

1 INTERVIEW WITH: Meyer Helshkop

2 TRANSCRIBER: Colleen O'Brien Scopel

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4 THE INTERVIEWER: What you are doing now?

5 MR. HELSHKOP: Well, I was born in Poland
6 in the city of Melk. I was born in 1913. Later,
7 after the first world war, my parents moved away to
8 the city of Sachsen, and I lived till the end of the
9 war -- till the war broke out.

10 In 1939 when the war broke out, we were --
11 our house was bombarized the second day of the war.
12 So I run in -- we run into the woods, the whole
13 family. We were a big family. We were in the woods
14 till -- from Tuesday afternoon until Thursday
15 morning -- till Thursday afternoon.

16 Thursday afternoon we had no food. We had
17 from -- you know, we came into the city to just -- the
18 city was empty, we grabbed -- I went and there was
19 only tomatoes, I bought two pails of tomatoes and I
20 brought them out to the woods and we ate tomatoes.
21 But we said there is no use being there, so we picked
22 ourselves up, we went back to the home.

23 The home was bombarized, so we -- I had an
24 older sister, she lived further down in the Blacks, so
25 we went in and we stayed with her there until we find

1 an apartment a couple days -- a couple weeks later.

2 The Germans came in Thursday night about
3 8:00 o'clock. Every man was in hiding. I was in
4 hiding. I said to myself, "What's the use of hiding?
5 I have to come out sooner or later."

6 Friday morning I picked myself up, I
7 says, "I'll go out in the city, in the streets and see
8 what's going on. I came out in the streets, German
9 soldiers walking around. I wore my cap on my head, so
10 they kicked me in my behind, you should excuse me, I
11 should take my hat off for them, you know, and bow.

12 So I says, "I'll do that." And this was
13 going on. About 9:00 o'clock, I passed by the street,
14 a man runs out from the haul, from a hallway there.
15 He says "Mike, you have to help me."

16 "What is it?"

17 He says, "The Germans are going to shoot
18 me if I don't -- you know what happened, when they
19 walk, they catches the prisoners, the Polish soldiers,
20 they walk with them through the streets and march them
21 back towards the German boarder. As they pass by, one
22 soldier jumped out from the line, he run into a Jewish
23 home and a Jewish man gave him clothes to change.

24 There was a Chris -- a Christian stood
25 there and he saw it, and he pointed to the German and

1 he says -- a soldier run away, they saw, because they
2 march them five in the (inaudible).

3 As he walked in there, he found them in
4 the house, so he remembered. The next day he came
5 back and he took them up to the -- we had 2nd Infantry
6 army in my city standing and they took them up there
7 to the army, they want to kill him.

8 He had to make him -- dig his own grave,
9 and they want to kill him, and he says -- he says to
10 the captain from the Germans, he says, "What are you
11 going to have if you kill me? What kind of pleasure
12 will you have? I'll give you something for my life.
13 I will buy myself out."

14 He says, "Yeah, you give me ten geese, a
15 thousand eggs, 50 bottles of whiskey and a thousand
16 cigarettes, and 50 pounds of butter, I'll let you go."

17 He says, "I'll make a deal."

18 So he ordered two soldiers to walk him
19 through the streets, you know, and maybe he'll catch
20 somebody, he will put it together, so he says to me,
21 "You have to help me."

22 He says, "Geese, I have at the house, I
23 will give him the geese, but the butter, eggs
24 cigarettes, whiskey, where are you going to get it,"
25 he says.

1 it to you," you know. She gave me -- I put together
2 the whole kibbutz. As I put everything together, they
3 want to take me, I should walk with the thing, carry
4 up to the army. I says, "Oh, no, this, not. I got it
5 together for you, now let the soldiers help to you
6 carry the rest."

7 So finally, they did help him, and he
8 walked him up there and they let him go free.

9 This was the first -- this was the second
10 day -- actually, the first day when they came in.
11 They came in Thursday night, this was Friday morning,
12 and this was going on and the country got a little bit
13 peaceful, because we were in the center of the
14 country, living.

