

On that square there were a bulletin board. And on the bulletin was written-- a lot of people were coming, and it says that Roschmann, that he's giving his honor, word, that if the people from that-- from that [NON-ENGLISH], and from that little house return voluntarily and he find them not guilty, he'll let them go free. However, if they don't report, he'll take 50 people from ghetto for each one of them, and will be shot. And everybody was worried. And a lot of people didn't know what it is about.

But some knew where the people-- and here what happened. Somehow, these people from that house find out that there will be a search or something. And they did not come to the ghetto. They hid in town. The town was easy to hid. You know, everybody could escape. However, for me, for example, there was nowhere. No, no, no Gentile would take in and save the Jew because, first, they didn't like them. Second, it was dangerous, dangerous. It was forbidden. If the Germans found that a Gentile was hiding a Jew, he was shot together with that whom he was hiding.

Well, didn't Ferk work with you?

Huh?

Didn't Ferk work with you?

Sure. Firk, yeah.

Did he report to work the next day, when he was--

No, no, no. Now, the day before, yes. You see, it was the evening. The next day he didn't report.

I see.

No. He wasn't-- and so what happened, they hid. They found out, and they hid in town. But some people, they were from Riga. They knew evidently what they were hiding. And they went out to talk to them and told them. And it wasn't-- they decided to come back, and they showed up. And Roschmann arrested them. Nobody of them came out.

Not only that, they started, as the days went on, to arrest all the young people who participated, who were bringing it in. And I was thinking. I knew what is going on, because I knew this house and I knew what we were doing. And I knew my deal, that I was repairing this. And I thought Firk, for Firk my friend is there. And I knew the Germans were torturing them, and I better get out. And the fact that they were arresting others, and I was waiting for my turn.

And again I though, what should I do? There is a chance I could escape and hide myself in one place there were-- he had horses. There weren't trucks or cars like here. There were a lot of horse and buggies there. And I could climb up in his attic, there where he keeps his hay. But I thought, how long can I be there if nobody supports me? And I could, I thought, maybe by my benefactor, you know. Then I thought, but who knows if he'll want it, and who knows if it's right for me to put-- he has a family. He had his wife. And he had a daughter with her husband.

You had not seen him since that day he took you to the ghetto.

One time I did see him. And I'll tell you about it. I was about to tell you before. So, and I always decided not. Then I though, where we were working, the Germans had a machine gun, a Russian, you know. And it was hanging like a-- like somebody collects arms. And it was loaded with bullets, on the wall. And I thought, if I see Roschmann coming, I would mow him down, him and the Germans, all Germans. And still, it wasn't a fast decision because what will happen to the other Jews?

This machine gun was where you were working?

Yeah, and out of the ghetto.

They let a loaded machine gun in there?

Right. Because they trusted the Jews more than anybody. And I want to tell you another thing. Roschmann did not arrest any of the Jews anymore in ghetto. He wouldn't go in in the Latvian ghetto. All the arrested people, he used to go in the German units, where the Jews work, picked them up there. And it was there, a room, where I was working so situated--

Was that because he was afraid that there were weapons there?

Oh, yeah. Yeah. After he found out that his weapons, they were there. That I could see who comes in in the front door. First it was a bell. And I could keep open in our room, a little bit, the door. I was-- and I thought, I will open down on this. And it was, as I said, such feelings, such that the danger is here, that it-- that it'll come to a point where, well, of life and death. And you were waiting for that moment.

And I remember it was-- it is hard to describe that feeling. We were-- our feeling in ghetto were like we are sheep in a slaughterhouse, where they'll pull out today you and today-- but there was an even worse. He never came to arrest me. And I don't know why. I don't know how. Probably Firk probably didn't give me out.

He was the one who knew. And the other boys didn't even know my name. There was another man I knew who was arrested. And we worked together. He was a chemical engineer. And somehow he knew how to make the-- not bombs. He would make powder, you know, something, gunpowder with cotton or something. And he was arrested. He was such a nice man.

What was his name?

Stober. Stober. And here it seemed to me I may be one more from the group who were active, I mean alive, and that's by miracle.

Now, you continued to work at the police station. Who replaced Firk?

