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13:01:28 My name is Beba Leventhal, and from home I am Epstein. I

was born in Vilnius, which is now Vilna, in 1925. I come from a

family of four children. I was the oldest. My grandparents, my

great grandparents, come from Vilna or from the vicinity around

there. So we have traced it to five or six generations in that

city. My grandfather was in publishing of religious books. He was

a partner. He was in charge of export to all countries of the

world, because Vilna used to be a very big publishing center for

religious books. That's on my father's side. My grandmother had

several businesses, like factories or stores.

13:02:50 When I was born, the fortunes were already not quite that

well. Still, we lived quite comfortably. My father was in sorts of

banking. He wasn't like an American banker at all. He was managing

a branch of a Jewish bank. My mother didn't do anything. Both of

them had middle education. My father went to commerce school; my

mother did go to a Gymnasia Russian school. They were fond of

literature and enjoyed what may be better things in life as far as

culture is concerned. Even though the city was quite poor, but

things weren't that costly.

13:03:43 On my mother's side, the family were merchants. They had

stores, weren't rich, they weren't poor. On my father's side, the

family had quite a number of children and they all managed to get

university education either in Moscow or in Paris.

13:04:07 Until 1939 life was interesting, uneventful, but still

difficult compared to American standards. Things weren't so

plentiful, we had to study hard, watch our manners, never discuss

money.

Q: What did it mean, "never discuss money?"

Well, like with the parents. This wasn't our business. The father

made all the decisions. For us, for something, we either could

afford it or not. But normally they wouldn't discuss money in front

of the children.

13:05:00 I had gone to a series of private schools, and so did my

sister, and my little brotherone of them, the other was too

small. We also had dancing lessons, piano lessons, whatever. I

studied in Jewish schools, which were not government, but were

private. Because my father believed in that. He was actually

involved in the education of Jewish children. He was on the

Parents' Committee of the Real Gymnasia. That's the school I

attended. Before that, I went to a private school, that is six

grades. They were all not government. The same for my sister. I was

a pretty good student. I wasn't anything spectacular. But I worked

very hard for my grades. Everybody had to do that, because we were

always under the threat: "well if you don't get the grades, then

you don't pass, and then you stay for another year." And that was

a shame.

13:06:17 I had thought, or my father would tell me, that perhaps I

would go to the University. But we already knew of the anti

Semitism in Poland, that it was very difficult. My father said that

perhaps it would be necessary for me to go to Europe. But this was

very far, perhaps to Paris. I don't know if it would have been a

reality or not, or perhaps I would go to a university or perhaps

not. I excelled in languages and history. My sister was very good

in arts, performing and arts and crafts. Then I was quite good in

sports. My father taught me how to swim.

13:07:06 Every summer, we'd go to the country to a little house,

where we'd stay most of the time. We'd rent some places. Winter

we'd also go. Sometimes I'd go to a little village where my

relatives had some land.

13:07:32 Everything was rolling along more or less normal. The

greatest interruptions being the antiSemitism. Because my father

would always complain that maybe he wouldn't have his job. Until

the Russians came in. When the Russians came in, there was a major

upheaval in my family. My father and my aunt, that lived with us,

were politically involved in the party of the Bund. They were great

enemies of the Russians; and we were on the list to be

evacuated.This was going slowly. First that evacuated the

Capitalists, then would take the political people. Well, we had to

take precautions. We got some summer places to stay, not sleep

homenot me, but my father and my aunt. Well, this didn't happen.

We went on to our schools. They were completely changed to the

Russian and Lithuanian languages.

13:08:36 In 1941 of June, the 23rd exactly, the night of

graduation. I remember coming home and the parents were there, too.

We heard all this canon, and we didn't know what it was. We didn't

pay attention to it. But we knew the next morning that the Russians

had evacuated and the Germans had come in.

Q: Just as suddenly as that?

