

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Isaac Bitton

May 17, 1990

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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Isaac Bitton, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 17, 1990 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. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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ISAAC BITTON

May 17, 1990

Q: Would you tell me your name please?

A: Yes. My name is Isaac Bitton.

Q: Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Lisbon, Portugal, March 31st, 1926. I was born in the hospital at Hiletia in Lisbon.

Q: Tell me about your family and about what it was like growing up in your family.

A: My...my mother was born and raised in Farouh in the south of Portugal. And...uh...most of the Jewish people that came to Portugal towards the end of the 1700s and beginning of the 1800s...uh...settled down in Farouh. And there was a very large community lodged and relatives over 126 families within approximately 100 years. By the 1900s they all disappeared so that Portugal...uh...Farouh today is...there is no Jewish life. But my mother was born there. She moved to Lisbon with my grandparents which originally came from...uh...uh...Morocco, Spanish Morocco and French Morocco. Therefore, my name Bitton which is a French, actually a French broken name. Uh...And of course my mother was married in Lisbon and...uh...we were five brothers and five sisters, 5 boys and 5 girls and...uh...I attended...the uh...the...uh...the schools in...in Lisbon...and...uh...the Jewish school...was a private Jewish school...uh...where we were taught Hebrew so we could...uh...we could read...uh...the prayer books. Because my family came from a reasonable religious...uh...family. Not orthodox, but...uh...religious. And we all had to learn Hebrew and...uh...we did so. At home my...my grandparents, primarily my grandmother spoke some Spanish and...uh...Lidino actually, and some of the Portuguese. And...uh...basically, I...I grew up amongst the Jewish community which was very, very small at that time. There was not much activity amongst the Jew youth. There was actually not too many youth in...in Lisbon, Portugal. And...uh...my oldest brother had actually begun to have some girl friends, not Jewish. My father was very upset about it and...uh...as I used to go to school to learn Hebrew by...uh...a lady that also was a Moroccan...uh...Jewish teacher, she had in her...uh...living room several pictures of...uh...of...uh...of Israel, of __ Israel at the time from the wailing wall and others. And...uh...I was always impressed by those pictures. Always! And that created in me a great desire at the time to...to go to Israel. Already from a little, early childhood. And suddenly when the opportunity knocked in 1943, then I went to Israel. But in the meantime, my Aunt Esther ____ Bitton, my father's sister, used to work at...uh...there was a Portuguese soup kitchen primarily at the time used for the poor...the poor Jews of Lisbon. And during the second world war, obviously this kitchen became very very influential in assisting the refugees to have one hot meal a day. And it was there that I really began to...uh...hang around a lot of time simply because I was...uh...I was very

impressed by the various languages spoken. Uh...At the time I spoke Portuguese and a little bit of Spanish, but when you begin to hear Yiddish...lot of...lots of Yiddish...uh...lots of German...uh...Hungarian, Czech. I remember families from Czechoslovakia. Uh...I was always very impressed by...by these languages and...and uh...and I used to help...used to help buy...uh...the sitting...the sitting arrangement. There were probably within the dozen tables...uh...each table would care approximately hundred...10... 10...uh...people so the dining room for the refugees was within...uh...150 persons sitting capacity. And there was another small dining room which was for the Portuguese...uh...the Portuguese community. And next to the kitchen, soup kitchen was a Jewish hospital. I was born in a Jewish hospital. So was my entire family. It was a very small hospital, but nevertheless they took care of...uh...of the Jewish community. So...uh...and...uh...it was during this period in history that...uh...one day while I was at the soup kitchen I hear...one family walks in...several children, father and mother...very well dressed, not dressed like a refugee as such...uh...with crumbly clothing, but really very nice and neat...uh...and I...I asked the gentleman. I said...I fact I told him, "Excuse me. This...this is for the refugees...this dining room." And he said...uh...uh... in Portuguese...he said, "But we too are refugees." And...uh...I couldn't quite understand it. I was a teenager at the time, but still...uh...I asked him, "Why is that you are refugee. You...you are Portuguese. How can you be a refugee." And...uh...he asked me to sit down. And it was then that I...I met the very famous...uh...humanitarian, Dr. = _ who told me that he was the ex-consul of Portugal in Bordeaux, France. And he went on to tell me that he had been expelled by the Portuguese government simply because he had refused...he...he was asked to refuse to give...uh...uh...visas to the...to the Jewish refugees. And...uh...as a result, of course, he was removed from his position. He was disbarred because he was a lawyer by trade also, and removed from the diplomatic corps. And...uh...I met him in Lisbon at the soup kitchen within...I do not remember exactly if he was 4 or a half a dozen. We spoke briefly. He was there in line standing with...uh...family to get his hot meal and...and to date I couldn't...I...I never got out of my mind simply that the...the men of his stature...of his caliber...uh...that had ...had really helped saved lives, was punished in such manner by being removed from...from his...doing his job. And...uh...I was very impressed and these image always stayed with me. Uh...I...I...I don't believe I can really tell you a great deal more about Dr. because I met him such a short few times. But I remember portions of the family. And...uh...uh...I remember the...the refugees primarily more so that were there in most cases because they were the fortunate ones that had received visas by Dr. in Bordeaux, France. Uh...I remember a family by the name of Deutsch, father, mother and two children who...they set up a shop in the most busy street in Lisbon which is called the Sheadu. In fact, it was burned out recently. Was on the portions of the city that was burned...ancient part of the Lisbon. And...uh... Mr. Deutsch used to put...uh...a table about maybe 3 by 3 and used to sell razor blades and other little things. And I help him bring them to the areas. I used to help also to bring the refugees to some...some new residences since they were not quite familiar with Lisbon and I was quite familiar with Lisbon. Uh...There was another family...uh...by the name of Goostave Zumich...Zumich. He was from Czechoslovakia. Uh...Uh...He was a shoemaker, and he set up shop...uh...at the soup kitchen, one of the corners. And there he

would repair the shoes from the refugees. And...uh...I remember Mr. Brown who was also a German Jew who...uh...was the liaison between the refugees and the Jewish...uh...Portuguese community. He was in charge of... uh...uh...helping them to...uh...go and...uh...he was the one that would ask me at times, why...why don't you show this person where such and such a street is and so forth and so on. And...uh...I remember a family by the name of, I believe Grallman, who...uh...uh...whose lady had...uh...uh... a very small little girl, a child, but she became quite ill. She was hospitalized in Lisbon...uh... for I believe was mental stress. And my Aunt Esther, God bless her soul, took care of her daughter for a given period of time and for as long as she was hospitalized prior to moving to Israel. Later on, since we traveled on the same ship to Israel...uh...the family asked me to join their own family in Nahariyya in a little farm, which I did. That's how come I arrived in Nahariyya. It was through the Grallman family. And...uh...basically...uh...sometimes when I remember of the...uh...the...uh...the incidences...you know, you are a young man and...uh...up to that point in time in history, life in Portugal as such and Lisbon was quite uneventful for a young man. And...uh...suddenly when all these refugees start to come in...uh...it was very exciting. I could not understand what they were saying in most cases, but they would...uh...they would come to this soup kitchen a little before noon. If it was an hour before, and they would...in groups...you could sit them right in the...uh... the ____ and ____ in Lisbon is still today a street that has no end, you know. It...is two little corners like. You must turn around to come out. And...uh...they would walk around there, talking about problems, families, the anxiety, what happened to other members of the family because they did not know. They hadn't heard from them. Uh...And...uh...this to me was all very exciting and...uh...as a matter of fact, it reinforced in me even more so my wants to...to go to Israel. And...uh...it was at some point in time that we met...uh... members of...uh...the...uh...Sofnut that came from Lisbon to ...uh...uh...help the refugees to immigrate to Israel.

