

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Michael Vogel
July 14, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Michael Vogel, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on July 14, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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MICHAEL VOGEL

July 14, 1989

Q: Uh, would you please give me your name and your date of birth.

A: My name is Michael V. Vogel. V-O-G-E-L. I was born November 29th, 1923.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Jacovce, J - A - C - O - V - C - E, Czechoslovakia.

Q: Tell me about your childhood, about your growing up. What was it like for you?

A: I come from a family, my parents, my father was a businessman, he was a cattle dealer, in the small community of Jacovce. We stayed in Jacovce until I became six years old. I had an older sister and a younger brother. We then moved to a larger community which is called Topol_ any, T - O - P - O - L - C - A - N - Y. C with a umlaut [ha_ek]. And the reason for the move, because of schools. My father wanted to put us into a larger school, school which was in Topol_ any. And we lived in Topol_ any, we started, uh, Jewish schools, and soon after, two more children were born in our family. I can give you their names. My name used to be Moshe, which was, uh...they used to call me M - I - S - O, S with an umlat [Mišo with a ha_ek]. My sister who was older than my, uh, than I am, was name was Rose, Ro_i--R - O - Z with an umlaut [ha_ek]- I. My younger brother, who was not quite two years younger than me, his name was Arpad, A - R - P - A - D; and I had a sister Marta, M - A - R - T - A; and a little brother, the baby brother, whose name was Maxmilian. We lived a fairly happy life in Slovakia. Well, it was part of Czechoslovakia--this was the region of Slovakia. It was Czechoslovakia, but our part was called Slovak. We were the Slovaks. Antisemitism was there, always there. I remember when we used to play soccer as kids, there was never boys against boys, it was always the Catholic against Jews. That was the kind of soccer games we used to play. But we got along as well as one could get along. We stuck to our ways and they stuck to theirs. Uh, we were quite religious, especially our mother. I even remember my bar mitzvah in 1936. Uh, my grandparents on my mother's side, my mother by the way came from another community, uh I would say sixty, seventy kilometers from Topol_ any. Her maiden name was Feldman, and our grandparents, her parents, were there at my bar mitzvah, which we called the grosse shul--the big temple, the big shul. Our rabbi was a very famous guy. His name was Abraham Weiss. And we had to go to temple, to shul, every morning and especially before I became bar mitzvah. And then of course after that, every morning. We all went to the Jewish schools, except my sister. My sister was sent to Vienna. Now she was a pre-teener, pre-teenager, where my father's youngest sister lived; and she stayed with her a couple of years to go to school there. Uh, I would say from '35 to '37. And then she was sent back when Hitler started the rumbles. This was before the Anschluss in 1938 in Austria. We knew of problems in Germany. We knew of some problems but no one...no one paid much attention. Everyone felt ah nothing's going to happen to anyone. But we found out later that it did. Because in 1938 when Hitler marched into Austria, and annexed Austria so to speak

as part of Germany, he started to take the Jews on the streets. We heard on the radios, those of us who had radios, what was going on - the beatings of the Jews, the break-in of the shops and that type of hooliganism that was going on. And pretty soon we found the Austrian Jews were running away from Austria and came to our towns. And my mother took an Austrian lady in to us. We didn't have a huge home but the five children but we gave her a spot to stay. But most of all I remember is when the Czechoslovakia mobilized its armed forces. And the reason for the mobilization was because Hitler wanted to take part of Czechoslovakia which known to us as Sudetenland into Germany. He wanted to annex Sudetenland into Germany. That was a Germanic-speaking part of Czechoslovakia. And I remember my father was also taken into service, and I still remember the narrow street as the five children and our mother walked with our father to the railroad station to wish him well, to say goodbye to him. And, of course, the famous Neville Chamberlain quote, "peace in our time." And peace in our time never came; because as soon as he [Chamberlain] probably closed the door of 10 Downing Street, Hitler marched not only into Sudetenland but he took over the Czechs, Bohemians, Moravians. But Slovakia, the region where I was born, didn't, never seen a Nazi. Nazi soldiers never marched into Czechoslovakia, into Slovakia. So what happened with us, the Hlinka Guard, Guard, Hlinka, which H - L - I - N - K - A, was formed, and then in March 15, 1939, is when Slovakia became the puppet government of the Nazis. The Hlinka Guards, these were people that were our neighbors, people that our parents did business with, that grew up, and lived with practically. They became the Guards.

Q: O.K., the Guards did what?

A: Guards? Their function was, this was the Nazi-type, almost like an SS-type guards. So what happened with the Jews in particular, of course, only to the Jews in Slovakia as a matter of fact, all Jews from the age of six had to wear a yellow Star of David, sewn on the left breast of their outer clothing, with the inscription, Jude, Jew in German. I remember we couldn't, couldn't walk the streets together. No more than three or four Jews could walk the streets together. And, of course, curfew. By eight o'clock all of us had to be in their homes. We couldn't shop, uh, uh, any time we wanted to, only designated hours. And since my father was, uh, a cattle dealer and horse dealer, while my father was, uh, gone, I became, I was the oldest boy, my sister was older than me of course, so I was sort of in charge of knowing some of the millers, some of the flour millers, and go to pick up flour for our family. And you couldn't do it during the day because if you got caught, the Hlinkas would get to you and of course you were punished. Midnights, uh, middle of the nights, was when my mother and I and a couple of other Jewish ladies would go, go to the miller and pick up flour so we could have bread. And it was all black market, and you always paid through the nose. (Laughter) Everyday there was a new law read to us or posted on, on bulletin boards - they had these little round, uh, stalls where you would come and read the bulletin what happens next to the Jews. Uh, we were harassed, beaten on the streets, and of course the businesses were taken away from all the Jews. My father business, my father's business was given to the person who worked for him. And my father had to work there to show him how to do the business, to sell the cattle. And my father never believed that anything would happen to us. Almost to the last minute. He said no, he - the reason for that was because most, most of these people,

first of all, we were Slovaks, Czechs, we were born there. No one's going to bother us. And second, my father also dealt with the Czechoslovakian government. He sold cattle and horses to the government for, for the armies and that, uh, type of business. So he said no, nothing's going to happen. This will, ah, this will pass. But it didn't. Because we were harassed, we were beaten, and in early 1942, end of 1941, early 1942, we heard that they are going to put us into camps. There was a rumor at one time, too--which was not even a rumor. Actually it was the truth, that the Jews will be shipped to Madagascar.¹ Uh, I was a kid, I never knew, I was a small young teenager. But it didn't happen. Instead of Madagascar, myself, my older sister, and my next brother--Rose, myself and Arpad--were told to report to the Town Square. All young Jewish boys and girls. When they rounded us up, they told us that we're going back to our homes, pack our belongings - take food and clothing with you - you're going to be relocated and your parents will join you. They took us about two hours from our home town to the first war camp. It was called Arbeitlager. And the camp, the name of the camp was Nováky, N - O - V - A - K - Y, manned by large group of SS, of, uh, Slovakian Hlinka Guards. Mind you, we have yet to see an SS officer. Let me, let me re-track back for a moment if I may. Uh, the first time that have seen German soldiers was when Germany was invading Poland, September 1st, 1939. And how we seen them, the German army was going through Slovakia to get to Poland, because we were first and then came Poland. But we felt them. My father had to take the cattle from his stalls, from his, and the horses, and deliver it to the Town Square for the German army. Beaten by these, uh, by the Hlinka Guards behind him, going fast, to give this for the Germans to take with them as, as food and and horses for, for carrying their materials, war materials. That was the first time that I'd seen a German soldier. And when we'd seen them on those little motorcycles with the side little car and, and, and trucks and horses pulling their, their - that's how we've seen - that's the first time we've seen the Nazi soldiers, the German soldiers. This was the Wehrmacht at the time. So, we never had anything to do with them as far as being our guards yet, because our guards were the people that spoke Slovak just like we did. And when we arrived to Nováky, they loaded us on to trains after we loaded, after we packed our belongings at home. They came with us to our homes so we wouldn't run, we wouldn't hide, and they had enough of these guards all over, all over the city.

Q: Did you know any of your guards?

A: Oh, absolutely, by names.

Q: Tell me about your conversation with them.

A: Well, they would come, first of all they became ruthless. O.K. The word "_id" was common. "_id" is a Jew. "We finally got you _ids," and that type of words, and beating. They all had clubs and rifles and canes. Whatever they had they would beat you. These were people, this one guy in particular, his name was Martin_ek (ph), who was the barber, who was our barber. We used to go to the barbershop - he worked for a Jewish barber called Dezider (ph)

¹ The Jews were never deported to Madagascar.

Banau, B - A - N - A - U. The poor guy perished in Auschwitz, but you know. And this Martin_ek (ph) was my barber. He cut my hair, cut my family's hair, and he, you couldn't ask for a nicer guy during the time (laughter). He was also an alcoholic but most of them were. And when we arrived to this camp, we seen guards from our home town. You would go close to him and would ask him nicely, you know, please don't help or something. Boom, the first thing would happen you would get hit. When they took us to Nováky by train, by, by passenger train, and when we arrived there it was a huge complex. With wooden barracks. Girls on one side, boys on the other side of the barrack, camp. And we were assigned to our bunks, unloaded our belongings, and then we had to line up in front of our barracks and then the guards would read us the laws. And, by the way, food at the time was still plentiful in Slovakia. Slovakia was a farm country, so the food was there. The cooks were our people. The Jews became, those who were appointed to be the cooks. We had meat, we had, we had potatoes, we had eggs, we, we still that. And we were also allowed at the time still to be receiving packages. So the parents would send some stuff to us. So that was still allowed because it was our, you know, still in our country. When the next morning when they woke us up and lined us up in front of our barracks, they told us after breakfast, you're going to report to work. What kind of work? Something which really, uh, none, nothing, uh, useful, just carrying bricks or stones and making piles. Because they didn't build anything. There was nothing to build. This was a camp, just a big grounds with holes where they were digging, some people were digging sand. My job, I was assigned to carrying stones in my bare hands and making a pile. And after we made that pile high, then we take that pile and make another pile. And this was the daily, daily routine. There was some people, there was even railroad tracks with small, small cars that ran on the railroad, that we pushed on the railroad. And we would just carry sand, dump it and carry more sand. No reason. There weren't homes built. There weren't roads built. There was just a camp, just a detention camp. And beating. Yea, we still had music and our singing groups. None of us believed what, what was waiting for us. When in April 1942 the first transport, well actually it was the end of March, the first transport from Nováky was taken and my brother Arpad was there and so was my sister Ro_i, Rose. I stayed behind. Of course, I didn't know, we didn't know where they were going. Neither did they. And I found out of course much later, my sister Rose ended up in Auschwitz. My brother Arpad ended up in Lublin-Majdanek. Couple of months later my turn came. I, I left with a bunch of people, Slovakian people from my home town also, and we, this is what they told us. This is how they did it. They lined us up in front of our barracks. They told us we're going to be relocated to the east. Pack whatever you owned, report back in front. We did that. They loaded us into trucks, and I will never forget, just as, just as the trucks started to move, in unison we all started to sing the Hatikvah. I'll never forget that. Just the trucks moving, and we singing the Hatikvah anyway. And when we finished the Hatikvah, still being Czechs and Slovaks, we sang the Czech national anthem. When we came, the trucks stopped at a railroad siding. Railroad siding is for the, load, uh, freight. We've seen, oh, I would say about twenty cattle cars lined up, on the railroad tracks, and each cattle car had a wooden plank, doors wide open, and the plank leading into the cattle car. They loaded us into the cattle car, between eighty and hundred of us, boys and girls together. A metal bucket was put on each end of the car which was used for bathroom. The cattle car's doors were locked and sealed. We could hear them locking it. This was the

last time that we have seen the Slovakian Hlinka guards. Some of the boys got friendlier with the guards, and they say, "Goodbye to you. You know, this is it, we won't [see] you no more." And the train started to move, and Nováky is approximately 24 hours distance from Auschwitz. Of course, we didn't know we were going to Auschwitz. They told us we were being relocated and our families will join you. Your families will soon join you. I would say approximately 24 hours later . . .