Well, it took 24 hours, perhaps. When the Germans came in, we

didn't know what to expect. In the beginning it was passible, but

right away they started coming out with the edicts, that Jews can't

do this and that, can't have jobs, go to school, had to maintain

curfew. It was getting very difficult in that respect. At that

time, Warsaw was already occupied by Germans, and a lot of refugees

came and stayed with us. People were making plans to leave Vilna,

to go to the U.s. or Japan through Russia. I didn't understand very

much. I didn't know what was going to happen, and how long this

terrible situation was going to last. However, we didn't make any

plans. This was very bad. And still today, I think about it. It

could have been much more different. Especially maybe if the

children were sent out, because we could have written to other

families who had already gotten papers. We could have started

something, but we didn't.

13:10:38 Q: Were the other families aware enough to do that?

The families that came from the other cities, that had already

experienced stay under Hitler knew more what it was. We were caught

in that very first. In the U.S. there were some organizations that

were helping. Some of my teachers and friends were already leaving.

But my father didn't do anything, so that's how it was. We thought,

"this won't last long."

I remember the days quite well from the 23rd of June to the 6th of

September, 1941. We were in our apartments. We didn't go into the

ghetto yet. But we had to wear a yellow star or and armband with a

"J" for Jude. Our neighbors, the Poles, weren't of help and used to

laugh at us, add fuel to the fire. We were made to walk in the

streets, turn in our valuables, and had to stand in lines for long

hours under threat of death, that if we don't turn them in

(radios,bicycles), they're going to shoot us.

13:12:15 Curfew. You could go out into the streets from six in the

morning to eight at night. After eight at night, you couldn't get

out. So next day, if you go out in the street, you would see some

people lying dead on the street with a note clipped to their suit,

saying "8:20."

Q: They were shot?

Right, so we wouldn't think it was joke.

13:12:55 I had a girlfriend, a very beautiful girl who lived in

another part of town. Very good friends; her name was Buba, my name

is Beba. Her father was a very prominent person in the city; she

didn't have a mother, she was brought up by her grandmother. I went

one day to see her. She lived in what used to be the old ghetto,

because Vilnius was started in the 16th century, so there was the

old quarter. She said to me, "something is happening. The Germans

are coming around, and they said we have to be evacuated.

" So I said to her, "Buba, why don't you and your grandmother stay

over at our house for a few days, and we'll see?" And she said,

"no. Maybe I'll do that tomorrow, or I can't, my grandmother is too

sick." And that was the end. Ww were talking that we'd see

ourselves the next day or the day afterwards. And when I came there

two days later, the apt. was completely empty. The conciergethey

owned the apt. housethe caretaker, the woman was in tears,

because she worked for the people. She was a Polish woman. She

said, that in the middle of the night, the Germans came and told

everybody to pack up their belongings. And the entire apt. house,

and the next one, and the one after. When I went back to Vilna, I

took pictures of all that. They were just evacuated. I didn't know

what it meant, in the beginning.

13:14:00 I said, "well, they took them to another city." But they

didn't take them to another place. They took them to the place,

that's called Pinari. A village outside of town, where we used to

go skiing. And they shot them. Now. And this is to make place for

us, for the people from the other districts to come in.

13:15:01 The Jewish community didn't function well anymore. You

see, the heads of the community were taken hostage. My father was

taken, and then he came back. There was complete chaos, like a

breakdown. But we knew that the city jails were full with Jewish

people. And people said, maybe they'll let them out and maybe not.

We didn't know what was going on. However, they didn't let them

out. Whoever had some special protectia (ph) could pay money and

get a relative out. But by and large, they would fill the jails up,

and then empty them out; fill them up and empty them out to Pinari.

13:15:51 My father was taken hostage. And everyday the Germans

would come into the courtyards and shout, that all the men and boys

should come down and take soap and a towel, maybe a change of

clothes for work. Naturally, the Poles would indicate to them where

the Jews lived, because the Germans didn't know. So they would go

from house to house. Well, my father was hiding, because he had

already come back. He had managed to stay with my uncles.

13:16:34 A few days before September 6th, there was an edict on the

walls and everywhere, on the loudspeakers, because we weren't

allowed to have radios. All the Jews will evacuate their houses and

will be going to a place specially reserved for them, a ghetto in

town, which was very close to where my Gymnasia was. It was going

to be all orderly. We were all going to go in the way we lived,

with the courtyard that we lived. We were going to be given a

marching order, and we were going to walk. Well, it was pretty bad.