Q: Could we hold it for a second?

A: Sure.

Q: Can you give me a picture. We've moved fairly quickly. Give me a picture of what happened. What was Portugal like when the war broke out? How was it different from what had happened before?

A: During the second world war?

Q: Yes. When...for you. For you!

A: For me?

Q: What did you see. Besides the refugees, when the war broke out, what changes did you see. What was your...was your life any different?

A: Well, since you asked...since you asked...uh...uh... (clearing throat), there was a time during the war that in the north of Portugal, they had found wolfrum. And that's some type of a metal. I do not know that much about it. But it's sometime of a metal that you must mix...uh... with other metals...uh...specifically for armory. And, of course...uh...that became very, very exciting all over Portugal. And many people just left the town and went to the north to try to work on the wolfrum mines. And, of course, being an adventurer myself...uh...me and a few friends, we decided that it was the time for us to go and dig wolfrum too. So...uh...we...we went there, but we were very...most unsuccessful. No sooner than we were there, we turned around and came back to Lisbon because, of course, we had no...no...no means...no...no money. And...uh...however little money we had...uh...didn't last that long, and I came back, of course...uh...very, very broken-hearted that I did not make a million escudos on the wolfrum mines. But...uh...that was an exciting thing. And as much as life generally speaking in Lisbon at the time for as far as I can remember...uh...other than going to school at the time, I...uh...being a member of a large family and my father, at the time...uh...God bless his soul, was working for the Portuguese printing department of the Portuguese government. And he certainly did not earn that much money either. So...uh...it was up to us...the growing up children to help the family. So, other than school, we would pick up whatever job we could, me and my brothers. And...uh... I was involved in the dismantling, believe it or not, of World War I mines and...uh...we had a little wrench. There must have been a million bolts and nuts in these mines, and we spent all day unknitting these...these things. Uh...Another job that I took was...uh...working on ships by derusting the ballast of the ships. You know, if you're familiar with the ship ballasts, they're little oval holes at the bottom of the ship, and you go in with a little swimming suit and you go with your feet and your head and your...your arms and you stay there all day with a little hammer, and all you do is knock down the rust that accumulates in these little cubicles, You know, they're very small cubicles. Uh...That was another part of a job. And I did other minuscule jobs and working on...uh...helping to manufacture of...uh...bicycle, painting, etc. And...uh...by and large, the...uh...there was an exciting period in Lisbon. I remember the...uh...uh...there would be a...practically every day in the newspapers some story about someone being killed. A spy or...or some activity...foreign activities...uh...in Lisbon. And there is another thing that I used to do with my friends. We used to go to the German Consulate. And they had always literature. Tons of literature! They would give away propaganda about Germany. So we, of course, very diligently used to take as much as we could, and the moment we were out we used to toss it out in the garbage. So...uh...this was one of the things that we did...uh...for some obvious reasons...uh...actually. Another one function that I had...uh...was a neighbor of ours had a little shoe...uh...horse shoe shop. He was a big, big man and...uh...he couldn't read or write. And...uh...he always...whenever I came back from school, it was my function to come to him and read to him the newspaper and what was happening in the world. Because I used to like to read a lot. And...uh...and somehow or another we...we became very good friends, you know. And here was this big fellow. He couldn't read. I could never understand why he couldn't read either. But he was an older gentleman. And he was still doing the horse shoes...uh... in his shop. Blacksmith? I

don't know how you call exactly, but...uh... So, by and large...uh...other than our going every...we had to go every night to the temple because my father...uh...my father insisted that we go to the temple every day...every night. You cannot come home unless you've been to the temple to the services. And...uh...every Friday night obviously...Saturdays, we used to go to temple. So we conducted a reasonably...uh... I would say a moderate Jewish life. And...uh...our house was...was, of course...uh...kosher. My father was quite kosher. And ...uh...we had a very large family, as I said...uh...uh... five boys and five girls. Although two of them were born...I...one girl...my youngest sister, Rachel, was born after I left Portugal. And I did not meet her until 17... when she was 17. And my brother, Jacob, was...uh... few months old when I left for...for __, Israel. So...

Q: Did you feel...how did you feel being a Jew in Portugal once the war...once the war had broken out?

A: My only memories in this case is...uh...I didn't feel any...uh...truthfully...from the part of the Portuguese, I had no...no feelings that there were anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish or anything like that. Never had that feeling while I was in Lisbon. That's the truth. Uh...But...uh...by being in...uh...on a...almost on a daily basis, mixed with the Jewish refugees for a given period of time, that in itself inspired in me more so the desire really to go to Israel. Number one, to go to Palestine and to join the British Army, and go and fight the Nazis, which I did as a matter of fact.

Q: Tell us about that. You started to say...you had started to tell us about the Sofnut. Tell us about the refugees and Sofnut. What happened?

A: Certainly. Well, once we...uh...we...uh...we left Portugal, our first stop was...

Q: Excuse me. We have to back up. If you would please, tell us why...you were now in Lisbon.

A: Yes.

Q: And the Sofnut came to Lisbon.

A: Right.

Q: Tell us what they did and tell us what you did.

A: Well, basically, the...uh...uh...as far as I can remember, they came in to...uh...help number one, to bring all the children...refugees children primarily were the number one to go on...uh...on the registration to go to Israel. And then came grown-ups. So families with children, of course, were the first ones. And they asked the Jewish community also if there were any members of the Jewish community in Lisbon that wished to immigrate to...uh...to ..to __, Israel. And I...I and my brother were the first ones to...uh...join. Uh...In

fact...uh...I must say that my father at the time did not like the idea that we were going to leave Portugal. But I told him that I wanted to go to Israel. There was no Jewish life in Portugal, no Jewish youth. There was no girlfriends. At 16 a young man wants to have a girlfriend. And...uh...there was no such thing. And...uh...there were...there were, of course, many girls, but not...not Jewish. And...uh...I...I had very, very strong...uh...will that I wanted to marry within the Jewish faith and have Jewish children as well, and continue my Jewish life. That was really something that I always had since childhood. And I think as I mentioned before, I was very much impressed by the...uh...photographs from the...from ____, Israel, the wailing wall, etc. And Musrabano and other pictures that the teacher had on the wall. So we then registered with the government of Portugal. We had to pay some fees to...uh...so that we wouldn't have to go to the military, etc., and...uh...we left for Palestine. I do not remember the exact date, sometimes end of 43 aboard the ship Niasa...was a steamship, a Portuguese steamship. And...uh...there was several hundred children and adults, refugees. And...uh...our first stop was about a day...within a day, we stopped in Cadiz, Spain. In Cadiz, Spain, the ship picked up several hundred Jewish children again. And it was there that I met...uh...a fellow from the Jewish community in Lisbon. His name was _____ who with his brother, Samuel, were in charge of the...uh...uh...uh... removal of Jewish children from the border of France into Spain into Portugal and into Israel. Uh...Again...uh... knew very well...uh...Dr. because apparently there were visas some received from this gentleman through _____. Okay? So that was the last time that I saw _____ alive. He and his brother worked for the Jewish community of Lisbon in conjunction with the American Joint Committee to save the Jewish children. So...uh...we (clearing throat) we went to...uh...we...uh...went to Israel or to Palestine.