Q: Tell me, before you go on, tell me about those 24 hours.

A: That cattle car - first of all, it was jam packed, uncomfortable. People were fighting for places. You could not, not all of us could sit down. Hardly anyone could lay down. People were crushing each other. And of course they were fighting for the bathroom facilities. That was the worst part. Those people who couldn't hold, and then of course the buckets would be over-filled, and there was nothing else you could do, just relieve yourself as close to the corner of the car as you possibly could. We stopped once, on the cattle car, just the cattle car stopped once to relieve the buckets and they gave us some water, one, on one trip. I don't remember where - I was told it was in Jinna, that was the name of the town, but who could tell. And we got the buckets out and then they gave us some water. I would say next morning, now I would say next morning we arrived to our destination. The cattle cars stopped. The cattle cars were opened. And this was the first time that we have seen SS guards, SS soldiers, and SS officers. And every SS guard had a dog on a leash, either a German Shepherd or a Doberman Pincher. Mostly German Shepherds. Their rifles with bayonets sticking up, and either wooden walking cane, a bamboo cane or a whip in their hands. And of course, most of us, all of us in Slovakia I should say, spoke German. If you were Czechoslovakian, you spoke German, Hungarian and Slovak. That was our language. These were our languages. And they yelled, the Nazis would yell, "Juden raus schnell!"-- "All Jews out fast, fast!" With a beating. And we have seen, among the SS, people in striped uniforms, prisoner striped uniforms. And these were the boys that worked the railroad track. Of course we didn't know why. The Nazis, the SS would tell us to line up. And the boys, the prisoner boys, the people in prison uniform, would come to us and tell us either in German or in Czech or whatever language, line yourself up in rows of five. Of course, all done with beatings by the SS. When they separated the boys from the girls, when we were all lined up in rows of five, everything in Nazi concentration camp was five, because of easier count, and with the Nazis, with the dogs on the side of us, we started to march. I would say a mile and a half maybe. And we came to a gate of Auschwitz. A gate with a half moon sign, that says "Arbeit Macht Frei," work makes you free, or gives you freedom. After we were in Auschwitz, I'm going to jump a little bit if I may, in Auschwitz for what, three, four months, and we used to march through this gate, in and out of this gate, with the orchestra playing. As we marched through this gate, we used to say among each other, "Arbeit Macht Frei, Krematorium drei"--"Work makes you free when you end up in crematorium three." And those of us we always looked who survived, who's still alive. As we marched through the gate, the girls on one side of the camp, the boys on the other. Auschwitz is built of solid brick. It's, everything is brick. Even the road, the streets are made of brick. The barracks, solid barracks. Before the Nazis invaded Poland, this part of Auschwitz used to be a Polish

Army camp. So they marched us through the gate with whips and beatings and dogs jumping at us. We came to a huge brick building. They shoved us into the huge brick building, and there were prisoners and SS telling us what to do next. There were tables, long tables. The first area we had to undress, strip our clothing. There were hooks behind us. You put the clothing through a piece of wire, hang the clothing up. Take our shoes off, put the shoes on the floor. Next table were the barbers, the camp barbers. Where they shaved our head, cut our hair, shaved the entire body. They said this for hygiene. Then we moved to another table where the tattooing was done. So the tattoo was done on left forearm. There was one person who rubbed the little piece of dirty alcohol on your arm, and the other one had the needle with the inkwell, and he would do the numbering. So my number is 65,316. That means there were 65,315 people numbered before me, tattooed before me. After the tattoo, tattooing was done, they put us, they gave us the clothing, but not what we came with. They gave us, issued us a striped brown cap, a jacket, a striped jacket, a pair of striped trousers, a pair of wooden clogs, and a shirt. No socks or underwear. Then the last area, when they gave us the uniform, they gave us two strips of cloth. The cloth I would say was about six inches long, maybe inch and a half wide. And it would star, starred with the Star of David, corresponding with the number on your left forearm, sewn on your left breast and on the right pant leg. And then the last item which was the most important item that we received was a round bowl. And this bowl was the life blood of your being. First of all, without it you couldn't get the meager rations that we got. And second, the bathroom facilities were almost non-existent. Uh, uh, even at Auschwitz, each barrack on the bottom had a washroom. But you couldn't use it. It was only for the privileged. You could use it special times if you were quick, because they only gave you like two, three minutes. But most of us couldn't use it. So, when they gave us the numbers and the bowl, you are now, we were recorded, also by prisoners. This was the, what they call today the Nazi documentation department. These were, they were the officers that did all the paper work. And these were prisoners that worked in the Nazi documentation department. Every transport, how many people arrived, and what their names, where they came from, where was the transport from, where it originated, and so on. These people were the ones to do that type of work. And most of these people were actually office workers from homes - bankers, uh, people that worked as accountants possibly. So after they documented all that, we no longer had names. The Nazis called us Häftlings, prisoners. I became Häftling _____, prisoner 65,316. Then they marched us to our homes, to our barracks. In Auschwitz as well as all concentration camps, all buildings where prisoners, Häftlings, were housed, were known as blocks. I was assigned to Block 16 in Auschwitz, and Auschwitz _____, our main camp Auschwitz. Each barrack, each block, had between three to five people that were in charge of the blocks, and their name, their, their ranks and names would be such. The head guy was called Blockältester, block elder. Next to him would be a guy called Stubendienst; "Stube" means room, "Dienst," "assistant." He was the assistant of the Blockältester and the third guy was the most important guy actually he was the Schreiber or the register and the reason for which he was so important because he would write people he had in each block, and how much artificial tea or artificial coffee was served, how many slices of bread, and how much potato peel, potato soup was served in the evening. That guy was the one responsible for that. And everything was done by number. One of the most cruelest things in any camp was called the

Appell, the roll call. The roll call in Auschwitz, I will, uh, so many people got killed during roll call, murdered. Many people ran to the wires just, just before roll call. Of course even that the Nazis didn't let you do, run to the electric wires and fry. But that was the most cruelest thing. I, I, that was so bad, they would wake you up with beatings anywhere between four and six o'clock in the morning. It depended on how early they got up. And then, you had to line up in rows of five. And the whole camp was counted with the main prisoner, who was called the Lagerältester, the Lager elder, who in most cases was either a, a German criminal or came from Poland. I also want to make one thing very strong, very clear. The people in charge of the barracks in most cases, and I would say 90% or better, were Germans or Poles, Germans or Poles. These were the ones with the green triangles - then the green triangles were, were the criminals. The red ones were the political prisoners. And we had some red ones also in charge of us. But these people had better way, better living, better uniforms, underwear, regular boots or shoes. They had little rooms in each barrack. Blockältester had his room. Stubedeinst and Schreiber had a room, and they had food which was organized in Auschwitz. These were the murderers, the murderers among us. They were prisoners, but these are the killers. And during roll call they would kill many of us. Kill us for the simple reason that someone did it in their pants. They, uh, soiled their pants, soiled their uniform. Poor guy couldn't hold it. Dysentery was, was something very, very common. After two weeks of Auschwitz your eyes would swell up from water. Your, your whole face would be blown up from water. Your legs would puff on you because of malnutrition and hygiene. And then you became a skeleton which was called Muselmann by the Nazis. After the roll call, and only after the whole camp was counted and the count was correct, only then we were able to go to the labor, slave labor work sites we were assigned to, labor Kommandos they were called. Every group in Auschwitz as well as all concentration camps was called Kommandos. I was assigned, well, let me give you the barrack. There were four people in each tier. There were three tiers. Two men to a blanket. No mattresses, no nothing, just one little blanket for two people. You never dared to take your uniform or shoes off, clogs off, because if you did the next morning you couldn't find them. Because during working hours when we were working, many of us lost our clogs in the mud and there, that was it. No shoes. You died sooner anyway. So after the roll call they gave us our first ration of the day which consisted of artificial tea, artificial coffee. The Nazis called it Ersatz tea, Ersatz cafe, Ersatz's tea, Ersatz's cafe. Then your Kapo Kommando, Kapo who was in charge of the Kommando, you would have to report to him to be assigned to slave labor. My first job in Auschwitz was in Buna, which was a munition factory. We did, uh, artificial tires, rubber, uh, synthetic tires. There were two main factories like that. One was the Krupp Werke and one was Buna. Krupp is well today in American because they sell the coffee makers here. I see every time I walk by the department store coffee makers I just cringe. I worked in Buna, I survived Buna I would say almost three months.

Q: Describe the work please.

A: O.K. The Buna work, there were a lot of civilian workers which the Nazis brought from different European countries. The masters, the foremen, uh, the engineers. I want to make this very strong that a prisoner could not converse with these civilian workers. We could not

