

And I had to report at the railroad station on June 6 1944. And in the early morning when I'm at the railroad

station we heard that the Allies landed in Normandy. And everybody was kind of hoping that before anything really bad would happen to us the war will be over. Unfortunately, things didn't go quite that fast. We were put into these forced labor groups and for the time we were in Hungary under part of the Hungarian military.

We were prisoners. We had to work hard. But we were fed well and we weren't treated quite as animals, yet. It was kind of as somewhat subhuman prisoners, but it was fairly-reasonable treatment we had there for the first few months.

Q. WERE YOU PUT INTO A GHETTO BEFORE THAT?

A. No. When the collecting of the jews into ghettos occurred we, the young class, were taken to the military. And while we were in this military forced-labor camp the civilian population - the women, older people and ^{some} children - were taken to ghettos. So I, myself, was never in a ghetto, as such.

Our unit was taken to a town in some hills, some forest, to work in an ammunition band about maybe fifty, sixty miles southeast of Budapest. And we were there until about September or thereabouts. Some of these dates are getting a little bit faint in my mind because I didn't make any record of them, really, and this was forty years ago when these things happened. But toward the fall, and I think it was around September, when the Russians started to get very close and there was some big fights in the eastern part of Hungary, they started to evacuate us. They evacuated us under military guards, naturally, toward the west.

And at one point we were some place, I don't know,

a little bit under what we ~~call~~^{crossed} the Danube, and we were perhaps a few miles from the Danube on the western bank and maybe thirty, forty miles south of Budapest, or therabouts. It was kind of fast marching we had to do. We were standing there for some reason one morning, suddenly the news came around that the Hungarian Government started some peace discussion with the Russians and we were all ~~safe~~^{free}.

Our guards suddenly put their rifles down and we were milling around there. We weren't prisoners, suddenly. And were thinking, everybody, "Well, let's get going, and let's go somewhere. Let's go to Budapest." Everybody wants to go there. It was like that for about an hour before we could get going.

Suddenly, their attitude reversed, changed again very drastically. We were told, "No, back into a line now. Nobody can leave." Maybe a few^{of us} did manage to escape in that confusion that lasted half an hour or an hour. I didn't. And 99% of us didn't. We didn't think it was that urgent, you know, to run away immediately.

But a puppet government was put in. The Germans deposed Horthy at that time and they put some puppet government into power. And we were gathered back together and kept on marching west. And we were turned over to the Germans. And we had to march.

This is pretty-severe marching. You know, we had all our heavy things with us - whatever you had, your belongings, on your back. And I don't know how many miles we marched a day, but must have been maybe thirty, forty. I'm just guessing now. But pretty fast marching from one town to another. We stopped

at night, the next day early morning kept on going west, west toward Austria.

And sometime, I would say ^{that} even toward the end of September or maybe in October, early October end of September, sometime thereabouts, they turned us over at the border to the Germans.

And on the way we didn't know what was going on. We knew that there was terrific confusion, we knew that something is really bad happening. But no news came to us, we didn't know what the whole thing was all about. We were constantly warned, "If anybody is caught trying to escape will be shot on the spot."

"And where are we going?" We were told that "You are going to Vienna," that "there is a big family camp where the rest of your relatives are and we are going to unite you, you are going to get together with your relatives in a camp near Vienna." So most of us are going, "Well, this is better," we thought, "than trying to escape and getting shot."

Had we known where we were going, we surely would have tried to escape - whether getting shot or not, it wouldn't have mattered to us.

But, anyway, we just let them march us into the hands of the Germans, and they turned us over at this little border town of (Schurndorf) to the Germans.

And it was kind of shocking - the Germans, the guys that took over, there were a few SS guys, we noticed right away from the markings on their arms - but most of the guards that were assigned to us were little kids! About 14-year-old

kids with kind of miniature rifles - you know, not full-size. But those darn kids, they were kicking us and beating the people with their rifle butts for not marching faster - you know, to make them march faster and faster.

And lots of people got sick. I don't know what happened to some of those that got so sick on this heavy march through Hungary that they couldn't keep up with us. They got lost somehow. I have no idea what happened to them.

These German kids marched us to a railroad station on the other side of the German border ^{which was} with Austria, packed us in railroad cars. Pretty densely, I should say - I don't know how many, but you couldn't sit down in the car. They packed us in, locked the door, and then eventually the thing started rolling.

And then we thought yes, it's pretty uncomfortable but Vienna must be a few miles away from the border, it's pretty close to the Austria-Hungarian border, so it won't take very long. So nobody said much, we were just waiting, trying to figure out what's going to happen. And the train kept on rolling. And then it became night and the train was rolling. And the next day the train was rolling. And then we begin to fear very bad, because we knew that Vienna is much closer and we are not going to Vienna, we should have gotten there long time ago.

And no food. No water. We were banging on the door, we were thirsty. No water. No nothing. Once I believe they opened the door, and - I'm not sure, my recollection is getting a little bit faint and I don't want to tell too many

stories I'm not quite certain about or don't remember it very well, but I believe they may have given us some food at one time. I think they opened the doors one time. You couldn't get out. Maybe they gave us some water, too. I don't remember that. Then the train kept rolling again and we didn't know where we were going. Nobody was telling us. They weren't going to tell us, the Germans, where we were going.