Q: Excuse me. Tell me about the ship. I would like to know what it was like for you on the ship with the refugee children and what you did. What effect it had and there was an incident that you had told me about.

A: Right. It was...I cannot remember the names of this young man, but...uh...uh...as a matter of fact in my life, I was directly and indirectly involved in saving five lives. But he was aboard the Niasa, that...uh...the first thing that happened was...the Niasa had to take a large deviation because of the second world war as it was in...at that point in time quite active, there was...the...the specifically, the German...uh...uh...U-Submarines were in the Mediterranean and as a result, we had to...I only remember that we were advised that the ship would have to make a deviation because of Germany submarine activity. Uh...Although we...we...ourselves did not see any submarines. But we did pick up a time when there was very, very rough seas. And people, of course, were feeling not quite well, and everybody was running up to...to the top even though they were not...you were advised not to because it was reasonably dangerous. So I was going up to the deck and...uh...a young child I would say within 10 to 12 years old also was in a hurry apparently to relieve himself and...uh...he was caught by a wave. And...uh...don't ask me how. I only know that I dove to this child and I was able to grab him while I was grabbing myself also to the rails. And meantime his mother was very...uh...excited and

she called the father which was a little further below the steps. And...uh...he came in a hurry too and to help me, and we brought, you know. This...This takes a few seconds because here comes the wave and...and...and just came through the deck and there he was. And I grabbed him and so we came down there and there was no water any more or anything. And the father....I will never forget it. Uh...He jumped at my feet, and he wanted to kiss my feet because I saved...I saved his child. Now, you know, it's one of these things. You know, he could...maybe he would never gone overboard, but he could have gone overboard as well. So...uh...I do not remember their names. I do not know...once we landed in Israel, I don't know whatever happened to them because they went in different directions and...uh...uh... But nevertheless, life on board ship for the approximately 1 week that we spent that normally would take within 3 to 4 days, but it took a little longer because of that...those deviations that...uh...the ship had to make in the Mediterranean...Mediterranean. But we...uh...landed in Haifa. Life was not that exciting on board. You know, it...uh...people would sit again in corners talking about what happened, wishing, willing, what happened to the families, etc. in...uh...in...uh...in...uh... Also, sort of type of permanent...permanent...uh...anxiety. That's the only way I can describe it, you know. There was I would say...uh...many sighs of relief when...when the word Israel, the land of Israel. I remember that when all of a sudden they say land, land, land. And there was Haifa __ Israel. That was a word that was very, very striking to everybody. Because everybody...all you hear at that time was Israel, Israel, and I could not understand what they were talking about. It was Polish or Yiddish or German. But you could hear all the time Israel, the word Israel. That I remember. We were unloaded into a...uh...buses and immediately brought to...uh...it was some sort, if you wish, of a concentration camp in Atleit. I don't know within 10 to 15 miles from Haifa, south of Haifa. And...uh...I asked, "What are we doing in here?" It's like a concentration camp. Barbed wire with security police everywhere...uh...Arabs, Jews, British. And...uh...the camp was divided into two sections for...one for men and one for women. And later on we found out that...uh...because or due to strong activity from the Fifth Column...the German Fifth Column they had to do a series of interviews and they asked everyone and they checked the papers, etc. So we stayed in that Atleit within...uh...a couple of weeks. The conditions were not the best, but they were fair. The Sofnut was there to help us. And...uh...from there on, most of us were moved to a little...uh...a little quarters outside Haifa by the name of _____. And there was worse because the conditions there were...everybody was mixed, men, women, children. There was no beds. We...uh...they didn't expect apparently that large number of people at the time and they were not prepared. And...uh...as a result we slept for a few days on...on the floor with blankets, etc. Then...uh...the...the youth were moved to a camp in Carmel in Haifa, the . And it was there that...uh...I had the great privilege and the honor of meeting the great lady of the Youth Alijah Movement, Henrietta Solt. And she was a lovely lady, God bless her soul, who...uh... I talked to her personally too. She talked to each one of us, welcoming us to ____ Israel. And...uh...some of us we were already above desirable age to stay in the Youth...with the Youth Movement. And I was one of them. So I then was moved from the _____ to Kibbutz BitAlfa. And here I must say that...uh...I could not get used to life in a kibbutz. I just couldn't. Uh...I was too...uh...you know, full of

action, you know. And...uh...I wanted to join the British Army. I wanted to join the war, not...I didn't come over here to be in a kibbutz, you know. So my brother, Abraham, stayed in the kibbutz and my cousin, _____, God bless him. He also passed away in Israel. Uh...They...they stayed in there. And...uh...I went to...uh...to join the British Army in Haifa, the British Joint Office. Uh...Once I filled all the papers, I was advised that because when they asked me for my papers, I gave them my Portuguese passport that I arrived legally. So I was advised by the...by the lieutenant in charge...he said, "I'm sorry, Sir. You can't join the British army. Portugal is a neutral country." So I said, "Okay." I left and I joined the...at the time was in Haifa talking to some other friends in there, I joined the PPRD, the Palestine Police Railroad Division. And this time my cousin also joined. He came back from the kibbutz also. He couldn't manage there. And...uh...so we both joined the PPRD. But I did not like the PPRD, the Palestine Police Railroad Division. What we did was simply night guards. We had to be with the rifle or the carbine by the railroad or be escort to the British...uh...payroll, etc. And it was not what I wanted. I wanted to go to war. That was my main thing. So I decided to...uh...go to Sarafan, which was the largest British joint group...army...uh...camp. (clearing throat) And again I fill out the papers and...uh...when I was asked for my...uh...uh...papers...how did I came to Palestine, I said, "I haven't got any papers." How did you come in? "I'm an illegal." And I wrote in this time in my...in my...my papers that I was born in Sofia, Bulgaria. As a native of Bulgaria, of course...uh...Bulgaria was at war too, so was no longer neutral (clearing throat) and...uh...speaking to some other friends...uh...we realized, of course, that the British they speak English. And not once was I asked about if I speak Bulgarian. Which I don't! But...uh...so...it was in this manner that I was able to join the...the British army. So we spent some time in Sarafan...the camp, and then we were moved to the Jewish Brigade group...uh...training camp in...uh...Ismailia in Egypt. We were part of the ITD...the Infantry Training Depot. And, of course, we were trained by British...uh... officers and also by...uh...Jewish officers. So we spent several months in training in infantry accelerated training because at the time the British army...the Jewish Brigade group because they wanted us to have a very fast training. The Jewish Brigade group had seen some action in the front in Italy at the time. And...uh...of course, I never saw any action in the front. The end of the war came while I...we were still in Egypt. So...uh...we were then moved to Europe. We left Alexandria aboard a British troop carrier, Escanya, if I remember right, and from there, of course, we were designated to the different...uh...Jewish Brigade...uh...unit. I was assigned to the second battalion of the Jewish Brigade group. And shortly thereafter, I was transferred to the corps of military police of the Jewish Brigade. (clearing throat) And we saw duties in Antwerp. We had our main station in Antwerp in Belgium. And it was there that...uh...I really had some first impact with dispersed persons that...people that came from the camps. Not the refugees that were able...that were fortunate to run away and arrive in Lisbon somehow in a reason...reasonably healthy manner. I'm talking about a dispersed person that survived the camps. They came out. They were skin and bones. Okay? And...uh...as a member of the Jewish Brigade, our uniforms were part of the British...uh...uniforms. The only difference was that we had our patches and we had the Star of David in gold with...uh...two whites and...uh...uh...blue...uh...stripes and...uh...it was in Antwerp and we

