

They told us in a Russia place that the Russians may come over at any time, and the Germans may come to take us out. Or they may want to even shoot us on the place. But we have to organize. And here was, we are going to do it-- was worked out a plan.

And they tell us fast and go from place to place. And they worked out a plan. Somebody, they were-- we had a lot of intelligent-- the cream of the crop in our place. They are all young and a lot of educated people, because usually in Europe, we didn't have college educated, as many as-- in America every child goes to college. There were a few.

And they worked out a plan over teletype. The people there were repairing trucks. And we'll go with the trucks. And there was a wooden fence and push it down with the truck. In the fence, you go and push down the fence to open the fence, and the others should run.

In case we-- the few Germans came, or they-- till the Latvian guards from around, you know, [NON-ENGLISH]. We should have-- anybody should have arms, not arms like firearms, but hammers. You know, the shoemakers have hammers, have files, and bars. Whatever anybody can, we should have something. Could be a hand for hand fight we'll have to fight.

And there'll be-- we had a siren for alarm. They said when the minute comes, push the button. Over on the side will come, everybody should go out. The trucks will push down. They told us which wall-- you know, a whole side of it-- all the trucks. And there will, right away with trucks, and whoever will, there will be-- they said some will fall, but some will save them.

We'll go towards the Front to save ourselves or to hide or whatever we can. And it was, here again. It was such tension and such-- it is hard, it is hard for a person or for me, now, to-- it was, again, here is the moment of life and death, of decision is coming,

And we knew that it won't be easy. And you know you were looking on whatever. Some get pipe pieces, some this-- whatever anybody and-- and it was very tense. And you know-- oh yeah, on the other hand, you see that the end is near. You hear that it's-- they're, the Russians are coming, they're here.

And on the other hand, we knew how weak we are in comparison to them. But some had courage, and they lifted us up. And it was the decision. I remember I had something, too. And like everybody, waiting.

What did you have?

I don't remember. Something like a little piece of iron bar or something. And here what happened. All and this stems from Scherwitz come, comes from down, Scherwitz And in the army, the German-- oh yeah, some army are going back and forth. Scherwitz come, and he's excited, too. And he had some, among the Jews, good friends with whom he's better off and with whom he was joking and talking.

And evidently, that's what I was told. And [PERSONAL NAME], I understand he is now in Israel-- talked to him and told him the situation. And they said to him, you stay with us, and we'll save you, because you were good or decent, and if you want so the war can be over for you-- we'll-- nothing will happen to you, because we'll kill the Russians.

So here what it did. Scherwitz made an Appell. And it wasn't lunchtime. Usually, he would talk in lunchtime or after work. It was, like, 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We were working till 5 or 6. An Appell, and we-- on Appell, we had that alarm when you-- everybody comes to the big dining room. You know, it was in, like in army.

And we came. And Scherwitz came out, when they see him, like that-- I know everything what you think and what is going on here. And he said, don't make any dummheit. Dummheit mean dumb things. Are you listening to me-- don't make any dumb things. And he said, here I have the papers-- he takes down.

He said-- and here what happened. I promise you, and I guarantee you, if we see the Russians inside-- if the Russians

are coming-- when we have them inside, he said, I'll take the Latvian guards, and I move away. And you'll be free, he said.

And if not, I have the papers, and we'll go to Germany after, if it comes down. And he said, don't make any dumb decisions. And he said-- oh yeah, and he said that the-- then he said I should stay with you. And this, he said, that's a bad idea for me.

He said, they would zerfleischen. It means, in German, they would cut me up in pieces. And somehow, we quiet. down. He said-- and he repeated it, again. I take the guards, if I see the Russians are coming, I take the guards away. And they come with me, and you will be where you are, ready to come down.

Then it proved that the Germans sent new troops, and they stopped the Russians. In fact, they push them back. And that would happen in the Front with the Germans if you-- they had the Second World War-- they would go back, come again. And that is this episode is.

But it is so engraved, like, in my mind or in my heart of the days of, the hours of excitement, the hours of decision. And while there was, from one side the sun were shining up. Going up, there were the clouds there. And you didn't know where you will finish, in the darkness or in the light. And we survived.

Now, one more episode for there. So the Russians-- we have still time, yeah. So the Russians were held back. And in fact, and it calmed down. However, the Germans weren't sure what's going to happen.

And our plant was, in Riga, was like here with Berlin. Riga was between-- Riga was divided into parts by the Dvina, a river, a big river, almost as wide as the Ohio. And it was for shipping. So usually-- and this was in before in previous wars-- we were on the eastern side of the river. If the Russians would come, they would come first.

And the river then is a barrier for, again, for war operations. The bridges, they blow up the bridges, and you cannot come over. On one side would be one army, and the other, they shoot at each other, and you can't pass.

So the Germans didn't know what is going to happen. Here what would happen-- so Scherwitz wanted to save us. So in a few days after we come down, about a week, all of the sudden, Scherwitz says we are going to evacuate this site, and we are going until we get the boat. Yeah, until we get the boat to go to Germany, we are going over in Salaspils.

In Salaspils where the-- you know, like Babi Yar, where they were killing all the Jews-- and nearby was a concentration camp for Latvians, for non-Jews. And again, how can you believe, you know.

[TELEPHONE RINGING]

So one morning, again, we-- he made an Appell. And he says, we are going to Salaspils. And he said, don't worry. He said, we are just-- we want to be safe there. And as soon as a boat comes, he has all arranged. We are getting all the machinery. We'll get on trucks, and we're taking over, and don't worry.

And I don't know how other people felt, but I did not believe in-- you know, it could be. Anyhow. We got up in rows like soldiers, eight in a row. And we were marching. It was about 8,10 miles and with a lot of guards with the machine guns, with the SS.

And we didn't know-- is it-- the Germans were famous with telling stories that-- when they were taking out women and children and the elderly, that-- he said, they want to take them out from Riga, and they are taking them to somewhere to the-- where there is more food-- it'll be easier to food, and it won't be so crowded. And they were taking them and killing them. We knew, already.

We didn't know what it will be. So it was. But you could not-- there was no way to do-- run from, when there are so many with many machine guns, they're machining you, gun down. A few boys hid in the building. And when we came back later on, they were shot, because the Latvians were there. And they tried later on to get out of the building and--

So here's what happened. I remember when-- Salaspils were in the woods, I remember when we came, and we had to go through the woods. There were no roads like here. And the woods were woods. You had to walk through the woods. There wasn't made the roads for cars, though.

And I remember. I thought maybe we should run, and then we could save ourselves. But on the other hand, if you do something prematurely, you-- so--

Were the woods like our woods? Where they as thick as our woods or--

Thicker.

Thicker?

Thicker and no roads. And you come in in the woods, it's dark. And the land was pretty rich there, and the lumber were growing. However, the brush were cut out. There weren't so many brush or blackberries with the stickers-- we didn't have at all. So anyhow, we came with him up there.

They brought us to the concentration camp from the Latvians. We had a free big barrack. And Scherwitz came with us. And we saw how they, in the concentration camp, how the Latvians, they had to carry big hunter bag, big rocks and this and put it away. Some would pick it up from the same pile and go a big circle and drop it off and rest and pick it up, again.

And here is a barrack. And it wasn't-- this I remember, it was in April, end of April, because the sun was warm. The snow was melted. And Scherwitz comes in, and he calls in the Germans-- which, again, were the criminals who were taking care of those concentration camp people. From the Latvians, it was more like a jail for Latvians who were arrested for crimes.

And he tells them, to them-- the people who were supposed to take care of us-- he said-- and he was already Oberleutnant, you know, a big chin and tiny mouth. And he said, any things what they do, you don't punish them, you tell to me, and I'll be here every day-- Scherwitz and Germans.

Over this concentration camp was a Mr Krauzer. He was before in the ghetto over here-- Krauzer, too, a murderer. He was a very-- like Roshmann, even worse, I think. And here what happened--

Was he a German?

Oh, sure. Yeah, he was a German, an SS. And he was there.

Was he have lower rank than--

That Scherwitz? Yeah. But after Scherwitz left, he comes in. And you know, he was such a mean one, he was pretty mild with us. Not only that, he goes and tells to take food from the Latvian prisoners and bring over here. They brought so much bread and grease that-- all kind of fat, you know.

Then he said to us, why should you be indoors, you come out, the sun is shining, get a little sun. And we were there about three or four days like that. This, the murderers, that Krauzer and the others, which they were terrible, they were nice to us.

And after a few days, the Russians, evidently, who were pushed away back, were coming back to Lenta. You know, Lenta was our place. And really, he came with the trucks. We start loading the machinery. And they loaded us up in boats. It took a couple days-- first, the machinery people were hauling, the sewing machines and all of what we have. We had a lot with the garage tools.

And we came. And they put us in a boat, in a cattle boat, you know. It was-- the manure was there. And I remember I got so seasick. Everybody got seasick for-- and they had barrels where women and men were together. You have to make, urinate and this. And they have a few barrels. It was like a big barges.

And I remember I was so seasick. I have no food. And I thought if that boat would sink that would be a good thing. It was, again, too bad. And oh yeah, and before we left, Scherwitz said, see you in Germany, and as I promised you, we'll have a shot. And he-- we landed in Gdynia-- Gdansk where now is the Polish states, what they started out with Gdansk or Gdynia. You were, you're in there, Poland.

Right.

We landed there. We didn't see anymore Scherwitz. We came on that land. And Germans took us over, and we landed in that concentration camp, Stutthof. But then I'll tell you the other story.

Was that the last time you saw Scherwitz?

Right, but I heard about him after the liberation.

What did you hear about him?

He was caught after the war in Brussels, Belgium. A man from our people recognized him. And about, too, it would be an interesting story. He turned him over to the authorities, that American. And he said that he wants to go to Israel or any place to be judged by Jews. He knew that he have offense. And then I don't know what happened.

But I'll tell you why that man turned him over to the authorities from a Lenta man. That man was, again, he was married to a non-Jewish woman, and she went with him to the ghetto. However, I don't know what he was from occupation. He was quite intelligent and knew very well German.

And his name was Jan Kolovich, but he changed his name to John Kolovich. And he was saying to authorities always that he's not Jewish. And they brought him in our place [RUSSIAN], as bookkeeper. Oh yeah, he was a bookkeeper. And he kept the books, because we were producing. And then In Germany, you had to. So he was.

So John Kolovich. And he had it better being a bookkeeper and in the office. He knew Scherwitz well. And evidently he had something against Scherwitz, because the other Jews-- I would let him go. In fact, there was, in the Jewish papers from New York, was write-ups about Scherwitz and about the story after the liberation. So that was--

You don't know whatever happened?

I don't know what happened. But I knew when I met, when I met refugees, or in Israel when I met something, and we were talking from the same-- so they told us about Yankelovich.

Now, when we landed, we landed our 600 people landed together.

Were there women and-- as well as men with your group?

Yeah-- no, not many there were. Because for example, in-- seamstresses were women in our place. So from our 600 people, we landed at a unit in Stutthof. In Stutthof, we came. We were in two barracks that are small barracks.

And I remember the first night when we landed, we had to lay on the side on the floor. It was floor, a little bit of straw, because you couldn't lay like that and take up so much room. We-- put us like sardines, they put us in.

And after being there in Stutthof for about six weeks, they used to send us to work until we got lice and flea and bedbugs, German bedbugs or Polaks. You never saw a bedbug, probably, or lice and things.

And anyhow, parts, again. What happened-- after about six weeks, industrialists came to that camp. And they came to us and used to ask--

Was this IG Farben, by any chance?

No, no, no, no. I don't know if-- I heard there was speaking about. What we landed is in Magdeburg. It was a big factory for aluminum pots and pans that they converted it in making ammunition for flack, such big-- these have somewhere for cannons.

So the mechanics, this, they took out. But the tailors and the others they didn't need yet. So I know from my shtetl and from other, a lot of my friend remained there, and typhus broke out. And they closed the these. And the others perished.

