

So they organized in small groups. Not only that, if, in many cases, the Germans, the German units who needed the Jews kozemed them in. Kozem means they quartered them in in their places, so they didn't have to go back and forth to the ghetto.

And the Jews who worked for the Germans felt safer. The others who did not work in the ghetto, then they forced, they work hard and killed and sent to concentration camps. There was a camp, too. The ghetto was a little somewhat better in Riga. I don't know how-- tell in a concentration camp.

At that time, they took me. And in fact, how I got the job with the Ordnungspolizei-- Ordnungspolizei mean the police who keep order on the town. But they weren't-- our policemen weren't the killers. You know, the killers were the SS, Hitler's troops.

And they were supplying telephone and communications apparatus to the Eastern Front. So we were working there. In fact, we could listen to the radio, too. We were repairing radios, on shortwaves. And here what happened-- and that was forbidden, you know, forbidden for everybody under death penalty.

I mean, when you-- I don't know if in the present radios-- if you tune in a station on shortwaves and there is another station-- in another house, another room-- it start to whistle, high-pitched whistle.

In next room-- I told you before how where we were working, there was a three-room apartment on the basic floor. In the front was the warehouse in the middle room where the Germans, in the last one where our workhouse where we were working.

Where we were fixing the radios, we would just turn the needle. This would get a whistle all the time that the German-- you know, there were about four or five Germans, but one especially used to listen, especially lunchtime when the other Germans used to go away for lunch, he would tune in shortwaves on.

And on shortwaves from England, they had, on every hour, news in German for the German people. At that time, in English, I didn't understand when I worked. So I would listen, and I knew what's going on on the Front.

If-- so I would know. And then-- but it was so you had to watch out not to let them know that you listened. If somehow the Germans would find out from all the Jews somehow around the way that somebody listens, and it comes to the authorities, you would be shot.

However, I had, in Riga, another few people from my shtetl who settled in Riga. And we were good friends. And one was so-- and he was the most intelligent of my shtetl people. He was so interested in the news, he would wait for me near the gates when I come in. And he would come and put his hand on my shoulder-- little boy, what's what.

And it was such a funny thing. I would tell him what and how. You know, the Germans would always report they drown so many boats and this and that. But the English would be truthful. They would say they loaded that much, they load. But they would say what they did to the Germans.

And I would tell him right away. And he had another brother. And there was another two brothers from my shtetl. And right away when he would go home, he would tell these two people-- they lived in the same. And there was always a little exaggerate, made a little better. But it was for us-- they kept me like I was the radio. [LAUGHS]

And I would tell him. And it was very important. It was to raise the morale, because it was-- the Germans, if you would listen to the Germans, you would think you are lost. And we knew, also, what in abroad, in America or in England, what they report about the Jews. You know, we have, too-- in England, English knew that they are murdering or they had.

So I worked at the time for the police. And then it was-- again, came from Berlin that no more-- the German units cannot keep the Jews working. Yeah, they liquidated the ghetto and sent all the Jews to the concentration camp. And there were goyish too, you know.

Irving, before we get to the concentration camp, how long did you work for the police?

About eight month to a year.

And during that time, I believe you told me, but we didn't get it on tape, about your experiences.

Yeah, yeah.

Would you mind telling--

The torture.

--me that again, so I can--

Oh, I think like that. Let me tell you-- let me go my way about the goy and my good goy. And this will make an extra--

OK.

Maybe an extra, right?

All right.

So here what happened.

This-- we're taking-- he took you to the ghetto. And that's where you left off. And he had a hard time getting out afterwards.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. And oh yeah, one time while I was worked for the police, here what happened-- the police there-- we fixed radios. But also was going to go on the-- one of the policeman, they had drivers driving trucks back and forth to the Front.

And in wartime, gasoline was very-- it was rationed. Private people couldn't get gasoline at all. So here what the-- what one time, the driver from a truck-- and he was the-- he used to pick us up from the ghetto and bring us when he wasn't on the road.