used to do a lot of duty at...uh...train station that the group of dispersed persons came in. They came out of the train, and I don't know if they came from Germany or from where they came from, but...uh...it was several of us...MPs, military police...and when they saw the Star of David, there was one of the most ___ things I ever experienced in my life. They came to you, and they kissed the Star of David. And they was saying in Yiddish, ___. They didn't believe that. And it was very, very touching. So I spent some time in...uh...in Antwerp, and...uh...then we went to Eindhoven in Holland to a...uh...R and R camp. We spent some time there. And...uh...of course, this is after the war. Uh...And...uh...the Jewish Brigade at the time was not doing much of anything officially. Unofficially, the Jewish Brigade group or part of it or portion of it were very, very...uh...diligently working in moving...uh...dispersed persons from one place to another place. It reminds, perhaps, of the story of...uh...the Jewish Brigade group was like a duck that...uh...you only see the smooth sailing on...on above the water, but below water they peddle like Hell so to speak. And that's what was happening. The...uh...the Jewish Brigade group...uh...I'm assuming in conjunction with the Haganah and...uh...the Aliyah Bet and I'm sure you know the meaning of Aliyah Bet. Uh...There was the convention immigration and the un-convention immigration. And the un-convention immigration was what we call today or we called then Aliyah Bet. Uh...so that it would be distinguished from the convention immigration. Because the British mandate, at the time, in Palestine did not wish...did not want to allow any more Jews to come to Palestine on a variety of grounds that they believed in. But...uh...but, of course, the Jewish agency believed in...in otherwise. And the Jewish agency, of course, had other ideas. And as a result, the Aliyah Bet was created. So...uh...there were many a times that...uh...in our camp, for instance, there was a time that over night there was several...uh...several...uh...tents that overnight had been erected in our...in...inside the camp. So for anyone on the outside looking at...at the army camp, another half a dozen tents wouldn't mean much of anything. Uh...Certainly, we were advised at the time that, you know, leave them along so to speak. They are dispersed persons in these tents. The reason is, of course, that the British mandate at the time...the British government...uh...with the assistance of the...uh...their various intelligence units...with the assistance of the British Royal Air Force, the British Navy, they had a blockade of Palestine not to allow any Jews to enter. And...uh...the Jewish Agency had no choice, but to try to evade their...their investigations. Where are the Jews coming from? Where are they being loaded? On what ships, etc., etc.? What ports, etc., etc.? So...uh...that's when the Jewish Brigade was of much help by using the military vehicles in transporting the refugees from one town to another town or if it's from another country, from...if it's from...from Holland to Belgium or to Italy or...or France, etc. So this involvement actually was...uh...ultimately was found out somehow, and the British government, of course, dismissed the entire Jewish Brigade.

Q: Were you involved in any of this?

A: No. I...I was not directly involved. No. Not at all. No. I was only by...by virtue of being...of serving with the Corps of Military Police of the Jewish Brigade. I do know that...uh...there was...uh...every...every vehicle...army vehicle had a log. And in this log,

of course, you have to write the moment you leave your camp, where you going, who is for, dut dut dut da. So...uh...they used to..to write in their logs when they were moving refugees three letters in English. T-T-G. And actually the meaning...uh...is...uh... Hebrew, Arabic, and Yiddish, which means _____. Which means if...if you pardon me, up your rear end business. That's what it meant. The reason that they wrote TTG on their...on their...on these log sheets was when and if they would be stopped by some of the Allied...uh... policemen on the frontiers, etc....uh...when the read, if it's British police and they read TTG on it, that sounds...even though it's a Jewish Brigade convoy...20 convoys or 30 vehicles, etc...uh...they're not going in to see what's inside. Fortunately, for us, they wouldn't because if they would have lift the...the gate, so to speak, you'll see that there was women, children, refugees being moved around. From one port to another port, etc. So this part was very exciting. I knew it about it. I was not involved directly with this. Uh...I was indirectly involved because, for instance, after spending some time in Europe in the British Army in the Jewish Brigade group, you are entitled to a vacation home. So an Isaac Bitton, in fact, went home on vacation. But the real Isaac Bitton never left, simply because the...uh...again...the...the Jewish agency had trained younger men, refugees to be able...how to hold...uh...the _____ the way the British army does or way the Jewish Brigade does. How to eat, etc. etc. Uh...Some Hebrews words in the event they would be questioned, but otherwise they went home on vacation. They never came back. They stayed there. But Isaac never left, say Antwerp, either. And then suddenly Ike is back from vacation. You understand? And...and the other Isaac stayed in Israel. So in this manner, many refugees also arrived in Israel with...uh...with false...uh...army...uh...army papers, army documents. So that's the only time that I was, if you wish, indirectly involved with the Aliyah Bet. Uh...of course, the end of the Jewish Brigade came about 1946. We were dismissed. And we went back. And it was prior to living in Antwerp and that one evening I...uh...I took a...uh...an electrical train in the city and to my great surprise, there was Brigadier Benjamin. Brigadier Benjamin was a...was a British Jew who was commanding the Jewish Brigade group. And it appears that he had never been informed officially of the underground activities that the Jewish Brigade was doing at the time in Europe. And as a result he...uh...he was just totally demoralized if you wish, prior to the...to the...when we all left...the Jewish Brigade left Europe. And Benjamin would be just...I saw him more than one occasion walking around in town. But I met him personally in the electrical train. I had to salute, of course. He was a Brigadier General and...uh...but we didn't speak. He was a very, very reserved man at that time. So I do not know from there on...uh...I never heard that he went to visit Israel or even if he ever went to Israel, but he was very upset about the whole thing. Uh...But the meantime...the main...the main...the main point was to save and bring as many Jews to Israel as possible. And that was something that the Haganah did...uh...the Aliyah Bet did very well. And...uh...so we were disbanded, discharged pretty much. We went to Egypt again, and from Egypt we were...we stayed in some camps for a short period of time and we went to...we were discharged in Sarafan also officially and...uh...received our civil...civilian garments and little bit pay, etc., and we were free men again, so to speak. Out of the...out of the Army. Out in the streets. And...uh...immediately, when I went back in Nahariyya, of course, we joined the...all of us joined the Haganah underground