We could only carry what we could, either a rucksack or a suitcase.

People weren't sure whether we were going to go to a ghetto or a

little further.

Q: Pinari?

Pinari. So we all lined up, and we went. I remember my little

brother, he carried toys. I forgot what I took. Some clothes,

something. And we came in there with all the other inhabitants,

when our marching orders were given. Before that, we managed to

hide some things, get some things out of town, to some neighbors.

Essentially we took very little. We were herded into that ghetto

and were assigned a room with a couple other families. It was

raining. First we were sitting in the courtyard; rain was coming

down. Then we found ourselves in a room with some other people.

13:18:35 O.k. My father managed to make some contact with the

outside. He knew a guy. Polish officer, and he agreed to take me to

Goda (ph). That was around October. They came for me. I could see

life was terrible. We didn't have what to eat one day, one day we

had what to eat. The kids were crying. The ghetto was being emptied

out. I started to realize, we weren't going to make it there. It

was a holding tank. Bring in the people from other towns, and then

take them out. There was the Jewish police. Some of my friends from

the high school were going to escape; and some were going to stay.

13:19:40 Andrei came for me. I was smuggled...I looked pretty much

like a Gentile. I was blond, blue eyes. I put on this long coat. At

night I was taken to the farm, where I stayed for three months. And

I went back now to see that place. It was alright for me to be

there. And I had contact...

Q: Did you have any Aryan papers?

No. They were in the process of making a birth certificate for me.

We were going to the church. They had started to talk to me about

conversion. There was a birth certificate they had for me. I didn't

see it; I didn't know... Most of my time I spent on the second

floor. It was like a little estate. But people, the neighbors, were

far away, and they knew.

13:20:37 I used to have contact with the family from time to time.

I used to get, through peasants, a little note. O.k. after a while,

the peasants would come there and say the most terrible things were

happening to the Jews. "They're taking them out and killing them.

It's just a bloodbath." And I stopped getting letters. I wrote one

letter and the other, and I didn't get anymore letters. I decided,

that it makes no sense for me to be there. I don't know what's

going on. And I told them, "I want to go back to the ghetto." I

can't say, if they were heartbroken. They tried to dissuade me. But

I was taken back to the ghetto, brought in a special working place,

put on a yellow star, and marched back. When I went to the ghetto,

I didn't find any of my family. But there was also a smaller

ghetto. People told me it was a holding place for people who would

be sent out to other places on work. My family was taken there in

December. I wanted to go there. People said if you go there, you

can't come back. I was young and inexperienced. I found an uncle,

and he said, "you can't do anything." So I went to a policeman and

said, "maybe you can go and find out if my family is there?"

Q: What policeman? German, Polish, Jewish?

Jewish. They can go from one ghetto to another. It wasn't that far,

a quarter of a mile. But it was all locked in. He said, he thought

they were there. Anyway, I couldn't do anything. I don't know if

they were there, or weren't there. I never saw them again.

13:22:38 Then I lived with an aunt of mine. Her husband was also

taken away. Two children and the brother of her husband. I had to

work. So I went to the Judenrat, where my father had a lot of

friends. I needed a job, because if you didn't have a job, you'd be

deported. They gave me a job working with ration cards. It had

something to do with pasting coupons. I worked there during the

cold months, like January, February, March. I don't know how long.

There were some older people and some girls who worked there. I

knew this wasn't the place, because most of the people that you

could get something to eat or anything worked outside the ghetto,

in the columns...

Q: Columns? What do you mean by "columns?"

Every morning the work force used to go out to work outside the

ghetto. They used to line up with their leaders. So I was thinking

about that. I tried to make contact with our old maid. She had some

of our things. And then at night once, I went out with the

policeman to a neighbor. I could recover some things, but the

reception wasn't very good. And she says, "Don't come here. It's

very dangerous." But she gave me some things I could sell.

13:24:25 After the three months had passed, I went to my cousin. He

lives in Israel. He was an engineer, a grandhomme, in charge of the

many gardens they took away from the religious orders. I said, I

needed a job. He said, "o.k., I have a lot of parties that go out

to work in the gardens in the Rossa (ph)"which was very close to

where I lived. So I used to go in the morning to work in the

gardens, which was very good. Fresh air, and there weren't many

Germans. And I worked with lettuce, and tomatoes, and beehives, and

incubator chickens. And on the way going, sometimes the maid would

come and bring me some things.