And the next morning, I believe, the sun came up and through the cracks in the railroad wagon you could look out. And somebody saw that it's Munich. "What the heck are we doing in Munich? We're supposed to go to Vienna, and Munich is Bavaria, it is not Austria anymore." And we said that's it, we don't know where the heck we are going.

But, again, thirst and hunger, and banging on door trying to get out. And we are told - I don't remember whether they opened the door or not, but we were told that pretty soon we arrive where we are going. And then the train start rolling again in a few minutes and maybe an hour or so the train stops, they open the door, "Everybody out," and you see in the railroad station it said "Dachau."

And we didn't know much about concentration camp, but everybody knew what "Dachau" meant, that was the prototype or archetype of the concentration camp in the horror stories of the '30s, you know, whatever we heard about Dachau being the political concentration camp, camp for political prisoners.

And they didn't want to get out. Suddenly they weren't thirsty or hungry, the people didn't want to get out to get to Dachau. Well, naturally, there was no way - they got us

out, and they march us to the camp.

And I remember mostly the iron gates and there are pictures on it and this says on it, ("Aurbite mach frie") - you know, "Labor Frees," it makes you free, and so on. And it was a terrible feeling. It would be difficult to describe the fear that we felt at that time. And I don't remember what time of the day, but it was during the day because I remember we saw that writing on the door, it was daytime. They got us inside somewhere and - probably immediately, I don't remember exactly, they started this transformation of us now from human beings into sub-animal kind of species - undress you, shave every hair off your body, everywhere. I remember a guy came with some long stick with some red cedar and they stuck it in some burning fluid that was a de-licing agent and smeared your body, freshly shaven, with this burning stuff, and it was a horrible feeling, you know.

And this was towards the end of the war, ^① so many ^② prisoners were processing there was no time and no tatooing any more. They were short on this prisoner clothing and that was fortunate for me and for some of us, they allowed us to keep our jackets. I had this waistlength coat with lambswool lining and I could keep it and that probably contributed to saving my life. I'm sure, not just probably. I also could keep my good boots, and that was part of the luck.

And they assigned us to barracks. And the next morning getting up early, it's about four o'clock, and counting the people. All this was wintertime, this was probably early October, mid-October, somewhere thereabouts, and it was very

cold, and this linen thing is awful thin. And as I say I had this jacket and that helped me, kept me a little bit warmer. And then waiting for hours outside in the windy, snowy - it was snow on the ground. Because I remember when we got out the railroad and got into the camp it was new, there's nothing else to do, people got onto some snow piles and started eating the snow, because we were thirsty actually. *[Determining out food what to say next]*

Let's see, they took us into these barracks and it was a completely new experience and terrifying and we didn't know how to treat this, how to deal with this thing. Naturally, we were hungry and they gave us a piece of bread. There were other prisoners, older prisoners there, that were handling us, distributing us to the barracks and assigning us bunks.

And we were told - naturally there was a language barrier, I spoke only Hungarian, little German at this time. The language of communication in the camps was German, naturally. I did understand some German. Some of the prisoners were Greek, and from all over Europe. But there were some Hungarians also, I don't know how they got there, from where, maybe Auschwitz or something like that. But basically with the little German knowledge that I possessed at that time I could understand the instructions, what to do - to wash up, not go to that, and go for bread. And they gave us a piece of bread and I think some coffee or something, I don't remember the details.

What I remember is we knew at that time that food is one of the very scarce things, you have to be very careful with it. So I took that piece of bread, it may have been, I don't know how much, a couple of handfuls, a little chunk - it

was a small piece, a chunk, and I ate half of it and I took the other half and put it under my little pillow and I save it for the next day in case we don't get food. Early the next morning we got up and supposed to go out in a line to wash, there was one wash basin somewhere, and by the time I get back, the bread is gone! We didn't realize that in the camp, everything that you are not having with you or around you all the time is lost. Anything of value. You cannot keep anything.

The first day when they took us out to work they took us out to some railroad terminal, and we were supposed to unload some sacks of grain. And fall some grain pieces here and there, we ate it promptly, naturally. And after working there for a while I thought I got a little warm, so I took my glove - they gave us gloves, some linen glove - pull it off and put it down there and just turn around for two minutes and there, the thing is gone.

Slowly we learn that this is different world. For one thing, everybody was stealing from everybody, one prisoner from another. There was no such thinking "Here we are together in this business and what is yours is yours." The instinct of survival forced you to try to get everything that you could get hold of. Surely you didn't grab it out of anybody's hand, but if there was something there that wasn't held by somebody it was yours.

So we were in Dachau. Every morning the same routine, get up about four o'clock, would be a couple of hours went by by the time they counted you. And it was so wierd, this little yard that was attached to each of these barracks, and the

prisoners of that barracks were in that yard, and when the German SS guys came - there was a leader, the barrack leader, a prisoner, an older prisoner, and the German guys came and they counted the people and then went to the next one. And you had all these people waiting for this, I think they called it ("apel.") So cold! Maybe forty or sixty people getting so close, they tried keep each other warm. And try and sway in that cold, back and forth, tried - you know, it was kind of a real and unreal kind of situation. For us it was really terrifying because we were new. Some of the guys that had lived with it for months, or years perhaps, were better used to it. We worked there, may have been, I don't remember exactly, two, three weeks perhaps, maybe four, in Dachau.

