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Oral history interview with Renee Pritchard

RENEE PRITCHARD

PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND

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D. Mrs. Pritchard, why don't you just tell me what did you do during the war?

P. I worked as a mid-wife because that's what I was, that was my job. I delivered babies.

D. Where did you deliver babies?

P. I delivered babies in Belgium and in France. We lived on the water and the of town, 18,000 people.

D. What was the name of the town?

P. Wervik. That was the spanish(?) part. The French part was Wervicq. It dated on the time 1620, you know when the French write. There was a, there is a separating the two which separates France from Belgium called Lys and, uh, during the war men were sent to Germany, you see. Young men from 15 to men of 55 were picked up by the Germans and sent to Germany as forced labor.

D. What kind of, you mean they were picked up

P. To work, they were taken by the SS. The Gestapo came and picked them up. In the middle of the night they would have raids and they would come without saying anything and go in houses and take, they had the lists of the names of everybody living in every house. Because you see in Belgium it is mandatory to have an identity card so it was easy for them to go to City Hall, look in the register, take your address and name and find out who was born at what age. It was very well organized.

D. And these were jewish men or just

P. No....Belgium people...

D. Just Belgium

P. French people. And they were taken and sent to Germany to make ammunition. I was trained when I was young to be a singer. You see I went to the Qu..... and I had vision of seeing my name on the marquis, you know, when I graduated and be somebody because I wanted to sing. And one day at breakfast my parents said, we've decided, because the Germans are here, you are going to become a mid-wife.

D. What year was this

P. That was in 1940. And, I was only 17-1/2 then. The war was declared between Belgium and Germany on the 10th of May, 1940, that's when we were invaded by the Germans. Of course, Belgium was an independent country. So, I didn't want to be a mid-wife. I didn't even know how babies were born, although we were seven at home, I had no ideas, you know my mother always used to break her leg jumping after the vegetable wagon trying to get the biggest cabbage, and that's how she used to break her leg and then the next thing we knew there was a baby. And the pram that was the story, you see. So I had no idea and um, what happened after, I said why? And my father said, I said I want to be a singer, I've been to the Qu..... I've got some exams, and, Daddy said No, we don't want you to go and sing for the Germans. My father was a lead B.... was Belgium. Neither of this came truth in his heart and he said, uh, a midwife, we talked about it, and a midwife cannot be sent to other countries, she stays home to deliver babies. All the men are gone, all the doctors are hiding. So therefore, you going to deliver babies. Oh, I didn't want to be midwife. Anyway, my mother prepared my uniform. I had to pass an entry exam and the second, the year before the 2nd of September, 1939, that's when France declared war to Germany and I had a contract with the to sing, you see I was supposed to sing at the

D. Repeat that so we can transcribe it

P. Radio ptt, ptt is post, telegraph and telephonic

D. PTT

P. You see, and Lille was in France

D. L - I - L - L - E

P. Yes, the city. And, um, how that came to happen, to go back. I had been to do some in Paris through the university and I had been to a, there was a competition of singing and I had been singing. First prize was to sing on the radio and I wanted to be a singer, it was my degree, you know, at my university, my q....., this would be the perfect way to get more advance. So, I went, I sung, I was preparing the next, the, the diero cheribini, you know, more c.... appeal, I don't know how you say it in english, my heart

D. My heart, the marriage of

P. Yes, it's from the marriage of f....., and, uh, what happened, I was there prepare, I was in a room full of mirrors, top, all over, you couldn't see, it was mirror all over the place and there was the microphone and I was going to start singing, it was my, I had to wait for the cue, for the light to come on, and all of a sudden I hear on the radio, I could hear from the other room, we have to interrupt this transmission because France has just declare war to Germany. 17-1/2 years old, I thought the moon was falling on my feet. The song was coming, the earth, it was the end of the world. You know, my whole world collapsed. There I was ready to sing and everything was broken.

D. What day was this

P. It was the, it was a Saturday, and I remember in 1939.

D. What day?

P. The second of September, 1939. Do you want me to tell you .

D. Do you remember the time?

P. Yes, 2:00 in the afternoon. I'll never forget that day. You don't want me to tell you how we got back home and how we got bombed and how we saw people laying on the street in blood and everything like that, you know, the war.

D. Tell me

P. You want me to tell you?

D. Tell me what you wish to tell me

P. So, my father said, well to get to Lille we had taken a bus because it was a Saturday and then he said it would be difficult to find a parking space. So, my father had come with me to the radio station in France, from Belgium to France, only to sing, right. So, coming back he said, we've got to leave now, quick, he said because it's a war, we'd better go back to Belgium because we're in France, you see? So, we walked the street, I've never seen so many people in the streets, it was like ants all over the place, people were running like crazy, soldiers were coming out from all over the place. Buses were immobilized, policeman stopping traffic so Daddy said, we are going to walk. 18 kilometers I had my first high heels. I had practiced a whole week to wear them to go to sing. I had a beautiful dress my mother had made, it had all this lace on the bottom, very full, little puff sleeves, square, c... lace, you know, swiss embroidery. Anyway, we walked and walked and walked and in the end he said you better take your heels off because you won't be able to make it. We were between jumping in the ditches, being bombed by the Germans, it wasn't funny. I tell you I was scared. And my father was there pulling me by the hand saying jump in this ditch. Another airplane came down. Bombarding, little yet, you know machine gunning people in the street and people were wounded, running, everybody was going making for the French border because they wanted to go to C..... to go to England. You see. So, cutting a long story short, we got home about 7:00 that night. With my beautiful dress all torn to bits, my silk stockings, silk hose that for the first time I was wearing long stockings because I had been wearing socks, you know. All that was gone, I was in pieces, I was terrible. Would you say being put to an age backwards that was exactly the picture you can see. My mother was waiting on the door. My parents had shock. And my father was the a, um, an auditor for the court. In other words when big company were getting, you call it chapter 11 over in America, well instead of doing Chapter 11 they be in Court and my Dad had to inspect their books and everything. They were only 9 in Belgium, one per province. There is only 9 provinces in Belgium. So, Daddy was there and my mother was waiting and my brothers were there, we had something to eat, I didn't feel like eating at all, I was just too sick. And then it was the war. So my parents said, now we'll have to sit down, tonight we'll sleep in the cellar. Our bed was upstairs. We lived in an old monastery, that was the house that my parents lived in, and uh, it had been transformed, you know as a shop. The whole street where we lived was a part of a convent from the time of the Pope's, you know the Monk's and Daddy said, we're going to sleep in the cellar tonight