13:25:17 That was for a couple of months. And in the ghetto, it was

relatively quiet. But in winter the gardens were shut down. So

then, "What am I going to do now?" And he said, "Well, the work

force will revert to the headquarters of the Gestapo, because they

gardens belong to the Gestapo." So I went to work in the

headquarters of the Gestapo, which was different scenario. I worked

in the buildings that used to be the Polish Circuit Court.

It's very interesting. It's always the same. It was the now Russia,

so it's...that was the Gestapo...Polish, it was the same police

things.

13:26:00 Since I didn't have any training. The Gestapo was set up

with a lot of Jewish workshops. People that were tailors,

metalworkers that did the locksmith and bullet thing with rifles,

there were cooks, painters. Since I didn't have any particular

skill, I was put with a group of girls who were chambermaids. We

used to clean the empty rooms. Then we used to make them dirty

again, 'cause we were afraid then we wouldn't have any work. If we

didn't have any work, then they'd send us home. After a while, our

work actually changed. I was sent in the afternoon to the officers'

private quarters to clean, which were the nicest Jewish apts., not

far from that particular complex. I wound up quite often in the

house of our doctor. I used to look at the textbooks that were

there. They were friends of mine.

13:27:20 We then worked out a little system. Since in the ghetto we

weren't allowed to have radios under threat of death. And the

people from the Underground already knew where we were working.

They had asked us to listen to some news. So the way we worked that

was, we would come into the courtyard where there were many apts.,

and we knew that we had to go to 5, 17, 19, etc...A group of us.

And in every apt. there were radios. So the first thing, in the

courtyard were the guys who used to prepare wood for the

fireplaces. They had saws and would make a lot of noise. So we'd go

out there and start listening to the radio. We'd listen to whatever

we could. And we'd always get somebody with us who understands

German better. We'd listen to what's on the Front. After a while,

we'd break one radio. We didn't break it; we'd have a guy remove

some tubes and put it back together. The German, sure enough, would

come and say he couldn't listen and take it to the radio shop. We'd

always have one radio in the shop that was working. This one we'd

fix, put the tubes back, and bring in another one. They didn't

know. But it was necessary.

13:28:43 I worked there for quite a while. It was terrible in other

respects. After a while, it was shifted to the Lithuanian unit. The

Lithuanian unit was the execution unit, the Einsatzkommando. I was

assigned to them. This was a group of 20 to 30 barbarians that the

Gestapo commanded and kept drunk all the time. At the dormitory all

you could see was vodka, guns, and bullets. Their faces were always

flushed. Morning they were always drunk; at night, they worked.

Killed Jews.

Q: What did you do for them?

I cleaned, the rooms of the German officers. And I was assigned

sixteen rooms. I had to dust them. They'd tell me to look at their

papers and ask me if I knew German. I used to have to fire the

furnaces with wood. It was cold.

13:30:09 The most terrible thing was when they would go on this

killing of Jews and bring back the clothing. And people had to sort

it. I didn't have to sort it; but some of the people would

recognize the clothes of the people. I worked on the third floor.

On the second floor were the rooms for interrogation. Half the

windows were painted, so I wouldn't see in the courtyard. I

recognized some of my friends were brought there. Never got out

alive there.

13:30:48 Then I had a job also in the basement of the Gestapo. It

was a prison. People who were brought in there, never saw the light

of day again. I had to go in there. They had little cuts that would

come out of wall (wool?) made of canvas. Sometimes we'd have to sew

it back to the metal frame. Sometimes, we'd meet prisoners, read

things on the walls, people wrote before they were taken. Terrible

things. I met a few of my friends there, in those rooms. They would

ask me, "what's gonna happen?" I said, "nothing. In a few days,

you'll be out." Some people also knew where I was working and would

ask me to bring in bread. Which was another thing threat of death

to do it. There was a group of girls accused of Rassenschande, of

sleeping with Germans, which wasn't true. But they were good

looking girls. And they brought them in. And Germans maybe

spilled...I knew two of them. That was part of the job. It was a

terrible thing. But I didn't have anything else to do. I was there

already. Some of the guys that worked in the Gestapo were in the

Partisan, in the Underground. ~nd they stole some ammunition. They

were good with the chauffeurs. I don't know how they ended up with

two revolvers. I don't know how the Germans found out. Maybe the

chauffeurs said something. At one time, there was an appel. We had

to come down. They called out the two guys. They shot them in front

of our eyes. That's all.