Asked me, he said he needs gasoline, but he cannot get gasoline unless he has the tachometer. the meter in the car, the mileage meter. I heard, you know. He asked me if I can do it for him.

So and he said that he needs it. He said he-- well, let me see. So I got under and I screwed-- you could get-- I took a drill machine, a hand drill. And I put on, and I drilled it like that, so he put on more mileage. He could get more gasoline. The gasoline they used to sell for cigarettes, for everything.

So and he was a good goyim. So one time he said, I would like something to do for you. Do you know-- I think--

What was his name, Irving?

His name was Weissner. He was a German from Germany. Oh yeah, with the Germans, we knew they felt sorry for us. In fact, one time one of the Germans there, a man, he was from Berlin. It was-- I think it was Christmastime or New Year's. He said, I wish the war would be over, and we have a good year. And he said, and for you, the situation would change to the good, too, he said to us.

What was his name?

His name was Master, Mr. Master from Berlin.

He was the head of the, chief--

Right, right.

--of the police?

Right, not of the police, but of this. This was a branch of the police. It wasn't the main. This was a branch. And they had to worry about the telephone and the radio for the Front. But he was a pretty good man.

Not only that, in fact, the other boys-- you see, the other boys were taking care of the building and heating and this. And they all used to go for lunch. One boy saw that he got a letter he put in his coat on the left side. He took out the letter, and we knew how the Germans feel in Berlin.

So he had a wife and a daughter. And she wrote him how bad it is-- food is scarce and the bombardments and this. And she said that the war is lost, anyhow. And she goes, they wish it would be over sooner.

But so after a certain period of time, all the Jews had to go to the concentration camp. However, it happened-- and I don't know how that one German took out specialists of the ghetto, and he moved over. And he quartered them in in a plant. It was a textile plant on the other side of the river.

And the textile machinery-- the Germans didn't need the textile. They broke up in scrap and sent it to Germany. And there he made a tailor shop, but a big tailor shop and a shoe manufacturing plant and a garage they used to fix and a printing plant.

Every imaginable trade, he placed there, because during the war there was nothing. Everybody was on the Front, or it was destroyed, or it wasn't important to-- and there-- and he gathered them Jews with trades.

And when I-- and they came in here. Then I said, who am I? I can fix typewriters, I can fix watches, I can fix electric motors.

This was while you were working at the police station?

No, that was in between when they closed it. No more-- that was after, a little after, a few days after.

OK, you had been working at that police station for 11 months?

Right, but I used to stay there, to sleep in there.

And go back and forth.

Go back In the morning, yeah. Not to go back by myself, but a German used to come, one of the-- and pick up his Jews. And we'll come back at night. And it was a lot of groups like that.

Would you mind telling the gun story?

Now?

Yes, while you're at the police station, so we don't jump ahead.

Oh, OK. So well, we would have to jump a little bit back. While I was at the police station, I met him, the man, and I was known. Very soon I was known by the Germans that I know too more, this and that. So anything imaginable they used to bring me to fix.

And one time that Master, he brings me-- he said, can you clean my gun, I haven't cleaned it for a long time. I said, all right. In fact, he didn't-- can you clean, but he said, do it, you know-- it would-- so I take it apart, and I clean it.

And meanwhile, there was another boy. We were-- at this group, we were two, four, six, eight young men were working. There were two who were chopping wood and heating the rooms and cleaning up. And two were in the warehouse, loading and unloading there, some packing this.

And two were with us. We were, myself and another, were fixing, repairing the things. So while I cleaning, so one-- Abraham Field, was his name, Abraham Field. And I knew him before, I told you.

We were the same age. And when we had maneuvers, he was serving in the army in a different town. And I was in a different. But for me and the Jewish people, I was in the army the-- who blows the horn. You know, the--

Bugler.