because we don't know, we may still be bombed by the Germans so, they had, I don't know if you knew about those things, being a big family my mother always used to buy in big quantity. You know, like her, and they used to have those boxes, aluminum boxes full of biscuits, big biscuits that we used to eat for 4:00 time with a bar of chocolate and a glass of milk. Well, those boxes, she had many boxes that were empty so we all slept sit, sat, on those boxes, passing the whole night, couldn't sleep, it was terrible. And the next day my father said well, we're going to have a kind of holding counsel, we're going to bring the beds down and establish this as a quarters and we'll have to sleep in the cellar now. Well, being an old monastery, we had about five cellars, we had a coal cellar, a wine cellar, a vegetable cellar, laundry cellar and then there was another cellar that you had all those wood, kind of wood burned, wood bench and everything to work in it, you know, it was a huge place. So, Daddy said we'll have enough space here and it was warm in the winter and cold in the summer, cool and fresh in the summer. So, we, um, my brothers moved the beds up and down and we started living in the cellar. And then, uh, my parents decided that I was going to become a midwife so I had to prepare for the entry exam and the date of the entry exam was the 2nd of September, 1940 and at 7:00 that night I was in the hotel in my bed, my mother in the other bed, twas daylight, in Bruges, an old city, they have the bells that rings and sings a song and I was thinking a year ago, I was going to sing, I was going to become, oh, Hitler I hated him. I had to, to avenge myself for the feeling of making me go down and everything, you know, breaking all of my dreams. I was really mad at him and I was going to avenge myself about Hitler into all I could to defend Belgium. Joan of Arc was always my fan, I was always a fan of Joan of Arc so I had vision I could save Belgium. You know, you're young, full of dreams. Anyway, I, uh, I passed, I passed the exam, was accepted, my mother had to sew to make my uniform because we got ration cards, you can see in here the ration cards. You only could buy material for the amount of coupons you had. You see, twasn't very many so my mother had to buy on the black market material to make my uniform. That's where the savings went out, you see, and to buy food too because as you can see from the coupons you only had so much bread a day and that didn't feed you, that was not enough and when you have young boys and girls growing up, you need more than one or two slice of bread. The only good thing for Hitler, there was no fat women in the war, everybody was what they called the slinkaline, slim line. Anyway, um, I became a midwife, I went to school, studied, worked very hard

D. How long did you go to school?

P. Two years. I had to wash, to scrub, to learn how to scrub the diapers, the babies diapers, of course they didn't have those pull ups and pull on diapers, whatever you call here. You know. And it was cold and the laundry room was not heated and those nappies, the diapers, were, we had to soak them, clean them and we had to do all of that by hand, no rubber gloves, cause it was war, they didn't have rubber gloves. So we had to scrub with a hard brush and our hands were all, you know, what you say in english, they were chapped and when you bend your hand it burst and the blood used to come out so you had to go to the matron, the head nurse, the big in charge and she used to pour glycerine in it and that used to hurt, burning, stinging, it was like needles. Anyway, that was my apprenticeship to become a midwife. Oh, I hated Hitler, I really did hate him. And uh, then of course, when you go to school and you learn to be a midwife you've got to do all the lower, from the bottom of the, you know the bottom of the ladder, you have to go up, it's like in the army you learn by the hard part and then you get to the top, that was when you graduated. So the dishes, there was no maids, although my parents were paying a lot, a lot of money, there was no maids so I did the dishes and I thought, well, I am an optimist really, the war won't last forever, the first one only lasted

four years. Well, this one, God willing, will not last more than that. So, I started singing, practicing my singing so I could keep on singing when the war was over, so I didn't want to keep on working as a midwife all the time. So I did all of the dishes, and there were lots of dishes, you know, patients and dishes, the whole hospital came to, the pots and pans and the dishes, no dishwashing machine. So, one day the matron, do you understand the word matron? She's the head, the big boss, heard me singing and she came in and uh, she, I hadn't seen her, she sat down and listened to me and she said, you sing well and I said yes, of course, I went to the Qu..... and because of this war I am here. She said, this is a good job, you've got to thank God you're here. You think your way, I think mine but I am going to keep on singing so she said, tell you what we can do, there is no entertainment, there was no radio except the German, the Belgium radio was German all the time. She said we will have a concert every Sunday and you can sing to the patients. Well, the maternity, you had beds downstairs and then you had a big spiral staircase that went upstairs where all of the other beds were. They had about 75 beds. Rooms with two beds and some rooms with one bed. And, so there was a piano upstairs and I could play piano, I used to accompany you know, to study you've got to learn. So, I could practice and the patients used to like it. So on Sunday I sang and everybody liked it and the family came and everybody was coming and I got my little bit of a which made me very happy and which gave me more heart to work, to go and clean those full of, anyway, that was my day of sunshine. And um, I graduated in 1942. Right, in 1942. And then I went home and I went to see a doctor and he said I am going to go into hiding, if you need me this is where you can reach me. Not by telephone, we used to go on bicycle in those days because the Germans had taken all the cars and everything, you know. And, you know Belgium has cobblestones so, right,

D. Did you bounce along?

P. Right, bounced all the time. That was the beginning, that was great because we had tires but on the end we had no tires anymore we had those wheels, and it was like little springs all around with wood inside. It was like a double rim on the bicycle so it was kkkk, kkkk, kkkk, every time you, kkk, kkk, kkk, everytime you move you peddle, that was the way it was. It was the only way to keep on going, you see. So he gave me the number where to find him and he went into hiding and he went underground. In other words he became a white shirt instead of the common black shirt.

D. What do you mean by that?

P. Black shirt are the Germans, the Belgians that turned towards Germany. The one that gave Belgium away really because if it hadn't been so many, you see, this goes to another part of history, Belgium, they have two languages, Walloon and Flemish. The Flemish part is very poor German. The Walloon part was french. And there is a cold war, it is like in Switzerland, you know you have all of those different languages, there is still a cold war going on. You don't see it but it's there. And, many of those Germans they were inflamed, you know when somebody is young you have an ideal and you want to become, to do something for your country, either go with the enemy or go against the enemy. And that's the way it was. So the one that went for the enemy was called black shirt and they had a uniform and it looked like a war ship doesn't it? Anyway, they had, they were wearing black uniform, black trousers, black socks, black shoes, black shirt and that's why they called them black shirts. Of course, they were well fed, they had extra rations, see they worked for the Germans. So, if you weak, you go towards, if you want to food, to feed yourself you'd sell your soul and that's what it is. We were Belgians, we didn't want to do that, my body is French and I had to punish

Hitler anyway. So, came back and I delivered a few babies, well not a few quite a few, left and right. And at night there was a curfew, you couldn't be on the street after six or seven o'clock in the winter or eight or nine o'clock in the summer cause it's light again. And, during, I had to have a special paper, a special word they call a schein, a pass,

D. s-c-h-e-i-n ?

P. Uh - huh, right. In case the Gestapo, the army was patrolling the streets two by two to see that nobody was on the street.

D. The Gestapo or the SS

P. The Gestapo were going on the street. Sometimes it was the army, it depends. We didn't stop to look we just could hear the steps on the pavement. So that was enough.

D. We?

P.as much as we could. And uh, somebody used to come and bang on the door, number so and so is having a baby. So one day, about 2:00 in the morning somebody came and knocked on the door and through the window I said yes, what is it? Uh, Mrs. so and so is expecting a baby on number 14. And, on number 16, I beg your pardon, number 16. So I had a little, we had a little lamp there that we could go at night, couldn't go with your bicycle because you couldn't see so we had a, what they called a dynamo, it was a little hand lamp and when, you had to press it and everytime you press it it went zzzz, zzzz, zzzzz, and a blue light would come to lit your step on the pavement. So there I take my case and I get in that street and I go to the first house which I think is number 14, I count and I ring, I bang on the door and no body comes, I bang again so somebody comes and opens the door and with my light I can see he's got a big white apron full of blood and I thought oh, my God I am too late, I should have been here before where I could make it before. And I say, where is she and I push my way and get in the dining room and there on the table was a pig that they were killing on the QT because that was, had you been caught with that you were sent to a concentration camp. You see, so I looked and I said, where is the mother, isn't that number 16, no this is number 14. And I said, oh, I was amazed, I seemed to meet every weird thing. So the man says when you finish delivering the baby next door, cause next door was 16, he says, come back and we'll have something for you. Afraid that I would talk I suppose. So, I said thank you. So I went delivered the baby, she was in labor but she wasn't ready yet so the baby was born at about 6:00 in the morning. By the time I stayed with her and cleaned the baby and I did everything it twas about 8:00 so I went next door, back to number 14, and I said I was told to come back and he said, yes, we've got a package for you. And uh, it was wrapped in some white paper and then newspaper and it was warm, still warm. I didn't look at it I put it in my suitcase with my dirty apron. I put my dirty apron around, went home and my mother said, you must be tired. I said yes, I'm going to bed. I said, I've got something in my bag that needs to be disposed of. She said what is it and I said, well open it. And she says, oh, she says, you didn't bury the afterbirth, the placenta, and I said, well, I said, look at it, and she said well, I don't want to look at that I am going to go and bury it in the garden and I said, well, you'd better look at it. So she takes my apron and she opens that newspaper and they she sees the white paper and she says oh oh..... it's blood sausage, you know what is blood sausage, you know what it is? It's the blood of the pig that they put in the sausage. We haven't seen that for years. You