talk with them, although some of us snuck through and tried to, uh, they would throw us sometimes a piece of bread if they weren't afraid, because these, these people too, they had an arm band and the arm band would identify them as civilian workers. See. They knew what was going on, but, but they couldn't talk about it. A lot, there were some from Slovakia, those Yugoslavs, there were Poles, the Polish civilians. There were some people from France and Germany. These were the people that were building, that that did the work there. Actually these were the masters, we were the laborers. They would tell the SS how many people they need and what they want us to do. And it was hard labor. Most of the time you didn't work with tools. Everything was done with hands. There was a break for lunch right around noon. The factory whistle would blow and you'd go outside to lunch. And prisoners with wagons would bring our noon meal which consisted of the soup. The soup had mostly potato peels - no meat whatsoever. Hardly none, no fat whatsoever. Just a little margarine thrown into it. And by the time they brought it to us in, to different, you know, they had more groups to bring that. They brought it on a wagon what they pushed by themselves. They didn't come by cart or trucks or anything. Pushed by prisoners to the work sites. By the time we got it of course it was cold. It didn't, you know, and then we go back to work half an hour later. Back to the same. I will never forget when they lined us up in rows of five to march back to Auschwitz, to the camp, you would carry fifty, sixty of our comrades on our shoulders, either dead or dying. Back to Auschwitz, back to the camp. Because no one was allowed to die outside or be left outside. Because when we marched through the camp, the gates were open and they would count us there. Then we go to our own barracks. But not upstairs to your barrack where you could relax and sit down and lay down. You stayed in front of your barrack until the whistle blew, the horn blew, Appell. And the Appell was always yelled out from the first barrack and then like an echo, each barrack had a person that yelled Appell. There was an SS in charge and he would be in a tower. He would be the one who would initiate the Appell call. And like an echo, it would just go throughout Auschwitz. The Auschwitz itself, the Auschwitz camp itself was not that huge. So when everyone was lined up, then the Lagerältester, the main prisoner who was in charge of the whole camp, would, the SS hierarchy, the SS officers, they would count from one barrack to the next to the next and the next until all. And this is how we sound over the phone, over the echo: Block _____, _____ - Block seven, count correct. Eight, correct, and so on and so on, correct, until they came to a block where was not correct. You stood there until the person was found. In most cases, the person either was somewhere in dying under some, under something, under, under a bunk. Or he was so sick he didn't care one way or another whether he lives or dies. Or someone ran to the wires, to the electric wires. But only after everyone was counted, even those we brought on our shoulders. He was dropped in front of his barrack on the Appellplatz, on the roll call place. And that's where he was. And after the roll call, each barrack had to clean up their sick and, and the dead and carry them to a barrack which was a holding place. And then the dead ones would be picked up the Leichen (ph) Kommando. How would I translate leichen (ph) - as a dead, a Kommando that, this was a group of, of, of Jewish prisoners that worked with a wagon. They would go from barrack to barrack, from camp to camp, to pick up the people that died at work, and those who died over night. And then they would be taken to the Leichenhaller (ph), to the dead cell, where they were stacked up like sardines. And the next after that, they would be taken to the gas

chambers, or to the pits, whichever was available, and the body would be burned. I survived Buna...I would say, close to three months. Then one evening after roll call, a friend of mine from not too far from my home town whom I got to know, he told me that he just got a job, and he said if there's a way to survive Auschwitz, I think I got it. And there was a try out in front of Block Sixteen, our block. He was also in Block 16. He asked me, told me, try out and see if you can make it. So the try out was held by SS. They had suitcases there, and they put suitcases on the arm to see how fast you can run. Of course, we didn't know why. I made it. And I was assigned to a group called the Canada Kommando. It's like the country of, it was named by the Nazis and the prisoners, the Polish prisoners named it Canada Kommando and the reason they named it Canada, because the final solution, of course I knew nothing about final solution in those days. I knew nothing about anything else far as, other than being in Auschwitz. But the Canada Kommando was, or the organization was called Canada, because we unloaded all incoming Jews from every Nazi-occupied country, European country. By this time, this was still in 1942, this was like September 1942, this time they were bringing in entire families. Not just young people. Families from their homes, families from holding camps like Nováky, and from, uh, Vienna, from France, from Belgium, from Holland. We had people coming in from every different, every country. And the Canada Kommando consisted of start out I would say about four hundred and fifty people. And we had two shifts, day shift and night shift. I was assigned to the day shift, and we would go to the railroad tracks. This is still Auschwitz I. And before we went to the railroad tracks, the Kapos would line us up, and the SS would tell us in no uncertain term, if there is anyone here that will talk to the people you are unloading other than what you are supposed to tell them. See they told us you will only tell them, leave your belongings behind in the language that you understand or they understand, that they speak. Anything else you can't talk to them about. You can't say anything to anyone else other than what you're supposed to do. Anyone caught talking to the people that are arriving will be dealt with. And I've seen many that was being dealt with. Some of us found their families. Some of us found their brothers and sisters and parents. When they unloaded them.

Q: What happened when they tried to talk to them?

A: They were killed. The Nazis would take them behind the cattle car after we unloaded the people and slowly torture and murder them. We carried a poor, a poor, poor soul back to the camp. Nothing stopped the transport. In many cases, an SS man depended where the transport came from. Western European countries for instance which people came from Holland and Belgium. Well dressed. When they came, an SS officer would get over a bull horn, and he would tell, ladies and gentlemen, I want to apologize that you've been a little inconvenienced, but you know this is a war on, and we don't have the facilities for to better trains, but you will be soon taken care of. You are in Auschwitz, that's a work camp and if you work you will live. Just leave your belongings behind, and everything will be brought to you after you are cleaned, disinfected. You will get hot tea and so on. And of course we couldn't do anything about that type of stuff. Although many of us tried, tried by telling them, don't take, to a mother we'd tell, don't take a child with you because if you do, you're not going to survive. Excuse me. (Pause) Some got caught, some people got caught doing

that. Didn't live until the transfer left. That's when they took care of them. After, I would say today, then I didn't know, really none of us knew, I would say that approximately 10% of the incoming people with the families were selected to be taken to slave labor. The rest were taken to the crematorias. There was, uh, one crematoria at the time only in Auschwitz. This is 1942. And uh, they couldn't, they couldn't, uh, eliminate so many bodies in the one crematoria so they build trenches, ditches, and that's where they would pour gasoline or some kind of inflammable item on them and that's how they would burn them. And I want to make clear we didn't see it then. That we still didn't see, except we knew the boys that worked in Sonderkommando, and these boys, the kind of Kommandos on this Kommando were constantly tried to be, oh we will not, they was isolated. They lived in the barrack that you were not allowed to go to. But we already had enough Pole, old-time prisoners so to speak. Some of us knew how to get away from there and the Sonderkommando knew how to get away from their area, and by bribing certain officials, certain people, you were allowed to communicate between each other. It was an underground, uh, well, it was called Organizierung, organizing. The underground, uh, resistance group was always there, from day one. Some of, some of our boys were the leaders of the group. They, they, they knew how to organize well. I was a youngster myself, eighteen years old, ah, not quite. I was seventeen when I arrived there. I really, I was part of the group that brought the riches from Canada back to the camp, smuggled it in. I was the young smuggler. There was three of us that did that job. And we would bring it to our families, to our friends, those of us who had sisters and brothers in the camp or mothers in the women's camp. And there were those who, who knew how to get it to them by bribing some of the Nazi officials.

Q: Can you describe that process, but I think maybe it makes sense to break the tape at this point. We've got fifty minutes. Let's break and change the tape and we'll pick up with describing . . .

End of Tape #1

TAPE #2

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: Take us back, you were starting to describe the Canada and how it worked. Can you do that please?

A: Sure. The Canada Kommando, after we unloaded the people, after the Nazis made sure that we go to the tracks, and that we don't speak to no one, the main job was to tell the people and try to keep them calm. And when, the first thing that would happen after the people were unloaded, in those days there were trucks, dump trucks. The first people they would get rid of were women with children, the old, the sickly, the ill, uh, the people with, uh, cripples. These people would be loaded on to trucks, and taken away right away, and the last people that the Nazis would march were the people that were selected to go to slave labor. With the belongings, some of it on the ground, but most of it in the cattle cars. And when these people were taken, men to the men's camp, women to the women's camp, and the same process was dealt with them as it was done with us. Numbered and shaved and showered and so on. Assigned to the barracks. Only then we started to work on the mountains of luggage which was loaded in to trucks and it went to the Canada warehouse. It was a huge complex where girl Canada Kommandos, mostly Slovakian girl Canada Kommando, worked. And their job, they were, they were the only ones dressed up almost like, not a civilian but nice, a dress, and they all had babushkas [NB: kerchiefs] tied on their heads, because their heads were shaven. And these girls worked with the clothing. Disinfecting of the clothing. And when we, we, first we would do this. Load it into trucks. Unload it into Canada warehouse. And there were boxes in front of us, SS guards walking back and forth watching us, what we were doing. And we would take first the valuables would we put into boxes. Monies in one area, gold and watches and rings and that type of stuff in another box. And everything had its place. Then we started to work with the clothes. Of course, we search the clothing - search the pockets, the shoulders, the shoulder pads were, were, were felt for any, any hard stuff or any soft clothing, or soft monies, and then we had to rip some of it off. Even shoe heels were opened, because the Nazis found out that the shoe heels the people saved. And toothpaste, in those days because the toothpaste in Europe was not the greatest, not like America, and they would squeeze and look for diamonds and gold, which was found there. Then we started to work with the clothing. Separate the clothing. Men's, women's and children's clothing separate. There was a blanket on the ground always where we dumped the clothing. After the blanket was full enough, you bundle, you put on your shoulder and took it to the girls. Now, let me make a very strong point. When these bundles of clothing were taken to the girls, many of us brought food to the girls, in the blankets. But, there was always an SS man standing by, he was watching of course the girls too. But the girls, he couldn't watch the girls doing that, because the girls wanted to, working with the clothing. They were watching what, as we were dumping, if there was any food. They knew we were bringing food there. In a way they let us, we played a cat and mouse game with these guys. If they caught you, you got beaten. Twenty-five on your behind. You bend down and then you get twenty-five. You had to count them, twenty-five. And you count twenty-five on your buttocks, and the Nazis

stop you. They say, how many did I give you. And you say, seventeen. Wrong. All over again. This was a sport. They called it sport. And that's how we used to bring the food to the girls. And, information to the girls from the camp. She had a brother there, or a father there, not working in Canada Kommando but working in Marashar (ph) which was uh, uh, people that work with the bricks and, and, and, mortar, that type of people. And they would say, your father told me to say this and that, they could keep up and so on, whatever. And then they would write, they would find pencils. . .

Q: How, how did they find pencils?

A: From us. From Canada Kommando. We had the pencils, the papers, the watches, the clocks, the compasses. We, we, people from Europe, from France, Belgium, Holland, they used to bring stuff with them that you wouldn't believe. And of course everyone brought the finest finery they had because they felt they can sell it to save their life. That was another thing. They even told them, some of them, bring, bring, because winters, you need, a lot of them came with nice fur coats and, you know, it was all gone. And so, I mean, I mean, so we would bring these girls and the girl would send a note to their father or their brother or their cousin or their husband. There was one boy who died last year, his name was Fisher. His wife was working in Canada Kommando, in women's Canada Kommando. He worked in the men's Canada Kommando. So that's how these boys, that's how that was. And I, I worked there, the warehouse and the railroad tracks. Then I was put on the night shift. You know, you see, you couldn't survive Auschwitz by yourself. You had to have a partner. In Yiddish it was called, in Hebrew it was called shitif (ph). Shitif (ph) is a partner. And I had three partners. Not one of them is alive. The last one was Fisher, who died uh last year. And without a partner you couldn't survive. After we finished a day's work at Canada Kommando, you just couldn't go home, back to the camp, without being searched, first at the work site - lined up, stripped naked in most cases. And if you weren't stripped naked, your pants dropped because they knew that some of us carried money in the places that is, uh, kind of dark. Uh, but we do, we also knew how to smuggle out, smuggle the stuff in. For instance, you in this row, and your friend is in the row in front of you. You always stood behind your friend, behind your partner. And as you partner was already searched, you shoved it to him. And he stepped forward. And then you were clear. A lot of times we got caught, beaten and caught. Let me give you one incident what would happen to the clothing. After the girls cleaned the clothing, it was bundled again, and carried by us, there was at the Canada warehouse, there was a railroad siding, railroad tracks, with freight cars waiting. And this was taken by us, loaded into cattle cars, into freight cars, and shipped to Germany. I remember one incident very, very clearly. I don't know, I don't know if names, German officers' names mean anything. Uh, there was one guy named Otto Graff (ph). There was another guy named Unterscharführer Wiglet (ph). That's a rank. He was in charge of the Canada warehouse. And a young boy from Grodno (ph), a Polish Jewish boy, as he, the one boy stayed in the cattle car, in the freight car, and stacked the bundles, and the other ones like us, we would carry the bundles. He would fill the car. This boy from Grodno hid himself with the bundles and the freight train took off. Now it's evening time, ready to be lined up to go back home. And we were counted. Fisher, by the way, was a registrar of the Canada