13:33:06 That much for the Ghetto. I started to hang out with some

of my friends in the Underground, but I wasn't quite that active.

I was aware that, towards the very end, some groups were departing

the ghetto for the forest. Some were caught in the cross fire, and

some were shot, but some managed to get to the forest. I thought of

doing that, too. However I didn't do it. The ghetto was getting

closed, and we no longer worked in the Gestapo. We were told, we

were going to be evacuated.

13:33:50 Between the 23rd and the 24th of September the ghetto was

emptied out.

Q: What year?

1943. I did not really say anything about the ghetto, which I

should. Because it was a very terrible place to live, but also a

very interesting, in as much as we had our hospitals, high school,

literary evenings, theater. Most of the songs that are survived

came from the stage of the Vilna ghetto. There was a small

newspaper. The library was the only place really to escape. We used

to try to cheer each other up. Teachers would teach in the schools

not knowing, if next day they would come, or the children be there,

because there were actions. One day they'd take the sick from the

hospital, one day the children from the schools.

13:34:45 Parties were also formed. The Underground, it was a

coalition FPO, Forenic Partizanisha Organizatia (ph). It was a

coalition of all the parties which functioned in Vilna.

Q: What were some of the parties?

Labor Zionists, Revisionists, the Bund, the Communist...some other

splinter groups. The general staff consisted of, I believe, 7

people. The Bund had two people on the General Staff. The General

Chairman was Mr. Aberkorbner (ph), who is now in Israel. Then there

was Mr. Wittenburg, who was killed. It is very interesting how he

was killed. But I can't go into that. He was more or less let go by

the staff. The Gestapo put a price on his head. They would bomb the

ghetto, if the staff doesn't hand him over to the Gestapo. There

were negotiations, and he tried to escape. But he said if the

ghetto has to go, if it was his head or all our heads. Course some

of the people in the ghetto started to scream, that he must go to

the Gestapo. So he took some cyanide with himwound up in that

same basement.

13:36:21 I don't really know how to tell you. The ghetto was in the

very beginning 80,000 people. It was being brought in from all

kinds of places, from all surrounding little towns, from the Pelif

settlements, and it was being emptied out. At the very end, I would

say that there were about 20,000 people in the ghetto. And nobody

could go anymore and work outside the ghetto. In all the places,

where the Germans werein the Schneiderstube, where they were

sewing uniforms, or in the Verpflegensamt, where they used to have

their food delivered, or in the Panzerkommandoall kinds of places

where the Jews used to be the laborers.They said, the Front was

coming close; the ghetto was going to be liquidated. The

Underground, the FPO, at that time knew that this was a sign that

we are going to be killed off. They decided to take a stand. The

ones that were in the forest, were in the forest. But those that

remained would take a stand. And there was a shootout with the

Germans. I saw it through my window. After that, they lined up some

people, some were executed.

13:37:46 And then, on the 23rd of September, in the morning...

Q: What year?

1943, I'm sorry (microphone fiddling). We again had to line up with

our packages, whatever they were, and march to the railroad

station. It was a terrible thing. It was raining. We were walking

in the middle of the street with our bundles, like you see in all

the movies. It wasn't very different. Most Poles, really, were too

ashamed to look; but some of them were standing and cheering on the

Germans: "Good for you, Jews." "Wind up on the bottom." "Got what

you deserved."...Some maybe weren't like that. We thought we were

going to the trains. We were going on that road, but we weren't. We

were going to a place near the trains, about a mile away, which was

a convent.

They herded us all in through a gate. What we saw was a big church,

but we didn't go into the church. We went into a side yard. It was

an enormous mountain. And we were all herded in there. And we were

lying in the rain for two days. With lights ablaze and machine guns

all around. And we thought, "they will finish us off over there."