see, gosh that was great, we had at least about six pounds of blood sausage, so she prepared it for.....and, um, that was it and I went to bed but that was one of the funny episodes. You have to look at the funny side at times because you have so many sad sides to see.

Sometimes, another time, okay, the Vicker, not the Vicker, it was the Pastor, it's higher than the Vicker, the Priest because Belgium is a catholic country. So, there was a curator, above the vicker, the deacon?

D. The deacon?

P. Okay, the deacon. In the Catholic church it's called the Curia in French.

D. Curator? The Monsignor? The Bishop? The Cardinal?

P. No, no, no, that's official. No, no, no that's all much too high. It's much before that, it's above the Vicker. Anyway, he's the head of the whole town and he's got about 5 or 6 vicker's under him, okay. Well, let's call him the Priest. He had an understanding with the Vergemaster of Wervik, if anybody would come from the Gestapo the Vergemaster would give him a signal and the way they had done that was not by phone, they were pressing bells that used to go from the desk of the Vergemaster to the office of the Priest in his house, okay? And the Vergemaster was kept in touch by the Vergemaster of the next town. You see, do you understand what I am saying? All of the town were giving sign to each other saying that the Gestapo was coming. So when there was a raid they used to press the bell to tell where they were going next. So they next visit, to the next town, used to know when they were coming. So they had the bells they used to ring in the church and everybody, young men, old men up to 55, used to go to church with their wives, and then about half an hour later, 45 minutes later, there were only women coming out, all of the men had been gone, had been and gone from the church. Where they went, I'll tell you, that church was a 15th century church and behind the alter there was a secret passage the width of two men on a horse and the height. And all the men went down that passage underneath the river, to the castle in the French town Wervicq. that was the castle where Hitler was wounded in the first world war and the Germans had taken possession of it and the German flag was flying on the top of it and the German's were saying huh, the English are afraid of us, they never bombed us. Little did they know that in the cellar, was the underground, the wounded, the paratroopers, everything, you know, hiding there underneath. People who laugh last laugh longer, is that what they say. And that's how the men disappeared.

What else did you want to know?

D. I want to know more about your activities? Were there any jews in the town?

P. No, there was no jews in the town. Not in the town where I lived, there were no jews.

D. What about gypsies?

P. No gypsies.

D. Any other groups that were

P. No there were pure Belgians which were a mixture of French and Parisians. But without talking that was the most important thing. The king had an urge to know about that. The King was taken prisoner and was prisoner, as you know, in his own castle. And his brother, Charles, became the head, the leader of the Belgium underground

D. What did the Belgium underground do?

P. They surprised, made, stole, clothes, foodstamps, which was the most important thing to hide because once the Gestapo had been to pick up the men, they couldn't find them then they were taken off the register so they couldn't have any stamps, no food stamps. There was, salvation, they would have to come out because there was no food for them. You see, everything was rationed so therefore we had to give a lot of, we had to find a lot of food for hiding the underground. Sometimes were in smuggling arms.

D. Where did you get the arms?

P. I don't know where they came from but, um, oh, sometimes we had loads, airplanes coming and landing on and that had to be sent to left and right. You see, S..... B..... was the name of the underground in Belgium. That was the name of the group. Communicate it with Zero France

D. Z - E - R - O

P. Zero, France, in other words Belgium would communicate with Zero, that means it was the hour, it was the time for Belgium and they got in touch with the Time of France. That was the name of the group. So you never carried your whole name. You never wore your, you were never called by your whole name.

D. What were you called?

P. I was called Genny . . .

D. And what were your duties?

P. I was a midwife .

D. So, how

P. I used to carry messages. Um, if messages had to be delivered, I went to see the doctor.

D. What was his name?

P. It will come back, I have forgot it.

D. Where was he in hiding?

P. Oh, he was in an old castle in Corvine, in the country, his farm, the plow is farmland, he was

hiding there. He was being very active. You see people all have cells over there. Every house has cells and you don't know that. You may, if the German came to, look they had one cell they showed where, you know they went through the whole house but that cell was built a way that no body could see, you had to go through the field in it, it was camouflaged, you know, to whom did you supply these arms. The underground in France, we, uh, we had a place for instance, ammuniton, I would carry ammunitons for the underground because I had a case. As a midwife I had a big uniform, a big cape to wear over my dress, over my uniform. It was a nursing uniform and we were wearing the veil, I should have brought you some pictures shouldn't I, I forgot about that. Anyway, that's how we did, that's what I did, and we put it underneath your dress, put your dress on the top, your apron, and your cape and you were on your bicycle crossing the bridge, the Germans was on one side and you crossed the bridge and you have another German there, nothing to declare, no, you just open all your bag and he sees all of your tools, you are going to deliver another baby. I was known as the mid-wife, you see, and that's what happened. I never charged, when I used to deliver babies in France I never used to charge anything because the French rationing was better than the Belgium rationing. They had wine, they had chocolate, they had coffee. It takes seven coffee beans to make a cup of coffee, did you know that? And you had to roast it yourself in your oven, but they used to get in their rations green coffee beans, you know people used to roast their own coffee. And, uh, one day I delivered a baby and it was going to be my parents anniversary and I had nothing to give them, and we ..., we couldn't buy anything, there was nothing to give. Tomatoes, we couldn't buy tomatoes, that was rationed, that was for the children, the babies from four months to a year, they were entitled to get tomatoes. That was all. I hadn't seen a tomato for four years during the whole war, you know. Anyway, I delivered that baby and um, we were talking, to the mother, to the grandmother, and I said you know, it's my parents wedding anniversary what could I give them? And she says, oh, I think we have some wine left over, how much is it for the delivery? I said nothing, you give whatever you have in surplus in food, that's the way I delivered babies you see. So she says, I'll give you two bottles of wine and you can use that for your parents wedding anniversary. I said how am I going to get through the border, she said, don't worry come here, lift your dress. I lift my dress and she had strings and she put those two bottles, strings around my waist and I had them between my legs, the two bottles of wine. Have you ever tried to ride a bike with two bottles of wine? I've done it. Every time you go peddle up you go clink, clink, because they bottles are doing clink, clink, clink. Your through customs, the first one, the first German, nothing to declare, you have your apron full of blood and the bag. I always used to put that on the top so they could see, I delivered a baby and that stopped them from going into the bag. And then, what do you think about this? You must learn to be crafty you know, that's the only way to, you have to survive. And, I think God gave me that strength. And you go over the whole bridge and it was a windy day and it clinked, clinked, clinked, clinked, and you can't go back on that bicycle because the wind is so strong and with the bottles clinking like that you were afraid that he may hear it so I just walked across the bridge, got on the other end of the bridge and the other German said why aren't you riding your bicycle today? I said the wind is too strong. He said, hold on I will hold your bicycle. Here with my big cape and I went and held one bottle with my hand, got on the bicycle and got the other one and bicycled and I got home. See it was a feast, my parents were very happy and I was glad to get home. Every time I had a completed mission I had diarrhea for three days, nerves, it's not funny you know, you live on your nerves. I couldn't do it now, I really could not. Because the anxiety it's something that you cannot describe, that feeling in side, it's terrible, sometimes, many times I think about that. People that have to be, you know in those countries these days when they are going to be shot and everything, it must be terrible, that apprehension, knowing that you are going to die. I wasn't afraid to die, I was going