Kommando. Besides being working there as a Canada Kommando worker, he had the job of registering all the prisoners. He's counting, he was short one. Now, they started looking. First all over the warehouse. A lot of us would rest sometime without the Nazis knowing in the bundle where the girls worked, on top of the heap, and they would cover us and let us rest. And they would take, we had lemons a lot of times from the transports. You know, the lemons would come, they would make hot lemonade. Just hot water, but there was a place that cooked the food, you know, that cooked for the Nazis. And we'd get hot water from there and make lemon, or squeeze the lemon into hot water. So this boy who was bundled himself up in, in with the clothing, train left and he went with it. Of course, we didn't know he went with it. Looking for him, the Nazis are looking for him, not us. The Nazis and the Kapos are the ones who start looking, searching the, all Canada warehouse. Can't find him. All of a sudden Otto Graff, the SS officer, jumps on his motorcycle, goes after the train. And they bring him back. As close as I'm sitting to you, there was a tree on the ground. Otto Graff lines the boy up against the tree and goes to his neck, and shoots him right here, in front of our eyes. And he tells us right then and then, this is how you will end up if you try to escape. And we carried the boy from Grundo, I can't think of his last, his first name, Jankl (ph), and carried him back to camp. Many of us tried. There's so many people tried and never made it. September 23rd, 1942. (Cough). It's a day that I will never forget. I was working night shift. My friends were, some of my partners were working day shift. September 23, 1942 fell on Erev Yom Kippur, when my mother and my father, my little sister, Marta, and my little brother, Maxmilian, were brought to Auschwitz. My mother, my little brother and my little sister were gassed upon arrival. My father was assigned to slave labor. My mother was only 42 years old. My father was assigned to slave labor, and we met in Auschwitz. Not in the same barrack of course. My father was assigned to work with horses, being that he, that's what, many times they asked, in most cases they asked how old are you, what is your profession. So my father was assigned to work with horses, to do some work. My father took ill, uh, second week of November 1942, and he was put into a Krankenbau, a sick bay, Block 7 in Auschwitz. Auschwitz I, still Auschwitz I. I would come to see my father every night after roll call. I was not allowed to go inside the barrack, but to the window. I would yell to him through the window and he would come up. I will never forget the last time I've seen my father. He, uh, said to me, and by then he knew there was only two of us left in our family, whatever you do, try to survive and carry on the name. I came to see him the next evening, and, uh, yelled for him and called for him and he never came out. Another person came out and he said to me that they took him this morning. They gassed him this morning. First of January, first part of January 1943, the Canada Kommando was moved to Birkenau.

Q: Can you go back...is it too hard?

A: O.K.

Q: How did you know that your family had arrived. How did you know that your mother and children were taken?

A: O.K. The boys that worked the day shift unloaded my family. One boy from my hometown's

name was Yako Buchler, Jacob Buchler, B - U - C - H, Buchler in this country. Buchler was, I would say, fifteen years older than me who knew my family quite well. We lived in the same town. And he told me what happened to my family. Yako Buchler ended up in Israel after the war. In 1981 I went to the World Gathering of all us survivors. (Long pause - crying) and that's when we discussed and we talked about that then too. Excuse me. (Long pause - take your time - conversation) O.K. Oh dear, I didn't believe this would happen to me. (After you went through it, it's real to you.) Alright.

Q: So you found out really the details.

A: Yea, we were partners, and, uh, of course I went to see my father (pause - conversation), and my father's birthday was November 8th. My father was born in 1898, and my mother was born in 1900. So in 1942 she was 42 years old and my father was two years older.

(PAUSE)

Q: You wanted to pick up . . .

A: We moved, they moved us from Auschwitz I, [to] what the Nazis called Auschwitz zwei, Auschwitz II, which was Birkenau. Course we knew nothing about it. The only thing we knew there were boys working in Birkenau, building a new camp. As I told you at the outset, Auschwitz I was solid brick. Birkenau was all wooden huts. Dirt roads practically, muddy. The Canada Kommando was housed in Block 28. Then the railroad tracks already led into Birkenau. We didn't have to go back to Auschwitz railroad tracks to unload the victims. In front of all the people because Birkenau was a camp on two sides, two sides of the road. Let me explain. Only one entrance, but here's a road in the middle. There are camps, rows of camps such like this way, and rows of camps same way this way. We were, the first camp were the girls. Wires in front of us. A ditch in between, you know, wires, in between the camps. Guard towers all around the complex, all around, constantly manned by SS. We, the Canada Kommando, were so gutsy already by then, seasoned, knew how to bribe some of the officials, some of the SS, would go close, as close to the, to the wires as possible, and the girls would meet us on the other side. And we would throw over food to them. But we paid. We knew which SS we paid for it. Because the SS were not allowed to take in front of you, in front of them. But they, they would say, Canada Kommando _____, Canada Kommando, what do you have today. Ye _____, I have today a gold watch. And it's all right, you drop it there, so when he, when he is relieved from the post by the other SS man who relieves him, then he tells you where to drop it and he picks it up. Then he would turn his back and you would throw something to the girl. All the other guards could see, but the other guards were busy with same way. One, two, three of us would go to the wire, and they would, you could never go close enough. You made your, you made the arrangements the day before. You would say, _____, I come tomorrow, I got a sister here. See. And he says _____, what are you going to bring me? _____, what would you like? You know, whatever I find, you know. And that's how we did it. I survived because of Canada Kommando. And uh, if it wouldn't be for

that, I probably would be one in six million.

Q: Tell me about Birkenau. Birkenau was...

A: Birkenau, as I said, was nothing but mud. The water was in pipes. The water came out real thin spritz [**Yidd:** a spray] of water of pipe. You couldn't drink the water. If you drank the water, you died. But the Canada Kommando were the organizers. And the Sonderkommando were the organizers because the Sonderkommando got the valuables from the clothing of the people that were gassed. Canada Kommando got the valuables of the, of the the big valises, and luggage and baggage of the people. So, we were treated differently by, even by the SS to a degree. They killed us, they beat us, that part they did with us. But we were the clog in the machinery. If you got caught you got killed, regardless who you were. Where you could be close to the SS who you gave so much because he couldn't pick it up, even the SS work in the Canada Kommando. But they were hoarders, these people were, were hoarding, uh, uh, valuables, monies and whatever, but they couldn't pick it up themselves. So they knew. In Birkenau they treated us differently. And by the gate some of the SS who were jealous of the other SS who worked the Canada Kommando, they would say, ah, here comes the Canada Kommando, let's search them. Always at the gate. And when we searched them, we dropped it, they would take it. So everybody got a piece of the action, so to speak. But the camp itself, this was really and truly the death factory. Birkenau had four crematoriums, two gas chambers, two crematoriums on one side of the road, two gas chambers, two crematoriums on the other side of the road. And the railroad tracks went right into, close to the crematoria. And the whole camp could see. You could see the flames, not just the smoke, you could see the flames from the chimney. Well, of course when burning the Muselmann, the people that were skeletons, only the smoke. But when there were fat people, with still fat on them, there were flames. And a lot of people when they were coming, when they came to Birkenau, they thought, they thought it was a bakery. The smell, they they, thought it was a bakery, something was baking. (SHORT PAUSE) April 7, 1944, the first two successful Jewish boys escaped Auschwitz. First name was Walter Rosenberg--who changed his name after the war to Rudolph Vrba-- and the second was Freddie Wetzler, W - E - T - Z - L - E - R, who kept his name. And these two boys escaped. Three days they were buried in an empty camp in Birkenau called the Mexico Camp. Nazis called it Mexico because when they brought the Russian prisoners there, they didn't have any clothes, so they put blankets on them. So they called it Mexico Camp. Mexico. Nazis had names for everything. And these boys for three days were buried there, and we had to stay on roll call three days without food, without water, until, the third day the Nazis - would, this is what would happen. If someone escaped, the siren would blow, everyone had to go out regardless of what time, stand the roll call. When the person was found, he would be displayed in front of us. In most cases they would bring him dead or dying or shot up or tortured, and he always, they would sit him in a chair and they put a sign in his hand, and the sign would read, hello, ____ -----. Hello, I have returned. And then they would display this guy in a 36-inch space between the, by the gate. There was a 36-inch space between, wire, wire space. They would sit the chair there and as you marched in and out to work, you would have to look at that person. But with Vrba and with Wetzler, and Walter Rosenberg who changed his name to Vrba, they didn't catch them.

They successfully escaped. We didn't believe it ourselves that they escaped. Because I remember one time, three Polish Jewish boys escaped, and they were gone for two days. And they got them. The Polish population would turn them in. See. They, we didn't have any friends even then outside. And they brought these three Jewish boys in, and the law, the policy of the camp was such that when there was someone brought back who escaped, there was a public hanging. The whole camp had to be involved in that, had to watch it. And Nazi would beat his drum, and the other guy behind him would read a, read a sentence, why he had sinned against Third Reich. And who were the people who did the hanging? They would take prisoners, put hoods over them, over the prisoners, that did, not only the ones that were hanged, but did the hanging. And these three Jews, Polish Jewish boys were hung. In public. There were, Sundays were the hanging days. That was common, very common. There was a single gallows that was, they built the gallows for more than one. And some of them sang and yelled the last words. You know, revenge, and I remember one Polish Jewish boy said, _____, the Polish national anthem. He started yelling it. I stayed in Birkenau until October 21st, 1944, when again, an order came in the middle of the night that we're being transferred. Pitch dark, you couldn't see two feet in front of you. Of course, the darkness was because of the bombers come. You could hear the bombers already then. You could hear fire, gunfire. We didn't know anything really. We were, the only thing we knew how, when the war was bad, when it got worse, it got worse for us. Less food, more beatings, more killings, more eliminating, more, more, uh, trying to, uh, cover up, more, the evidence. Of course, we didn't know that either. We just seen when it was bad for them, it was worse for us.

Q: . . . in '44. We have a picture here of you with a Hungarian transport. Can you talk a little about that?

A: Yes. Of course, I didn't know this photo existed. This is from an original from the Nazi documentation department. This photo was taken in May, May 1944. And it's a photo I'm one, I don't know if I can point it out which one I am. Which, what, I can't tell from this side.

Q: Turn it around and find yourself.