Two days it rained. Lots of people died over there. On the 24th or

25th in the morning, we all had to pass through a very narrow door,

like this, the way we came in. And one of my immediate men from the

Gestapo, Weiss, he was there. Martin Weiss. He knew me. And that

was the selection. To the right. My aunt was there with her

children, some other people. To the right, it was one way; and to

the left was the other way. I was to the right. In the beginning,

I didn't know. I thought, "well, who knows what they're doing."

They always intimidated people. But then I could see quite a

difference, that the little children and the older people were over

to the left. I tried to do something for my aunt, and I didn't see

her. Everybody said, "when you go there, you go there. You want to

stay here, don't..." In a little while, we were all in a kettle

wagon.

(microphone fiddling) We got in the kettle wagon and they locked us

up. It was with people I knew, young people. It was like standing

room only. We went and went for a long time, two days. People were

dying; people didn't have anything to eat. The Germans would make

a panic and start slowing down. We thought, they would chase us

out, maybe shoot people. They would intimidate us. Terrible. One of

my friends jumped out the train. I never saw her again. Sister of

a friend of mine. She's in New York.

13:41:15 Came to Kaiserwald, which is in the outskirts of Riga,

Latvia. In the middle of the night to the usual, what I found out

later, "Welcoming Party." You come in with the searchlights and a

big gate which says, "Arbeit macht frei," which was the Meisterplan

for all the camps. The dogs were jumping at us. "Raus, raus, raus!

And leave all the packages behind and jump from the train!" And if

not, you got it over the head. Right away, the group to the right,

to the left. Who knew what it was. It was the middle of the night.

And then they said, we're gonna take showers. "Showers!" Everybody

started to holler and to cry, because that's for sure death. But

the Poles, there were Polish people in the uniforms. So we'd start

to say, "what about the showers?" "Well, you take a shower. They

take away all your clothes. And you'll put on this Pasacki (ph)."

It means the striped uniform. Gotta trust somebody... So they

herded us into the showers, and the Germans were standing all

around, looking. I had no more clothes. But I did manage to leave

a briefcase someplace. And I had some clothes there and some

photographs. I went in the barracks. In the morning I could see a

lot of people walking around with these little hats, men. They were

all wearing this uniform, the stripes, and a white towel or some

rag around their neck. I would ask them, "why you wear this white

rag?" They said, "it's not a rag, it's a towel." "So why do you

have to wear a towel?" "Because there's no place to leave it. If

you leave it, it gets stolen." It was kind a crazy. You land like

on the moon. You don't know what's happening.

13:43:13 Finally they gave us a barrack. I wound up with a lady

from our courtyard, from Vilna. Very beautiful looking girl. And

she was kind a like older sister, took care of me. She lost her

whole family and wanted to be close to somebody. She had this

thing. I always used to be envious of her. When she walked home,

the Polish guys would always carry her books, and she used

lipsticks. She was 34 years older. She managed to have her

clothes. The German prisoners and the Polish prisoners spotted her

right away. At night, through the barbed wire, they would talk to

her. All of a sudden, she got a job in Kleiderkammer, which means

where you take away all the clothes, in the clothing department.

All the best clothes. Every night she'd bring me panties, a blouse.

And I'd wear everything, she'd bring me, everything, 'cause there

was no place to leave it. She would go out there at night, the guys

would talk to her. And I'd go work in the Kleiderk.uer. I didn't

know from nothing. Come home to the straw sack, lie down, eat the

soup. And she would do the same.

13:44:43 After a couple of weeks, I come home and she wasn't there.

