

ORIGINAL

SIGMUND MERMALSTEIN

Tape No. 20

Transcribed by: Janice M. Knetzger CSR#4434

Q. I'd like to remind you that if at any point you want me to turn off the mike, we can do that very easily and speak off the record. And if at any time you want to stop if it's too painful to talk about it, we can do that too.

Tell me your name, please.

A. My name is Sigmund Mermalstein.

Q. And, where were you born?

A. I am born in Alenon (phon.), Czechoslovakia.

Q. What year?

A. 19 hundred 13.

Q. 1915?

A. 13.

Q. 1913. And, in what year were you deported?

A. I was deported in 1944 in May I arrived at Auschwitz.

Q. At Auschwitz?

A. Yes.

Q. And, what happened to you then?

A. Auschwitz I been for a week and they took me to Warsaw in a concentration camp in a place where the ghetto used to be before the uprising. I been there until July. In July, the Russian Army approached in about 25 kilometers from Warsaw so first they tried us -- took us to another camp and they wanted to kill us and then they took us back and later on we went -- we walked about 100 kilometers and very hard. They didn't give us to eat anything. Two people went -- and there was a river -- they went to drink water because it was very hot. People were thirsty and

they shoot them. They didn't kill but they took them and they pushed them into the water and then they expired.

Q. They drowned them in other words?

A. They drowned. The water was shallow water, not deep and they keep them there under the water and they die.

Q. And, you saw this happen many times?

A. If I have to tell a time, yeah. On the way then they took us and we stayed in a town. It was named Kootnan (phon.). That we were for three days and there they went and they put us in trains and they tell us they transporting us to Dachau. On the way, we been there in cattle compartments where they used to transport cattle. In the middle was the two doors. On the two doors there had been SS storm troopers and that place was empty. On one side it been 45 people. On the other side, people couldn't sit down, just stand. If somebody wanted to sit down or something, they beat them. And once they took one person, you know, because he made a little hole in the compartment for air and they beat him and they beat him so much and then they let him go but he was already sick and he got fever and then he talk with the fever and they went and they shoot him.

Q. They shot him?

A. They shot him. He had been laying near me. In the morning when I got up, I had blood from him.

Q. His blood was on your leg?

A. On my thigh. And, then another one --

Q. This was still on the train?

A. Yes, on the train. And another one, a young man -- He, you know, was so thirsty, he went out of his mind. They took him out from the train and told him to kneel and they shoot him. They didn't give us water even so thirsty that the people drink the urine from themselves. Then we come to Dachau.

Q. This was the transport to Dachau? Is that right?

A. Yeah. From Warsaw to Dachau. Then, we come to Dachau. They feel as if they didn't want to give us any water. They felt that we will get sick of typhus and then when inmates from Czechoslovakia from friends, you know, they give us through the windows, they give us water to drink.

Q. Prisoners there already?

A. Yeah. Prisoners. They been in Dachau. In Dachau, we been for a week. In Dachau, they transport us to a place they called Kofering.

Q. Can you spell that?

A. Yes. K-o-f-e-r-i-n-g. In Kofering, I been there for two weeks and we been working very hard there. They didn't give us to eat and from there they took me, a few of us to -- maybe about 1,000. I don't know how many. And another camp it was Camp No. -- any way two different. Kofering was Camp No. 4 because they had more camps that they belong to Dachau. In Camp 2, I been there for -- until the end of November. We been going to work and we been there. Some had shoes. I didn't have shoes. They let me stay and I worked inside for a while.

Q. What kind of work did you do?

A. We used to work by hour. You know building under the ground factories. We used to carry cement and all the kinds of hard work.

Q. So, you carried cement --

A. 50 gallons of cement, unload cement and mixing cement. It was worse to mix cement. I was once there but the rest I was working there. You know, the cement used to stick to the face and those people didn't care less to work with the cement because they used to inhale the cement.

Q. And, you didn't do that?

A. Once I fell but coming, just once. But I worked other hard things. We had -- We been digging with shovels and digging there around -- Sometimes we be carrying -- we be making for the train. Those heavy items we been carrying all kinds of things. Very hard work.

Q. So, this was Dachau? Right?

A. This was in Dachau. This was in Kofering. Then in those camps. Then I went -- People went sick, they would take them away.

Q. Where did they take them?

A. They took us back to Kofering, that camp. But we didn't know that -- knew that they taking us there. We thought they taking us to exterminate. We were lucky because around there at that time they stopped the exterminating. You know in November, they stopped --

Q. In November of 1944?

A. '44. There they didn't cremate. They just been digging mass graves and burying the people. So, they took us there and we been there with sick people there in that camp. So, there was filth and an epidemic and a lot of people, they get -- I can't explain it.

Q. Dysentery?

A. Dysentery. Yeah, yeah. You know, dysentery. They die of dysentery.

Q. They died of dysentery?

A. A whole barrack one time in there died burying about 50 people. Maybe 46 of them died. It was not one place, it was in all over a lot of people died. Some areas lasted too.

Q. Why do you think you lived?

A. You know I was used to. You know, I had to work at home. I'm a baker. I used to work very hard.

Q. A baker?

A. Yeah.

Q. In Czechoslovakia?

A. In Czechoslovakia. So, for me it wasn't -- I didn't take it so hard, you know. People who were not used to hard work, they will die like fleas or flies.