A: Oh, excuse me. OK. Here on this end, I'm one of the persons unloading the belongings of Hungarian Jews that were brought there, May 1944, that already been gassed. This came from the zunda (ph), from the gas chambers, from the undressing rooms. This photo, by the way, was given to me by historian, Czech historian, Czechoslovakian historian, Jewish man. His name is Erich Kulka. Erich Kulka had this photo and he used this at one time in Germany in a court to identify a Nazi. And there were two boys in there that were cut in, in, in, in the court, and I was already living in Detroit at the time of course at the time when this was going on. Detroit, Michigan. And there, here, here we are unloading the belongings of, uh, Hungarian Jews that were brought to Auschwitz, Birkenau actually. This photo was given to me, uh, in, uh, June 1981 when I attended the, uh, World Gathering of holocaust survivors in Jerusalem. Erich Kulka lives in Jerusalem. He knew I was alive, and when I got back to my hotel, there was a message for me to call Erich Kulka with a phone number. Of

course, I didn't know who Erich Kulka was, because Erich Kulka's name in Auschwitz...he changed his name after the war. His name was Schöen, S - C - H - O with two dots - E - N.

Q: (inaudible)

A: Erich Kulka, as I told you, was named Schöen. He's from the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. He was brought to Auschwitz, I believe it was November 1942, and he came from Neuengamme, from another concentration camp. Erich Kulka and I became friends in Auschwitz. I was one of the persons that would bring Erich Kulka food and material to give to the people. Erich Kulka had as workers, as a, as an electrician. He doubles his job in the camp, locksmith; he did locksmith work, he and an another person named Otto Kraus. And I got friendly with these two boys, not just myself but other boys. And we would bring them the materials to help our people. And Erich had more of a freedom, not a freedom in Auschwitz, but he could move because of his assignment as a locksmith, he could go from camp to camp. Of course, he couldn't go away from the complex but, because it was all locked in, fenced in. So when I had the message to call Erich Kulka, I called the name and then he told me, "Mišo, my name is Erich Schöen. My name was Erich Schöen." What he did, he changed his name. Took his wife's maiden name. His wife was killed. She also was in Auschwitz and then transferred to another camp in Germany, Stuttgart, Germany, and she was murdered there. She died there. As I told you, I stayed in Auschwitz until October 1944. We were put into cattle cars. We thought for sure that's the end of us. Two other boys, two of my partners, Buchler was one and Ziedler (ph) was the other one, were also taken. We came to Oranienburg, which is Sachsenhausen. They didn't have any room for us. They had to let us sleep on the street of the camp. And the American bombers and the British bombers were bombing Berlin. Sachsenhausen is very, very close to Berlin. And we didn't know it then of course. We only knew, the only thing we knew we were in a camp and what's going to happen to us next we didn't know. From there, because there was no room for us, we went to Dachau. We got to Dachau, practically the same thing. Not much room there either. So the last camp they took us to was called Landsberg. And there we stood until March 1945 when the Allied were very close, I don't know how many kilometers, but they were close. We heard the bombs. We heard, uh, we heard the shootings. So they started to evacuate that camp.

Q: When they evacuate, tell me about Landsberg.

A: Landsberg. Landsberg was also a dirty wooden camp built like in bunkers. The, the barracks were very low, built like in, like, like in down...almost like bunkers. Landsberg was horribly, terribly lice infected. Which all camps were by the way. You could put your hand under you arm and just throw lice out like this. But Landsberg had, had awful diseases. No crematories, no burial places. Just dig a ditch and that was it. And you carried these bodies like, like sardines. And we did nothing in Landsberg as far as labor.

Q: No Canada Kommando?

A: Uh, there was no Canada Kommando. We went out to work on farms. OK. The farms, we worked the German farms. They didn't have much. They had potato rows, you know, covered with dirt. That's how, I worked in that. And the food was hardly non-existent. And when we started to move from Landsberg, there were a bunch of German prisoners in Landsberg. And I know of two of them who were given SS uniforms, to be our guards. (Laughter) I remember the two, Kapo Hantz (ph). His name was, he was a Kapo, Kapo Hantz. He got a German uniform, he became the guard. They gave him a rifle. And we started marching. And we marching and some of the older prisoners, uh, older German guards, as we were marching we had, there was a wagon always behind to pick up the bodies. As we were marching, you know, picking up the bodies, the Germans would come to you and they say, sign that I was good to you. Sign that I helped you. You know, I gave you bread. And of course none of, none of us did. You know, believe me, none of us did. By then we, we had a feeling either we going to be all die, all killed, or some of us will survive. During an American air raid, daytime air raid, American bombers come down bomb daytime, we all run in the ditches--including Nazis--and we made a human SOS. And myself and two other boys ran for the woods. I never forget that human SOS. That was so beautiful.

Q: Did the bombers move away?

A: The bombers didn't go after us. The bombers were hitting some, some target. They had a target because we could see. The bombers were going real low. So, I disappeared with the other two boys. And no one even cared anymore then. Because we've seen Nazis running. We've seen, in the woods, we've seen Nazis running. We got into a farm house. And we got old civilian clothes, whatever we could find, and shed the clothes.

Q: Were there people in the farm house?

A: (inaudible) We knocked on the, you know, they, the Germans knew already who we were then you know because they were afraid of, they were afraid of their own shadows. Your know, there were no men, no men folk home.

Q: They let you in?

A: They let us. We got some shirt, a side room. I got a shirt, big farmer's shirt (laughter) and a pair of old boots that didn't fit. And that's how we walked around. Took two weeks about when I was picked up by the United States Army. Seven - yes?

Q: What did you do in those two weeks?

A: Just walked the woods and eat whatever we could find. Knock on farm, farm windows and farm doors. Cooked potatoes in the wooded area. Seen Nazis running left and right. Soldiers running with no rifles at all. Uh, we seen them going without any, any of their markings, just plain uniform. They threw away their, their sergeant's stripes, whatever they had.

Q: Tell me

A: Three GI's in a jeep met me on the street, on, on the road. And I went with them. They took me with them. The other two boys went east someplace. They disappeared. We split. And I was picked up which was then the 774 Tank Battalion. These boys brought me with them, cleaned me up, gave me a pair of fatigues. Didn't speak a word of English, not one word. But one of the boys was a Polish national. He was born in United States, Chicago boy, and he spoke Polish. And one was a cook in the Army, the other guy. And they took me in and I worked as, as, in the field kitchen, Army field kitchen. And I stayed with this outfit from Germany to Czechoslovakia, all the way to Czechoslovakia. From Czechoslovakia, this outfit was on the way back. In World War II there were point system. They had enough points to go home. The Army point system. If you had, if you've been in the Army such and such long time, if you have so many children, you have points for each child. And this outfit was on the way back home. So I'm with them all the way through.

Q: What was that like?

A: Great. Well, I learned English real quick, real fast. While I was with the United States forces, of course the Stars and Stripes were a great teacher for me, and I remember there was a teacher in this outfit who was teaching me English. And we lived in tents by the way. There were no, no barracks. Army tents and this, they would teach me English. This guy made me read the Stars and Stripes aloud.

Q: The newspaper Stars and Stripes?

A: The newspaper Stars and Stripes. And then he would tell, teach me how to write, how to read English, how to pronounce some of the hard words. And I do have a good ear for languages. I pick them up quite, quite easily. I stayed with this unit. Of course, food was there.

Q: What was it like to taste the first food and know you could have it, as much as you wanted?

A: Well, uh, when you line up for chow, which was Army chow, we all got mess kits. And I was like a soldier, I had everything what they had. And you line up and in the morning. In those days we had fresh eggs because it was all farms, and the GI's would pick up the eggs from where ever they, whatever community they were at. They would send out a mess sergeant with someone to look for food. And of course the Army had food shipped to them. We had powder eggs, but in, in this unit, because most field units they would find chickens, they would find eggs, in, in the farms. And when you had enough food, when they were cooking, you could eat all you wanted and the baked biscuits and the baked rolls, you know. You couldn't believe your eyes. And what, what, how much they would throw away. What was this, waste so much, I just, just couldn't understand it. You know, coming from where I came from, I see. Then we would get fresh fruit, fresh oranges, they would ship us bananas. I said, oh, my God. You know. It was amazing. Now. So I stayed with this unit all the way

through Germany, Czechoslovakia, then back. Oh, we were stationed once in, one part in Nuremberg. OK. Nuremberg is where the big stadium is where Hitler, the Olympics. This is where he had the big, huge, huge stadium. And the GI's used to play baseball there. So we used to go watch the baseball games there. Which I knew nothing about. (Laughter) I knew nothing.

Q: Describe your first contact with American baseball.

A: Well, I, there was a guy named Shoemaker, a soldier in my outfit, and he would play catch with these guys before game, you know. This was, these were guys that were good, good baseball players. You couldn't prove it by me, but they were good baseball players. And Shoemaker had always had a baseball mitt with him. He came, traveled with that, he carried it all the time with him. And he would play, he would play catch with the guys. And I was a soccer player. I didn't know anything about baseball. I would kick the darn thing. (Laughter) And I found out you can't kick a baseball. Real quick. And then we would go to Nuremberg. We went to Nuremberg to watch a baseball game, a real baseball game. Yeah. And of course, what I was always most afraid of was doctors. That was the biggest thing that scared me. Dentists was most. Fear of dentists.

Q: How did you deal with it?

A: Ah, very badly. They took me to a dentist. As a matter of fact, the Shoemaker guy took me to a dentist. Because I had an abscessed tooth. And all my gums were pretty well dried up, uh, from malnutrition; and they took me to a dentist. And I remember, they gave me a capsule and I took the capsule and opened it and took the powder in my hand out, you know. I didn't know how to deal with it, the guy didn't tell me what to do with it. That was horrible. And I ran away from the dentist chair I was so scared. I never forget that. I ran away from the dentist chair. When we got back to France. . . Yes?

Q: How did they fix the abscessed tooth if you couldn't stay in the chair?

A: They didn't. They didn't. They didn't.

Q: You lost the tooth?

A: Oh yeah, lost most of them. They didn't. I was deathly afraid of it. I was so much afraid of doctors. I never trusted any of them. Never trusted, as a matter of fact, the biggest problem was not trusting anyone. Always, always being afraid there's someone behind you. Some, you always figure the Nazis will come after you. You looked, you always look behind you. It was in the camps, if you didn't take you cap off in front of a Nazi you got beat. If you did take your cap off in front of a Nazi you got beat. They would, they would call you all the time and ask you, come over here. Do you know what day it is? They would always pick a Jewish holiday. But if you told them you knew what day it was, if you didn't tell them what day, it didn't make any difference. Same thing. So my fear was with me a long time. My trust

didn't come back to me for, oh my God, for, forever almost. But I was very, very lucky that I was picked up in the outfit I was picked up in. Because when we got back to France, we came to a camp called Camp Lucky Strike. And Camp Lucky Strike was a camp for all the GI's that were on the way home. It was like a tent city. The whole camp was loaded with tents, and the GI's would stay here until their their turn came to be taken to Le Havre, France to be put on a ship to go home. So one of the guys took a picture of me and this, this is me in the Army, and this was the (conversation) this was the, the first American picture I have of myself in an American uniform. And I stayed in this Camp Lucky Strike until September 1945 when my outfit was taken to Le Havre, France and me with them, to be put on a ship, a troop carrier called "James Parker". And our commanding officer whose name was Lt. Colonel Conrad B. Sturgis (ph), a West Point man, he practically made the decision to put me on the ship with the unit, with unit and take me home. Home where? Oh, by the way, I'm going to have to retrack a little bit because I didn't tell you. By then, I already knew of the family I had left. My father's youngest sister lived in Detroit, Michigan. I didn't know, I knew she was in America, but I didn't know where, see. But nothing was done yet in 1945, so . . .