Bugler, yes. So and he said, oh, how come a Jew, they let you be a bugler? [LAUGHS] And that's the way we got acquainted, because just as I said before, the discrimination was so-- they were ashamed to let a Jew be a little higher than the ground.

So he said, oh, you know how to do that? Said, well, I know, and I was in the army over there. So he tells me, we need you, I want to talk to you, come over to where I live in the ghetto. So I came over. I said-- so he tells, he said, there is an organization, we are organized where we are arming ourselves. And he tells me how he gets the arms.

And you see, some Jewish people work, sorting the armaments they get in the Front from German soldiers who are killed or Russians. They put it all on trucks and bring it and dump it And it has to be sorted-- which are good and decent-- and oil and unpack them and put on tags-- or they are of the same kind to put here, to go in that.

You know, some are--

So he said, these people, they take apart and bring in parts. And the Jewish police-- at the ghetto were Jewish police who had to examine for the Germans-- you know, there was one German and 10 Jewish policeman. They examine that the Jews don't smuggle in food-- bread and butter. You know, this, they were.

So anyhow-- and there they are in connection with the Jewish police. And they make them that they are not examined-- and he said, we need to put it together on that time. So I said, I feel like it's so dangerous, I would-- oh yeah, and I asked him, what will you do with it? He said, we won't do anything.

But he said, the Front is coming. And he said, it might come a time when the Russians are here and they want to take us, or they might want to shoot us-- we'll shoot back-- no matter a small amount, maybe we will save them.

So he said, they can do it, but provided I'm by myself-- nobody, nobody knows about it. Because a lot from me will that come known, then everybody will know. But he said, yes, you come. And he showed me what they have-- a little in the basement.

And where they lived-- the best boys-- in a house away, a little house. It was a one-family house, while I lived in the ghetto in a house where there were about six or seven floors. And we were packed like herring, like sardines.

So he showed me here, and he said, you come. I said, all right. And I started to come in workroom. And there we put together-- start from-- would oil it. You know, some I was in doubt. I would try out, had ammunition.

When it was ready, there was an outhouse with a double wall they would take it out to and bring me in a certain amount and watch as when I fixed this, there were others, again, with the outhouse. And there was nothing in.

And I was going on, and It was a routine.

How long did you do that?

I did it for about three or four months.

How did you test-fire the weapons?

I would-- they had in the basement. And they would knock on, make noise, and it would go, you know. And one bullet I had test-fire, even one. I was afraid, sometimes, it may backfire on and explode, too. But I would-- they had a wall of burning wood prepared, evidently from the person who lived there in the house. I used to go behind.

How many weapons do you think you repaired in that room?

Oh, I would say probably about 35, 40. And some didn't have to be repaired. They showed me even a machine gun, a new one. And they had-- and I worked from one night. And it became a routine. I would come to my place and have a bite-- whatever there was, you know-- and go there.

And I worked and go out. And I got acquainted with the other boys. But I don't know-- only one or two I know their name. And the others I didn't know. And I didn't-- it didn't interest me, because I didn't want to. And the same, too-- it worked like a conspiracy we had there.

So one night I came as usual. And I saw after peering around one-half windows not dark. And during the war, even the Front was far away, especially the ghetto had to be darkened, because they had orders to shoot. And they were trigger happy. Oh, if they had only-- they didn't need an excuse, they could shoot.

But this way, for the guards-- and the guards were Latvians, the Latvians who volunteered for to cooperate with the Germans. They were all, they were all-- it is all cooperated with the Germans, the Latvians were mad at the Jewish people.

So I thought, something is wrong, all right. I want to go back. And you know, he calls me. He calls me in. He said, come back, come back, come back. So I start to-- he comes in. And I got in, I get in in the house. At that time, there were already half of the ghetto or two-thirds of the ghetto was divided up for-- Jews from, not from Latvia.