Q. So, you were a strong young man, 32 when you were deported?

A. I was 31 when they deport me. Not even 30 yet. And after this, there was another epidemic. Typhus. Spot typhus.

Q. What?

A. Spot typhus.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And that spot typhus I got sick. It got me too.

Q. Um-hum.

A. I was for about 14 days so sick and I come out I didn't know even what for a date. Then, after that I live far away.

Somewhere, I recuperated. They took me to another camp and I can't remember. No. 1 was, another camp. I been there --

Q. Which was called --

A. This was also in the Dachau area, you know. This was just an extension, you know, from Dachau. And then I been about three week and then they took me back to Kofering in that camp. And, then from there once they come and they took us back to that camp and American they were very near, you know. They used to make filings and before the airplanes come. By that time, filings -- the airplanes were not again.

They took us back in that camp back in that No. 1. Alfa barrack, Alfa camp went there. The other was by the station waiting for the train. The next morning come American fliers.

Q. This was January?

A. This was already in April.

Q. This is April of '45?

A. April of '45 it was. And they start to shoot on three of us carrying soldiers. The Army did, the German Army. And they been hiding us and a lot of people being killed or they thought that this is -- They didn't know what -- A lot of people they didn't kill so they went to --

Q. Wait a minute. Back up a second, please. Who? The Americans were coming. They started bombing?

A. They started, yeah. You know shooting the airplanes, yeah.

Q. The camp itself?

A. They were already also the Russian, you know, on the way to go to -- in the train -- in the train depot. They thought that this was maybe the Army or something rather than being killed by the Americans. So, they took me and a few of us to bury. And they knew they couldn't give an order to come back in the camp. They come and get us and we wouldn't dare to move further. From there they took us in a train again and the next morning -- all night long we been going until next morning again -- they been hiding -- the German Army, you know -- by train that they shouldn't get shoot so they start shooting again at them and they shoot at our people were killed too at that time. And then being there all day long and from there they took us to Dachau and Dachau we come I think the 28th of April and the 29th the American come and they freed us.

Q. The 29th of April?

A. Of April.

Q. And, tell me what you remember about that day?

A. We been -- Everybody real happy about it and but, you know, a lot of them didn't live long. They been so weak, you know, a lot of them. Already (??) You used to eat because they were very hungry and start to eat and they get dysentery and a lot of other things happen or they die. It was terrible at that time.



Then, about the 23rd of May then the Americans took us to Czechoslovakia.

Q. Who took you to Czechoslovakia?

A. The Americans. With trucks they come and the people from Czechoslovakia they went with us in trucks to Czechoslovakia.

Q. So, after the liberation you were still in Dachau for about a month?

A. For three weeks.

Q. For three weeks.

A. And they took us from -- they let us out in Lubin (phon.) in Czechoslovakia. From there we went where ever. I went back home but didn't find nobody because the place where I was born the Russian occupied. It's now Russian sector. Back to Czechoslovakia and Czechoslovakia I went until 1950 and when the communist regime started that's when I escaped to Germany. From Germany, I come here in 1951.

Q. Now, before you tell me what happened after the war, I'd like to ask you a few more questions.

A. Yes.

Q. Were you married?

A. I been married. I lost a wife and a child.

Q. So, you were seperated immediately?

A. They separate and we been deported together and they separated by us by the train. And the women and the children, they were gased. I didn't -- We didn't know that but we found out when we were there. They were taking old people, sick people

and women and children and so on. I left a three year old boy. I loved him very much.

Q. At Auschwitz?

A. In Auschwitz, yeah. In Dachau. I lost -- We been four brothers. So, I lost two brothers and three sisters and one brother he went in a labor camp, in a Hungarian labor camp, on the front. So, he survived. A year ago, he died.

Q. Did he come to this country?

A. No, he went in Russia 'til 1973 then he come to Israel and in Israel he died.

Q. And your parents and extended family?

A. My parents. My family didn't live. They died before.

Q. So, you and your brother were the sole survivors.

A. I and my brother been the sole survivor from seven. All of them they married and all of them had children. My aunt, a younger sister, she had a child. She went away and she didn't come back. And then I have one sister who had four children and a brother had four children and I had one sister that had five children and another brother had about four. I don't even remember. They went away about three in a family to a concentration camp. They all died.

Q. So, you came to this country in 1950.

A. I come in December 1951 to this country. And here I -- I been first of all in Lincoln(?) for 10 years. I grew (?) and then I work again in my profession.

Q. Baker?

A. As a baker. I work for the Giant Food Inc.

Q. For the --

A. Giant Food Inc. And now I'm retired.

Q. And did you live in Maryland all this time.

A. I live in Maryland for 17 years. I been 15 years in (?) in the city here in the district.

Q. Have you talked about this much before?

A. Not much. I will tell you -- You come here and you started to tell the people our story. No hair. There's no use to talk. Then, I don't want to remind myself of the whole thing that happened. The fact, you know, to talk about it.

Q. Did you remarry when you came to this country?

A. Yeah. I remarried. I have a wife.

Q. And, did you have children?

A. No.

Q. Was your wife a survivor also?

A. My wife is a survivor but she went to Palestine. She was in the war in Palestine. Then, she come here in 1952 to have one child. Her husband died. I remember that.

Q. And, she's Czechoslovakian?

A. She's from Czechoslovakia. That's the whole story but as you know there are many versions of this story. You could write a book about it. But enough killing to put it.