15 It was a little bit peaceful, people could
16 open up the businesses, you know, as usual, it was
17 going on, but under pressure, you know.

18 Till finally, 1941, got all the time got
19 tougher and tougher, you know, they tightened the rope
20 a little bit tighter and tighter until 1942. 1942,
21 September, the other cities were already evacuated to
22 the crematoriums, Treblinka, Auschwitz, you know, most
23 of the -- from the neighborhood there, the cities,
24 went to Treblinka.

25 We paid off the Germans and they had

1 worked -- they built a road they called a
2 builder-to-Aus-sen, to Russia. We were left 250
3 people working on the road, making that road. I was
4 left there with a brother of mine, a younger
5 brother -- he is now in Canada -- we were there
6 till -- and there were a thousand people -- as the
7 reclamation was going on, a thousand Jews run into the
8 woods in hiding from my city because we were a
9 kilometer and a half from the woods.

10 They were running into hiding, and they
11 were there, and we went to the road working, so we cut
12 the road, you know, the woods, and we make the road,
13 so every morning we brought out bread for them, and
14 milk and coffee, everything, you know.

15 So the Germans find out that we're
16 supporting the people in the woods, so they went and
17 they sent us away to another camp that was a 105
18 kilometers from my city.

19 It was Ne-o-loch. They called it
20 Skarzysko. Over there was a death camp, just -- there
21 wasn't a day they didn't kill 25 people, 18 people, 16
22 people. I worked in transport, really hard work, but
23 we -- somehow, we managed. But I'm not going to tell
24 you the whole life story.

25 Now, I am interrupting this and I am going

1 to tell you the last minutes. And then we dug
2 trenches and in Ne-o-loch -- in another city they
3 called -- we dug trenches -- I forgot the name --
4 against tanks and after they heard the Russians were
5 coming they took us away to Germany, to Buchenwald.
6 We were in Buchenwald to almost the last minutes.

7 The Americans were already around, all
8 around Buchenwald, the camp. They ordered one day,
9 March the 27th, Friday night, all the Jews out. We
10 went out and they isolate us into a separate building
11 there, all the Jews.

12 Saturday morning they took us out and
13 they (inaudible), you know, which was, you know, they
14 counted us every day there. They took us out there,
15 they says, "Who wants to go by train and who wants to
16 march?"

17 With me were about 250 Jews from my home
18 town. I was the only one came out alive from that
19 march. So we signed up to go marching.

20 The rest of us were half and half divided,
21 actually. There were a lot of sick people, you know,
22 they went to go by train. So what happened, the
23 people going by train, they took them into a trench
24 and with machine guns and hand grenades they killed
25 all of them.

1 Us, we marched, we were about 7000 Jews,
2 marching for seven weeks.

3 THE INTERVIEWER: Did you have any idea
4 that if you chose the train, what would happen to you?

5 MR. HELSHKOP: Yes, we didn't want to take
6 too easy because we didn't trust them. Right from the
7 beginning, we know what's going on more or less.

8 So, we start marching, they took us about
9 7000 Jews out from Buchenwald -- from Buchenwald to
10 the camp there was -- the roads were filled with the
11 soldiers already, so they took us through the field,
12 they sneaked out from Buchenwald through the fields
13 and we marched for seven weeks from March 28th till
14 May the 8th, day and night, day and night, and we were
15 no bread, sometimes they stop off at the farmer and
16 they ordered they should boil a couple potatoes for us
17 and they gave us two, three potatoes to a person.

18 Water, we didn't have. We didn't have
19 anything to drink, so we drank water -- sometimes we
20 wet our lips with the puddles from the rain on our
21 lips and that's it.

22 But luckily, I don't know, if people
23 believe in God, it was really God's thing.

24 One night they took us into a barn to stay
25 overnight, and we came into that barn about 8:00

1 o'clock at night. We stood there for a couple hours,
2 and all of a sudden, chased us out, the Americans were
3 coming, and we start marching again.