because the word at the time was that...uh...things did not go that good for...in Palestine. The...uh... (clearing throat)...when it came to...was the beginning of the...uh...the problems...the...uh...the...the war, of course, if you did not travel in a convoy, then the chances of going from a place A to place B alive was...was very difficult. And...and it was here that I came quite involved in the...in the underground...in the Haganah between...uh... primarily between Haifa and Nahariyya and the Western Galilee. We used to meet convoys going south in Shavatsion, a few kilometers south of Nahariyya and...uh...and take as many cars as possible and...uh...in each one of the vehicles was at least one person, one member of the Haganah which was armed. Now if it was a girl...it was many of the girls that...that were also armed or if it was a boy...either if he were sitting on top of the truck or in the bus or in the car or in a motorcycle, etc...uh...that was a safe way for us to travel at the time. And coming back in the late afternoon...early evening during the daylight, we would...uh...we would all congregate in the _____, you know, next to Haifa, and because between _____ and Haifa was reasonably safe with the exception of the refineries in which...uh...there was a very, very...uh... very serious incident. Uh...One time...uh...the...at lunch time, a car went by and while all the Arabs and even some Jews that used to work in the refineries were sitting outside having lunch, somebody threw some bombs. Uh...As far as I can understand...uh...of course, the Arabs blamed the Jews. The Jews blamed the British. And...uh... the facts remains is that the Arabs were so angry...uh...at this attack that the massacred every Jew that worked with them. For years, they used to work together. For years and years! No matter how...all of a sudden, bingo. I don't think there was...if there was a half dozen Jews that came out of alive of the...Haifa refineries. They were all massacred. And on the same evening, the PALMA by orders of the high command of the Haganah took action, only with cold arms, no hot arms...they went into the Arabic village right outside Haifa...uh...where most of these Arabs came from, and they...they really fortunately enough...there was no men on that evening in the village. They all had escaped because they knew that...that...uh...the Haganah was after them. I do not know exactly what...what happened after that, but the...the fact remains that it was a very...at the beginning of the war...the war...this...of the problems. SO we...we used to congregate in Keathim, and from there on again we used to travel all together to...uh...to...uh...Nahariyya.

Q: Excuse me. Did you see the results of any of this PALMA or the fighting? You were not there?

A: No. No. You mean at the...uh...at the...uh...the refineries.

Q:

A: No. No. No. But I tell you one time...on two different occasions, I arrived late to the convoy, and I lost the convoy. Once was going south. And I was alone. No...I beg your pardon. I was...I was alone, and then I picked up a fellow who was a mechanic, Heim Yenkel, was his name...was a mechanic in Nahariyya. And he sat next to me, and we worked to the city of Akko, but he was uneventful. There was no problem. However, on

another occasion coming back when...when just shortly before the war really started and things were getting a little tougher...uh...several people had been killed in Akko...that...one by a...in a motorcycle. They tried to cross Akko alone, so to speak, by car, by bicycle, and they never made it. So one time I arrived...uh...a little late, and my wife, at the time, was pregnant and I...I...I had to go, get home. And...uh...certainly, I always had a gun with me, a 45 pistol liberata, Italian hand gun. But...uh...since I was driving at the time a Volvo...it was an old truck, and I had on...on my truck I had...uh...flour for the bakery, and a variety of other products. So I took my Arabic...uh... head dress which I used to carry with me because since I'm quite dark featured, I could pass very easily as an Arab. I put my head Cafia on and...uh...when I arrived at the gates, they had this...we called this Spanish donkeys...is barbed wire on...uh...cross...uh...horses you know. And we used to call it Spanish donkeys. And...uh...when I came to the city of Akko, the entrance to this...to this gate, I just put my head of the...my cap, and I shouted in Arabic, "_____." "Open the gate. Open the gate." And the...the guy looked at me and opened the gate and I just kept on going, and I was never stopped. But...uh...you can do these things when you are 20-some. (Laughing) Today, probably I wouldn't do that. Uh...I was very fortunate too, but...uh...then, of course, the...uh...the war began pretty much very quickly, and...uh...I was...uh...with the...I was with the Fish in the Haganah, and then I became...uh...Sergeant Major in the Israeli army, and I was pretty much stationed in the western Gaililee, in Nahariyya and in north. But at the beginning of the war, something that sometimes people wonder, "How did you do it. How...How did Israel deceive them." Now, you are attacked by so many armies surrounding you, and how did you do it? One of the things that we did, we excavated roads between Nahariyya and...and...uh...frontier of Lebanon, which was about 7...5, 7 kilometers north of Nahariyya, and...uh...we excavated in a zigzag for miles up to the road where was the Kibbutz Hineta, so that one evening, by command of the Haganah, we took every car, every bus, every motorcycle we had. Now there was no arms at the time other...other than the Haganah itself. There was no army at the time. That was before the...the great shipment of Czechoslovakian arms came to Israel. This is all before that...that period. We took out all these buses...the things with full lights and we drove toward the frontier. Okay? And so if you are sitting on the top of the mountain and you're looking down like the Arabs were at the time at the frontier of Lebanon in Israel, whoever...there was some army there. Of course, not...nothing of any great numbers but there were some. And they're looking down and you see all these lights coming in. They would say, .. "The Israelis are bring the entire army over here." Well, we did. We drove with lights on. We turned around underneath the mountain where they could not see. There was large growths of...of olives, and we turned around and came back without lights. And we turned around again and came back with lights. You know, in with lights on, back without lights. And we did this for a given period of time. But for your information, there was only one time that we found out that it was a few Arab tanks that came down from Horshineka, Russ, and Nicura, down into the section of the road to Hineta, and they turned around and back they went again. They never dare to go beyond that point. And, let me tell, if they had there was nothing to hold them like I said. So in this case, the Haganah...uh... used a lot of...of strategy of faked...uh...movements which was very

successful in illuding the enemy at the time...uh...from advancing, because they did not know what was expected from...from them. And...uh...but...uh...at this point in time...uh...I'd like also to talk to you about an experience just very, very shortly before this...the war started, there was a convoy going to Yesshiam, Kibbutz Yesshiam. Yesshiam was the name of a young man by the name of Yesshiam Vis, who was a meter of the PALMA, special forces of the Israeli...uh...Haganah. And...uh...Yesshiam Vis was amongst the detachment of...uh...PALMA that involved in operation bridges. In 1947, the Haganah decided to build, to blow up every bridge...every bridge that was connecting at the time the land of Israel so to speak and all the other Arab countries. And...uh...so...uh...it was very effective. The main purpose, I understand, was...uh...uh...just to show that...uh... we can take care of ourselves, and also some sort of a warning also toward the Arabs, you know, that..."Don't attack." It didn't maybe work, but said don't attack us. Leave us alone. Let us be. Unfortunately, there is a legend about the...the...Yeeheim Vis. The bridge they were supposed to blow up was in...uh...was called Asiv, which goes back to the Finnishian times. It's a little bridge. And...uh...uh...the legend is that...uh... the...uh...from some Arabs later on we found out that there was a group of British army...uh...soldiers. There was a British army camp not too far away from Asiv, that...uh... was...apparently, they were doing some sort of manuevers in the middle of the night unbeknown to the group. And as a result, they were ambushed. Since every...and each of one these young men carried the...the dynamite, explosives with them. Uh...There was...not a thing was found from them. Absolutely nothing! They just disappeared. Was about 8 if I remember correctly. And today there is a memorial to...uh...Yeeheim Vis in Asiv by the bridge. And...uh..before the war, there was an American...as a matter of fact, an American group of young men and women that built a kibbutz in Asiv, by the name of Asiv...American...I was there on the commemoration with General Adror at the time. But in the meantime the...

Q: We need to stop at this point and change tapes.

A: Okay.

Q: Okay.

A: In...in the meantime, actually, the Jewish Agency decided...uh...to honor the name of Yeeheim Vis. His father was at the time, I believe, a high official in the Jewish Agency. So...uh...in the Western Galilee, there was too much openness actually, especially coming in from the mountains...uh.. So they decided...the Jewish Agency decided to build two kibbutzes. It was just shortly before the war started. And one of them is named, today, of course, Yeehim. I'm quite familiar with the area because Yeehim if you go back to...uh...to several years ago, used to be called _____ in Arabic. And there was an Arab...a very, sort of a stronghold. But it was abandoned. There was no one there actually. And...uh...so the Sofnut decided to build a kibbutz at _____ by honoring the name of Yeehim. And...uh...this was done. Next door was built another kibbutz and...uh...uh...uh...I believe was Gotton. I cannot quite remember the name, but I

remember that I was there at the time. And this kibbutz was built already under fire...under Arabic fire because...uh...you could...it was a very...it was a very excitable day because here were the Haganah putting up little sheds and so forth, girls making food, and here these guys were shooting down from...from the...from a spot called the Mountain of the...the Tree Mountain. Because was in above the higher level. And...uh...I can't remember exactly all the names in Hebrew any more, but it's...was like a tree because there was a large tree there. And...uh...that's basically how come that this kibbutz Yeeheim came about, to honor Yeeheim Vis, basically. And we used to go...uh...prior to the war...uh...the Haganah used to train and we used to bring arms, ammunitions, and food to kibbutz Yeeheim. We used to walk for 4 and a half hours from Nahariyya to Yeeheim because you go up to the mountains and you have to walk to _____, and you had to bypass small Arab villages and you had to do it...uh...all night long pretty much and you had to do it to such an extent so that you would not create too much noise. If you had...uh...a squad, which is equivalent to a British army squad of 11 men and the officer, uh...we...uh...we used to have different squads going to different areas. And...uh... also to make a mock attacking, attacking Yeeheim because we expected there would be problems as...as... as the kibbutz would be...be put in there. And there were many problems. They were...they were attacked many times. But...uh...obviously, the attacks could not come from the _ because there was no shape, or form that as you were climbing this...this...this high mountain, big so to speak...uh...you always made noise, no matter how careful you are. You could hear it. You could hear it way a way before you were...uh...inside. They could hear the noise already. So basically that's what happened in...the __. And from there, of course...uh...we...uh...(clearing throat) ...uh...there was a convoy where I lost my...my very best friends. I used to live at the time...shortly before that I used to live with a family by the name of Shinerman. And...uh...there was two boys and a girl. Moses, Alisa, and Salome Shinerman. And...uh...There was a convoy at one time. an armed convoy...that's when the conflicts already had started in 19...uh...beginning of 48...uh...that...uh... they took...it was a bus and several trucks, and a pickup truck. The pickup truck had a...had a device like in V shape that had a wheel and this device would be lowered to the road and it would push any any stones that the Arabs used to block because they used to block the...the roads all the time. It was very easy to do. You throw in a few large rocks and no car can by. Uh...Interesting enough, the road between Nahariyya and Nefriam...uh...about...for about 5 miles was a zig zag, very zigzaggy. And...uh...the Arabs used to call it the road of backshis. The...uh...backshis is an Arabic word for tipping. And the reason being that...uh...way back before I even came to Palestine, the...uh...when the British mandate were building the road...that particular road... uh...which was quite parallel to the...the Lebanese border so to speak...uh...every Arab sheik that had orange or citrus groves or lemon groves...by paying the British backshis...the would make the road came to their gates, so they could come with the trucks and as a result the road went like this. That...that's a fact. And...uh...so as the _ came about, and I can tell you the precise date and the precise hour was March 23rd, 1948 at 20 til 3 in the afternoon. Uh...There were brutally attacked by...by the arm of _____, the known...uh...Arab liberator of Palestine so to speak. And he was very...very smart man, and he was able to illude the Israeli army...uh...at the time...uh...by running

away through a...his own ___ road that he made to the Western Galilee. But nevertheless...uh...the attack on the convoy to _____ was quite successful simply because there was a serious of tragedies. Uh...Number one, the officer commanding the...uh...the convoy was...by name of...uh...uh...Ben Aame if you heard about him. And...uh...my best friend, Moses Shinerman was a lieutenant at the time in the unit. This was my unit. I was spared simply because my wife was giving birth to my daughter at that...a few hours before that. And because she was quite ill with a...with a bone...some type of...uh... deficiency, that the doctor at the time...we did not have a hospital at that time there...he said, "Isaac, you must stay here." And in fact he even talked to our commanding officer, that I must stay there because they expected the worst from birth. Fortunately enough, nothing happened. But...uh...Alisa Shiner, which was like my sister, came to see the baby at...before she left even to the convoy. And...uh...I said, "Gee, I wish I could go, but the doctor did not allow me to go." I had to stay there. So the convoy left...uh...uh...a few...it was a few minutes after the left Nahariyya, they were all ambushed. Because they...they ...they waited until the...the...uh...last truck had passed this zig zag and then they started to put some rocks and they put some rocks at the other end of the zig zag so that they first car unbeknown to them was able...was able to break the barricade. The second car in line was the bus. The bus had armor. The Israeli, at the time, they put armor and they welded these heavy metal plates in the cabin so that the driver would not be hurt. Unfortunately, as the driver of the bus was trying to turn around, they threw apparently some of a molotov cocktail. And both of the tires were shot so the truck then became paralyzed in...in closing the road. So all the other 6 or 7 other trucks...they were behind them...okay...we...we felt the same...the same thing. They couldn't move. And as a result the...uh...the people were given the word apparently to...uh...save yourself. And... uh...very, very few were to...to survive this incident. Uh...they were able to escape by hiding on the water that flows from the Western Galilee to Nahariyya to the ocean...to the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean. There was a little bit creek, and they were able to survive by hiding there because in the meantime it was beginning to be dark, you see. Had the convoy had left earlier although it was 20 in the afternoon, 20 to 3...uh...March...uh...uh...it wasn't quite full summer yet. And...uh...they survived by staying there in the dark, and maneuvering. Some of them arrived in Nahariyya and they...what...the next thing what happened was the British mandate was...the army was and the police were still at the time in Palestine, they did not allow the Haganah to...whoever the forces that we wanted to go out and try to help, but they would not allow it. Could not live Nahariyya. And it was one of the greatest disasters that we suffered...uh...in...uh...in the Haifaam...the convoy to Haifaam. Uh...We lost 40...49...I believe 49 members. But then there was an action that...uh...some...some said in Israel later on there was a...uh...an action from the Haganah to make up for the convoy to Haifaam. And what happened was one of the Israeli telephone operators caught up or intercepted a message coming from the Lebanese border that there was a convoy coming in with...at the time if you remember the British...the British had the Arab Legion in Palestine as well. And the Arab Legion had some stations in the Mount Cumberland Haifa, if you remember. They had some...so the...the Israeli intelligence was able to find out...the Haganah...that there was a convoy coming in from Lebanon full of arms and ammunitions for the Arabs. Let me tell you, that I saw

personally. And I have never seen a thing like this in my life. For several days, the entire _____ all the houses along the main road Haifa Beirut were emptied. Now, the Arabs, of course, didn't know that. And there were several members of the Haganah and the PALMA waiting in hiding because they...they knew that the convoy was coming but they did know when exactly...the precise time. And...uh...by sheer coincidence, I was not involved in...in any of those actions at the time, I just happened to come to _____ with a truck which I used to bring food and all kinds of things from Haifa to Nahariyya during this period. And I just had arrived barely in Kayathim... was a big, big circle. And all of a sudden, all Hell broke loose. This convoy had come in with the arms at the other end on the north side of Kayat...uh...Kayathim...Kayat valley. And...uh...of course, it appears that not just there was several...uh...private cars, automobiles, sedans, and there was some Araban Legion trucks. And apparently each one of them had some sort of dynamite in it. Not only did they have some dynamite in it, they also had some officers of the...uh...the Arab Legion in it. So the result was, it was just...uh...very tragic for the...for the convoy, because...uh...no one came out of it alive. Not a single person! But what I saw and that I'll never forget in my life, for as long as I live. The British police and the British army...of course, they immediately surrounded...closed the roads. Okay? And...uh...you could smell the fire. You could smell bodies burning. You could see the fires because we were right there. Okay? But I'll never forget in my life is when the British...when all this action disappeared...several Israelis were also actually hurt because one young man from the Haganah, he just went the head of that truck and he then became...he received the highest medal from the Israeli army because he was the one who really went to the middle of the road and just stopped that truck. He just shot everybody...whatever the truck as the truck was coming to him, and he himself in turn was blown up, and his face...uh...I can't remember his name...they had all the plastic operations and a year, etc., etc., and he was for a longest time hospitalized. But the point is...I wanted to make, when I saw the British officers, British police with...uh...portable...uh...what do you call this...uh...when you put somebody...it's made of canvas, you know.

Q: Body bag?

A: No. Not a body bag. No. No. No. Uh...if someone is injured, for instance..

Q: Stretchers.

A: Stretchers. I beg your pardon. They used to have stretchers. Okay? And...uh...they would put a stretcher next to a body. Now that body...uh...those that I have seen...I saw at the time without a head, without arms, etc. They didn't touch the bodies as such. They used sticks, and with sticks they used to push the bodies into the stretcher. Okay? And then they went like this...one...two...three, and dumped the body into the pickup trucks that they had. I'll never forget it in my life. Never! I thought it was so inhuman...no matter if it was Arab, if it was a Jew, he was dead...the person, whoever was left. And I thought he would be treated a little more...with some dignity, and not as if you tossing a pail of

garbage into the truck. But they did it. It was very, very cold...cold. And...uh...so we afterwards, we had to wait several hours. We were allowed in when they cleaned up on the roads, etc., and the mess...we were allowed to go to Nahariyya in our convoy when we met.

Q: You obviously fought through the War of Independence.

A: Yes.

Q: How long did you live in Israel?

A: I stayed in Israel until 1959. That's when I left basically.

Q: Okay. Tell us why you left and tell us something about you coming to this country.

A: Well I (clearing throat) after the war I...I became a tourist driver guide, licensed by the government and...uh...I had one of the blue license. There was a red and a blue. I was not a biblical scholar, but I did have and I do have a basic knowledge of the western Galilee, and I was familiar so I drove many, many...uh...tourists... dignitaries. Uh...I drove...uh...Polish...uh...commission. They were making a film in the western Galilee. I drove...uh...I drove the Turkish Consul-General to Jerusalem...uh...the new one that came to...to Israel at the time. I drove...uh...a...uh...Jewish Parliamentary Commissions that came to visit also the western Galilee. Uh...I was assigned at one time, and I drove...uh...Isaac Bensfee, the President of Israel at the time, and his wife. They sat in the back of my car, and in the front...uh...we picked up in Auspina on the way to...uh...the excavations of Hotsora at the time...uh...we picked up the very famous archaeologist, _____uh...God bless their...their souls. Uh...He was the leading...uh...archaeologist in the country, and at the time he was also the Chief of Staff of the Israel Army. So we drove to the excavations of Hotsor in western Galilee. It was the most fascinating experience in life to listen to these biblical scholars speaking about how Joshua had taken over the mountains from the Canaanites. And it was a fascinating experience.

Q: What made you decide...when do you come...what made you decide to come to the United States?

A: I had the...the great honor of meeting a very charming...uh ...older lady in Israel which is...uh...was my wife's great mother. And she used to live in New Rochelle, New York. She came to visit Israel on a few occasions. I only met her once. She was quite an elderly lady, and somehow or another we then had a little reunion, and it was discussed that...uh ...perhaps we should come and stay with her family in the United States because myself I only had a brother in Israel at that time. And my wife had these cousins and...and so forth. And then a little bit later on, again by...by...by sheer coincidence, there was another member from the United States, a father-in-law of my wife's cousin. He had, at the time, arrived to visit Israel and I had a meeting with him with my mother-in-law and he was a

very exciting man. He was a Polish Jewish fellow...uh...namely Abe Rockland was his name, God bless his soul. And he told me in his broken English, he said, "You should come to America yesterday." And...uh...kind of I...I start to think a little bit more in that. Now I always liked United States. As a child in Portugal, I used to love to read. Books...the little booklets about Buffalo Bill. That was my number one hero was Buffalo Bill. And the buffalo and the...and the things...fights with the Indians and all that sort of things. I used to read a lot. And that's how I...I read a lot of it in...in...I couldn't quite understand English at that time, but I forced myself and taught myself some English. And so I always had the good vision that the United States, of course, is...is the greatest in the world. And it is. And...uh...and we decided then to immigrate, to come to the United States, and we left Israel...uh...in 1959, and we came to the United States in 1959. My wife, Miriam, and my daughter, Tamara, my son, Daniel, and my son, Michael. Uh...My daughter, Tamara, went to Switzerland to live with the rest of the family after she graduated from high school. My son, Daniel, of course...uh... stayed in...with us, and...uh...he joined the army without my knowledge...uh...joined the Vietnam war. He volunteered to...uh...to...to go to Vietnam. And...uh...although (clearing throat) I am very, very proud of him because...uh...he served with great honors...the...uh...with the Green Berets, and also with the Ninth Armed Calvary. And he was shot down four times...uh...from the helicopters. He used to be with the...uh...the...uh...the small...uh...OV helicopters, the observations helicopters. And fortunately enough, he was always fell in some rice paddies or within the area that he was not...never injured. Uh...he jumped out of the choppers actually, when the choppers were...were attacked. And...uh...he's very heavily (clearing throat) honored ...uh...Presidential citations and bronze stars. He has three bronze stars and many other medals, and I'm very, very proud of him. And Michael, my younger son, works with me in the business.

Q: Thank you. I'd like...I'd like to go back a little now.

A: Sure. Sure.

Q: If we could, I'd like to go back to Portugal...uh...during the war.

A: Okay.

Q: You're a young man of 16?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Can you tell us a little more about your impressions of the refugee community that filled the Jewish soup kitchen? More about the people, and about the numbers of people that came there.

A: Alright. It's...uh...

Q: Could you repeat the question? Just repeat it a little. The microphone will pick it up.

A: Okay. I...uh...uh...I understand that you would like to know a little bit more about the situation in the soup kitchen...uh...perhaps some numbers of refugees that came by and what was the...the situation, the atmosphere. Uh...It's...uh...sometimes difficult...uh...to go back so many years and...and be able to precisely memorize on what happen then. Uh...But something of very interest that I should have and I did not mention earlier, was...uh...by a sheer coincidence, as I told you before, I happened to be a cousin to Senator from Minnesota, Rudy Boshwitz, through my wife because of the marriage. And his wife, Ellen Boshwitz, was one of the refugees that passed through Lisbon at that point in time in history. But I don't remember meeting her then, because she was much younger. She was a younger person than me. And I do not remember...I don't she was necessarily at the soup kitchen because not all the refugees that came to Portugal were at the soup kitchen. Some of the refugees...they...they were persons of means that were able to somehow manage to bring some money with them, some...and they were able to stay in...in hotels and...uh...for a given period of time. And...uh...and I understand that Ellen and her family...they left Lisbon by boat to Brazil, and then from Brazil, they came to the United States. But...uh...most of the other refugees that really had no means and were waiting for visas to...uh...to... uh...immigrate to the Unites States, to Israel, to South America, etc., etc...uh...there was a time in...uh...Portugal when...uh...many of these refugees' visas had expired, and they are allowed to stay a given period of time, if it was 3 months, 6 months, etc. And as a result the...uh...the Portuguese, if I may say so, are very...the Portuguese language is a very complete language. They say _____.

Everything is to be just so. Uh...And they're very particular. And the reason they're law-abiding. So...so when the refugees visas expired, the next step was you are jailed. Simple as that! Now, you have here...uh...uh...a large group of people, reasonable large, several hundred people that suddenly, while they were able to escape the Nazi persecution and the Nazi armies, are being put in jail in Lisbon with common criminals. And the sad part is, of course, that most of these people in large numbers were academicians. They were doctors. They were engineers. They were scientists, etc., businessmen, etc. So the Portuguese-Jewish community and I believe again here, in conjunction with the American Joint Committee, asked the government of Portugal to allow these refugees...to...to assign to these refugees some small villages surrounding Lisbon so they...they could with some ...some dignity live in there, until they were able to receive visas to leave Portugal. And this was granted. There was several little villages. I can't remember...I think one of them that I remember is _____ that was allowed for refugees to stay there. They were not allowed to move out of these villages without the permission of the Portuguese...uh...Naturalization Immigration Department, because they were very strict. Uh...The president of the time of the Jewish community in Lisbon was Professor Onsolack. Uh...He was the professor of...uh...science in the University of Lisbon. And ironically...uh...it is often said that he was good friend with the Prime Minister Salosar. even though that Solsar give orders to _____ not to issue visas to Jews...uh...on the side, the Portuguese government was very strict. And I cannot, as I said earlier, personally say, that I was persecuted by the Portuguese government. I was not as such.

Uh...That Jews were persecuted by the Portuguese government, I can't say that either. Either than the fact that _____ was removed from his position, that it is true of the Portuguese people, not the government, that they were very helpful to the Jewish refugees. In many instances! And many stores even, I understand, even giving them clothing. Although I have tendency to disagree with some of the statistics that are coming out from the Portuguese government side stating that over 40,000 Jewish refugees came to Lisbon. I...I know...I'm quite certain that...that as many refugees as I saw in the soup kitchen, I did not see 40,000 refugees come to the soup kitchen. If indeed there were refugees that came to Portugal and somehow they...those that you never knew about...they...they came in; they stayed a few days in a hotel; they got a visa; they kept on going to South America or...or...or North America or...or...or Palestine or Israel or other countries for that matter, I do not know. I do not know. And...uh...in as much as the atmosphere itself in the soup kitchen, it was..uh...I tried to bring back my...my mental memory...uh...and look at these families sitting on the table and...uh...and...uh...they were not happy faces to say the least. You could always see sad faces. Okay? Faces of when...when a person is concerned, when you are worried about...uh...whatever happened to...to your mother, your father, your uncle, your aunt, your niece, your brother, your sister? You don't know. You didn't know. You were the lucky one. You were able to make it. You run away fast. You..you were lucky to do it. You saved your life. What happened to the other ones? And it was very difficult. And it was a concern because as you well know, Jewish are so very emotional, and...uh...there were many a tears in the kitchen soup, many a tears and you could see...you could observe that. Uh...And yet there was...uh...as I told you before about this fellow, Gustof Zumick, repairing the shoes of other refugees. That was the least he could have done to help his fellow...fellow...fellow in...in...in this instance you know. So there was a...a...a still a little bit of a sense ...of...uh...of, "I am your...my brother's keeper," you know. That's a atmosphere that I can best describe. Helping someone with the nothing that you have, you know. And I think it was very typical of the...of the Jews at the time, helping each other with the least that they had, with the nothing that they had. So I don't know if I answered your question.

Q: You did indeed. Is there anything you want to add.

A: (Sigh) Yes. I...I'm having a hard time keeping my tears inside me. Because every time when I think about these things, you know...uh...I happen to be Jewish too and very emotional too. It's hard to keep them down. Really. It's...uh...my friends that were killed during the war and...uh...even some of the what I saw in Europe with the dispersed persons and...uh... Later on in Israel, if I may add that too, as I became a tourist driver guide, there was a kibbutz by the name of _____. In English, it's called the ghetto of fighters. I was very, very fortunate again because I was called on more than one occasions...many, many times, to drive one of the leaders of the ghetto fighters. His name was Isaac Zuckerman. Yes. And I drove that man so many times, taking him from the kibbutz, bringing him to Nahariyya, bring him to Haifa, bring him here, bring him there. And there was a girl by the name of Miriam. I cannot remember her other number. But she was also one of the few...Isaac Zuckerman and Miriam were one of the few Jewish

people that were able to...to get out of the Warsaw....Warsaw ghetto alive. I guess most of the leaders were all killed by the...by the ...by the Germans, by the Nazis armies. But they survived. And...uh...as the kibbutz was being from...from the very beginning...uh...which was built near a Roman aqueduct in...about 5 kilometers south of Nahariyya, _____, as it was built up, of course, I used to bring tourists over there also to visit the kibbutz .. But this was... uh...one of the last things really I...that it was very, very touching. Anytime you went to the...into the ghetto's fighters, as they were building the kibbutz and talking to these people and...and witnessing the things that they did to humanbeings, making soap out of hair and skins and children, that was...uh...uh... As far as I'm concerned...I'm...I'm one of those that believe in the philosophy that never again...I'm gonna die with some dignity, as opposed to just submit.

Q: With that note, I think we end.

A: Good.

Q: Thank you very much.

d. Thank you.