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Jerusalem

M - What brought you to Turkey?

T - Practically, the train. I went to Turkey because it was a neutral country and we had contact from there with the Jewish underground. Gradually this developed into several contacts, also mainly with the British intelligence. The American intelligence didn't exist yet. They started only growing at that time but the British had deep roots there. The people who worked in the British network were mainly people from families who for several generations have been British merchants in that area, in Istanbul, in Constantinople, who knew the area extremely well and that was their great advantage. We wanted contact in order to save, even individual Jews from the other side and to keep contact with the Jewish underground. For that, Istanbul was the right place.

M - In what countries did you have contact with the underground?

T - Well, to give you several examples, we had telephone contact, for instance, practically everyday with Budapest. What we found from them were weather reports. You know you didn't have a weather map of the world as you do now. The problem was that they tried with their airforce to do whatever they could, through that they needed a weather report which then at that time was easy to get if you were in the place, but you didn't have the technical facilities you have today. We gave them the weather report, we spoke o Budapest, we spoke to Bucharest from Istanbul and then we could give a weather report to the British that used it for air attacks of the airforce in those areas. Besides that, more important, but minimal to our regret was the contact, the physical contact, was the Jewish underground. There wasn't very much of it. There was a bit of it in the camps and a bit of it in the various youth movements that existed, but it was very meager. But anyway what ever we could get, very often only over the phone, and sometimes in direct meeting we could get to Istanbul. >From Istanbul we could transfer it to where ever our people said, in Turkey which was a neutral city (country) and how neutral it was I'll tell you: I had for instance, several times, there was one good restaurant called Abdullah's, and I

went several times there to have lunch and at the next table you had Germans sitting. I had an incident where a German who didn't know me came up to me and said "I hear you are from Bayrot." I said "No I am from Beirut". He quickly withdrew.

M- What was your cover?

T - I was a newspaperman.

M- You were sent by the Yushurv?

T - Yes.

M- By the party or by the youth movement?

T - No, I think I was sent by the Jewish Agency. I don't think the parties or the youth movement had people there. They first couldn't afford it. It was not extremely expensive but the parties and the youth movement were very small and weak organizations, which couldn't afford to send people abroad.

M- What years were you in Turkey?

T - Let me think for moment.

M- I can check it out.

T - (sound started rolling mid sentence) sitting at one table and the next table Von Pappen, the German Ambassador had lunch, so it was that close to each other. I had a German once come up to me and speak to me and said, " I hear you are here from Bayroit?" I said "No I'm here from Beirut" So he quickly leaved the room, you know.

M - What did you know was happening to the Jews from the vantagepoint of Istanbul?

T - We had correspondence with the camps. We knew more or less what was going on. We couldn't do very much. We could save sometimes and individual and even that was a success for us. We had an agreement with the British and we would try to get prisoners of war out, the same time we would try to get Jews out. The prisoners of war they were interested in were mainly pilots. They had pilots who were shot down and pilots. The pilots then took many hours to be trained, much more than now- a- days. To get a pilot back who had been

shot down and was a prisoner of war and to get him home and make use of him again was a great thing. So the British and we had a close cooperation on trying to save people who were in prisoner of war camps. There were only cases of individuals where we succeeded. This was an ??? affair, but it was very important to get these individuals.

M- You were working closely with the British on one hand to rescue but on the other had the British become opponents when it came time to bring the Jews to Palestine.

T - Well, this was a neutral country. The British also didn't have a very strong position there. The whole question was one of individual, saving individuals on our side as well as theirs. I don't think this mattered very much. I'll tell you when it started mattering. This was before the Hungarians got into the war. We had sent parachutists over, 20 or 30. We had an idea of sending a larger number, we were talking about 250 to 300 in order to prepare the Hungarians for some kind of war like action although they were few. We were training on our side in Israel. 250 young people to be dropped in Hungary as we had dropped 20 or 30 or 40 that we had dropped before. They should organize the little bit of underground that existed in the various youth movements, various Zionist movements. We did this together with the British until one day one of us saw a cable lying on a writing desk, we could read it and get the content. The content was roughly this: " It isn't worth it to organize a few hundred Jews in the underground, it will give us so many problems when the war is over from Arabs and others. You better leave that scheme alone and don't touch it any more." The British intelligence who had worked with us first on the individuals that we had sent and then prepare together with us these 250 that we had trained here in parachuting and various other things, and they were all people who had come from various areas (Disruption by a chiming music clock)

T - Maybe the best example to give you in connection with the fact that Turkey was a neutral country. There was a very good restaurant called Abdullah's to which I went from time to time to meet with various people and I remember the occasions where I sat one table removed from Von Pappen, who was the German Ambassador, who was normally stated in Ankara but he came to Istanbul from time to time. When he was in Istanbul apparently he also liked good food. So he came to Abdullah's. Another occasion was when a German whom I didn't know; Von Pappen I knew by face, he was often photographed; but a German I didn't know came up to me one day and said: "I hear you are from Bayroit." That's a city in Germany, "When did you arrive here?" So I had to tell him "Dear friend I came here from Beirut, not Bayroit." He withdrew quickly. It was an interesting field to work there.

M- Were you enormously frustrated that there was so little, so much was happening, and there was so little you could do?

T - Terribly frustrated. What we could do was send the people in the camps some money which helped them from time to time. Partly, to acquire very few hand weapons. Generally to have an easier life maybe. There was very little we could do. But you could know what was going on, and that was your question before.

When you knew what was going on, you wrote home and you contacted the Yushurv in Palestine. What response did you receive?