Dachau at that time was really a kind of distribution center. The prisoners, they were working. But, really, I don't know of any gas chamber operating at that time, or crematory, or any kind of mass killings. That may have happened in some other parts of the camp, it wasn't obvious to us.

And pretty soon they put us into a transport and they transported us to a smaller work camp. I don't know, I don't recall how many of us - it must have been a larger group perhaps that was transported. Every day transport went from there to the various work camps and new prisoners were brought in.

And we were transported, or we were sent to a work camp which was a fairly-large one called ("Nueldorf.") And (Nue!dorf) is east of Munich, shown on the map. It is a fairly-large town, I don't know, maybe something like thirty, forty

miles or so east of Munich. And near that city were a couple of large camps. And my recollection is something like four or five thousand, or five to ten thousand, prisoners were in one or both. I don't know. But, anyway, a fairly large camp. There were two camps there, I know one was named ("The Waldlogger,") the forest camp, and the other I don't recall what the name of it was. I think we got into (The Waldlogger.) And we were there, again, for a relatively short time.

There we really began to realize what was this whole thing, what we got into. The hunger was rampant. And we were fed very little. And I was shocked myself. And once on our way to work or back from somewhere I recall I found a small potato, a frozen potato, on the ground. I don't know how the heck it got there. And I thought it was such a precious possession to have found a small potato, a frozen potato.

And slowly this sink in, that hunger is going to be a major difficulty, a major problem. And that feeling of terrible hunger, painful hunger, really never stopped until we were liberated. We were continually aching because of hunger. Sometimes they gave us a little soup, so that helped a little bit. We never were left without the feeling of hunger. But shortly after you got that warm soup or some warm water with something swimming in it - vegetable pieces, something like that - really, even that didn't - we never felt ^{fat} satisfied, you know, hungerwise, until the end of the whole thing.

So, well --. Can I --

Q. GO AHEAD.

A. We were discussing --. It might interrupt my

story, but I would like to interject with the idea that whenever the Holocaust is being discussed publicly in the last few years in the magazines, on television, or in lectures and such, it seems to me that the happenings or the tragedies and the terrible things that happened in camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka are the things that are associated as representing the Holocaust. And it is correct, too, because the core of the Holocaust, or the center part of it, is really those terrible things that happened in these camps.

But from the point of view of the victim, however, the things that happened in these German labor camps - and there was no gas chamber and no mass shootings - perhaps there were also hundreds of thousands died. They died the agony of slow death, tortured for months and months - the hunger, the cold, and whatnot. Perhaps from the point of view of the victims it was much worse than Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was terrible but you got through it pretty quickly - here for months and months before the people died they were suffering terribly, for many months.

So I think this aspect of the Holocaust, or this part of it, the labor camp sufferings, perhaps is worthwhile to bring up and discuss at times, or talk about it. As I say, for us, if we had known at that time, you know, that Auschwitz was having gas chambers and whatnot and somebody asked you "What do you want? You want to go to Auschwitz, or keep going here?" - probably most of us would have picked Auschwitz. Because it was such a terrible - it's difficult to describe, you know.

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they was driving us to - we knew that we have to get something in our mouth just to keep our stomachs alive, we were chewing on wood, pieces of wood - in the springtime when grass appeared, we were eating grass - trying to get something into your stomach. The feeling of the pain of the hunger was so terrible all the time. And, naturally, the cold.

Now getting back to the story, I believe we left off where we got to (Nueldorf), and it was a regular working camp. I don't recall now exactly what for the short period of time I was in this camp ^{what} we were doing. In these camps various commandos - a group of people under the supervision of a Jewish Kapo and guarded by a couple of SS guys - were taken somewhere to some area and we were digging some ditch or doing some kind of work. And I don't recall exactly what we have been doing in (Nueldorf.)

I do recall that in Dachau, before we left, the first few days I was assigned to a group that was unloading these railroad cars, the time I have mentioned before. And then after a few days I was assigned to another commando, it was a kind of underground but open pit like place, but below ground level, and we were told they are building an airplane factory.

And it was a huge place, as I recall, vaguely, and my work was to carry cement sacks, these 50-pound cement sacks, up on a ladder to the top of one of these cement mixers. It was a pretty huge machine and there was lots of steps to run up on a ladder. And the German guy and the capo was standing on the bottom with a stick, if you didn't run fast enough they were beating you. Those few early days of my imprisonment I was

reasonably healthy, I had some strength and I could do it, and many of us could. And that is what we have been doing, carrying these cement sacks up on this ladder and feeding it into the cement mixer. I don't remember anymore what we did in (Nueldorf.) There were so many little commandos, I must have been in one of them.

But fairly soon, in about two weeks or so, a guy, also Hungarian, whom we met there, he was a middle-aged guy, says: "Shornya," that was my nickname, he says "I'm forming a group, we are going away to another camp, and it will be much better there than here. Do you want to come with me?" And he was trying to collect, get together - apparently he has some "ins" with some of the camp leaders, I don't how how he did it - he was working there in the warehouse, in the food storage.

Q. WAS HE A GERMAN?

A. No. He is a Hungarian Jew. But, you know, the camp was staffed with prisoners. All the work was done by prisoners - the cooking, the keeping of the storehouse, the stockroom kind of things. And he was working in there. And he somehow wriggled for himself an appointment to go to another camp and be there in charge of the stockroom. He knew that they had to get maybe around a hundred people into these transport to go to that camp, and he apparently had the connection that he could pick some people, not perhaps all. But he asked me to go with him. And then after a day thinking I decided I go with Yenner - that was his name.