4 Well, what happened, as I walked into the
5 barn, I was looking for grain, wheat or rice,
6 anything, oats, anything, you know, of wheat.
7 Finally, I found oats, so I loaded up all my pockets
8 with oats, and I was marching, I ate, spit out the
9 shell, took the kernel in my mouth, and spit out the
10 shell, and somehow -- then a little bit further we
11 marched. We were marching, I would say, a group at
12 that time, we were a group as long as this hall is.
13 But from the beginning --

14 THE INTERVIEWER: That's about the length
15 of a football field or more. About two football
16 fields.

17 MR. HELSHKOP: From the beginning, we
18 start marching, I couldn't see from one end to the
19 other. It was that long, you know. But every couple
20 blocks we marched, they cut off the last line, cut
21 off -- pushed them off the road and shot them with
22 machine guns.

23 The SS were marching with us. In the
24 front were a couple wagons with horses, they
25 (inaudible) from the Germans and SS were there, and a

1 couple more Germans and then the sides were -- in this
2 line was one German with a machine gun and this line
3 was a German, and actually they were -- most of them
4 were Hungarian SS on the sides, but in the front was a
5 German SS, and in the back were Germans and dogs, dogs
6 all around with us.

7 To run away, it was impossible. You could
8 never run away, because we marched through the Black
9 Woods in Germany and it was impossible to run away
10 because they make us hold hands, hands in hands and in
11 your group if they saw one is missing, they would have
12 killed all of us, the rest of us, you know, in the
13 line, so we had to see that nobody is running away
14 because we were afraid, because we know it.

15 As we were marching, all of a sudden, I
16 was in the middle because I didn't want to be in the
17 back because I saw the back, every couple minutes,
18 every couple blocks they cut off a group and killed
19 them. So everybody was running towards the front,
20 toward the front, to be in the front, so I was
21 marching in the middle, into the line.

22 They had ten wagons, ten people pushing
23 the suitcases they had with the bags, you know, had on
24 the wagons and we pushed, ten people at each wagon, so
25 as they cut off -- killed all the people out, there

1 wasn't too many people pushing the wagons, so towards
2 the end they picked me, I should pull the wagon, also,
3 you know, and this, somehow, I came out alive.

4 We were marching through three states,
5 Tu-u-bek, O-ber-bein, Nei-ter-bire, and we were freed
6 near the Austrian boarder. They call the little town,
7 Lau-fen.

8 They marched us into a barrack, it was a
9 women prison there for women, so they put the women
10 together into another barrack and they left us in
11 there.

12 This was actually a farm someplace but
13 they make a women prison out of it. They were German
14 women that they killed their children and caught them.
15 They were not crazy, they were just mean, mean, you
16 know, life sentences.

17 They also had from Czechoslovakia, people
18 from Austria which were against the government, so
19 they put them there. We were there for a couple
20 weeks.

21 We marched seven weeks till the mayor --
22 as they marched us into the camp, to that barrack,
23 they put dynamite around and they wanted to explode
24 the whole barrack. But we were a left 161 people left
25 alive.

1 From the 161, one went swimming, he
2 drowned and something -- the rest of them, they were
3 so swollen they took them to the hospital, we never
4 saw them back because I wasn't there till the end.

5 Later on -- well, I will tell you later
6 the story. So we were in that camp. So the mayor
7 came, a little man about four and a half feet tall, he
8 came into these barracks and said to the SS to let us
9 go because he had an order to take us over. They took
10 us over and they brought in right away at night --
11 this was about 8:00 o'clock at night medic -- they
12 came in with pots, with hot water and washed our feet
13 because we couldn't move. Our feet were swollen like
14 this, already, from undernourishing, so they came in,
15 they brought nurses in, they kept us there.

16 About 12:00 o'clock at night, all of a
17 sudden a bunch of men come in with rifles and we
18 thought, "That's the end, they are going to take us
19 out and kill us."