And there were Hungarian and Germans, mostly Germans, from Kehl, from different cities. And they have the-- again, German Jews were these for entire ghetto. And that Roschmann somehow trusted then the Germans Jews policemen and the Latvian Jews police.

So he sent in-- in the Latvian ghetto, the German Jewish police at that house. And I see the house when he searched. And they keep on searching. And they said, you sit down, we have orders from Roschmann that anybody who comes in this house not to let go back-- to arrest.

And I thought, hmm, something is all wrong, I'm a lost man, I'm lost, because I knew it never happened that you, from ghetto should be arrested-- is it for food or for stealing or for-- and it should be free. He-- if they send him away to the city jail, to the-- and what they do with them-- but they never come back.

And I thought not only that, but that my-- if they found something or something that-- if they are there, you know, it is for sure about this. So I'm lost, a lost a lot. And always I made-- it's called a Heshbon Hanefesh. As somebody of life and somebody what's going on, I thought, the fact that I will die is nothing, because the chances to remain alive is very slim.

But I thought, well, they'll start torturing. They'll want to get out, get this. And it can be terrible, and I heard about the tortures. And I thought the best will be if I can die, and how can I die.

And I was worried and worried. But it wasn't a worry like you have a worry today-- you made some mistake or you missed a train or you made a mistake or you lost money. It was a different worry. It's the worry about dying in a torture death. You don't know how it feels. And I know it will be torture.

And nobody comes. And I wonder where are all the people that lived-- our own group. I wasn't thinking about living. I was thinking about dying-- how can I? And he-- they kept us until about 11 o'clock.

And they talk. Roschmann is supposed to come. He said he'll come-- nothing, nothing. And I thought I'd-- and then a policeman comes from there. Then the Russians said they should lock there this place. And they arrested, taking the book. What did he say? They said, what should we do with that? He said, I don't know.

Anyhow, I landed in the German ghetto in a bunker. A bunker was an arrest house. We called it a bunker. Why, I don't know. It was a garage with the windows. They put in blocks. It was a block building and cement floor. There was some straw. There were a few other Jewish people.

And when I came in, I was envying those-- OK, those maybe will die, too. But I didn't think they'll torture for-- because it was for stealing or smuggling or-- and I thought they don't want to give out all the-- so I thought even in death there is different categories.

I tried to hold my jack a little ways-- maybe I can-- nothing else, I tried to hold my breath, he can't-- to commit suicide. I wish I would have something I could cut myself. Then I thought, maybe when Roschmann will come in the next morning, maybe when he'll come, I'll jump and grab his eyes, scratch his eyes. Or when he'll leave me, I'll try to run, and he'll shoot me the back or--

And I-- it was cold then, but nothing bothered me, and no sleep-- none of it. About 2 o'clock, I heard that they come to open the door. And again from the German Jewish policeman said, the one who is arrested in [PLACE NAME]-- it was the address there-- should come up.

So he get up. And I thought he was going to take me to the Russian, now. It was about 2 o'clock in the morning. He takes me out, locks the door of the cell and said, where do you live?

I said, [NON-ENGLISH]. So I'll take-- we'll go in from this ghetto, this, and bring me this. OK, they let me out. We go-- didn't ask me my name, nothing. Then I go up in the fourth floor, who are sleeping three in a bed, climb in, lie down. What's going on, here? Why this, why, though? Why didn't I seeing if the other boys are arrested?

I didn't sleep. And I remember in the morning, I get up, and I will go to work. I didn't tell anybody, no. I was sleeping near-- Kaplan was his name, my best friend who went to trade school together, and we worked together. I didn't say but I don't-- what is going on here something is.

And the next morning I get up, get dressed. And we go out. We had a square where we used to gather a lot in the-- a thousand people or more where we used to gather, and Germans who would come and pick up which is Jewish. And you'd come outside, come out where we would go. And a guard would open the door. He would take us back and this, this-- some were big units with 200 people who were