to die for my country if I died, but inside you are being taken and you know you are going to be interrogated and the way that the Germans interrogated people was awful. You know, you must have read about that, the way they interrogate people at times, beating them and really, it was awful, terrible.

D. What happened then?

P. One day I was going, I was sent all over because I used to, whenever there was Dr....., that was the headquarter, they used to send me letters saying Lady, Mrs. so and so is going to have a baby at that date, you have to go and see her. So I used to bicycle all those kilometers, far away, you know, Lille is far as 18 kilometers on a bicycle, it's a long way. And, uh, you rode there and you see the lady and you say when is the baby due and everything, then you report to the doctor, you tell the doctor about it, you go on the QT to see the doctor and the doctor tells you yeah, that's okay, you know, how is she? you examined her right? And you give the whole report. The doctors always kept informed of what's going on but the doctors never there, he's like the scarlet p....., you know, very elusive. Anyway, one day that was, not far from Lille and you've got the description in the book there about Asque, that was a frightful thing. I don't feel I need to tell you all of that because you've got it written down, and you've got

D. Why don't you tell me your view of it.

P. Uh, I only can explain to you what I was, I was in cellar delivering the babies because the underground had put some ammunition to blow up the rails, you see the Germans, the Gestapo was coming, there was a train coming from Russia, I believe, and the underground had put some ammunition to blow up the train, to blow up the Germans. That's why we needed ammunition, that's why we needed guns and, no guns but it was ammunition we needed. And, I was there in the cellar, deliver the baby, and we could hear all these people screaming and yelling and machine gunning, we didn't know what was going on, during that time I was delivering the baby. You know, she was pushing and the grandfather was there, the father was in hiding, he was in the underground too. And, the door of the cellar was left open to get some air because it was April, it was warm, the beginning of, it was the second of April, 1944. And it was warm in that cellar, no ventilation, no air conditioning in the cellar. Air conditioning didn't exist in Europe, not like in America. And then the morning came and we could see, through the little light, the daylight had changed and it seemed to have quieted down. From time to time we could still hear a machine gun or shot, a single shot and people crying, howling, I don't know if that is the word but you know, in pain, in suffering, you know when somebody is wounded and nobody helps him you cry and you hurt and you sob, parents sobbing. Anyway, the grandfather says, we're going to, I'm going to close the door to the steps, of the cellar, and I was, I had put the baby on the breast when the baby was born, I washed everything, it was tidy and, the baby was sucking and I went on the steps and I heard those German coming in. I was going to close the door of the cellar to make us more close in in case there would be some more, we didn't know what was going on, we were like, you know, in hysterics, you don't know what's going on, you can't see, oh, outside just a little bit of light from the top window. And you hear those Germans and he said they've already left, they've gone and they went up stairs, they came down, they said no, there's nobody here. They must have looked all over the house because we could hear them walking and you know, my heart was beating so strong I was afraid they would hear the beating of my heart. Then they left and we had azart's coffee, it was not, it was, they didn't have any coffee that day, it was

azart's, it was like malt that was burnt and they made coffee of it. That's what you were drinking. So we had a drink of that and we waited a bit longer and then it was quiet. It must have been about 11:00 in the morning and then we heard a lot of noise, big cars running by and more Germans coming down, I didn't know what was going on. And, I said to the mother, I have to leave now because I had another delivery to go somewhere else. So I had to take my 18 kilometer back so I said, if anything goes wrong, I said, I'll be back but there is this person, there was another person, that was going to come and do the swabbing, you know, to clean her up right and give her all the hygiene needed for the baby. So I went to the station and on my way to the station I saw bodies all over, blood, you have no idea, it was terrible, it is one of the worst things that had happened. You will see, here, this is Aicq, the massacre

D. The massacre?

P. Massacre, yes.

D. Who was killed there?

P. The whole town, you know the Germans used to drink, have a bottle in one hand, drink and shoot and take a girl, a young girl, 14 or 15, rape her underneath they eyes of their parents because their whole village was on the town, had been put on the town, and they raped her, they raped them and then they shot them.

D. Why?

P. Because, the train. Do you remember, the ammunition on the rail? This is described better than I describe it because I didn't see it. The way I describe it is, you know, I spoke to people. If you like to read it or you want me to read it? Do you want me to read it?

D. Sure.

P. The movie house in the village of Aicq closed it's door, twas about 8:00 because that's when the curfew was. The streets were peaceful, but all of a sudden shots broke the silence. Followed by the derailling of a train. About 39 inches of rail were blown up, along with the train carrying hundreds of SS soldiers. The damage was very small and no one was wounded. They didn't kill any Germans. Those living near the station were awakened and an officer shouted orders, all the civilians were to be executed. They were going to shoot a French, how..... would teach them a lesson. The officer ordered the entire village to be burned. The station master enforcement were working in the main office of the station, the door burst open and in walked a German SS who began to beat the two frenchman. They they were shot. The postmaster managed to escape and the station master was shot in the leg. The sound of machine guns broke out followed by sounds of screams and anguish and cries for mercy. Windows were shattered. Next to the station was the room of a frenchman who had just been released as a prisoner of war, he was very ill. The SS took him outside and beat him and dragged him half dead to the railroad track and shot him. Mr. Morrell, he was about 85 years old, he was also very ill, that was an old man that lived there, he was dragged out of his bed and thrown open, to an open window from the second floor. This scene was repeated throughout the village. All the men were taken to the train and had to walk all the way through it with their hands

on their heads, they had to hold their head all the time. Then they were shot. Women were to the eyes of their husbands and the SS stole everything they could get their hands on. They just went into the house and took everything they could. Then they went after the youth. They pushed them to this church square and pulled down the church door. The priest was shot at close range. The vicker was awake by the noise and put on the jssuble, do you know what the jssuble is, it's like um, you know what it is right? He was put on the jssuble and left .. to see what was going on. He was also shocked. All of the people in the church were executed one by one. Little girls were raped in front of their parents and the boys were shot. This last an hour and a half. Over 86 men and 126 boys were killed.

End of tape.

Pritchard - Side B

D. Remember the station master.

P. Remember the station master was wounded, you got that?

D. Yeap.

P. He had fainted and was left for dead however, he managed to crawl to the telephone and called the railway station in Lille and informed the German officer of the and of what was going on. The Germans, a captain, of his soldiers to Aicq After a heated argument with the SS officer, thank God. Meanwhile the station manager dispatched ambulance to take the wounded to the hospital. The SS officers went around during the massacre and carried a bottle of liquor in one hand while shooting with the other. The following Monday they had to explain their actions to the German General, Bertram, of He sent out an official statement that accused a resident of l.... or shooting at the train. 50 years later now, this massacre is remembered as the worst in history. That's in the north of France. You will see in the paper I gave you they have put down, you who step here remember somebody left this blood for you to be able to ... (inaudible, crying). I'm sorry

D. Don't be sorry, it's very difficult.

P. I..... the same now in Yugoslavia. Why do people make war? I can't understand. Anyway, if you got it all written down here you don't want me to read that do you really, or you do?

D. It's up to you.

P. I'm giving you these, you can take it with you, it's a double.

D. Alright.

D. Why don't you tell me more about your activities then.

P. More activities. Okay, um,

D. Would you like to tell me some more?

P. Okay, a few days later, on 12th of April I was delivering another baby and we heard a knock on the door of the house where I was delivering the baby and a German officer came in, the Gestapo came in and he asked if I was there and the grandmother, because the father was always hiding, you know they were all, all of the men were hiding. She said yes, she's delivering a baby and he said, well, I'll wait till she's finished. And, the grandmother said why and he said because we need to ask her questions. So, unknown to me at the time, I was delivering a baby okay, in one room, the grandmother sent a message through somebody to my mother, saying that I was going to be picked up. Of course, my mother, you know my mother is a saint, she lost her son in the war and one day I said to her I've never seen you cry momma, I never saw her crying. She said I can't cry anymore, all of my tears have dried, my tear glands have dried up. So, I was taken when the baby, he wait, he had the decency to wait, and they took me to Loose, you will see that on the line in one of those things there. That was one of the big headquarters, that's where they used to do interrogations and everything. I was, the name of my aid(?) was terrorist.

D. You look like a terrorist.

P. Yeah, well right. Well no, anybody that was with the underground was a terrorist, they were against Hitler. So, I was a terrorist so I was put into jail. I had a mattress that had a, the middle of the mattress was gone, twas just the sleeve kind of thing full of blood and dirt and everything.

D. Were you in a single?

P. In a cell by myself, yes. Some of the cells, I was very lucky I was alone but some they had cells for one or two that had to be divided and shared with 12 or 13 or 14 people sleeping on the floor, you know. Mind you it was the spring, it was beginning to get warm. And, uh, for breakfast we had that terrible Azard's coffee and a bowl and then for lunch we had that bowl, was you could see a sliver of carrot and whitteburger and a potato floating in the middle and grease and like dishwasher dishwater the juice. And that was the soup. That's what we had for lunch and that's what we had for evening. That's why we all got sli..... Oh, I got a very nice lime when I came out of there. I was very skinny and um, they found out I was, of course, my name, they had all the information about me that I was a mid-wife so there was another young lady there, a young woman, who was expecting a baby so they took me one night, took me in the middle of the night, told me to get up, and uh, they drove me, I didn't know where, to a hospital outside Lille called Calnette, it was a big hospital and they put me in that room, no bed, no nothing, just plain floor, you know, the room was empty, white tiles, it must have been an operating room or something because it was all tiles on the walls. No bed, no nothing. And they give me, they put a sheet, they tore me a sheet for me to lay, put her, she was lying on it, and a pair of scissors, a bowl with water, and some lysol, disinfectant. And that was it. And a cord to tie the umbilical string. And I had to deliver the baby there. I had to deliver that young girl, she was 21 years old. She was very beautiful. She was in the underground too. She had been caught Montlinart, it's near Leon, south of France somewhere. And she had been caught somewhere around Lille somewhere. I don't know. Also giving messages, carrying messages somewhere, but she was pregnant you see. So they caught her and then I had to deliver,

one terrorist delivering another terrorist. We were, we delivered a baby, she had a little girl. I took care of her while, then, when she was delivering, um, with the baby on the breast and I asked for some milk for her and they didn't want to give any milk, they give her that Azard's coffee, twas awful, really. She had the same food, you know, we had the same bowls, water, greasy water with that potato floating. That was all. Well, after three days they took her away. And I don't know, I never knew what happened to her. She told me that knew she was going to be shot.

D. What about the baby?

P. I don't know what happened to her. Probably shot too. And then, um, they brought me back to Lous, the prison, you see, what they did was, they used to pick up all of the terrorist until they had enough to fill those wagons, you know like they use to transport animals in, those big gray, put them in there and drive them to Germany and they had about 8 or 9 of those big wagons and they used to put, I don't know how many people in there, 65, 100, 150. All in that card. You had no way of doing, hygiene was out of the question, you know how women have their period, I managed to steal some material and use that as a sanitary towel and use the water that you wash with with the towel. It was terrible. Well, when I was liberated, I was liberated on the 2nd of September by the Canadians,, and, uh, I had pubic lice, I had glands under my arms as big as a pigeon egg. It was so painful, very painful.

D. Where did they take you in the cattle wagons?

P. Where did they take me when the, oh, they didn't take me. No. You see, I was really lucky, I was put there until they had enough to fill in those cattle wagons. But that's, the destination was to be sent to Germany.

D. Oh so you never were sent to Germany.

P. No I was not sent to Germany, it was the pre-camp. The pre-concentration camp.

D. Was it just a prison?

P. It was the prison but they called it the pre-concentration camp and, you see, uh,

D. When were you arrested?

P. When was I arrested, the 12th of April, I said,

D. 19 forty

P. 1944. So I was only a few months, I was very lucky. But, what I saw. I remember one day when I was in that prison is Lous, pre-concentration camp, it was around, they had a big pillar in the middle, and they had caught one of those terrorists, a young man, he was dressed as a German Officer but he was French and he had transmission radio on him and he was caught and they stripped him completely, put his hands together and, and first they put a piece of leather around his forehead, they dipped the leather in water and put it around his forehead and twisted and twisted and asked

question and twisted and then you could see the blood spattering. He never spoke. Then after that they undid the leather, the belt around his forehead, and then they whipped him, he didn't, not a sound came out of him, and he was very cocky. The German Officer said, asked him questions, and he said, seeing that you know the answer why should I give you the answer, you know everything, he was very cocky, he was young, he was about 19-20 years old, you know. And they Germans always used to smoke cigarettes with a cigarette holder, I don't know if you know what that is, I don't know if you don't do that these days but in those days they did, they had cigarette holder and put, you know the officers, and he went, he asked for a cigarette and the end of the cigarette was red and he put it on his testicle, of the boy, to me he was a boy, and he yelled and he passed out. And then they threw water at him again, to revive him, and he did it again, he did it twice. And then they took him off and I don't know what happened to him. They had a room upstairs in Lous, I was told, where they had a and they used to put people in there until, you know keep them under water, till blood came out of their nose and everything, to make them talk, many did talk. Many died before they could, they didn't want to talk, so much blood was shed for the liberation of this country. You know, Normandy, they had a lot of blood shed over there but before Normandy, had it not been for the underground to prepare the way, the war would have never been won because you know, we were there to prepare the way, if you understand what I am trying to say. We were like the blueprint.

D. Why don't you tell me what you mean by that.

P. Well, we used to send messages to London and get them and tell them what division of Germans were there and all the rest of it. So, they had an idea of the movement. You see, so over here, they knew how to prepare, where to go and bomb and all the rest of it.

D. Do you remember what division of Germans?

P. No I don't remember. It's too long ago now.

D. You sent messages to London

P. My father used to do that, my father had a transmitter hidden in the cellar, it was, um, in the coal cellar, you remember I told you about the coal cellar, cause we used to buy the coal for the whole winter for the house, they used to come and deliver coal in the cellar, and he had, the transmitter was in a wooden box, and he had glued, with carpenter's glue they called it, glued a coal to the wooden box and there was a note and he used to take that out to transmit, and that was hidden in the coal. The Germans came and searched the house a couple of times, they never found anything. And then they used to come at night in the street, but it was always at the same time they used to come with their big car, you know, try to locate where the transmission was, but it was always at the same time they came, so when we knew what time they were coming, we didn't transmit at that time. You see, we used to transmit at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning instead of doing it 8:00, 9:00 like they used to come. You see, so my father was sent to Dakkar, he was there for 18 months. When he came back, when he left,

D. When was he arrested?

P. I was arrested on the 12th, Daddy was arrested on the 18th of April, and he was there for 18

months. And, uh, when he left he said to my mother, don't worry, we'll win the war, Churchill said so. And when he came back, when we saw him, when he was liberated, he was liberated by the Americans by the way, the funny thing was, you know, the world is funny, you have those situations sometimes you wonder why. One day I was a Sears in Valleyview(?), with my car, in Dallas to be repaired, I drove my car in to be seen to, and, uh, that mechanic said, where do you come from? Are you from France? I said, no from Belgium. Oh, he said, I've been to Belgium and we started talking and I said my father was in a concentration camp in Datkow, he said I was in the division that liberated the prisoners in Datkow, of course, he didn't know my father, my father didn't know him, you know, I don't know what division he was in, but isn't that funny? Small world. So, when my father was liberated and we saw him again he said to my mother, you see I told you not to worry, you would wonder, we would win the war, Churchill said so.

D. Did your father ever talk about Dakkar?

P. No, he didn't, the only, a few times when he came back, he had a quarter of his taken off, he was in such a bad condition. He used to say that in the morning before having their breakfast they had to go and clean the latrines, you know what the latrines are? And he had to empty them, clean them and then put back in everything. And he said, you know, he said it's amazing, you get used to that smell of roses. But he also used to say, you know the Germans, there were many that were gay in those concentration camps and when they used to see a nice young man, polish or something, for my father was with jews in the concentration camps, Dakkar, there was a lot of jews there, and they used to give them all potatoes as a special favor, you see, and those privileged used to skin the peel with their teeth and spit in on the floor and Daddy said, I used to watch them pick up the peel, spit on it, clean it and then eat it. It was something more well the food they had was a soup but he didn't like to speak about this camp. I don't think he liked to talk about, you know, those things, he tried to forget but there are things that you cannot forget that are still in your memory. Like I'll never forget that. So, what else is new? I know when I was in Calnett, that I hadn't mentioned in my book, I was put in, my voice is going here, I was put in the sterilization room, I got promoted after the delivery, and they put me in the sterilization room and I had to clean all of the instruments and everything, and when the nurse used to say, bring me so and so, I forgotten what it was, and I used to bring her a tray or a chair or something, to do it on purpose, thinking I was stupid. It was delayed several times, it was my way of..... I felt good after that. And, um, I managed to scrape and steal some soap and I managed to get a box of matches. You know, we used to have box of matches about that size, did you have that in America, those match boxes? And, I emptied the matches and on the bottom use the cigarette paper, a false bottom and put the matches back on and then when American paratroopers used to come in Calnett, I had to go in and do the cleaning of the stuff and I used to say to them, what is your number and what is your name, and I have the piece of pencil that I had managed to steal and cut it, you know the machine to cut the bread, I cut a piece of it so I could put it in my matchbox, and I used to write their name on the small piece of cigarette paper, you know, the, holding your cigarette, that name and that number. I had about twelve of them like that and when the war was over, I went to live in France and gave it to the Red Cross, the names of the Americans who had gone through there. Also, the name and the numbers of the three Americans that the Germans had put in their oven to burn because they had died and they had just burned them. They burned everything. But when they left, you know when we were liberated by the Canadians, I was looking to get a shower, to have a real good shower, and I was able to get free to run free in that hospital, and I entered, I opened the door of a room and that height, that room was

the size of your bed, not wider than your bed .

D. Six foot, four feet?

P. Something like that. About that height. Over three feet, four feet. It was, awful black boots with green legs in it and still flesh in it. You see, the Germans, when it was the invasion, the Germans were afraid that the shrapnel that they got in their legs, the German army got in their legs, were going to be, you know in the first world war when the Germans used to shoot the ... of the English or the Americans, they put, I forgot, what was the name of those , I have a lapse of memory, it exploded into the body, what was the name of it, do you know what I'm talking about?

D. Sorry.

P. Darn it. Anyway, it will come back, I know it, before we finish. So they thought that the English would do the same and the American would do the same. You see, by shooting, we are more human than they are, so we don't do things like that. So, what they did instead of taking, removing the bullet, they just kept didn't you know this, in Germany now, that many men, about 60, 70 years old are all wobbly.

D. I didn't

P. No you didn't know this because you should have gone over to Germany after the war, you would have seen the way they all had crutches because they all had one leg. So many were amputated, they were all soldiers, they amputated them, one leg cut off, did you know that? It's true, the stench in that hall was terrible and it was there, the legs of the soldiers there in those boots, I'll never forget that, it was a terrible sight. They had to rush, quick, quick, quick, go, you know, retreat.

D. With one leg?

P. No, no they took the soldiers, their wounded with them but what I mean is that they had no time to clean the hospital behind them, they left everything was there, they just went, they went away.

D.

P. No, no that was the well, they had the airforce, there was no navy, I never met anybody navy, I saw some Italians there. Of course, I couldn't speak to them, I was in that room, in the sterilization room. I had to do all the cleaning and everything.

D. What instruments did you have?

P. Well, they were operating you see, scalpels and that kind of that thing.

D. What kind of medications did you have?

P. I don't know, I was not near the medication. But that's about my whole story, I don't know if it's interesting to you, if there's anything in it for you.

D. Did you know about any of the gassings that were going on in the concentration camps?

P. We didn't know anything about it at that time. It was only after that that we found out. It was only when, Daddy didn't know anything about it either, even Drakkar. Well he didn't know that people were being gassed because he was kept in one spot of it. The camp had different barracks, yes, sections and all that they had to do, they seemed to have to do a lot of cleaning and from what he said was cleaning the ground and burying things. They buried a lot of people, but they didn't know at the time that they were gassed, it was only after that they found out, you see. Would there be any use for you, what I've been saying, I don't know?