20 In the meantime they start talking to us
21 in German, Jewish, Polish, English, you know, and we
22 didn't know who they are. So finally we recognize
23 them. There was a prison they called
24 In-ter-ne-ons-lag-en, this is what the Germans used
25 the word. This was American citizens that were born

1 in Poland and when they showed who they are, so they
2 took them away there and they kept them in a prison
3 there and they received Red Cross packages from the
4 United States and they lived, you know, in a prison,
5 but not bad, but when they heard there were prisoners
6 here in that place, they broke the doors open because
7 they know already the Americans were coming, they were
8 around all over.

9 So they broke the doors open, they run
10 into the ammunition pile, they grabbed rifles, with
11 machine guns and came out to that camp and they stood
12 with us there, they brought us out packages, Red Cross
13 packages which they didn't have enough so they divide
14 two to one package.

15 A few of us died to start eating the
16 chocolate and other things, because I didn't touch any
17 of the food, you know, couldn't eat, we only drink
18 liquid. They gave us like grits, you know, very
19 liquidy, you know, you could drink it, and this is
20 what we ate for a couple days.

21 And the next morning about 10:00 o'clock
22 the Americans came into this place. They ordered the
23 mayor to send barbers in, and they cleaned us up,
24 everybody was shaved and -- you know, we were so
25 filthy and dirty, I cannot describe to you the dirt we

1 had on us. You have heard of lice, maybe. We were
2 full with it. So later they dumped us into a kettle,
3 a big kettle with disinfection and we jumped into
4 that, we dived in it, and they cleaned us up.

5 We walked around about four weeks and the
6 mayor gave us hospital beds -- shirts, dresses, we
7 walked around like this for over four weeks till we
8 come to ourselves a little bit.

9 Then two of us victims picked themselves
10 up, went to the train and traveled around the whole
11 country, went down where people were left alive.

12 And so there was a camp, they called it
13 Trel-gu-fink, this is near Munich, it is quite a
14 distance away, you know, and they brought back lists,
15 you know, who is there, names and everything.

16 I saw on the list a few cousins of mine
17 who were left alive and I saw a brother of mine
18 because Buchenwald, they divide us, he went to work --
19 the Germans make the pylons which they sent to
20 England, you know, which sent to England, you know,
21 which they bombarized England, this was like a
22 propellent, you know, they send it there.

23 And my brother worked there. This was the
24 Alps, he worked. He was freed. They took us into --
25 the Americans came in and we walked around there for

1 four weeks. When I saw my brother on the list, it was
2 the (inaudible), the Americans -- so we went to the
3 (inaudible) and we begged them to take us to
4 Trel-ga-fink.

5 There was one fellow there, he recognized
6 his father's name there was on the list and somebody
7 else recognized brothers, sisters, so they load up a
8 truck load with all of us and they took us to
9 Trel-ga-fink and I was (inaudible) -- but I had --
10 they killed -- actually, in my family, my grandfather,
11 my father's father, brothers and sisters, my father
12 had -- each one of them had seven children, some of
13 them were married, had two children already.

14 So my own family, I was two sisters, one
15 sister, the older sister had two children already, I
16 had a younger sister than me, four years than I and I
17 had two younger brothers, one was 17 years old, one
18 was 13 years old. They all were killed in Treblinka.

19 One brother was in the hiding in the
20 woods, which he died about two weeks before the
21 Russians -- he died -- (inaudible.)
22 And I came to Trel-ga-fink later, you know, and I saw
23 my brother there, I had a sister here. She came 1944
24 -- '24. She came -- (inaudible).

25 We sent a postal card to the workhorse

1 from Munich right away, I've memorized her address,
2 and sent a postal card. The minute she got the postal
3 card she went to the -- (inaudible). My brother's
4 papers got lost -- (inaudible), so I went for myself
5 to the United States and later on while Truman was
6 president, something happened, they start talking the
7 immigration -- (inaudible), so we went to Canada and
8 we told them to bring my brother, so she went and they
9 brought -- and to this day he lives in Canada.

10 Three children, he has two sons and one
11 daughter, and I came to the United States, met an
12 American girl -- this is my daughter, I have another
13 daughter home with a baby, this is my son-in-law, Jeff
14 Berman.

15 And I went in -- from the beginning, I had
16 a trade --

17 (Rest of tape inaudible.)

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