

LACHMUND, Peter
Germany Documentation Project
German
RG-50.486*0062

Tape 1, Side A

In this interview, Peter Lachmund talks about his childhood, education, his parents, and other memories related to Nazi Germany. He focuses on his experiences during the war as well as the different jobs he held, including his work for the German Air Force. He discusses the professions of his parents and his experience as a member of the Hitler Youth.

[01:] 00:20 – [01:] 10:59

He describes his work as a “Luftwaffenhelfer,” (a soldier in the German Air force) toward the end of the war; mentions how everyone tried to escape from the Red Army and avoid the Eastern Front. *[Mr. Lachmund and the interviewer take some time making themselves comfortable for the interview]*; talks about his upbringing beginning with his birth in 1927 in Schwerin, Mecklenburg; discusses his father’s profession as a lawyer for the Department of Justice; remembers his father’s dismissal and replacement in 1933 by the “Reichsstadthalter” (Reich Governor) and later prime minister Hildebrandt; comments on the problems his father faced while finding a new job after he was declared an opponent of the regime and expelled from Mecklenburg; describes the professional consequences of his father’s dismissal and his father’s work as a judge in **Reichswald [Reichswalde]**; talks about having to change schools very often during his early years; discusses details of his work in the Reich Labor Service, “Reichsarbeitsdienst,” (RAD¹), and later on, at the German Armed Forces among others; describes his musical career first as the assistant to the orchestra director in 1950 and then successive jobs until he became the director of the Cologne University of Music; remembers his early interest in music and politics; explains the details of the day of the “Röhm Putsch” (Night of the Long Knives) a series of political executions carried out by the Nazis on a single day in April 1934; explains that the “Rohm Putsch,” took place on the same day he began school and that his father was replaced.

[01:] 11:00 – [01:] 16:59

He discusses the details of the Gestapo profiling and screening process; explains that the Gestapo would wait for his father to come home from work and would then interrogate him; points out how their Communist nanny always informed his father about the Gestapo visits; discusses details of the trips his parents took to the United States and France; discusses the beginning of the war; remembers his French godfather, a member of the French Communist Party, “Parti Communiste Français” (PCF) who wanted to take him to India; remembers how his nanny spoke to him in “Plattdeutsch” (Low German), the regional dialect of his birthplace.

[01:] 17:00 – [01:] 23:59

¹ Nazi institution to combat unemployment and support the German Armed forces at the same time.

[Peter Lachmund asks the interviewer if his story is too detailed so far, he replies that the testimony does not have to be in chronological order.]

He describes going to a normal school and discusses his education under the supervision of a Nazi headmaster; mentions a school friend, who was half-Jewish and the grandson of the well-known historian Ernst Bernheim; points out that after his change to a school in **Reichswald** he only made friends through the Hitler Youth; describes his extracurricular classes as a member of “Hitlerjunge”, (Hitler Youth); comments on the program the children had to go through; mentions how their educational curriculum emphasized history and politics through a military lens.

[01:] 24:00 – [01:] 32:59

He comments on his acceptance into an elite youth group called “**Spielschar [Spielschor]**,” (a group made up of selected members of the Hitler Youth, which performed plays, songs, and dialogues during special gatherings); the members of the “**Spielschar**” wore distinctive uniforms, and participated in an orchestra, a choir, and a theater group; *[shows the interviewer a picture from Meissen (Saxony); interviewer asks if it is of the Hitler Youth, Mr. Lachmund acknowledges]*; remembers learning to play the violin in order to play more interesting parts in the orchestra; describes his achievements as a violin player; remembers playing next to the famous **Edward Mold**, the concertmaster; comments on **Mold** becoming the ambassador of the German Democratic Republic, “Deutsche Demokratische Republik” (DDR); explains the importance of the concertmaster and his followers for choral conducting in the DDR; remembers getting in touch with two of his old school friends; gives a detailed account of the many piano concerts he gave in different cities; remembers his favorite teacher, who was the head of their group and whose death in 1942 at the front affected him deeply; mentions that his time in the “**Spielschar**” was the main reason for him to choose studying music and German.

[01:] 33:00 – [01:] 42:59

He talks about his mother offering bedrooms in exchange for food in order to make packages for Theresienstadt or for abducted Jews in **Bianzè [Biaski]**; describes how one of his teachers showed them maps in secret and told them about the real situation by comparing the news of a Nazi radio station with foreign stations, like that of Radio London or Radio Moscow; describes working next to Russian prisoners while in the Air force; describes the two journeys he took during his years with the “**Spielschar**”; remembers his experience upon learning of the existence of mass graves of Jews; remembers being advised to act in front of Jews as their master.

[01:] 43:00 – [01:] 52:59

He remembers joining a guided group of Hitler Youth during a visit to a ghetto in Lithuania; points out how these students wore the same brown shirts as the members of the “**Spielschar**”; describes meeting the “**Ordensschüler**” (a student training to become a Nazi leader), who was their guide during the tour; remembers hearing the “**Ordensschüler**” discuss the importance of keeping the Jews alive, rather than killing them, to use as workers; gives a detailed account of the rules in the ghetto, as explained by the guide; remembers hearing about the commandos smuggling more or less food into the ghetto to keep an average of 1,000 calories day per person in order to maintain a certain level of working capacity among the

Jews; talks about visiting the “Fürst der Karaimen” (Prince of the Karaites) and being presented to him with others as the Youth of the German Reich.

[01:] 53:00 – [01:] 62:59

He describes his feelings and the feelings of other members of his group and how they envied the “Volksdeutsche” (ethnic Germans) of the same age who had higher ranks; *[interviewer asks about the prince he mentioned]*; explains in detail who the Karaites were, where they came from, and their role in history; talks about joining the RAD as a workman and doing shovelling work; describes how they used different “Spatengriffe” (different positions on how to hold the spade) similar to that of soldiers presenting their rifles.

[01:] 63:00 – [01:] 71:59

He explains how he had to swear an oath to the RAD; points out that he first declined the oath; describes a discussion with his superior about his refusal; recalls his realization that his refusal could turn into a serious problem for him, as well as for others; discusses his eventual acceptance of the oath; describes his years after the RAD as a soldier in Vienna.

[01:] 72:00 – [01:] 76:59

He talks about going to Denmark after his stay in Vienna; describes his strict training; talks about his instructor there.

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Tape 1 Side B

[01:] 00:10 – [01:] 10:59

He describes the time he spent in Denmark; comments on an occasion where he missed one of Hitler's speeches and was caught calling it "rubbish"; remembers making excuses for his behavior and the resulting warning that he could end up as a prisoner in a concentration camp; describes how he was punished and harassed by superiors for a long time; talks about being relocated to the infantry and how he considered the infantry to be Army's cannon fodder; describes his transfer to Rostock together with 500 other unserviceable recruits; remembers seeing his father in Rostock; talks about how they considered hiding out; tells how many would choose to serve voluntarily on missions as recruits using the "Panzerfaust" (a type of bazooka) and "Panzerschreck" (a rocket tank rifle) to get away from the troops.

[01:] 11:00 – [01:] 20:59

He talks about the stories he and others told each other; comments on how they listened to foreign radio stations by turning the volume up on local radio stations in order to receive reception from the foreign ones; explains how everything started to fall apart, that he and others in his group started to turn against the German officers; discusses the details of the flourishing blackmarket and how it began within the German Army around 1943; explains how the black market led to corruption; remembers that while overseeing the construction of a bridge he met a farmer who still believed in the value of printed currency; talks about getting deployed to **Diven**, east of Polish **Voldi** and describes the area as very quiet due to mines in the meadows; comments on **Diven's** warm weather.

[01:] 21:00 – [01:] 30:59

He focuses on the day he became a soldier; remembers the day he was trapped in the mountains by the Russians; describes the region briefly; talks about how he went to Copenhagen and then to Heide, where he was released; comments on attending a special course of studies; describes his math teacher and his friends; gives details about his studies in Kiel in 1946; describes how he found out about his father being put in prison for working as a counselor at schools and universities in **Reichswald** for the Russians; remembers visiting his father in 1945.

[01:] 31:00 – [01:] 40:59

He talks about how he played at the Christmas concert with a former member of the **Spielschar**, which was a part of the Free German Youth, "Freie Deutsche Jugend" (FDJ), a socialist youth organization during the period of the DDR; remembers seeing a comrade from

the RAD in **Pilchau [Pillau]** and describes how the FDJ manipulated them in order to organize parties for political purposes: to show officers from the airbase and the navy what real National Socialism was; *[shows the interviewer a picture of himself when he was in the German Air Force]*; describes the tours and several concerts he gave with his orchestra; focuses on his life in Cologne from 1947 on; comments on his acceptance to the university in Hamburg and the beginning of his formal musical instruction.

[01:] 41:00 – [01:] 48:59

He discusses his decision to become a Kapellmeister (musical director); describes his mother's work in 1945 as a public official at the "Volkssolidarität" (the National Solidarity Organization); remembers waiting for her after work to send off her letters; talks about his acquaintance with **Manfred Ewald**, a former FDJ leader and musician.

[01:] 49:00 – [01:] 56:59

He talks about wanting to publish two letters from Fünfeichen (a camp for prisoners of war, then a Wehrmacht officers' camp) at the exhibition: *Sixty Years after the Capitulation of Reichswald* but hesitating out of fear of misinterpretation; *[shows the interviewer the original letters, explaining that he does not have any copies, reads one of the letters]*; mentions details from his father's life such as an alias and a cover address; talks about his father being the *famulus* of a barrack of 360 people; explains the different opinions historians have about the letter; discusses again his mother's help and the resulting repercussions for her behaviour from the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, "Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands" (SED), which governed the DDR from 1949 to 1989.

[01:] 57:00 – [01:] 66:59

He describes his mother's life in Berlin; discusses her opinions and mentions his frequent visits; explains how she resigned from her job working for the SED, but avoided to mention her conflicting views with the SED as a reason for resignation; mentions his mother having friends with important political positions; tells how a stranger came to see her weeks before the union of the political parties to tell her that there will be many things she will dislike and warned her to accept them quietly in her own interest; describes his mother as being more politically extreme than his father.

[01:] 67:00 – [01:] 75:59

He describes his mother's appearance as "Aryan" and gives an example on how she successfully persuaded a representative of Friedrich Hildebrandt (Reich Governor of Mecklenburg) to let her husband stay in his position; mentions passing a music exam and going to Cologne in 1955.

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Tape 2, Side A

[02:] 00:10 – [02:] 09:59

He remembers what other people used to tell him about finding work; describes how he ended up working at a theater for six years; comments on the time when he was living and working at a theater in Bonn; remembers quitting his job soon after getting married and subsequently taking a job as a teacher, which was more lucrative than his job as a musician; explains that he was also a conductor at the theater during this same time; discusses his mother's efforts to free his father; describes an occasion when a Christian friend of his father helped his mother get in touch with a Gestapo officer (a witness to the Waldheim case) for him to testify for his father; describes how the Gestapo officer had a very successful SS career and later on became the right-hand-man for the French chief of the Gestapo; mentions how his godfather was very much in favor of Stalin's system; remembers details of his godfather's letter to Stalin asking him to be kind to his friend Lachmund; *[Peter Lachmund reads the Waldheim letter written by his father in Fünfeichen. The letter suggests that everyone should study Soviet law, and that he [Peter Lachmund] should become a teacher and spend a year in Moscow studying]* He says he does not know if the people who would visit the exhibit in Reichswald would be able to relate to the year 1946; discusses the ambiguity of the letter's content and the possible public response; points out that the statement could be seen as either a form of self-protection (if someone of the opposing side caught the letter) or as treason to his own country. *[Mr. Lachmund reads part of an article that says that the comrades showed very little sympathy and profited by the Nazis];* comments on how impossible it would be to put something like this in the paper nowadays.

[02:] 10:00 – [02:]20:59

[The interviewer comments on the importance of publishing this letter to show the difference between facts and stereotypes.]

He acknowledges the historical importance of these letters; says that he has talked to **Mr. Kiel** in **Reichswald** about publishing letters from those years; comments on his teaching career of 13 years at a gymnasium; discusses his work as an abstractor of music and theatre at the Ministry; remembers moving back to Cologne to start at a music school after his wife became very ill; describes his life as a "prisoner" of the Federal Republic of Germany.

[02:] 21:00 – [02:] 29:59

He mentions that after 1963 he retired and had enough to do with selling his house; focuses on details of his working career, starting at the age of 23 and retiring at 63; talks very generally about politics and mentions the Free Social Union, "Freisoziale Union" (FSU), a socialist union; explains how he discussed Ulrich Novak's work with **Mr. Kiel**; discusses his reasons for joining the All-German People's Party, "Gesamtdeutsche Volkspartei" (GDV); points out that in the end, everybody joined the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany, "Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland" (SPD); remembers Ernst Nolte being part of their

theater group; highlights the different interpretations of Nolte's book then and now; explains why this book allows for different understanding and describes how it focuses mainly on who started these terrible totalitarian crimes, Stalin or Hitler; describes Ernst Nolte's personality and how he became a history teacher without having studied history assuming that he could offer some experience.

[02:] 30:00 – [02:] 39:59

He mentions that he has **Lohmeier's** file of reprieve with him and digresses to historical facts and authors of that time and their books; *[Peter Lachmund mentions that he has come to the end of his interview and the interviewer says that she wants to ask some questions now]*; explains that he has not been involved in politics for some time, but has participated in organizations against totalitarianism, cultural-political societies and unions; comments on the research he did on his mother's efforts and work, such as collecting stories of conscientious objectors together with **Helen Wessel**; remembers the trips to Poland, where his mother worked on reconciliation together with the Evangelic Church and the Polish people; discusses how his father dedicated himself to freemasonry throughout his life; mentions his mother's later withdrawal from the Evangelic Church and her commitment representing the Church of Peace of the Quakers.

[02:] 40:00 – [02:] 49:59

[The interviewer asks if his mother stayed with the SPD]

He emphasizes his mother's separation from the SPD and explains how the Margarete-Lachmund-Strasse, a street named in honor of his mother, in recognition of her involvement in the reestablishment of the German Women's Organization, "Deutscher Frauenbund." *[The interviewer asks if his parents were against him joining the Hitler Youth]*; tells that they did not like it, but that they had to accept it; *[the interviewer asks if he joined it willingly]*; explains how although he did not willingly join, he considered himself more privileged than others, because he knew one of the higher ranking officials personally; remembers how his father warned him before signing up for Hitler Youth; mentions his father being a part of an irrelevant Nazi organization himself; *[interviewer comments on everybody being in some kind of Nazi organization during that time and asks about his experience with his mother helping persecuted Jews]*; tells about his mother helping them with packages and consultation at the Bureau **Brüger**; states that Jewish people would, in a more or less "normal" way, stay at their home, but would not stay more than once; remembers his father being very careful during that time and not keeping a radio at home to avoid being accused of listening either to foreign radio stations or Hitler's speeches; tells how their neighbors, Nazi functionaries, used to invite his parents over on purpose, every time Hitler was holding a speech.

[02:] 50:00 – [02:] 58:59

[The interviewer asks if he can remember Kristallnacht, (the pogrom on November 9–10 1938)]

He explains that he does not remember this event and that it did not affect his hometown in **Reichswald**; *[the interviewer asks if he personally knew **Klara Brunwald**, the person who continuously wrote to his mother]*; talks about how his mother gathered **Brundwald's** letters around her before she died of old age and read them over and over again and did not want anybody else to take them; mentions that she kept the typewritten letters and sent the handwritten ones to **Brunwald's** family in Israel; *[the interviewer asks about more details on how he found out about the common graves and what year]*; comments on how he and the members of the orchestra drove to a village one day and held a concert every night in

a different place for two weeks; mentions that they were bathing in the nearby river when the other musicians told him about the common graves there; explains that it must have been around 1942–43, but he is not sure if they were near the Kovno ghetto or the Vilna ghetto.

[02:] 59:00 – [02:] 65:59

[Interviewer asks if he remembers what the ghetto looked like] He remembers being led by “**Ordensjunker**” [**Ordendschuler**] (a graduate of the “Adolf-Hitler Schulen,” Adolph-Hitler schools) with other members of the Hitler Youth through halls similar to industrial halls; remembers seeing 30 workers, women and men working on sewing machines, hammering or carrying out other manual tasks; remembers their expressions were full of hatred; talks about how the guide asked the group who was in the Hitler Youth; recalls that 60 raised their hands except for him and two others; remembers how the guide said that they were going to be responsible then for everything that is being prepared in the ghetto; explains that the guide himself said he was against the propaganda and the claims of Radio London; *[interviewer asks what an “Ordensschüler” was]*; explains that it used to be a student from the “**Adolf-Hitler-Schulen**,” explains that “**Ordensburgen**” (there were three, one in Kroessinsee, one in Vogelsang, and one in Sonthofen) were castles used as a training school for Nazi leaders in Nazi Germany; *[interviewer asks if it was an SS school]*; explains that it was created by the National Socialist German Workers’ Party “Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei” (NSDAP; Nazi Party) and how “**Ordensjunker**” was the highest rank before starting a career in the NSDAP.

[02:] 66:00 – [02:] 74:59

[The interviewer asks if the head of a ghetto was usually someone from the SS]; explains that when that was the case, the ghetto was meant for destruction; repeats what the guide had said about the usefulness of Jews for work being more important than everything else; comments on how he and his youth group did not understand why; admits not feeling any indignation or anger and cannot remember any emotions he felt at that time; explains that the reason for his lack of emotion was due to the indoctrination he had undergone; *[interviewer asks if he witnessed any arbitrary cruelty while visiting the ghetto]*; says he did not witness any cruelty; remembers how proud the “**Ordensjunker**” was of the Jewish self-administration he had established; explains that if something went wrong, he either harassed the Jewish leaders or got rid of them; points out that he did not personally see how the Jews lived in the ghetto.

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Tape 2 Side B

[02:] 00:10 – [02:] 09:59

[Interviewer asks how the prisoners were dressed]; explains that he does not remember; explains that that was just a closed area; explains uniforms were only used in concentration camps; describes the prisoners striped uniforms, also called “Zebras”; describes prisoners he saw in **Penemünde**; *[interviewer asks about more information on the so-called “Zebras” in Penemünde];* remembers seeing prisoners working in small groups everywhere, similar to the Russian prisoners; discusses the treatment of Russian prisoners of war; describes an example where there were 10 soldiers and 40 “Luftwaffenhelfer” and that the prisoners were used as cannoneers in one battalion; discusses how the soldiers lived in tents and how the prisoners were forced to warm up and serve them their food at 5:30 a.m; explains how when the prisoners cleaned up the dishes, they devoured the leftover food; explains how normal it was to treat the Jews as servants, as that is what they were taught from the beginning; comments on the former point of view of declaring the German race the “master race”; explains that second in line were the Anglo-Saxons, then the Scandinavians, and then, at the bottom, the Jews and the gypsies; *[interviewer asks if he disapproved his parents’ decision to help the Jews];* comments on knowing from the beginning that the war would be lost, therefore he did not disapprove his parents efforts to help; comments again on his education and how he started school at a very young age; remembers repeating a school year to study Greek; remembers his parents’ wish to have him join his godfather India.

[02:] 10:00 – [02:] 16:59

He discusses his realization much later, that by keeping him studying his parents kept him in school his parents kept him from the front; remembers the details of 1940–41 and the feeling of freedom during that time; mentions the beginning of jazz; *[interviewer asks when he was first given notice of his father’s conviction];* answers that he and his mother heard about the conviction in the year 1950; tells about his mother’s attempts to appeal on points of law; remembers how his mother wrote the appeal over and over again; *[Interviewer asks Mr. Lachmund when he got married;]* remembers his wedding in 1954, four days before his father was unexpectedly released; explains that his father was supposed to be released in 1975, was given ten years of amnesty and then suddenly released in 1954, explains how he thought that it must have been because of **Emil Fuchs**; tells how everything was a political issue back then.

[02:] 17:00 – [02:] 23:00:59

[Interviewer asks personal details about his wife];
He comments on his wife Johanna; discusses her profession as a historian and English specialist; explains she taught at a school before their son Michael was born; comments on her family background; remembers her father, a lawyer and the mayor of Cologne; explains that her mother was a very naïve person, but had strong morals; discusses how her parents hid a

Jewish couple in their house from September 1944 to March 1945 and how they even had Germans occupying their house at the same time; *[interviewer asks him about personal information about his son]*; comments on his son and his son's family; *[interviewer asks who Mr. Lohmeier was]*; explains that **Mr. Lohmeier** was the headmaster of the University of Reichswald; remembers that **Mr. Lohmeier** was arrested in 1946 by the Russians on the opening day of the university in front of an international audience; remembers how **Mr. Lohmeier** was later executed for working as an "Ortskommandant" (a deployed commander) in Russia; *[interviewer asks about the years of birth of his parents, he refers to material he gave her about them]*.