Her name was Basha. I asked about her. And they said, she wasn't

here any longer. They took her to the ghetto. Riga still had a

Ghetto. They accused her of flirting with the Germans and Poles. I

never saw her again. So I knew, they took her there to shoot,

because Kaiserwald didn't have the place for, I don't know. They

said, they took her to the Ghetto. I was very upset, because she

was such a nice person. I really liked her. And then I started to

think, "They knew that she was with me, and they usually work by

association." So I gotta get out of this place. So I said, even

though I have this little good job, but what am I going to be in

the camp? And every time, here today or tomorrow? People started

saying the Germans come in and they need workers for farms or

factories. I said to myself, what am I going to be choosey? I don't

know farms from factories. Tomorrow morning I'm going to go and see

who's come. And I talked to some girls and they said, "yea, it's

time to get out of this camp." Because we are just sitting here in

the S.S., in the lion's den, you know. I also worked a little bit

in the hospital. I saw what happened in the hospital. It was

terrible. The abortions. Polish doctors, Jewish doctors, no

supplies, nothing. People came to the camps pregnant. They wanted

to get rid of the babies. Screaming, no anesthetics, dirt. And I

didn't understand all those things. But I said, get out to a steady

place.

13:46:25 So in the morning, I see a lot of people, after the appel,

we were all forming a company, and I am standing there with a lot

of other. And an assessment with some workers come, and they

started counting, counting, and they took me on a truck. I didn't

know where we were going. We went to Riga. We wound up in a factory

that's called Vef (ph) by the Latvians. And Aiga, algemeine

electrotechniches Gesellschaft, which is a very big factory now in

Germany. That's where I wound up. It was a big factory, for not

electronics, used to be for radios and telephones. But this time,

equipment for submarines, for airplanes, all kinds of things,

cables.

In the mornings, after we'd stand for four hours maybe in the rain,

to count us back and forth, we'd go there. And the whole day we'd

work on the machines. I worked on electric bore machines. And, I

forgot what it's called in English...I worked there for a long

time...

13:47:37 Q: Was this where you were able to do some sabotage?

Yea, a little bit. O.k. We worked there for a while. The food was

very meager. We were getting skinnier, and work a whole day. And

then I had an accident. A bore machine went through my hand, in

here. And since we couldn't get into that little hospital, I

thought I was going to get poisoning. They took me to the barracks.

There was a doctor. And all we had was water and paper bandages.

And I was afraid. They wanted to send me to Kaiserwald, but I was

afraid to go to. Because I go to Kaiserwald, I never come back to

work, you see, or be sick.

13:48:20 Anyhow, after a while, I came back to work. I managed to

get on the swing shift. The swing shift used to be like from five

o'clock 'till two a.m., which was better. There were fewer people

and the pace wasn't so terrible, and there weren't the hoards of

people. But we had a problem. When we came there, we had this

problem with the German Jewish girls. They were also prisoners like

we, but they had a better understanding with the Germans. They

thought, that they had to put in their maximum effort. Which we, of

course, didn't think. We were not interested in helping the Germans

win the war. And besides, some of the girls had mothers and they

couldn't work that fast. So a Meister, or a foreman, would take a

girl, a German Jewish girl and tell her, "this is what has to be

done. And I am going to stand and time you with a stopwatch. And

we'll see how fast you can," and she would work like a bat out of

Hell and make sixty parts. Then he would come to us and say, "you

all have to do that, sixty or..." Although we couldn't do it, break

the needles, and get the needles through the hands. So we thought

at night, we'll have a friendly talk with the girls. And we told

them, "next time the new parts come in, you don't have to work that

hard." "No," they were afraid, this and that. Anyhow, it didn't

help. We talked to them several times, and they didn't do it. So we

decided that we have to do something. To just show them how it is

worked where we come from. Since we were all covered with a lot of

metal shavings, because we worked with it. We only had a air hose

to clean ourselves. So when we come to the barracks, we would have

to take a shower. Because, really, we were aluminum shavings.

Before we got into the showers, there was a little passageway, a

little dark one. And we thought, we'd just beat them up over there.

To teach them a lesson. So when they came in, we were prepared. And

we threw blankets on them. We sat them down; we let them have it,

three or four of them. We told them not to cry, and not to yell,

and that's for not listening. And we also told them, that if

they're going to say one word to the German authorities or to

anybody else, so that means that they won't take us, because they

didn't know who exactly it was, but they had an idea. They kill us.

But I said the moment they kill us, your people will be killed,

too. Our friends kill. That helped. From that time, they started to

slow down a bit.

13:51:04 We worked there, in that factory, for quite a while, until

the Front came closer. And when the Front came closer, the Germans

said they need all this machinery. The Russians were advancing,

going West. So they said we will evacuate the factory to Torin,

which was a Polish fort in the northern part of Poland. We again

went on those trains, I don't know, forever. And we came there.

There was pretty good. We lived underground in some fort with a

moat. And there were actually prisoners, English prisoners, with

their quarters, and they had maids. They felt sorry for us and

would throw us parcels with food. Meanwhile, the machinery didn't

come. It was the end of the war. They didn't have good connections.

13:51:52 After being there two months, we were shipped to Stutthof.

Stutthof was the worst of the camps.

Q: So when, approximately, did you get to Stutthof?

That was in October of 1944. I was in stutthof from October '44

until April of 1945. Stutthof to me is Auschwitz, because it had a

crematorium burning. It had thousands of prisoners. People were

dying of Typhus. There were no bathrooms. I was continually hit

there. I was hit by the German Blitzes. That means the German S.S.

Fraus. Like once, I had to go to the bathroom. I always was on the

third bunk. So that the people, if I had been on the first step(?),

they'd throw their lice on me. So I was on the top, could throw my

lice on them. I was there with some friends. People were dirty,

starving. Everyday we'd get up, there were more people dead than

alive. But the floor always had to be washed. When the floors were

always wet, and I had to go to the bathroom. They wouldn't let me

go to the bathroom. So I decided, I have to go...

Q: Who wouldn't let you?

The doors were closed. And there were the guards. The German guards

were standing, because they washed the floors. So you couldn't get

through. So I decided, I went through the window. I went to the

bathroom. I had, by that time, bloody diarrhea. It was terrible...

Q: That was the Typhus?

That was Typhus, yea. I think by that time, I had it already.

Coming back was another matter. I had to come through the door. I

couldn't climb back through the window. They were waiting for me

with the Welcoming Committee. The Blitze knocked out a few of my

teeth and kicked me good. And my friends came down and scooped up

some snow. I thought that was the end at that time, but it wasn't.

More and more people were dying.

13:54:15 And then all of a sudden, towards the very end, they told

us we are evacuating the camp. And they put us on barges, boats and

barges, and put us on the sea. I was on a cement barge. And we were

going on that sea for ten days. We had nothing to eat, like sea

water. I already knew, that I wasn't going to make it. I really

didn't...It was interesting that there was the battle for the

German sea. We would go and look out. Planes used to fall in the

sea, shooting bombardments. There were a lot of boats. I remember

a beautiful boat the Capicorna (?) with a lot of prisoners of war.

Polish. They were dressed in their uniforms, the stripes, but very

clean. The weren't emaciated like us. And they were just waiting.

It was going to be Liberation. A day later, we came back and that

boat was standing with the bow up here. And the whole thing was a

living grave for them, you know. They were bombed.

13:55:25 We were with the S.S. And there were also Norwegian

prisoners with us. All of a sudden, the boat came to the middle, to

a halt, and the S.S. put in to a small launch; and they went away.

We were just left there on that boat. I didn't understand anything.

But the Norwegians, they understood it. They said, we had an

explosive charge tied to that boat. And they tried to dismantle it

and somehow, this was on the third of May, and the boat made for

shore. But it wasn't a port, someplace. I remember we came into the

water. And we were quite far. And there was one German. The Germans

saw that we, on the launch, that we stopped and were getting out.

And they started to shoot at us. And we started to run. And they

said, "run as fast as you can!" Our prisoners said, "don't turn

around!" And we were all shot at, and some were falling. I wound up

in a forest. And the British were there, and I saw Russian

prisoners. It wasn't quite like I tell you, but I realize our time

is getting short. I don't know how I ran, I can tell you that. I

don't know how long I ran, but the shots were all around, and

people were screaming and falling. I wound up in some dense forest.

And there were prisoners, and some of my friends were there. And I

was actually delirious by that time. Now I remember that they said,

"you have to go to a hospital." And I didn't want to go to a

hospital, because I was afraid the Germans were going to kill me

there. If they didn't kill me in the camps, they'll do it in the

hospital. So for three days I was in some kind of forest. And then

I had to wind up in the hospital.

13:57:26 End of interview.

.END.