But before that I would like to say only this much about (Nueldorf,) that that was the first time where I saw

these, you know, run-down people, these bone-and-skin people. It really scared us, "This is what awaits us, this is what we were going to become?"

And this is the first time I ever met lice. You know, in one day started scratching. Either first, second, third day, I don't remember - scratching. "What the heck is this scratching business?" This is where you caught some lice on you. The lice was rampant in this place. You could not get rid of it. And nobody made any attempt to try to get rid of it.

But, as I say, after that, maybe we have been there a couple of weeks, three weeks perhaps - and I believe this must have been now early December, end of November-early December, sometime around that time, when finally this transport was put together and they took us to this other little camp.

This camp is I believe south of (Nueldorf,) not very far from it. I haven't looked it up on a map, I don't know where it is. It was called (Mittergas.) It's a small German town, a small Bavarian town. Outside of this town was this camp. It was much smaller, perhaps five hundred prisoners in it.

And the major assignment in this camp was to supply labor to a nearby cement factory that was set up just recently. It was one of those make-shift factories, it wasn't an established thing. You know it was done later, because it was wooden structures, was set up very quickly. And we were producing there these concrete plate-like things, maybe something like 18-inches by 36-inches, with a little hook-like thing at each end. They used it for building pre-fab houses, we were

told, for the Germans that the Russians were pushing west - these were German refugees that came from the east, to provide housing for them. They made the Germans these pre-fab houses and they were making the concrete slabs for it. And it was solid winter by this time. And the Bavarian winter is pretty cold. And food was very scarce. And every day, day after day, from the morning until night, we went to this factory and were working there.

One assignment I had been given for a long time was filling little cart-like things on railroad tracks, a little small cart like you see in coal mines perhaps in pictures what the guys filled the coal with. We were filling it with gravel from a nearby hill, which seemed to have been made out of gravel somehow. We filled it up and they used it in the fabrication of the cement, in place of concrete slab. Another assignment that I had to do for a while was carrying the slabs from inside the factory where they were made - after they were, you know, ready - outside and stacked them into stacks for transportation. The work was pretty heavy. Both types, these two types that I have been in, were pretty hard work. Because they were watching you very closely, you couldn't slack off or goof off, it was constant movement.

and by this time really due lack of food, we were there only for a couple of months

And let me say that while we were in the Hungarian forced labor camp on that military, at least we were fed decently, we weren't hungry, there was plenty of food. The work wasn't very difficult and there was plenty of food, so we were all practically have a relaxed belly and ~~all this was chubby~~ *I was always chubby in my childhood*. And here, in about two months our strength was gone. And the cold got really to us and we began to lose weight in a very bad way

and became very weak. And this work was very difficult.

Let me just say some of the highlights. For one thing, I can't recall, you know, kind of continuously, but I'd like to just bring up some things about life in this little murderous camp. This was the most murderous place that I have ever been, naturally, in my life. Much worse than Dachau. It was much worse than (Nueeldorf.) It was a small camp and the labor was pretty hard, it was very cold, our clothing was very flimsy, and I should say that my --.

OK
 ..(End of Side A, Tape 1)..

The idea that even though the circumstances for most of the ^{Prisoners} ~~people~~, practically all of us, was very difficult because of the cold, in this particular instance I was luckier than practically all of us because I had a warm jacket. And I had this warm jacket for a while.

One of the SS Guards noticed it one day. And "Red" - they called him "Red" because he was a redheaded guy - through the kapo sent me a message that he wants this jacket. And naturally he could have taken it from me, but he was decent enough not to take it directly. But he told me through the capo that if I give him this jacket he is going to give me an extra ladle of soup every day.

I figure that if I say no he is going to take it. This way at least I get an extra ladle of soup. And I gave him the jacket. And lo and behold I was told by the capo that after the soup is distributed then if I go to the back door of the kitchen the cook will give me an extra ladle. And the Russian cook - Russian prisoners of war were the cooks in this camp - he

gave me an extra ladle of soup, and it was fantastic. I was cold, but I had a little extra soup. This went on for about two weeks. After two, two-and-a-half weeks, I don't recall, the Russian guy threw me out, "No more." So that was the end of it.

Nevertheless, these kind of little things like having that coat for a month or so, having for a couple of weeks this extra ladle of soup, perhaps contributed to the fact I managed to survive. Not too many of us survived.

That Hungarian guy that talk me into coming to this place, he later became the master of the stock room. I don't think I did get any special favor from him. Perhaps once, I met him one day and he gave me a couple of cigarettes. Cigarettes were the extreme top of the commodities in this place. Nobody had cigarettes, and you naturally didn't dare to smoke them but you gave it to somebody for a piece of bread. And so did the capos and some of this things.

Let me tell you just roughly what the routine was in this camp. First of all, in the morning, again four or five o'clock, I don't recall, ^{dark} early. They woke you up and you had to stand in the yard to be counted and be assigned to your work group. The camp commandant came every morning and he gave us a speech: "You dirty, lousy Jews, you think you are going to get out of here alive? You are mistaken, you are not going to get out of this alive. We will kill you, every one of you. First you work, and then you die." This is the kind of speeches we heard, in this general kind of tone, you know, every day. Particularly when the - I think after the Battle of the Bulge or thereabouts, when things got really fuming and they told us "If

Germany is going to lose this war, don't you think that you will survive it, you are going to die with Germany." And this kind of thing. And they assigned us to commandos and we went out to the factory.