D. Was there any jewish population, any gypsie population, in Belgium at all?

P. Yes, there was some not gypsie but there were jewish is the place where all the diamonds are where the jewish people are more or less congregated, segregated,

D. Well, if they were segregated they were apart

P. No, no, they congregated them, they congregated in and, um, was very bad, I had a friend, I remember, the Gestapo came to pick up all the jews in that street, or they were, there were jews and there were gentiles I suppose you call, you know, the people that are not jewish are gentiles right? So, it was 1/2 gentiles two 1/2 jewish, 1/2 gentiles two 1/2 jewish, they're mixed up, but what happened was they took the children and they put them in those wagons, you know with the kind of tent over the wagon, and a mother lift the tent and she put that little baby out and another woman took it, that was the mother of my friend. And she brought that little girl up as their children,

D. You mean some jews?

P. A jewish lady pushed her little baby in. Are you okay?

D. I'm cold.

P. You are? Here, put this on it's nice and warm and it's supple. No, she took her baby, lifted it and put it there and another lady passed by and, a gentile lady took the baby and walked away. You know,

D. So you saw, or people saw people .

P. The friend, the mother of my friend did that.

D. No body ... of being arrested in Belgium .

P. Oh, yes, oh yes. And the way they did it, it was in the middle of the night they used to do it most of the time. You see, what happened, you read about one way of the way they picked them up and it was the same everywhere, they just used to go in with their guns and go in and turn everything upside down, looking underneath the beds or opening cupboards, turning everything, you know, and

then take all the women and the children, everybody has to go down, the house was empty. That's what they used to do and then they used to see something they liked, they used to pick it up and keep it for them. They Have you ever been to

D. telling me about.

P. You know what I was telling you about that castle, where we used to put, the men used to escape through the channel? That secret passage to the castle? Okay, that was the road, the road to escape to south of France. To go, either to the family, to go to Spain or to M..... you see, where they had boats that used to take them back to England. Of course, many people didn't know that in Spain it was full of Gestapo again, it was full of double agents, so when you thought you were safe in Spain you were in the Devil's mouth, if you can understand the expression. And this one, was the one that was doing documents for, you know, the passports and everything to give identity cards. He was killed, he was taken by, he was taken away by him.

D. What's his name?

P. Coals,

D. Captain N.... Coals

P. Yes, the most, now this one here, Dr. Davis, he was a doctor, but his line was the path... escape and he was the line to go to M..... for people to escape, you see the number of the villages.

D. Where is this from?

P. Oh, that was another, that came out after the war, you know after the war news stories were kind of

D. What, uh, what kind of

P. What newspaper? That was, I can't remember the name of the newspaper, from this, it's another one that came from what was the name of that paper?

Pause

P. It was, Nord Eclair, Eclair means lightening.

D. Do you know the date of this article? The war's

P. Yeah, it was in 1945.

D. Nord Eclair, 1945.

P. 1945, yes.

D. Where is it published?

P. It was here, it's in um, 1521 R..... in H.....

D. I better write this down.

D. Alright, who's this?

P. A-l-r-e-y, my voice is really going. N-e-a-v-e. And he was, he escaped from C..... you know the prison in Germany, C-o-l-d-i-t-z. And he went to the P..... line, you know that escape route I was telling you, that was run by Dr. , oh what's his name, Dr. Albert Guerisse. That was, his real name was Pat O'Leary. And, after that he, in London he was the coordinator of the escaping route. After the war he became an MP and was assassinated by the IRA who put a bomb under his car and it exploded when he came off of the A lot of reading to be done. There was, in France, if you can get hold of a story called the Dr. Petriot, he was a very good doctor with children and then he let escape that he had a for escape to send people to Spain to go to England. He took a lot of jewish people and some other people too that didn't want to stay in France, of course, they had to pay for their passage, and they always had a big meal before they left that night, and then they had a drink for the and, before having their meal they were sent to talk to their parents to say he was going to send it, to have it sent from Spain, to their parents over here, I mean in Europe I mean, Belgium or France, saying that they had arrived. When they received a card that meant they had arrived. So they would get signed in right and wrote their name and gave it us and everything. Behind the scene, this is what happened. They had food, they were fed and they had a drink of wine for the road and it was for the long road, it was drugs in it and it killed them and he put them in a acid box and he had the passage and he buried them in there and so that they couldn't, they didn't melt, he burned them. And people used to complain of the smell, the smoke, must smell, burning bones and that kind of thing. And that's how he was caught. They found that in his house, the secret passage. Didn't you hear about that. Dr. Petriot , because my uncle and aunt died there, my father told me. It was in 42 or 43, I can't remember now. Oh, and he kept all their diamonds, and the gold and everything.

D. Oh, for money.

P. Just for money, yes. You see, they went to see the doctor and they said they wanted to go away and that's the way he used to, to dispose of them, acid box. That's the end of this story.

D. ?

P. I, if it's not in here I don't think I mentioned it, you know I, I vaguely, I vaguely recollect, I put a passage in there that my uncle and aunt died,

D. But is your story is recorded in other places.

P. Oh, I am sure it must be recorded somewhere because it is true fact. I'm not making it up.

D.

P. It must be, no, something must be written about it. It must be in the library. I'm going to go to the, I was going to go to the library tomorrow, I will go tomorrow then, because I'm going to look to see if I can find anything about it and let you know, would you be interested in it?

D. Well, but yeah.

P. I'll find out the name of the book or whatever it is.

D.

P. Yes, he was a very good doctor

D. I'm sure.

P. No, with children. He always managed to give them a lollipop or something like that, you know, and it was rationed in those days. Sick children, they always used to have a lollipop and everything. but that's the way, and people, and he had, he was, he entertained Germans in his house, and uh, the other room, the people that were ready to "escape" were waiting, when the Germans were gone they were having that meal, the dinner. I don't know what the meal consisted of. And then they had their drink for the road and that was it.

D. What happened to him after his arrest?

P. Well, he was taken by the Germans. What happened after, I think he, he, um, after the liberation, he worked for the Americans I believe. Under another name of course, and he was caught. He had some false paper. He used to take the paper off some people that had died, he kept all of those papers. And he passed himself under one of their names. I vaguely recollect, I cannot, don't quote me know, but that's more or less the story that goes on. He worked with the Americans at a certain time trying to find out where the Germans that were hiding, you know, during, what's the word in English, you know to escape the war tribunal .

D The Nurenburg trial?

P. Yeah, not Nurenburg but there were other tribunal. And they were hiding under other names and they were so good, able to find many of them that had worked for the Germans. He was one of them of course, he worked for himself anyway but he kept all of those, he kept the diamond the gold of everybody because many died, people had diamonds sewn in their clothes and the was there were some Russians too and I remember in the morning, I had never met a real Russian before and in the morning they were very, very religious people, they were orthodox probably, we used to, they used to have this thing, they washed themselves with a facecloth, they used to fold it a certain way and put it at a certain way and they all used to kneel in front of it and pray. I never understood a Russian, all I remember was and da da but that's as far as I can remember. But, you know, memories are, you forget in the end, but those are just images coming to your mind that you remember, they were very kind people, as far. I was trying to help them as much as I could with whatever I had, I can't remember what I was doing at the time, I was doing some cleaning down there

I think. And I had some soap and I gave them some, I gave them a piece of soap, they were four of them in that cubbyhole, because I had to do some cleaning. They were ill, they were sick, they were Russian prisoners,

D. Russian POW's

P. Yes, that were there. What went down in that hospital, I wish I knew exactly because they must have had all sorts of nationalities down there, of course, I was, you know, well looked up.

D. How big was the hospital?

P. Big. It was big.

D. Was it in Lille?

P. Outside Lille? It was a huge hospital. Apparently before the war it had been a research hospital. They used to call it the City, the City Hospital because it was so big. You know, I could see from the little bit, every time you could look toward a window, you could peek through a window, it was long, long, long, oh, it was probably like as big as a street, of course, we were padlocked at night, we had to go in and they used to come and put a padlock on the door.

D. And were you in a prison cell?

P. Yes, it was kind, it was a prison cell. It was a prison cell. So that's it.

Pause

P. When the Americans landed, most of them, in the beginning, used to break their ankles and I don't know why, probably it was because of the terrain that was so bad because many times I had to go to the airport and put, well, there was a lift airport and we'd put some, we'd lit the lights, you know the flame on the ground so that the airplane could see where it was and then quickly, quick, we'd have to, somebody went out and ground and switched off kind of so that the pilot had a way of seeing where they were to land, for the parachutes to jump. And then they broke their legs and then we had to carry them or they were hobbling away to farm houses where they were nursed, you see, and when they were better, that's where the doctors came in, you know the doctors that were in hiding, that's how they helped, because they were not there in the house, you couldn't find them anywhere but the underground knew where they were, always knew where they were going to be at.

D. So they came and

P. They came and, well, nursed the wounded. You are tired, I think you've had it.

Pause

P. Right, Li-n-d-e-l-l-e. Was about three miles from W....., the French part, all of this is France I am showing you. And, uh, there was an airport that had been abandoned kind of, it was just a strip called B-o-n-d-u, that's where they used to go and have their clandestine landing. When the

paratroopers used to come.

D. The American?

P. The American or the English. English to start with you see, because we worked a lot with the English to start with and then it was because Americans came in in 1942, at the end of 42 and there is a place here in Devin, and I can't remember the name of the place, but it's not far from Black Pool Sand where the American practiced, they called it the beach, was exactly the same as in Normandy.

D. This is in Devin

P. In Devin. And, um, 1500 Americans were killed there because they had to practice with live ammunition and I think, President Clinton is going to come over here in June I believe, to Portsmouth, and I feel that he should do a stop to honor those little soldiers that gave their life, you know, to practice to be able to land in Normandy.

D. How do you know this?

P. How do I know what?

D. About the Americans.

P. Because I read the newspaper. And anything that has happened in the war I'm interest in it. And the English people also feel that President Clinton should go and visit them, there was a big article in the paper about it. It's in June, I think it's the fourth of June or something he's coming, I can look up the date but I knew he was going to come.

D. Alright, let's get back to, you said you have knowledge of the, uh,

P. Well, yes, that's hearsay, but vaguely I seem to remember, because that was factory, it was all working, and I seem to remember that there was an episode that was, well that I paid more attention to it, it was a bunch, not a bunch, about a dozen women, jewish women that were there that were musicians that were put into a factory,

D. Which factory?

P. In Linden, in that camp

D. Lensing?

P. Yes, Lensing.

D. You know where Lensing is?

P. Yeah

D. Where

P. In Germany

D. No, it's in Austria

P. Well, it's in a province Okay. And that's where they had those German, Jewish, those Jewish ladies that were playing violins. They were musicians, and they had made an orchestra for the other Jewish ladies that were there. And there was a doctor there. I can't remember the name, I've been trying to think of it, she was a lady doctor and she used to experiment, when they were dead, she used to take the skin, some had tatoos on their arm or something, or I don't know where, and she made lampshades out of the skins. Did you know about that? What was the name of that

D. I would like for you to tell me about your training as a mid-wife. How did you train?

P. How did I train? There was a hospital we had school everyday. We had to study the anatomy, we had to anatomy, physiology, we had laboratory time, and then, of course, practice. Especially, well, we learned the whole anatomy but then the most emphasis was made on gynecology, the ovaries, the uterus, and all this type of thing. We learned also for the disease.

D. And what was in did the mothers get any local anesthetic?

P. Oh, no, in Belgium they don't get any local anesthetic.

D. Tell me about labor, delivery.

P. You know I told you Belgium is a catholic country therefore, and the bible says you will, have your baby in pain so you just keep on pushing and pushing and that's it, they let it come naturally. I was very surprised when I came to England to see that they were giving D.... I thought that was wonderful and then when I went to American and then I read about the way they, into the spine, they give her inject

D. Spinal

P. Spinal, yes, so I could not understand, I thought that was bad for the baby because that must give some when the babies were born because it probably made them very sleepy instead of you know, being like the natural way they were born.

D>D. Tell me about the, hygienic methods.

P. Hygienic methods was very strict, very very strict. Um, a mother that had had the baby, the beds were changed every day, the drawer sheet, that was a rubber plastic, it was not rubber, it was, well I don't know what it was made of really, yes it was rubber in the beginning until 1942 and then they couldn't get it anymore. It was that red rubber that they put under the sheet and then they had the draw sheet on the top, and um, that was for the mother when they were in bed and then they were

washed, they were bathed every day, in bed, they were not allowed to get up before the fifth day, they could walk a few steps, they laid in bed all the time, and every day they were swabbed every day, two times a day

D. With what

P. With water and we had lysol, very strong, you had to be very careful not to burn our hands, a solution of lysol and water and we swabbed them and we had sterilized swabs, we had to wear gloves, and, um, we gave them a sterile pad, it was very strict.

D. What about the delivery itself?

P. Delivery, was in the labor ward and um, we didn't have any betadine oror anything like that, that was the medication that they inject when the baby is, you know,

D.

P. Erg....., it is made with Ergonatine.

D. Okay, what's that

P. That's the, you know what Ergot is?

D. Why don't you tell me.

P. It's when you see the, what you made the bread with, it's the little black thing that is on the end of the grain of wheat, that's taken and then it's worked..... and that was given, that was used to contract the uterus to prevent hemorrhage and the baby was born he had an agom.... injection.

D. ..

P. No, ... muscular, and then you massage the uterus, you stayed with the patient for about 1/2 hour and you kept massaging the uterus until it became as hard as a stone. And then it was as hard as a stone then you knew that the uterus was completely contracted and then you could leave the mother alone but you are massaging the stomach for about twenty minutes, after the afterbirth was born.

D. What about the other drug that you mentioned

P. Ergometrin, uh, what was the other one I said.

D. I forgot.

P. I forgot.

D. Where did you get this medication when you were on your own.

P. Oh, it was signed. A doctor has to give them to me. I mean I had to buy them and then that was what your patient was paying but I wasn't charging for any delivery fees or anything like that. And to sterilize we used to go, there was a hospital where I could go and have my cottonball sterilized and everything, I used to make a little swab by hand. Now everything is easy, you just have to swallow it, you put in your mouth and you swallow but in the olden days it wasn't that easy. You used a lot of iron, you put your iron on the stove to sterilize the clothes, and you were ironing them. What else do you need to know.

D. This was in the hospital, what did you do when you went out

P. That's what I am saying, we had everything sterilized in the hospital and then we went to the delivery, but you were ironing the, whatever, the pads, for instance, you couldn't throw them away, before putting them on you sterilize them, it was cloth that we were ironing and then put them, if you had an oven that was doing well, you know, they had those big ovens that you open, I mean stove that you open the oven and you put it in, and it was in a metal box and you put it in there and you let it sterilize for 2 or 3 hours, it was the only way that you could sterilize.

D. What happened if you had a breach birth?

P. You had to do the best you could. I was very lucky I only had one.

D. What did you do?

P. I turned it around.

D. You did?

P. Of course, that's they only way, otherwise the baby and the mother would,

D. How?

P. Well, it depends on the position of the breach. You had a special string that you had that you tie the cord with. You take that and you put it to the feet and you attach it on the feet of the baby, and, long enough, so that you can turn the baby around.

D. So did you get

P. Yes, but I only had one, it was a very small baby and I was very lucky I thought.

D. How long was your training period?

P. 2-1/2 years. During that only ... and then your an intern. I have some more training to do to get my British certification because you have to pass a board, an exam. You pass in front of four different doctors.

D. Alright, so I ... got enough information from you about how you got into an underground.

P. Well, I told you, I went to see the, Doctor D..., his come back

D. Spell it

P. D-e-

End of tape