But from Lenta, I didn't count them, but I know from friends and here, and some are spread out in America, a few in Israel that were, we remained alive, yes. After Stutthof I went to Magdeburg. And then I'll tell you about Germany. That is a big story.

Right after then went to-- on the way to Germany.

You came from Poland, is that right?

No, to--

Your ship--

Oh, we were shipped already, yeah. Yeah, yeah, we landed at Gdynia Harbor in a barge where we were. In the barge we're put in that, there was no room to sit down, one by one. And the barge usually is high, about 8 feet. And we couldn't see what's going on with us.

However, there was-- part of the barge had a roof, and most of it was open. And it was, you get tired standing up. We were pressed together. And the trip took, on the barge, I would say, 36 hours or so.

And some-- you were sleeping standing up. But I remember, during the night, I managed to get on the roof, and I fell asleep on the roof. There were several people on the roof. And it was in April, and the weather was so cold that from-- we didn't sleep for a long time. When I fell asleep, I woke up and was so cold and stiff, practically stiff.

And finally, we arrived in Stutthof. And Stutthof was a small camp which had a camp for Jews and non-Jews. But each nationality were divided up.

Was that in Germany?

No, that was still Poland. Oh, maybe I am mixing up a little. Oh, I think that we had already. I see. From Stutthof, I think Stutthof-- where I was, Stutthof-- and we worked there a few weeks. And then German industrialist came to Stutthof and were picking out young, able men to work in their factories.

What were you doing in Stutthof?

In Stutthof, just a concentration camp. And sequence, they took to the oven. They had a crematorium. And if we work there in Stutthof, we were to the woods, preparing the lumber, firing wood. We have to carry out from the woods trees.

And there there were a lot of shoes from the people they killed off, mountains of it-- and clothing we had to carry it from one warehouse to the other and clothing and something. And there were some shops. Some people were repairing those shoes or whatever. But it, mainly it was a concentration camp.

And in a few weeks the industrialist came. And they sorted, again, people with trades. They took what they're interested.

Because at that time, it was already 1944, and the Germans-- their own people they mobilized.

The Russians were coming already. I think they were already in the German territory. And it was after the invasion. So they shipped out their own people and brought in. So but they didn't take everybody.

But I was lucky with-- from our-- I think we arrived about 600, 700, maybe a couple hundred they picked out. And I was among them. And they brought us to Magdeburg. And there they put us to work. There was-- in Magdeburg, first, we landed in a camp from barracks with barbed wire.

And on the next day, they took us to work. They brought us to a plant. And there they were making shells, shells for guns-- all kinds, some for to fight, to shoot at airplanes. Some were about a foot long. Some were 20 inches long, big shells.

And each machine was-- first, there was a German and then a Jew, a German on each machine. And after some times, they took away the Germans, and there were only over, in the whole room, one or two Germans. And the Jews worked it. They taught them how to play it.

You know, it was each had a small job, but on the machines. So and we worked there for about a year, almost til the end of the war. And here what it used to happen-- we worked in shift-- two shifts, 12 hours and 12 hours.

And at that time, the Americans and the Allies, I would say, started, was bombing Germany. It was in full swing.

OK, it was Magdeburg in Germany?

Yeah, Magdeburg is in Germany. It is near the Elbe. In fact, this town is where Eisenhower met with Zhukov. The Russian and the American army met. And there is the Elbe River. And in fact, the Americans broke the Front.

And the Germans wanted the Americans should occupy most of their territory, so that they didn't resist in that area. And they did not. There was a bridge, you know, and they didn't destroy that bridge, because they thought the Americans will come. But Eisenhower already made the-- Eisenhower, the American government made a pact that the Russians go-- the Americans go up to the Elbe, and the Russians go farther.

And so they waited for-- of Germany was in full swing. In fact, over-- I don't know in-- where the Allies used to go, but they used to fly over Magdeburg. And whenever the Allies' Air Force used to fly over Germany-- there it used to be-- over Magdeburg there used to be an alarm.

And they had for us, under the plant, they had dug a ditch, and inside they put in big cement pipe, what you use for under highways. And it was about 5 and 1/2 foot.