Q: How could you have found out where she was?

A: Well, I gave the Army her name, her married name, because this is where by sister went to school in Vienna. She was from Vienna. And she arrived in the United States in 1939. And my father's younger sister whose name was Ethel Shotten, S - H - O - T - T - E - N. She was married to a man named Rudy, Rudolph Shotten. So when I gave the names to the Army, the Army and the Red Cross started to look. Put ads in the paper. Here we have this and this guy, born such and such a place, area, and then I would say about two or three months later, I get a letter from my aunt. Where she lived. So the commanding officer came to me and said, oh, you got your ad, you know. What we'll do with you, we'll put you on a ship and when you, we're going to Boston, they were originally, the ship, the, the United, the, the force, the the outfit was going to Boston. And they were going to be mustered out. In the Army, they muster you out. And then, from there you go to, to Detroit and report yourself to, to Immigration Authorities he told. Well, we had a captain whose name was Captain Yogurling (ph); and he was a lawyer, an attorney at home. And he says, "Don't do this. Because if you take him there, they're going to deport him. He has to have papers and everything else." So what he did, before the ship sailed, they got my belongings, my duffel bag and everything that I owned, and the boys took up a collection. And I got, we had already changed our money, our money was already changed into American dollars . . .

Q: Did you have money?

A: Oh yes.

Q: Where did you get it?

A: Well, from the Army would give me "X" amount of dollars, you know, from the, from the

cooks and from the captains. See, I worked the mess, the mess hall for the officers; and the...the colonel took a liking to me and, and he called me "Czechsky (ph)." So I was like his orderly so to speak. So they they took up a collection, and, and I had enough dollars to you know. So Captain Yogurling calls Camp Home Run which is in Le Havre, we were in Le Havre already then, now we are at the docks, OK, to be shipped. Calls up the commanding officer in Le Havre, and they take me in there. And he says since you've got your aunt here, in the meanwhile nothing was done with my aunt other than a couple of letters, and I wrote to her and she wrote to me, and my, this was in September of, uh, uh, and I'd already found her. November 29th is my birthday so my aunt sent me a, a Bulova watch for my birthday. So that was my birthday present from my aunt, my first present. And they say they're working, I shouldn't be impatient and so on. In the meanwhile, while I'm in Camp Home Run, October 1945, myself and a, a Spaniard, a Spanish national, two of us, was sworn into the United States forces. We were sworn in by, by a major. A colonel. By a colonel, I'm sorry. And I had the papers for me ... I showed them to you. And when we were sworn in, and, uh, the other person, person's name was Raymond de la Fontana Quintas (ph). The only thing they made an error. They swore us in under regular Army form. So, there are two Armies, the peace Army is the United States Armed, you know, the Army that you, you, you are, uh, have to join when something happens like in the war you, you join, you are forced to join the service. You, you are being, uh, uh, elected to join the service. Like during the war, they, they take us in. And the other thing is the regular Army you have to be, a foreign, a non-citizen cannot join the regular Army. So the War Department sent our papers back. Attached to the papers were the proper papers. But in the meanwhile my aunt was working on my, uh, coming to the United States. So the colonel says to me, you don't want to join now, cause you're going to be shipped to the Pacific to replace the forces. So this, that's what happened to Raymond de la Fontana Quintas. He was sent to Far East and he became a regular Army person. He joined after, I mean he joined the Army of the United States, and after that, he become a citizen, boom, right, right now. After you, after you're sworn you're now a - they also swore you in as a citizen in those days, in war time. So, I didn't join. But they gave me a job at Camp Home Run, in the, in the camp, to be in charge of the officers' laundry and dry cleaning. And dry cleaning was done with gasoline. You soak it in gasoline, and then you hang it up. That was the dry cleaning. Laundry was done in, in, in the wash tubs, and I was in charge of that. And I stayed there until my aunt wrote a letter that there is a very strong possibility that I will be able to come sometime in the Spring of 1946. They're working on it. The only thing is she said you need, you need all the papers. You got to have a passport, you got to have a birth certificate. And I had none of that, see. So the Army gave me a furlough to go my home town. And that wasn't easy either, because I was in France, and Slovakia was in a Russian zone. So I got to Regensburg, Germany, and there the Army, uh, applied for the Russian zone, to let me come, to let me go across to Slovakia on the train. I come to my home town, which is Topol_ any. Go to City Hall, tell them who I was. They tell me, "All Jewish records were destroyed." But they knew who I was. So I got nothing. Got back on the train. Came to Paris. Went to the Czechoslovakian Embassy; and they gave me a passport, no birth certificate. Went back to Le Havre, to Camp Home Run; told the captain what happened, told the chaplain what happened, and they all started to work on all my papers. I got a judicial record from the Army, a record of what I did in the Army, and

that the uh Ambassador should uh accept this because of I, and my stay in a concentration camp and all the records were destroyed. However, passport I got from Czechoslovakian Embassy. That's the only legal paper. You know how I got this passport? I gave the guy a carton of cigarettes, I remember that. And I needed three photos. So in Paris he tells me where there is a photographer on the street. Right around the, the Embassy is this, you get three photos over there. And I, I looked like a scarecrow in Army uniform and, and, and in fact, I, I, I, this is the uniform I took a picture, my passport picture in. So I ran, you know, this this is the kind of uniform, this, this is what, this is a little better. The other one I look like a scarecrow. So I got this, everything together. Come back to the Ambassador. I gave him a carton of cigarettes, he gave me the passport. Went back to Le Havre from Paris. Now I'm ready to go. Now I'm waiting for my aunt to get all, everything together.

Q: We have three minutes. Let's pull it together.

A: OK. So what happened, I got to Le Havre. The captain made arrangement for me to go outside of Paris, a place called Maison Lafitte, to live with a Red Cross Field Director, waiting for my aunt's, all, everything the Army had done for me. And May 10th, 1946, I got on a plane. Came to New York, came to some friends that knew my family. From there I went to Detroit. And about a year later, I had met a young woman, young lady, also survivor, whom I married a year later. We are now the proud parents of four children and four grandchildren. And as we say, uh, among the survivors, from ashes to life. (Pause) This was tougher than, uh, tougher than talking, than lecturing, I'll tell you. (PAUSE) I couldn't take any more of it.

(Conversation)

Q: Could we just do the pictures?

A: What pictures do you want to do?

Q: All the ones . . .

A: We didn't do this one.

Q: Hold that one up just so he gets it and describe what it is?

A: Uh, this what the Nazis called the Orchestra Platz, the Orchestra Place where the band, the finest musician, uh, Jewish musicians, from every European country, would play at the entrance to the, in and out of the camp, as we were marching to and from work.

(Technical Conversation - Pauses)

A: Which one should I show next?

Q: Uh, let's do it in order. Let's do the camp . . .

A: How's is that. This is the original crematorium in Auschwitz I. Which by the way is still standing. Very primitive. The ones they built after that were the death factories in Birkenau. Auschwitz II. Oh, there's a small photo--I don't know if you can do anything with that at all.

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

This was the first American unit that I ran across that, I got this in Dachau, outside of Dachau, and one of the GI's gave it to me. And I've been carrying it ever since. As you can see, the cattle cars there, this is where all the bodies were unloaded. Of course, they un, unloaded by the, the Germans. The GI's brought the Germans to, to show them what what was going on, like they didn't know. (Pause) Well, this is the entrance to hell. This is Auschwitz, entrance to Auschwitz, "Arbeit Macht Frei," which by the way, Birkenau also had a sign, "Arbeit Macht Frei." They all had "Arbeit Macht Frei." But this is the first one that I've seen, I'm, that I came to. (TECHNICAL CONVERSATION) All right. This - the happy times, the American Army and Mike Vogel.

Q: Next picture.

A: I don't think so.

Q: You have one more. Of you in the Army.

A: Oh, the tent city! My goodness gracious. Well, I should have shown that one first. This is in Camp Lucky Strike. This in France, in a farm country in France, that we waited for to be taken to Le Havre, France to be loaded on to ships to go back to the United States, except I stayed for another few months.

End of tape #2

TAPE # 3

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: We're picking up with the third tape, and we're going back, and you had started to tell me during the break, uh, about Heinrich Himmler coming to the camp. Could you tell me about Himmler and tell me about the preparations for him?

A: Yes, uh, this was before Birkenau was built. Actually, they were building Birkenau. We didn't know it, I didn't know it at the time, what was going on. But Himmler came there, and before Himmler came to Auschwitz, the camp had to be cleaned from, from top to bottom. The streets of the camp were swept. They got rid of all the Muselmans, all the skeleton-type people. And we all went to be disinfected. We didn't know why. We didn't know who Himmler, we didn't even know, we knew of Himmler from before, but we didn't know why he was coming or what was the reason. The only thing we knew that it was a big, big Nazi officer coming and we were beaten by our Blockältester to get, get to the disinfectant area. And this is the way they disinfected us. They would take our clothes and put them, take them away from us and gave us new sets of striped uniforms with our numbers sewn back on the left breast and the right, right pant leg. And we went to a disinfecting area. Small shower, shower with hardly, hardly any water pressure, but they would swoosh (ph), swoosh (ph), swoosh (ph), spritz (ph) us, uh, with some sort of a disinfectant, and then they would dress up, and when the time came from, for Heinrich Himmler, for the big-wig Nazi, to come to Auschwitz, to the, right to the camp, we were all lined up in front of our barracks, in front of our blocks. The Blockältester made sure that we're standing straight, we're clean, and he found one Polish Jew, Jewish boy, one of the buttons was missing of his tunic, of his jacket. And this Blockältester, Mietek was his name, M - I - E - T - E - K. Mietek. He was a murderer. He was a Polish, uh, uh, murderer. He was our Blockältester, and he, he pride himself that he could kill one person with a blow to the proper area in his neck. So he could kill him. And this poor, poor Jewish prisoner, Jewish boy got murdered with one blow and taken away from there. And the camp was standing still, holding for Heinrich Himmler to come and inspect the camp. I will never forget. I, I, in my time in Auschwitz, Himmler came twice to Auschwitz, but I will never forget with this happening in my block, this, this murder in front of my block when Mietek, Mietek murdered him. And there were number, there were more than one person like that. There was one other, a German prisoner they used to call Monkey Tin (ph). He was another one. Mietek and Monkey Tin would have a bet who can kill more people with one blow. And that's...this was Himmler's visit to Auschwitz. That's how they cleaned up the camp. First, they got rid of all the people that didn't look well enough. The streets were swept, the barracks were cleaned. Of course, Himmler never went into the barrack. The only thing, he came is just march with the Lagerältester whose name was Rudolph Hoess by the way.² Rudolph Hoess was the commandant of Auschwitz. And this commandant of Auschwitz, Mr. Rudolph Hoess, would walk with Heinrich Himmler and other lieutenants, their... their lieutenants, and just go from barrack to barrack on the

² Rudolph Hoess was the commandant of Auschwitz.

inspection. Yes ma'am.