T - The Yushurv here got news not only from us. There were individuals who came to Switzerland from Germany or came to Spain, which were also neutral countries and brought the same news. Altogether we couldn't do very much. If we could have done something, the millions that were killed wouldn't have been killed. It was the most frustrating position to be in.

M- Were there tensions between you and for example, Hyam Barlas?

T - We had tensions. Yes. Hyam Barlas worked through official channels. There was an office of the Jewish Agency which was quite official and that was his field of activity. We worked through channels that weren't so open. We found individual British, a few Americans; the Americans only started out at that time, they didn't have a well established history there; with whom we could exchange views, who helped us as postmen to take individual letters and take them to the camps. Barlas wouldn't do that; he did only the official things. We kept separate.

M- Did you have any contact with Archbishop Ron Calli?

T - To the extent he could he was of great help. He always, we gave him our news of what was happening to Jews. He transferred it, so he said to the Vatican. He commiserated together with us. He wasn't able to do very much. But what he could he did.

M- Were there any tensions between your group in Istanbul and with the Yushurv back home?

T - We had different channels. We had different people here with whom we cooperated. We had to keep the two things entirely apart. That's what we did. It

was the most frustrating period in my life I think because we could do so little. We knew so much and we could do so little.

M- How clear to you sitting in Istanbul was the scope of the Holocaust?

T - What?

M - How clear was it to you that Jews were being slaughtered systematically day in day out.

T - I think we knew about it through our representatives, through a single person that we had in Spain, and a single person, a Gentile who came out to Switzerland and told the story before we got the news. We had two fields, one was the Jews in Hungary, when Hungary was not yet taken over, it was under the influence of the Germans, they couldn't move a step without their OK. Mainly we tried to keep the spirit up of the people in the camps and it was a different altogether to the line that Jewish Agency or others took. It was the most miserable time in my life, no doubt.

M- Did you feel you were being effective?

T - Well even if we took out one person at time, it was one person saved. So, if you even send in a little and the receive received, the people inside the camps could help themselves to a little bit of food from time to time to buy a pistol or something of the kind. We felt this was an achievement, it meant nothing, it was microscopic in comparison to the disaster. It was what we could do and that's what we did.

M- What were your contacts with Turkish officials?

T - Very little. We were, I personally, we were a very small group. Altogether we were three people there. Many Pommeranz, whom you know, and a man called Bader who passed away from a Kibbutz called Mizrah and I. We were able to send, most important, a little money over so they could maybe here or there bribe somebody to get the mail through or even to get a little bit of food which was also important, very important.

M - Did you have contacts with individual Turks who helped you, who worked with you?

T - Mainly that they closed their eyes, mainly that they closed their eyes. We would have had many more difficulties with passports. I represented a

newspaper, I'll tell you, I was a member of a Kibbutz then, Engev, we invented the Engev News. We got an OK from here, some kind of official letter about the Engev news. The Engev needed the Turkish news as I need the news today from some kind of Turkish village. But that's what we had. We had Turks that helped.

M- But mainly by not seeing certain things?

T - Mainly by not keeping quite. But you read from time to time in the papers, today I don't follow this, you read about a thing like this in the paper. I look at it as carefully as I can, and you read about individuals, officers in consulates and give visa to Jews and so some of this is our work.

M- How important was Turkey's strategic position to your work? It being a neutral country, it being a contact between Europe and Asia?

T - It didn't have any influence. Maybe there was some kind of a connection somewhere on some other level. We didn't know about anything of this kind. I don't know until today. The Turks had no reason, the Turks are very careful for their very own reasons to really keep neutral and not to mix various things. But you found an individual from time to time, who would give you a visa in your passport. It was an individual affair. We had, if there was a contact with the Turks it was not on our level.

V- I have a question. Do you remember the Pera Palas Hotel in Istanbul?

T - Very well, I stayed there. The Pera Palas was the oldest hotel, and by the time I came there it was a bit neglected, but at the time we knew Herzelet stayed there, that it was "The Hotel" in Istanbul. Out time you had already more modern hotels, but the Pera Palas was a historic place for us. We went there from time to time. It had no particular importance in our activities.

V - So nothing important happened there at Pera Palas?

M- They described Istanbul at that point that a place where every group their own intelligence network. Everybody as a double agent or a triple agent or what ever have you. How much intelligence could you gather could you gather just by contact with other people?

M -When you say contact with the camps, which camps are you talking about?

T- Well, I don't know the names anymore but... Names are generally a difficult for me, but some of the people who afterwards came out, over at the head of the war or what ever you call it in the Warsaw ghetto or that kind of thing. They were the people whom we dealt with...

M- So you are talking more of ghettos instead of concentration camps?

T - Yes. I mean, in the concentration camps you couldn't deal with people, you could deal only with individuals in those concentration camps. You had no contact with the masses, with the great numbers. That would have been far too dangerous and would have disturbed what we might achieve by contact with individuals.

M- But in the ghettos you could leaders of the underground?

T - Yes.

M - You spoke of some Turks you had contact with, some worked for money and some worked because they believed in the cause?

T - Indeed. I don't know whether they believed in our cause but they may have. They certainly knew particularly that the time that I was there already. That the war was not going in favor of the Germans. That it will be over soon and any contact they had with the Allies would be very useful to them later. The easiest would have been through us.

M - You have had a very long and a very rich and diverse life. When you look back from the perspective of this stage of your life on your period of time in Turkey during the war, what does that say to you about that period of time, how do you look back at that period of time?

T - Well it was the most difficult to bear, because you felt so absolutely helpless in comparison to what you could achieve, you might have saved one person here, or two persons there, but it didn't mean anything in comparison to the great disaster. You lived in permanent frustration.

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