Oh, yeah. Oh, here I'll tell you. That's a good question. Now, I knew what was going on. Firk didn't show up. So this German, our master, asked where is Firk. So we say he was arrested. You know what? He got dressed, and got in, and got to that-- to the ghetto, to Roschmann. He said we need him. And he was a good boy, that man, very, very talented. He said we need him to work. And he said, I'll get him out. He says to us.

And he went. And he comes back. And he said, I couldn't get him out, he said, because it isn't for stealing. He said they said it's political. And then he says in the same, he said, you know, maybe he was listening to the radio, and he was spreading it. And he said, you know, it is forbidden, even us, if they would find out that we listen on the radio, foreign radio, they would shoot us. So he didn't know. He thought it is from the radio.

And they didn't replace Firk. There were orders. They gave over the-- and shortly after, they liquidated the ghetto and sent us to the--

Now, while you were working at the police station, did you see-- say you saw your next door neighbor?

Yeah. Yeah. That happened, I started to tell you, when we had a truck driver, you know, and he wanted to be nice to me. And he said, what can I do for you, sir? So I said, you know, I have a friend. Take me in the truck and let me off. I want to sit in for a while, and I'll come out. He said, yeah.

So he got-- drove me up to that place. And I jumped out, and I came in. And I tell him, trust me. They didn't know of him, I'm still alive and this. And it seemed to me, you know-- and I don't know, is it true or somehow, or my imagination, that this woman, his wife said, if things get very bad, he said you come over here. We'll hide you.

And this I don't remember that. Did she said, or didn't. You know, it was 40 years ago. But they were very pleased. And they asked me how, what. Oh, yeah, and she took out everything, what she had in the refrigerator, some [INAUDIBLE]

and things like that-- loaded me up. I got in, he took me back. [INAUDIBLE]

But then, next time, you know, I'll tell you that isn't finished with that.

And then you continued to work at the police station until they liquidated the ghetto.

And they liquidated the ghetto.

How did your job end at the police station? They just tell you one day not to come back?

One day, yeah. It was everything suddenly.

And you never--

In fact, they didn't have to tell me. No. It was from the ghetto. When we came to sleep, the ghetto is closed. They-- no more Germans can come to pick you up. It happened. They didn't know either, the police.

Is that the last time you saw [? the master? ?]

Yeah.

You know, Irving, before we begin with after the ghetto was dismantled, you mentioned to me off the tape the last time that there was an incident where you had a gun, actually had a gun.

Yeah.

Would you please tell me about that before we begin with the dismantling of the ghetto?

Well, I had the-- when I was repairing, I had guns. But I had a gun when we weren't even organized. And how did that happen? Next-- you have it on?

Sure.

Yeah. Next to my apartment lived a couple, a childless couple. And he was an elderly man.

Was that the one you had worked for?

No. No.

It was a different couple.

Yeah.

What was their name?

Katzen. Katzen. And he was working for a timber company. You know, in Latvia we had a lot of timber. So with the lumber men in the timber, he used to pay them their wages and this. So he had the gun. Usually, in Latvia, a gone, had only the police or officials. The population had no guns. There was no, not, no, no license like here. Very few who went hunting, they had probably small guns. But he had a revolver because he was handling money in the woods.

So when the war broke out and he lost his job-- all the Jews lost their jobs. So he had a gun, and he was probably 60 years old, gray, maybe [INAUDIBLE]. So he said to me-- we were next door. He said to me, here, you want the gun? Do with it what you want or hide it from me.

So for a while I kept it. Then I was afraid, you know. So I took it down. We had, downstairs-- it was an apartment building. In the basement, everybody had--

Was this before your brother had left?

Yeah.

So he knew you had it too?

No, no, no. that was not-- that is after my brother have left. No. No. So I had a gun.

So the Nazis were already there when you had the gun?

Yeah. Yeah. The Nazis were there. But I thought sometimes maybe at night I will go out and kill a Nazi, but it was so-- the responsibility was so big. If a Jew would have killed a Nazi, I don't know what it would happen. But later on, they used to take hundred for one. If a Jew committed a crime, they would take hostages. So that is a small episode.

But the fact is, I hid it. And I thought I'll use it, and I decided against it, very easy. But naturally, I had guns later on when I was fixing guns in ghetto, when we were organizing. So that would be the episode with a gun. I consider it a small episode, just a chance. But I wasn't that brave, and nobody would be that brave because it would be a lot of trouble.

So now let's-- so this chapter is finished. And now we'll start when they liquidated the ghetto. And that is very interesting. There are very interesting moments. And a story, you could write a book by this itself.

So at that time, Roschmann was in Riga ghetto. And the order was to liquidate the ghetto. So what did they do? They put a few signs that some people with trades or on the ages, are registered there. Some people already were working for the Wehrmacht. It was the army, the German army. They were working there, should register with them.

And I, at that time, was working in the ghetto. You know, I was an electrician and I employed a few people, you know, people who had shorts of this, small repair or appliances. So when the ghetto was liquidated, I started to look for a job outside. And it so happened-- oh, no, no, no. You know, I'm mixed up.

At that time, I was working for the ordnungspolizei.

Right.

Yeah. So entire job, the little jobs, you know, they stopped. But big jobs, where a lot of Jews worked with the Wehrmacht, they-- it's called in kaserne, you know. Kaserne means kaserne. You know what kaserne means, barracks for army. So they took the Jews and gave them a barrack where the army was. And they were working. And there was a lot of work for the Jews, all kind of work.

In fact, the Jews replaced the German soldiers from the front. And they had 100s, and 200s, and 300, and they utilized in offices, whatever you can think of. Behind the lines they utilized Jewish people.

But here what happened. One German, and I don't know how, and he was a very interesting man. His name was Scherwitz. He put out that all Jewish mechanics and tradesmen should register separately. He was an SS man. SS, you know, that Hitler stormtroopers. So I went and registered there.

Anyhow, he took over a Jewish plant. It was a textile plant. He took over. The machinery textile, the Germans didn't need for the war machinery. But they needed the cast iron. All the machinery-- and he took 1,200 Jews. And I was among them too. All the machinery, first we cleaned rooms, big rooms, textiles. It was a manufacturing plant. Broke the machinery throughout, and with a sledge hammer broke it, loaded it in the big tractor trailers, and they took it to Germany.

And after the rooms were cleaned, with the Germans, you know, it was working fast, and trucks were coming on the newest and shiniest machines, broken down and made scrap. Then we cleaned out the rooms. So one big room they made for dormitories, were sleeping quarters. And there were a lot of good workers who built, the beds and-- how do you call it in barracks, the beds?

Bunks.

Bunks. And some were making straw sacks, some blankets. And it was-- so he set up a big tailor shop. And the tailor shop used to repair clothing, German, for it, and make new ones. A big shoemaker shop, big-- there were a lot of shoemakers, Jewish shoemaker and tailors, and printing, auto repair shops. Some they left over from the textiles to make socks, knitting.

I was mechanical things, all kinds. I was assigned with a group to fix sewing machines. You know, tailors-- there were about 150 or more sewing machines. All the time it breaks. So one man was-- he was with a seamsters, with the sewing people.

And I was downstairs. We had a little shop. There was a goldsmith, you know. And he was a good man. He used to make some-- melt gold to make all kind fancy rings, fancy lighters, all for the Germans-- and typewriters, bicycles repair. And I think that was all.

And-- oh, yeah. And that Scherwitz-- and he was a marvelous man. In fact, we were wondering. Some gave him a nickname, "the Father." Some said he's a hidden Jew. He looked Jewish, black hair and-- you know. And he was so shrewd, and his ways were-- weren't German ways. You know? Then, food-- oh, yeah, then [INAUDIBLE] a washing machines he set up to wash clothing.

He had a butcher, butcher's, you know. And we belonged actually to the Kaiserwald concentration camp. And there was terrible. There were-- the Germans brought from Germany criminals. And they were the leaders of the ghetto-- of the concentration camp. So all the Jews belong still to the concentration camp, after from the ghetto. But we were like a state in a state.

He used to bring, officially, the food. But always additional food we had. Margarine and meat even we used to have. And there were tailors. One time he brought bales of clothing, make for us uniforms. Before we were wearing, with a-- jail people uniforms. He didn't like it. He didn't.

He said, I don't want it here. And the tailors--

Where was the concentration camp you were living in?

No, I-- we didn't go. I didn't go. They, when they liquidated the ghetto, part-- those they couldn't use went to the concentration camp. Those, the people who knew trades, went there.

So you were living at the textile plant. Is that--

Right.

I see.

Living at the textile plant. Some people who worked for the Wehrmacht, for the army, went with the army. But under arrest, went to the concentration camp.

All right.

So-- so we didn't wear anymore those clothes. In fact, later on, a high official from the SS came and he saw us. They

balled him out, why he did it. And part of it, he had stopped making those uniforms. And we were working and had it real good.

And he was-- and this German was living with us in the camp, only he had a separate little house. But he was there. And he had two more Germans, assistants. And around this was made a fence from boards. And on top, you know, with a wire. And outside were Latvian SS guards, the collaborators. But they were not-- he made so they were not allowed to go in, only outside.

And there was a big, big rooms, maybe it were that place had 15 or 20 acres or maybe more. We walk around. We used to walk around after work. And all of us, we never suffered hunger.

What was your job, Irving?

I was in the shop for fixing typewriters and sewing machines what they brought down. And I will tell you what happened. And we had it pretty good.

How did you learn how to fix typewriters and sewing machines?

Oh, I went to a trade school before. And, you know, I--

I thought it was electrical.

Well, but I was a handyman. I learned this, and I fixed watches. And I fixed a lot of things.

I see.

So-- so we lived there pretty good. And there was one time, and he used to do-- oh, yeah. And I'll tell it. He approached the Jews, you know, so close. There were a few from Riga who studied in Germany, and they knew perfect German and the German ways of life. He became with them friends. You know, he would talk to them.

And all over this was a Jewish manager. His name was Sheinberg. Then there was another Jew, and his name was Rudolf. And listen, well that-- that Jew wore a tie and a shirt and lived in a separate room, too, with his wife, on the premises. And he used to go out to the high officials. You know, in Riga it was a big center, but from Berlin, from the big shots. You know, Eichmann was there, and Muller used to come. If they wanted something special, suit or this, this Jew would go and take their measurements. Oh, yeah.

And he was a German-educated too. His German was perfect. And his looks was perfect. So he was the middle man. And we lived pretty good. Oh, yeah. And that Scherwitz was acquainted with some Jewish people. And some rich people had probably hidden valuables in town, what they lived. He would send out somebody, and they would pick up valuables. And he would trade. And with the Germans, that Scherwitz, used to schmear too.

When a big shot would come, and he needs some, the commander of the whole Eastern sector, he would bring them boots, new boots with fur, which during the wartime-- you know, in America you can buy it in every store. But during the wartime, it was-- you couldn't buy anything. And nobody was making something special. In there we could order up all kind of their uniforms with fur inside. It was cold.

And here what happened. One-- here I'm coming to an episode, what happened. Roschmann used to come. And he, with the Germans, he would come and see how we produce and make nice things. He would look like any other man. And-- and something we were building. They were building-- everything was going on. There were Jewish masons and building a building. And some from outside brought in gravel, sand and gravel, a load. This is what happened.

And at that time, Roschmann, an assistant, was at Lenta. At our place was called Lenta. And when, to dump the sand and gravel, a box with eggs fell out. And for the Germans, that the Jews, first, they couldn't understand why we look-- why we don't look undernourished there, you know. And when they saw it the eggs came out, oh, the Jews are trading

this.

So anyhow, they notified Roschmann. And he came on, and he said, what is going on here? And I don't know what Scherwitz told him. But anyhow [AUDIO OUT] the eggs. And it was a Jew from Prague, Czechoslovakia. We had some German Jews there because they brought to Riga, I told you before, Jews from all Europe. And Scherwitz-- so after Roschmann left, Scherwitz called in us together, and he used to make appells during lunch. And he would speak.

So he said, Roschmann was here. And he said we made a bad thing, a [NON-ENGLISH], a bad thing. And he said, Roschmann--