Q: We would also be talking about Mengele and could you tell us about your meetings with Mengele? I gather you did so often.

A: Yes, well, Mengele arrived to Birkenau, not to Auschwitz, in May 1943. I still remember when, uh, there too a big fuss was made about the doctors. The doctors were the ones. Because in all the Krankenbaus, all the, all the sick bays, where ever they put prisoners, there never doctors. The only reason doctors came there is to make a selection in who was no longer was fit to be kept alive or selected to go to the gas chambers. And they had a holding, they was a 7, 11 block in Birkenau. Block 7 in Auschwitz. And this is the block that they would take prisoners that were already on their way, on the to the gas chambers, gas chambers. And they would hold them there until they had enough, and then they would just walk them in Birkenau to, to the crematorias. So, but mostly I remember Mengele, first about the Mengele selections in the camp, OK. Of course, we didn't know when the selection would be. But all of a sudden, in most cases on a Sundays, cause everyone was in, in the camp. The whole camp was taken out to Appellplatz, to roll call place, lined up in rows of five, stripped naked, and your clothing was dropped by you in front of your feet. And Mengele, with the, with the Lager... Lagerältester, who was a prisoner, and the Lagerführer, and also the commandant; they would go from barrack to barrack, block to block. And behind Mengele was a prisoner registrar--a Schreiber what they called--and as Mengele would, this is how, how it would be. You in a row of five, always in rows of five. The first five, step forward. Mengele would walk in front and in back. As he walked this way, left or right, left or right, and those who picked up their clothing were still staying alive, because, we didn't know, we found out later how it worked. First, first time, second time, you didn't know which, what was going on. If you living or if you going to die now. Those who left their clothing were taken into a holding block and Mengele's selections would last practically all day because by the time he completed - Birkenau was a huge camp - by the time he completed the whole camp, OK, after he finished the camp, those who of course the clothing stayed behind were taken into another block and waited until everybody was taken from all, the whole camp, then they were standing there. You could hear them yell, scream, and beg for water, beg for, for help. They knew where they were going see. See, and those of us who stayed, we picked up our clothing. Then with whips and sticks by the SS and by the Kapos and by the Blockältester, by the Stubedienst, all the big-wigs of the prisoners and the SS, we were beaten into a, uh, shower area. And we bundled our clothing with a piece of wire with the number outside and threw them in a huge gas chamber, in, in a room, where Zyklon B gas was put on the clothing to disinfect the clothing. They disinfected the clothing while they disinfected us. Spray a little water and they sprayed us with some disinfecting, uh, water, some sort of a disinfecter. And then they opened the gas chamber, the room where, where the clothing was, and you started looking for your clothing. But the gas fumes were still there. And I'll never forget, I got weak and dizzy from the gas fumes one time. And, uh, I was fainting and my friend, Buchler and Fisher, which I mentioned before, grabbed me under their arms and took me outside and ran me back and forth, breathing for air. And that's how they got me through. That's how I came out of that. I already had enough gas in me so

if, if those two boys weren't there I wouldn't be alive. I would have died right there. So we picked up our clothing, we put our clothing on, were taken back to the barracks, back to our own blocks. The other thing I remember about Mengele very vividly is when the transports were coming in. He was the one who would be in charge at the railroad, at the siding, at, at what they, the Nazis called it the Rampe, the ramp. When he came to the ramp, the first thing he would do when he, when he, he had the people lined up, the able-bodied ones, he would get rid of those first. He would ask them, how old are you, what is your profession, what is your name, _____, what is your profession and how old are you. And left, right, left, right and so on. After he got rid of all these, of course, another thing he was looking, pregnant women and twins. We really didn't know what he was doing with them at the time. But he would, he called them "Schlingen" (ph) [Zwillingen?], the twins. He would take the twins into his area. I would see Mengele every transport and especially in early May 1944 when the Hungarian Jews were brought in. When the Hungarian Jews came, Mengele was there constantly. He had a motorcycle, and he would ride in the camp, up and down the camp, just looking, on the motorcycle, looking for anything that he wanted to look at. Of course, we didn't know what he was looking at. Always afraid of this man. I can still remember his, his piercing eyes and he'll, he'll, Mengele had dark hair and when he, when he, there were two people that we were deathly afraid of. Actually three. Palich (ph) was one. Palich was another one who was. He, Palich actually did this. Palich's favorite thing was to do to line people up in Auschwitz--Auschwitz I-- against the wall to see how many he could kill with one bullet. A friend of mine, close friend of mine, knew of Palich quite well. I didn't know much about Palich except I knew who he was, that he was a murderer, and he also ride, rode a motorcycle. He would line up people, two three people in a row, see how many he could kill with one bullet. Lined them up together. And the third person, who also came in '43, actually end of '43 I think, whose name was Hauptsturmführer Moll, M - O - L - L. He became in charge of the crematorias. And also, he also was the mentor of the pits, the pits that they were digging because the crematorias couldn't, couldn't hold enough people, burn and gas enough people fast enough. So he used the pits to burn the people. But the pits didn't work well. Because I remember the Greek transports that came and and he, he took some of the Greek boys working the pits and with bare feet they were, they were stomping the hot ashes for after the people, the hot coals after the people were, were burned in there. And the bodies just kept, kept coming back up.

Q: To come back to, you were talking before about twins. You had mentioned a particular set of twins.

A: There was a French set of twins, French boys. One was already there already, Mengele already had him. And, I remember when they came for the second set...second guy, second person, the second twin, this poor boy yelled and screamed. Oh yeah, I still...I can still just about hear his screaming, screeching, as they were taking him. The Nazis came, the SS came to take this guy to Mengele. And they took him. That's the last time we've seen him. He was castrating the boys, lot of boys, too.

Q: Did you actually see any of the experiments?

A: No, I didn't. No. None of us have. There, oh, I shouldn't say none of us have. There was some doctors, prison doctors that worked with Mengele, but of course, we didn't, we didn't have anything to do with that.

Q: What happened with the pregnant women? Do you know?

A: Only what I heard from, from people that were connected, that he was, uh, trying to, uh, uh, force the labor out, to pull the babies out of...out of their wombs. I heard that from from other people. And we knew girls that that worked...worked in Canada that also knew some girls that worked closer to the, to the Krankenbau area so a lot of times when Mengele worked in some of the sick, sick bay - he had a room, he had rooms there where he did the experimentation.

Q: You talked about one other person, um, and that is the man whom you identified for OSI. Can you talk about him and give us his full name and what did he do? What did you testify?

A: His full name is Hans Lipsky (ph). He's a Latvian. Latvian national. He was an SS guard in Auschwitz. He worked the railroad sidings where transports came. He was a murderer. He was a killer. To him, I...I remember, not only him but people like him, when transports came, transports came, we would sometimes unload the children. And take them off the train, off the cattle car. I remember one of the boys holding a little child, a little baby, and he takes out his pistol and shoots the baby in the, in the prisoner's hand. There was another one, Untersturmführer Otto. There was a Graff and another one whose name was Hans. Hans would whistle, uh...uh, operas, and at the same time would murder these poor people coming off the train. Just right on the tracks. Right on the railroad siding. This guy would sing and, and murder. I seen him once kick a kid like a soccer ball, when the kid was crying. Kicked him from his mother's arms. And Hans Lipsky was a guard. He was not an officer, he was just a guard. A murderer, like most of them were. And most of these people when they, those who guarded the the tracks and railroad siding, would be drinking before they got there so that they were fortified, so that they could do, do this job better. That was their ration, this booze. And and I remember they they all had flasks with whiskey in it and they would just drink enough so they could be practically immune to anything that was going on. So I identified Hans Lipsky. It's been five years now. Uh, from the OSI came a person who was at the time the Assistant Director; because then there was Ryan, who was the main person, and Neal Sher was in command. He got my name from some, some other Auschwitz survivors, and he asked me if I could come to Washington to identify this person. I said, well I don't think I can get away you know, so fast, so he said I must travel to see some people, could I come to Indianapolis. This is where I live. Could you meet me at the airport. So he came on a Saturday afternoon, and I met him at the airport, and he identified themselves. He checked in, and then we went to his room, and in his room, he started to investigate. Started to actually interrogate me like I was one of the prisoners, one of the Nazis, the way he was going about it. And, uh, after, he wrote everything, whatever I told him, he, he had it down, he had a tape, and one of the last things that he did, in his briefcase, he had eight mug shots

of people. And he told me, I want you to study these mug shot, mug shots, and if you can identify anyone, I want you to put your finger on it and hold it there and I'll let you know what to do next. I looked at this mug shots, _____ photo of eight, eight mug shots, and they were marked from one to eight. And I looked, and I put my finger on number three. And I said, here is your man. And if I remember what I said to him, I said, and this is, this guy's name is Hans. And he said to me, Mr. Vogel, I want you to sign your full name under this photo, and date it. And all the other ones I want you to initial and date. And after I completed the, the paper work, he says to me, you have identified Hans Lipsky who's going to be tried in Chicago on such and such and such a time and so on. And the trial was due to be the day after Christmas. And on my way to work I was listening to NPR, National Public Radio, and they mentioned that Hans Lipsky elected to be deported instead of going to trial. He was deported to West Germany. When I got to work I got a call from Neal Sher's office. This Eli Rosenbaum was working for Sher and he gave me the call. He says, there is no trial. Hans Lipsky elected to be deported. He is being deported to West Germany. He's been by himself to West Germany but we do want you to know that if in case there is going to be a trial, would you be willing to go to West Germany. And that is the last, last thing I heard about Hans Lipsky. He is probably living, ah, a life of Riley in West Germany.

Q: Anything you want to add to the tape, recollections...?