I was, on a number of occasions on the burying detail - you know, burying the dead - which was a fairly-good assignment. We dug some ditches somewhere. Picks were given because the ground was frozen solid and you have to pick this with pickaxe, have to pick this ground. And, you know, we were pretty weak, and this was terrible work. Many of us, you know, went out there, couldn't lift the thing, had to sit down, froze there, and we carried him back dead. Many of us died there, out there on this - on the work detail. Barely could march out with us and we had to carry them, the frozen bodies, back dead.

My best friend was with me here, he developed some --. If you couldn't go out for work detail, that was the end. They took you into the so-called hospital barrack. And that was a death sentence, because those guys, the supervisors, they took away that one piece of bread and one ladle of soup that was assigned and they didn't get ^{any good} anything there. They died there. Every one of them. I don't think anybody that I know got alive out of this sick barrack. So our only chance to survive, you had to go out to work, no matter what. And Nick, this guy, he physically - he was sore, frozen, and he couldn't walk. "You have to go. You have to come," and I pulled him and nagged him for a while, and one day he said "No, I can't go." He got in the barrack, and I never saw him again.

And one good thing, perhaps, that I recall of this

whole experience: There was a farm a couple of three miles away from our camp and this farmer requested some help - you know, prisoner help - from the authorities for his field. And, I don't know, there may have been other private places that prisoners worked, I never got into any of those commandoes, but I got into this one. We went to this farmer's place. And this farmer indeed got this group, maybe eight of us, eight of us and a German SS guard. I remember, he marched us through town, and on the other side of the town somewhere off in the fields was his farm. And regularly - I was in this for maybe a couple of weeks, in this commando - he took the SS guy into the farmhouse and they gave him drinks and whatnot, kept him. And his wife took us, the prisoners, into the barn and she gave us food. And we really didn't work there. Very little. Sure, there was some. But we were fed very well by this farmer's wife. And I believe that possibly - we did so little work, so little useful work, that I don't believe that farmer really took us because they needed us, they probably wanted to help ~~someone~~ ^{some of us}. And I really can't forget this. This is the only good experience I recall of this whole - during this whole period there.

On the way to this farmer's place we went through town and the townspeople saw us. Eight, maybe ten, I'm not sure, it was a small group, that went in. There was another, I believe, it seems to me, another commando group did go through town. But definitely for this commando, we did go through town and the Germans saw us there, you know. So it's not true that they didn't know what was going on when they saw these weak half-dead people march through the town under a guard, SS guard.

And suddenly we were going on this road. The farmers with their carts were carrying some produce. If they dropped something we were forbidden to pick the thing up from the road. They had this, how you call it, turnip kind of things, some animal feed or something they were carrying. And I remember one of them, they were piled high on that cart and sometimes one or two fell down. And a guy picked it up. Another guy picked it up. And the SS made them throw it away. And they said, "If I see any one of you picking any up, I'm going to break his arm." And the next day or some other time indeed the guy broke the arm of one of the prisoners on his knee, because he picked up one of these. So this is one of the few atrocities, direct atrocities, I saw.

There was another one that I recall. There were daily small little atrocities, but there was one, one that sticks pretty vividly in my mind: In the factory where we were working, it was a big factory, one day they claim that a lightbulb disappeared. And somehow, I don't know how, it was said that this guy, one of the prisoners from our camp that worked in that area, it was suspected that he stole the lightbulb.

And the company commandant when we got back made a big fuss out of it, that this guy stole a lightbulb. And he insisted that he didn't. Nevertheless he was sentenced by the commandant. The punishment in the camp for any kind of crime, there was an open little wooden enclosure, no cot, just some wooden enclosure - it may have been, I don't know, maybe eight feet by eight feet, or six feet by six feet, something like

that, with a door on it and they lock the guy into that thing, in his underwear. ^{partially naked things.} So, in that thing they locked him in overnight. That's pretty darn cold out there, subfreezing weather, I don't know how many degrees. And he was there all night long.

And in the morning when everybody was out there, you know, before going to work the commandant ordered "Bring that prisoner out, he has to go to work." And he was laying there half frozen, he couldn't get up. They dragged him out and he was told to get up and get into line and go to work. And he was half dead and he couldn't get up. And the commandant ordered the guard there to pour water over him. They poured water over him, two buckets or three buckets, and he couldn't get up. They left him there and I understand he froze during the day and he died. And this is another atrocity I know of. And this is about all of the direct atrocities, you know. But all of us were tortured continually by the hunger, by the fear, and by the hard labor.

Our food. When we got up everybody got what was called a coffee, a cup of coffee. We had a kind of tin can, one of those tin can kind of things, every prisoner got one. And a cup of brown warm water - at least it was warm and it was good because of that. That was in the morning given to us and I don't believe there was anything else with it.

At noon, at the workplace, there was this soup given. Again, warm water with some vegetable in it. I don't know what was the vegetable, some green leafy something, maybe spinach kind of thing or something. Not much, mostly warm water. They called it soup. And that was our lunch.

At dinnertime after coming back from work again there was food given to us, another soup, and this time maybe if you were lucky they had maybe a couple of small pieces of potatoes in it. You also got at this time a piece of bread, which was something like - let's say something ^{similar} like a slice of bread, maybe a slice and a half, I don't remember it anymore. And I don't recall any other foodstuff that we have gotten there on a daily basis.

On Sundays the soup was a little thicker, there were more pieces of vegetable and maybe a couple of more pieces of potato swimming in it. And once on ~~s~~undays some of the lucky ones even got a small piece of some kind of meat in it. I don't know what kind. Most of us didn't, but some people did. Maybe there was a little bit - you know, I don't want to be too extreme in it. I say not, but maybe we got a little piece of meat in it.

And they also gave you at this time - there was what amounted to a little pat of margarine, something like a little thin pat that you might see in a restaurant. And you also get a little pat like what they call artificial sugar, made of potatoes, some artificial sweetener kind of thing made from potatoes. It looked like margarine, but it was very sweet.

Q. HOW LONG DID THIS GO ON? HOW LONG WERE YOU AT THIS CAMP?

A. I was at this camp until the end of the time, until the end of April.

And just let me say this, that we went there, must have been early in December of something like that.

When we got to this camp, in our transport was about a hundred prisoners. And by the end of April, eight of us were alive out of the hundred in this camp. The rest either died there, or as they ship them - about every two weeks or so a transport arrived, a replacement, from Dachau, brought in new prisoners and they took back those real sick from the barrack. They were very sick, unable to work, and they didn't die yet, they took them back to Dachau. And I don't know, they either perish there or maybe they recovered, I don't know. But Dachau was at that time this kind of thing, distribute the prisoners and took care to bring the real sick ones that were unable to work. As I say, about eight of us were alive out of the hundred when we finally left Mitergrad in the end of April when the allied Armies were drawing near and the Germans evacuated us toward the Alps.

Well, let's see, I don't think - oh, just another episode, it's kind of difficult to really give you a flavor of the despair and the pain that the people, you know, were constantly suffering from at this place. It became kind of numb. You couldn't think. There was really a kind of instinctive hope that you somehow want to get out of this alive, but we had no idea how, or when.

And on Sundays when we got this margarine, this sweet margarine and the regular margarine, at least in our barrack, and the others did too, we had a little stove in the front of the barrack, which didn't really keep us warm but it was still better than nothing, and we took our cans, put some water in it, and put the bread into the water, and the margarine and the sweet stuff, and we cooked that thing, and it became a

little some kind of pasty stuff. You can imagine, it was sweet-tasting and some pasty. And I can remember we were always wondering, this is so delicious, how come that our mother at home never made this kind of thing, this is such a fantastic food.

Food, naturally, and eating, were always on our minds, but otherwise no strength and no ambition to even try to escape. At our place, at least. I don't recall any organized resistance or something of that sort. A few people escaped, and a few were caught, brought back - what happened to them I don't know.

Oh, just another thing. We were really so desperate for food. It was kind of early springtime, may have been March, April, something. I remember we were working on the top of a little hill in some wooded area and the German guards were a little bit lax and a few of us managed to sneak away down the side of the hill into a field of a farmer. And somebody found this potato in the ground, the farmer plant potato. You know, it was such a nice thing to find a potato. We were so hungry we didn't know what we were doing. And we picked up some few potatoes. A few. Maybe there were three or four of us in this group. A few potatoes from the ground. And our luck - the farmer comes up, you know, had been out, pulled up, was with his son, and they caught us, they saw us. And they ran over to the Germans and made a big issue out of it that these dirty Jews they dig up the thing and what crime it is to dig up the food that supposed to grow and bring more. How did these Jews - you know, they didn't know how hungry we were. To us, really, that

wasn't an important consideration at that point. Anyway, we thought this was going to be the end of us, we were going to be shot. But I believe because our guards were afraid probably that if this goes back to the camp and the commandant finds out that these guys weren't watching us close enough so that we could get down, then they going to be in more trouble than as if it never happened, and it was forgotten, nothing happened. But for a while all day long we felt that we were not going to survive the next day, because, you know, we knew - this was long after the other guy that stole the lightbulb - he was killed, and we knew this was a bigger crime than he committed - and he was killed, so that surely we won't survive the following day. We were lucky the guards did not report it, I think they were afraid that they were going to be in hot water if they do it. So that is another little incident that made us feel really bad and fear for our lives for all day long.

Toward the end of April then, we were moved out of the camp, we knew that the war --. Once we were not bombed but buzzed by American planes, the factory where we were working. I don't know what the name of those planes were but they were these double-bodied kind of, two fuselage kind of things. And there were some Americans, and they were buzzing us. The Germans herded us and other prisoners in our striped suits out in the open when the planes appeared, probably with the idea that the Americans won't shoot after they know that there are some prisoners down below. That may be true, maybe not. Nevertheless, they were buzzing us that day.

And it was known the war was going very badly and

the Allied Armies are nearby and the Germans got us and marched us back to Nueldorf. We marched, I believe - yes, there was a long march, and there we were put into trains in Nueldorf, and that was the end of April and they were taking us back - we knew we were going toward Munich. And that was a big train, there were lots of prisoners. *and we were locked in.*

Then at one point the train stops and they open the door and they let us out. And we see that all of the guards, the German guards that were on the train, are going away. And, you know, there were maybe five thousand prisoners *(about)* or something thereabouts - I don't know, many. And there were rumors start spreading that the Americans are very close and the Germans, the Bavarian Government - and we thought there was such a thing as a Bavarian Government - tried to make some separate peace treaty or something like that, and the guards thought the war was over, we were told, and the guards were going and we were left there alone. And in perfect confusion and tumult around the train, all the prisoners got out of the cars, and some of them broke open - there was one car had some provisions in it, some food, and I saw one guy with a bread under his arm walking away somewhere, and another guy as I recall carried a piece of cheese.

Well, to us - I got together with a couple of my friends, we could hardly walk ^{by} at this time, there was a little house, a warehouse, near the railroad station, and they broke in there, somebody broke the door open. We went in there and we saw some piles of dried cabbage, and I stuffed my pockets with dried cabbage and ate some of it. And we started with this

group marching away. And one guy had a piece of bread, one of us, I don't know where he got it from. As we were marching you could see on the horizon thousands of ~~people~~^{prisoners} that were fanning out in all directions from the railroad station.

We were going for a while and then we start hearing shots. We turned around and we saw a German soldier, sort of in a big car getting around the thing - later we found out there was an Air Force, German Air Force, grouping in a nearby station, stationed nearby, and they heard about this thing, and they came down with a railroad car and rounded up the German guards and they let them know the whole thing is off, get the prisoners back ^{into} on the train. So there was another short-lived freedom. Once it happened before in Hungary on our way to Germany. And here it was again. For a couple of hours we thought that really we survived it and the war was over.

And our group, we found ourselves on the bank over some kind of water hole, a little lake like thing, water on the bottom, a kind of steep bank, and a little house, a wooden house down there near the water, and Jim says people let's go down there and hide. Maybe I think there were four of us, I believe. And we were hiding in there, and from the cracks in the little house we saw prisoners herded back by German guards back toward the train. And we thought well, if we stay here for a while they will go away, maybe we can hide somewhere in the countryside. And I didn't know how - we had a piece of bread, I had some cabbage, another guy had some food, ~~so~~ we had some food. ^{with}

And one of the guys, he says he is thirsty, he wants to go and he has to get some water. Don't go out. No,

he's thirsty, he's going to crawl just quietly to the water and drink some water. And he did. And some German guy and his buddy were walking up on the rim of this hole, and ~~they~~^{he} saw it and he sent down his buddy. And they found us, naturally, and they herded us back to the train.

And those Air Force, traveling on a flatcar, they were shooting and big yelling and herding everybody back onto the train. We thought that we're not going to survive this try at escaping, but we did. They locked us back in and the train started rolling, and to Munich, that was evening, and the next morning out of Munich railroad station.

We were told, there was rumors spreading around, they were going to take us to the Alps and shoot all the prisoners. And I'm sure that was the German's intention, not to allow us to get liberated.

But I understand, and this is again just through the grapevine, that some of the guys that were, you know, kind of leaders, ~~kapos~~ and this kind, they had some contact with the German guards and allegedly they told them that - we every day knew that the American army is nearby - and told them to delay the train, to let the army catch up with us and they will see to it that they will get some special treatment. And something like that must have happened, because there was no reason why the train was standing in the railroad station of a small town south of Munich. They were standing one morning, the train was, and they open the doors and we could get out.

Well, that time I was very sick. I managed to catch this typhus there in that train. I managed to get away

without it all throughout these months while I was in the camps, the last few days in the train I apparently caught it, or somewhere. I was half dead, I could barely move, but I got out of the train, and the train was standing.

And indeed around noontime we saw the American tanks pull up. And it was really something fantastic. I never thought we would survive and I would ever see such a thing happen. The American Army, they pulled up, and the American tanks arrived, and they gave us candy, chocolate, more or less something like that. It was a day that I won't be able to forget. Naturally, I don't think I want to. Unfortunately, I was so sick I really couldn't appreciate the full significance of it.

I recall one thing, we were in the town, the railroad station was next to a town, we went somehow into this town. We were standing on a corner, an American tank was there and the soldiers were giving us candy and whatnot. ^{and} A German woman walked up to our group and she turned her lapel and it shows a Communist hammer and cycle thing. And she explained to us she is really not a Nazi, she is German but she is really a Communist and she is our friend. And she says I know where some rich German people live here in this town and they have all kinds of things and I take you there and you can take anything from them, and she says, talk to the American soldiers. And somehow we explain - somebody, I don't know how, to the American soldiers, and these two soldiers came with us and the woman was leading us through the town somewhere to a really old house.

And we are knocking on the window, and no answer.

And somebody notes that down in the basement some people were moving. So finally they opened the door. And they were scared to death, naturally. And we were told you go through the house, you can take anything you like. That was the first day, it was the afternoon of that first day. Anyhow, we go through the home and I don't know what to take. As I say I was half delirious, I didn't know what. But I remember I was walking out with a jar of pickles. That was the thing that I thought was a fantastic find, and I walked out with that.

And then they took us out to some big house, a collection center near that town, and the next day somehow I got back into town, I don't remember how. And it was snowing. I fell down in the street, I couldn't move. But I remember some nurse came, they found me and took me to some kind of makeshift hospital. From there over to Falafinga, or hospital, a house that was made into a hospital, and I was there all summer long recuperating from this typhus - anyway, I don't know whether it was typhus or typhoid fever, the one that is transmitted by lice is the one, and there was no antidote or no medication for it, but I managed to survive. I was lucky, apparently I had enough strength left to survive this disease.

And by that time naturally the war was over and everything was all right. When I got out of this hospital I got into a big displaced person camp set up in (Faldafink,) south of Munich - I don't know how many miles, maybe twenty, thirty miles south of Munich - that was set up by the American Army and became a big displaced person camp where liberated prisoners were brought in from the area.

And there we heard some of the horror stories from other guys that survived some other train march where the Germans took this trainload of prisoners and when the American Army came, was too close by, they herded them and machinegunned the whole group. And this guy that I talked to, he escaped because he laid down and they took him for dead. And the guy that told me the story, all his comrades were machinegunned. And probably this would have been our fate also if ^{my luck} the army hadn't caught up with us in time.

Q. DID YOU THINK OF GOING BACK TO YOUR HOME?

A. Hungary? Well, no. Well, I find myself in this - after I got out of this hospital it was toward the fall, by that time I was strong enough to leave the hospital and get placed into the camp. By that time, you know, things settled down a little bit, so we knew that Eastern Europe was occupied by the Russians. After what I had gone through I was absolutely sure that none of my family survived, I didn't think how they could have survived. It was a miracle that I survived this relatively-short incarceration. And I thought that my family definitely would not be there.

I hated the Hungarians because they were more anti-Semitic perhaps than the Germans. While we were in Hungary, the march from Hungary to Austria or Germany, if we had seen the least support from the civilian population we would have tried to escape. We were sure that the first Hungarian that see us is going to turn us in. So I didn't have any soft feelings for the Hungarian gentile population in general, the rural population at least. I don't want to generalize but the

average rural Hungarian peasant was anti-semitic, like the Polish peasant.

And definitely I did not want to go back into the Russian sphere, so I decided I'd just stay in Germany and try to get to West, preferably the United States but England or Australia or Canada wherever I can get out away from the Russian area.

And I didn't even - there were, during the fall and during the next year or so, lots of people ^{just} traveling back. Some young people managed to go back to Hungary and come back, they snuck through borders. And I was afraid that I'd get stuck there, and I didn't - later on, probably around the next, following year, I heard from my sister - two of my sisters and my brother got back to Hungary to that same city where my parents lived before the war, which was on the Rumanian border but was kind of Hungary at that time, now it became part of Rumania so they find themselves in Rumania. And my sister saw my name on a list of surviving prisoners somewhere in Hungary that by the (HIAS) the Jewish organization published in various places lists of survivors, and they saw my name on it and they wrote a letter and I got the letter.

But by that time it was kind of clear cut it was a big division between East and West, Russian, and I didn't want to go back because I was afraid I get stuck there, so I never went back during this time. I went back much later! ^{in '72} But when school started up, I moved to Munich and I went back to school.

Q. HOW DID YOU FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PARENTS?

A. Well, I knew that the Hungarian Jews, from all over Hungary, with the exception of Budapest, were put into ghettos in the summer of 1944 and transported to Auchwitz and all old people were killed.

And my parents - well, my father was born in 1875 so he was 70 years old in 1945, my mother was ten years younger. And I was sure that since all the Jews from (Oradia,) which is today (Oradia,) at that time it was (Rosewaldine,) the German name of that town, of that provincial town, all the Jews were taken to Auschwitz, and this was confirmed by my sister and brother when they mentioned that's what happened to them. My parents were killed in Auschwitz. They went to - I got now from Israel, they published a book in the 70's I believe, one of these memorial books for the various cities, you have seen maybe some of those books, the European communities, some of the survivors published a memorial book that tried to perpetuate some of the history of the Jewish community in that particular city. So there is one from (Oradia,) where my parents lived, and it tells you their name is in it as the people, you know, that got lost in Auschwitz, killed in Auschwitz, and it tells us I think in June but at a time that area was evacuated ^{to Archwitz} ~~was~~ when my parents left.

And this is about it. And I came to this country in 1949 and have lived happily ever since. And, really, until the Holocaust problems became more of a matter of public discussion I tended not to think about it. You know, life here, it's such that you can sort of forget about it easy. So it really wasn't very much in my mind. My wife claims that - and I know,

I do remember - that I had some nightmares sometimes - not lately. I used to have some dreams of trying to escape from the Germans. My wife claims ^{with that} there were several occasions when I was crying out in my dream, and I'm sure ^{it did} ~~that~~ happened.

But apart from that, I did not consciously occupy my mind with that thing for many years, and it's - now it's so far back, you know, in the fog, the mist, of the past that it's really - it's really - it's too remote to be really that painful personally.

It's more painful when I read some of these letters in the newspapers and the historical ^{al} review society guys that, you know, try to deny it. This kind of thing bothers me more than the actual pain of my personal experience. That is pretty far back in the past.

My kids, you know, were never - we never made a big issue out of it at home. Never was hiding it. I talked to them as they had gone to school and talked to them at their school, in the classroom. ^{and I like to have it there} But at home it was never a big subject of discussion. And they did not show much interest in it, you know, try to do anything about it or be part of the second generation thing, it is to them kind of strange and remote thing and they don't seem to be that much concerned with it, at least outwardly.

Well, I don't - well, I can't stand - I think that is a long enough discussion on this thing.

Q. THANK YOU, VERY MUCH.

A. You are welcome.