A: Well, I give you a Sunday life in Auschwitz, for instance. Sunday was the day of rest for the Nazis, of course. But the damn day of rest was sport, sport with us. For us, it was shaving each other, trying to get clean; which was almost impossible because water was nonexistent in Birkenau. We shaved each other; and in summer time we tried to air our uniforms off, delouse ourselves with our hands, but that was not allowed by the Nazis. They would come and do calisthenics with us. They would make us go on our down below and do frog jumps, frog leaps. And then they would make us roll on the ground. Then roll back and forward. Do push-ups. Run. Get into the ditches into mud. Roll in the mud in the ditches. And if you didn't do it fast enough, you got beaten. And then they would beat us up because we were dirty. Or muddy. Everyday in Auschwitz, you never knew when your number came up. Another thing was to see when you went to work, when you went to slave labor, who was no longer there. Who was, who's left. And it became, it became like, like, like an animal. Oh, I'm, I'm living another day, or he's, he's no longer, and and you know, the worst part, that you couldn't cry for it. You couldn't cry. You couldn't cry in Auschwitz. You cried, you died. If you, if you, if you show even more weakness than you already had, you didn't survive the day. You know, I remember once, here's another one. I got caught in Canada Kommando picking up sardines and giving it to a girl. Gave this sardines as I was carrying the bundle, Nazi picks me up. And a Kapo came there and the Kapo starts slapping me around, starts beating me. So, for punishment I was put into a Strafkommando [**NB:** punishment brigade]. And how do I translate Strafkommando? Straf is a...is you being punished, "sin kommando." I don't know if it translates well in English. Always the Strafkommando consisted of, first of all, the Kapo of the Strafkommando was a murderer, a former German prisoner who was a murderer. He was our Kapo, our leader. And the job was cutting seaweeds in water, with two of us. It was, was a chain saw, it was a saw on a chain, like a, like a, how would you call it,

like _____, OK, that had sharp thing and you cut it. And what the Nazi would do behind us, they would send a Kapo, a Unterkapo...an Unterkapo, his assistant, and they would dunk our heads in the water to see how long we can stay in, under the water. I was there for two weeks, and one of my friends paid off with a kind of riches, he paid off the proper people. And I was taken back into Canada Kommando. And when I came back the SS man who caught me, the greeting would be such: _____. Till next time, you old bandit, you still alive. And they, in a way, they say, oh, this guy survived. They, they were, you know, say, look, what else I can do with him. Another thing that you learned as you became an older prisoner, to be at the right place at the right time, which was not easy. They, Nazis, SS would say, _____. They would yell out, three men. You went, most cases one of you didn't return. They would kill you as you were doing some sort of work. And as you got an older, became an older prisoner, when an SS man called for three men, you would say, _____, cause they always meant three plus you. You stayed behind, because if you went again, your first time. I've got a mark on my neck here. I was hit by a shovel, on my neck. I thought I was going to be killed. That mark is still there. Also, when they called drei man, it was digging and wasn't digging fast enough, and the SS just hit me full force on my neck. And they indented my neck, and its been there ever since Auschwitz.

Q: Did you ever think of escape?

A: No, no, I didn't. When these two boys escaped, and when anyone escaped, we were in a way not happy about, about it. And again I must explain, we didn't know what was going on on the outside world. But the reason we were not happy because we suffered. We had to stand and on roll call until this poor soul was either caught, murdered, and then we were all beaten anyway. Because the Kapos and Blockältesters who were also out standing there at the roll call with us, they would be the ones who beat us because the Jew escaped, see.

Q: You had said before about the misconceptions about Canada Kommando. Did some people believe you? Could you talk about that and talk about the woman that you mentioned?

A: Well, uh, now, uh, you know, after thirty years not speaking about my experiences, finally, our youngest daughter Elaine, who practically made me do what I'm doing today, speaking on Holocaust, and the most important reason is because I want to bear witness because very soon there will not be an Auschwitz survivor or Dachau survivor and then Auschwitz will only be a legend. But I must be very blunt. I survived because of Canada Kommando. Good, bad or indifferent, I survived because I was assigned to work in Canada Kommando. But I must say that Canada Kommando was not just a group that worked unloading people. We were told before we went to the transport what is expected of us. If any one of us will ever dare to tell the people what is going on, will not live the day through. So now that I talk about it and I tell them that I survived and the reason, everyone survived for a reason, because in Auschwitz the Nazi law said that was no one can survive longer than three months on the food, the hygiene, and the work and and the torturing that he gets longer than three months. If you live longer than three months, you are doing something that is not according to the camp's rules. You either get more food someplace. You do get more food

someplace, or you have someone else helping you to survive, see. So when I tell some people about Canada, I told, I was Bloomington at the Indiana University a couple of years ago, and I'm speaking to graduate students, a class of graduate students. They were learning Holocaust, teaching Holocaust there, and I told the group about Canada Kommando, and of course questions and answers are usually very strong, and I really am quite immune to the questions because I answer them exactly, right from the shoulders. This young woman told me that her mother told her that the Canada Kommandos in her mind were murderers. Murderers, because when she arrived to Auschwitz, it was the Canada Kommando who lined them up in rows of five and one of the Canada Kommando slapped her. And I said, "It is possible, but a Canada Kommando person was only doing what he had to do. If he didn't do it he was shot right on the spot. He was murdered right on the spot. And I give you another example, another little story. I remember a transport came from Theresienstadt, 1943. Early spring of 1943. And we were unloading this transport, busy, this was the busiest night I ever seen at the railroad, uh, siding. There was a young woman with a child with her. And the child was restless and crying, and the mother was trying to calm the baby, calm the child--six, seven-year-old child. All of a sudden, the mother looks; and a Red Cross truck is moving towards us. And she's telling the little girl, "Oh, Red Cross is already here. Pretty soon we will be in our place." And a young Jewish Slovakian boy ran by there; and he told them, "Lady, that's not Red Cross. Take a look behind. You see the chimney. In one hour's time, you're going to be gassed. You're going to be burned." And she went and sees an SS officer and tells him that, this woman. She tells the SS officer about this man: "This man told us you're going to gas us, you're going to burn us." He said, "Look, Lady, he's a criminal. Don't...he's going to be dealt with." And he dealt with he was; because after we had loaded everybody, we all went behind the cattle cars and slowly they murdered him. Everyone of them just murdered the young boy slowly, just murdered the young boy slowly. Carried him back to Auschwitz on our shoulders. And the Red Cross truck. You know what the Red Cross truck brought? The Zyklon B gas cans. That's how it was carried into Birkenau. So that was the Red Cross truck. And there are so many things, you know, that...the...as I'm talking to you, there's just, you know, for a survivor, every survivor has a story. Is a story. The end is always, always the same. And every survivor survived because of something. Not because he was strong; because the strong ones were falling just as easy as, as the weak ones. And really, none of us believed you're going to survive that. It...it was...I'd been in Auschwitz two and a half years; and I was in--between Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz, Dachau, I was over three years just in concentration camp, plus so many months in, in, in Arbeitslager (ph), work camps. So from 1939 to 1945, we all suffered and, uh, uh, because of the Nazi regime and you know, every survivor, we didn't believe that we're going to make it. There is no survivor that will tell you I'm going to survive Auschwitz. They never talked about it. You know what the main, the most important thing was, to go to sleep at night with a full stomach, so if you die, you don't die hungry. Another thing was in Auschwitz, "Organisierung"-- organizing. We all had to organize. We all knew how to barter. And of course, the resistance group, see. People say the Jews, we the Jews walked into the gas chambers like lambs, like sheep. Believe me, those of us who were there a long time, we had an underground organization, without radios, without anything. Communications such as we all knew how to communicate from the other camps, somehow or other. For instance, there

was a Leichen (ph) Kommando, which was the people that picked up the dead. This man, he built a wagon, he had a wagon, and he built a false bottom. This guy's name is Joe Newman (ph) and he lives in Skokie. And he would carry things to the girls' camp, information. Information to person...you had him here not long ago, Erich Kulka. And Erich Kulka would carry it from camp to camp to camp, and to the resisters. To the girls that worked in munitions factory. Which was Kulka's job. Kulka did that. Kulka was the one who, uh, got the girls from the munition factory. And they got enough gun powder so the Sonderkommando blew up one of the crematorias. Of course, they were murdered unfortunately, they were killed.

Q: Did you watch that?

A: No, no. I did not. We knew about it but I did not. So you see, when, when people tell you that, uh, uh, surviving, those that survived, they are, they are a story, that's a different breed, and especially those who were in Auschwitz as long as I have been, as long as, you know, myself and the others, Kulka, Vrba.

Q: Did you help to smuggle information and material?

A: Absolutely. From, we used to bring...for the escapees, we used, we used to smuggle stuff in ourselves.

Q: Talk about that.

A: Uh, clothing for them, so they have civilian clothes. And that would be given to group such as Kraus and Kulka, that type of stuff. Shoes. And we didn't know why. OK. They didn't tell us these tomorrow, you know, you never knew who would - there was a Hebrew word, a Yiddish word "moser." A "moser" is a guy who tells on someone, who goes and snitches on someone. There was snitches among us. And the reason there was snitches, again, selfish, trying to survive that way. The Nazis, they didn't let them survive. They get their information, then they kill them.

Q: Would you tell me the story, an incident where you smuggled things?

A: I was very small, and my pants were kind of big. I would be lined with clothing, civilian clothing inside, after examining us, the clothing would be in an area as they put us in line, some of us snuck in and you put the clothing in your pants. And we snuck it in and someone in the camp already knew that I had it. But you see, it was a dangerous thing to do. Because the Canada Kommando was not only searched on the Canada grounds, we would also be searched sometimes at the gate. See. And if you got caught you got killed.

Q: Who did you get the clothing for?

A: The clothing would be picked up by a courier like, like, not a prisoner, who couldn't wore

them anyway because he had to have a striped clothes like me. And he would take it to the person that would be doing the escaping.

Q: You helped on the black market too?

A: Oh, absolutely. There was a big black market there. Constantly.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Uh, that was down with the civilians actually. Cause you couldn't black market much with, barter with another prisoner. What could he give you? We would buy chicken sometimes. Cooked chickens. From the Polish civilians. The ones that worked in Auschwitz. Vodka was brought into the camp. Cigarettes. For gold, for diamonds, watches, which we, which we took from the Canada Kommando. You know, American dollars was a very common thing in Auschwitz. Thousand dollar bills, hundred dollar bills, there was nothing to it. Twenty dollar gold pieces you would find in the clothing. And this was all survival of the fittest. Survival of the people that thought maybe, maybe, maybe. Never believe you're going to make it, but there was always a slight, slight glimmer of hope. What are you buying the food for, so you give it to your girlfriend, your sister, your brother, your mother, and throw it over the fence. Auschwitz was a constant organizeing, organizing, constantly going on. Between the Kapos who you had to pay off, the Blockältester who you had to pay off. The Blockältester who was in charge of Block 29, the Canada Kommando, he lived like a king in Auschwitz because he was our god. And to him we brought the riches. For better treatment, for taking care of our friends who got typhus. See I had typhus, I, I, I had, I acquire typhus, I got typhus in 1943 in Canada, and at the time I was already in Birkenau. And two my friends, Fisher and Buchler, I don't know if I, I mentioned these two boys prior. Here I have typhus. The first thing that happens to you in typhus, you lose your hearing, and you echo, your equilibrium, am I saying it wrong. You loose that, you lose your balance. These two boys would hold me under their arm with my cap off and march me through the gate, take me to Canada Platz where we worked the Canada warehouse. When transport didn't come, we all worked at the warehouse. Sorting the clothing. They marched me through there, take me to the girls' section without the Nazis see it and the girls would cover me with bundles of clothing and make hot water for me with lemons. We had lemons, you could, what people brought with them. And that's how they got me well. Not quite well, because I ended up in, in the block which was called the Krankenbau, and again, here was a Polish couple in charge of the block. And this friend of my named Fisher would pay them off to take care of me. Because Mengele came every day to make a selection to, to go to gas chamber. Now they got too hot, that he knew that I was on my last leg, that's when he brought me back and he said to Fisher, I can't keep him no more. You got to take him back to the barrack. So I survived Krankenbau with typhus. And that Canada Kommando, and again the girls took care of me until I got well.

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview