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Alan Zimm interview 2/10/95

S: Why don't you tell me how you came to [Dachau]

ALAN ZIMM: I came to [Durovan-Bullchiwan] in January of 1945

which was a very, very cold day. And snow was laying on the

ground much deeper than here. And, eh, we arrived at Atr -

and we were actually on the train for almost 6 hours, from

[Bulchwa] to [Dura]. And we arrived it was very early in

the morning, ah 5 o'clock. It was dark, still, and we had

to get out of the train you know, and the Germans with the

dogs, and with the bayonets. [Rauss, Rauss, Rauss]. And we

lined up in groups from the whole train and we marched into

the camp. [Muracha] didn't know what was there. And there

was in the mountains earlier a whole barracks, were up in

the mountains. We had to walk up and to divide a thousand

groups to each block one group. I was assigned to a certain

block. We had to walk up steps, wooden steps, into the

mountains and there was the barracks. We checked into the

barracks and they told us," You're going to sleep just a

couple hours and next you're going to be awakened and you're

goin' get some breakfast. The breakfast was unbelievable.

Just a little bit of waterish soup with turnips, and they

gave you a chunk of bread- black, it was black like black

coffee. It was so soft you could just throw it in the wall,

it would stick. So that was the breakfast, the whole thing.

And they marched you out, out of the barracks and we came

into a big place in the center of the camp called a

Appelplatz. We lined up in groups and the head of the

[Cest}, the Gestapo, came around with two officers and they

checked every - asked everybody what kind of - what's what

coming [brupastu]. What kind of profession or trade do you

have. So I'll told them I was a tailor. So they assigned

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me to the factory, and when we were there the two days,

until we got assigned to the factory, we didn't actually

know where the factory was. We were just a block away from

it. It was so camouflaged that you didn't know it was a

factory there. And the entrance to the factory was covered

with a net of artificial trees and bushes and you,uhum, we

didn't know it was a factory. When we marched in we

realized what it was. The factory was a huge underground

factory, it was about two miles long, and they had 48

tunnels, and each tunnel a different section, a different

part of the racket was built. I was assigned to one of the

tunnels, to a group of two hundred, and I was assigned to

work in that area. So I-I saw machines who I've never seen

in my life, so the foreman and the engineer, a German

civilian, and the foreman was also from a prison there. He

said,"I'm goin' teach you how to operate this machine, what

you have to do, and em, you're going to learn quickly." I

said, 'Well, I'm looking at the machine there was something

very unusual to me. So but uh it took me about six hours to

get what I was supposed to do. So I was supposed to make a

part to the racket. So hold it and still remember it like

today --------- and dis to order to make that racket hard,

you went through a certain operation, about 12 different

operations with the machine. The German called it drapping

what you put part on the machine you do certain operations

with it and eh they told me you have to make it with on my

shift. 20 of these. That's normal. We should not make

anything which is defective. If it's defective, one they

allow it but if make more than one, or three or four, then

we could be considered a sabotage. People would hang for

that. And then but them to hang you is no problem as if it

was 1-2-3 they hang you. So I learned how to make it and ah

the German foreman, the German engineer, civilian, he was a

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telling me later on that he was from Czechoslovakia. But he

wasn't in fact civilian, he lived outside the camp. And he

said to me do your work and no worry everything will be ok.

Do your work right and I will treat you well. So ah the

second I heard this I was increasing my norm and I was

afraid if I make some wrong I'm ah they hang you. So I made

instead of 20 I make 24, 25, and 26 and they foreman and

they engineer was very happy with me, so what he did is

during they give you bread additional bread in the factory

so he signed me up to get a loaf a bread once a week. A

whole loaf of bread. That was just like saving your life.

Because what we ate there was nothing couldn't even hardly

walk. So I ate the eh eh gave me this bread and told me to

hide it so nobody would see it. And we had to hide it for

our, in front our prisoners who couldn't eat. I ate at

night time on when I was going to sleep. And in the

barracks. But he was so happy with me he was a nice man.

Sometimes he would come in the morning early from before

when I came to the machine he would hide the sandwich in the

machine for me, his own. From we brought from outside. And

I was doing the worked in that factory actually for almost 4

months. And eh by the time I arrived we were evacuated. I

never saw the daylight. Because we arrived into the factory

in was night, dark when we left it was dark. And inside was

dark, I mean it was light but no daylight. And eh eh the

the Germans had the the prisoners stay eh eh eh that camp

where we were with 25,000 prisoners. And among those

prisoners were 10,000 Russian prisoners, war prisoners. In

eh uniform soldiers were there also. And what happen is the

one time it was in February I think, I was there almost 2

months. 2 escaped escaped the camp 2, 2, people, we don't

know who. So made us stay outside in winter when it was

freezing cold, snow up to here. We stayed outside for

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almost 24 hours we didn't get into the barracks, we didn't

go to work either. Because they were looking for those two

escapees in every barracks they looked everywhere. Under

the floors, everywhere and they haven't found them. So

finally they made us go back to the barracks and we what

they did took 10 prisoners from the group, Russians and

hanged them in the camp. For the ones who escaped they took

10 of them and hanged them. And they had a band there,

music from prisoners the band was playing while they hanged

the people. And we then we start keep on going back to the

factory working. I worked there and worked and one time it

was March, at the beginning of March '45. Somebody in one

of the tunnels in one of the sections somebody sabotaged a

part of a machine, broke apart of the machine, without that

part they could not produce the rackets. And they I heard

the engineers talking between them selves in German.

Whoever did this, must have known, must be educated person

to know what he is breaking, what he's doing. Without the

that part they couldn't finish the racket. And what they

did was they took the whole group from that section and

hanged them. All of them. In the middle of the tunnel.

Put scaffolds all around. An an almost 200 hundred people

where hanged in pairs. And we had to march the group they

marched every group they let them hang there for about a

whole shift and every group from every tunnel section had to

go march thru so you hanged from the hanging prisoners would

touch your head and made you look watch you that you look up

and see what we do with people who do sabotage. That's

gonna happen to you if you do the same thing. I was so

scarred after that I couldn't sleep all night. I'm that

really shook me so much that I say well we never going get

out of here alive regardless what we do. We didn't believe

anybody's gonna be alive for getting out from this place.

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Was so terrible, first of all they didn't give you any food,

every day when we walked out to work in the front of the

steps were dead corps laying 5 of them, people starving

from starvation. Because we were the good ones actually,

there were people going to the quarries from there working

in the rocks, quarries, drilling more tunnels in the factory

and enlarging the factory. Those people didn't survive,

very few of them. Every day dead people coming back.

Because there were bound to kill them the ------ kill them

and all the prisoners had to bring the dead bodies and lay

them down in front of the barracks where they belonged to

and the following morning people clean em up and take them

to the crematorium. Permanently. Right there was a

crematorium also. In that camp. It was working day and

night that crematorium. So we we were was a terrible

terrible time to was eh the the condition was just brutal in

that camp. And an well I was we continue working in the

factory. Till the end of March the end of March we notice

something unusual. The time to evacuate the whole camp,

because end of March, was the end of March 29 I would

remember correctly. American planes about 500 of them

showed up at one time. And in not far from the factory was

a small town called Mauthausen. And they came instead of

bombing the factory actually, they I don't know if they

realize there was a factory or not, but there was train

tracks going into the factory from outside and leaving the

tunnel also train tracks what the Germans did, they loaded

the racket up on the trains on the trains coming into the

tunnel and covered them with straw, boxes of straw with

empty boxes to camouflage them and leave in the tunnel. And

nobody knew what was on the train. Even the people leaving

Mauthausen didn't know. And they were loading the rackets

up to North to ship eh to use against ------. So at one

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time they unloaded all the bombs on Mauthasuen.

Sandy. . . ?

ALAN ZIMM:

Well, after after the bombing of Nauthausen, the Germans start to

evacuate the factory. The first they evacuated the Russians, all

of them by train. Constantly trains were moving in and taking

out the prisoners. That was the beginning of April. April 1st

and 2nd of '45. And ah what my foreman did he left me a stor?

last group to leave the camp. So everybody evacuating and I was

left with 2000 other prisoners. And what they did was they gave

us a loaf bread and can of meat because we were the last group to

leave. And my our um eh? which we were supposed to do there

was cut all the cables from all the machines and burn all the

blueprints. That what we were doing in the factory. And we did

it took us one day to do all that and then they evacuated us,

also on the train. While we were on the train we did know where

we were going actually, we were going North. They told us one

of the guards were going to Hamburg, Germany. And there they

gonna put us on a ship and blow us up. So we were very much

concerned what they gonna do to us and we didn't see anybody but

what they evacuated before. So we kept on going from station to

station but the American bombers came in and bombed the stations

before we got there. So the train was headed back. A

couple hours till they repaired the trucks so we could get

thru. So finally we arrived to a station in Hanover, I

remember Hanover in Germany the Americans came in and bombed

completely the station. And the railroads everything was

flames everywhere was burning. And we stayed with before we

can get thru we stayed on the train. It took we stayed

there 2 days and waited until they repaired the train. The

station was still burning. They made the train go thru the

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flames it was burning on each side with the train went thru.

Finally, after about 6 days on the train we arrived at a

small station called Bergen. That was a junction a railroad

crossing. And there trains coming from other directions too

with prisoners but we eh other places. So I had overheard

the Germans the guards talking between each other now we

have a chance to go into Americaner? or to the English,

Germans. We had to surrender to either to this one or that

one. So I knew the end was coming. But there still was get

it was guns like there machine guns around you all the time.

And no food. And everybody was from the group we we came

from Bergen, half of the people were dead actually. If we

if I wouldn't got the loaf of bread and the can of meat was

hiding under my shirt I would never survive either. When we

arrive there, before we arrived at that station, we stopped

in an area with a farm like a farm. The train stopped for

no reason, I don't know. This asked the guards wanted to

have some water for themselves so they stopped the train,

and eh eh I said to the guard who was sitting next to me,

can I go with you get something I saw some prisoners over

there in the field. Had some piles you know that could

mean all kinds of things. So a French man in Belgium, war

prisoners also grabbed by the SS. But they were not like

us, they was a a was war prisoners they were treated

differently like us. So we arrived there when in the the SS

got took some watering and buckets and I said does this can

I go over to the prisoners maybe get something to eat there.

Mushner! Mushner! So I ran over there to the Frenchman I

couldn't talk French I say Mzham Mzham food. And they let

me take potatoes and turnips what they had there whole

potatoes I just put them in my shirt and put some

turnips. . .mumbling. . .my friend was me we ran back to the

train. I had 2 of my close friends I gave them some

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potatoes to eat, whole potatoes we ate that's all we were

eating. Finally, after that we arrived at Bergen they made

us get out of the train, and line up whoever was living

still line up and we could holler I could still walk. But

eh some people could hardly walk. So we hugged each other

five in a row, and made us walk and there were a whole

column of prisoners walking a a 100's and SS were all around

us with machine guns, bayonets. So we walked and walked and

we started to walk 9 o'clock in the morning. When we

arrived there. We arrived at the camp. It was a camp I

don't know what camp it was--it was three o'clock in the

afternoon. Turn right, you go in there, and the gate opens

up, and we walked into this camp, Bergen BElsen. But here

were two camps actually, one was half a mile further down,

where the women were, women, and this camp wa a vacant camp

what the army used, soldiers used this for themselves

they had no space where to put us. They put us in this

camp. We stayed in the camp--everybody, they assigned us to

different barracks. We went in to lay down, there was

nothing in, er, no tables, no nothing just straw on the

ground and cement. We lay down, we were so exhausted we

just lay down and fell asleep. we must have slept about a

day an a half there. When we woke up--

was, probably if was about the twelfth of April of 45.

Suddenly we looked out of the window and they say, I was

with a Polish young priest, Polish ex-soldiers in civilian

clothes, we were together--Jewish prisoners were there very

few--from the whole 35,000 prisoners there in Bergen Belsen,

there must have been 200 of us left from all over. So I said

what are you making out of this. He said, Oh, I looked, he

looked and leaned his head out of the window. He said: the

German army is here, the army, not the SS. The SS is

somewhere else out there setting up guns, machine guns,

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heavy guns, and and all kinds of equipment, war equipment.

I said: What do you think they are going to do? He said:

Maybe they are going to kill us all here. Nobody believed

they're going to survive. Till the last minute, we didn't

believe. Suddenly a grand battle erupted. Without, without

any warning, the they shooting the German with heavy guns,

machine guns are shooting, and and and we hear from far away

distance artillery, shooting in our direction and explosions

all around. The camp was in a wooded area, all woods, no

human beings around there, and not far from the camp was a

road, in the woods going between the woods, a road going

somewhere, we don't know where. The battle took about 24

hours, a day and a night, and the following morning, early

in the morning, the guns were silent, nothing moving,

nothing, er er, eerie feeling--you don't know what's going

to happen. Laying down nobody there to lift his head. I

said to the chaplain, the young priest: What do you think is

happening? He said: I don't know. I said: Let's look out

and see where they are, the Germans. So he picked out his

head up to the window, the glass was gone, the windows were

shattered, all was gone. He said: We don't see any

soldier--all gone. What happened? He looks around, there's

nobody here. So we looked out the little window. The SS is

still there. But they had put on white arm bands on the

arms and there still were the guns. And they came, guarded

by Hungarian SS, all around. We can't get out from the

blocks; we're sitting in there with no food. We stay

already there almost four days without food. it was the

13th of April. After it was quiet. The sun was out, nice.

We looked out the window and suddenly like an earthquake,

everybody's running, all the prisoners are running to the

middle of the camp. We didn't know what happened. They

don't care about SS, they don't care about the guards, they

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are running. So I said to my friend: What we shall do? He

says: Let's run too, see what's going on. We jumped out of

the barrack of this barrack--we run. They knew what was

going on there. There were mounds of potatoes, mounds of

turnips covered in the ground for the winter for the

soldiers there. They prepare for the winter, and they were

still in the ground, and with their hands, everybody grabbed

with their hands uncovering the mounds. we uncovered

potatoes and turnips, I said: Well, this is something.

They didn't care who's shooting, or the German are there or

nobody. So I grabbed some potatoes, we're eating while

we're digging, we're eating already because we were so

hungry. We didn't know what to do. So I grabbed two

turnips put under my shirt on my shirt, a couple of

potatoes, and I said to my friend: Let's go back. I don't

want to stay out here. We can get shot here. So we run

back, we lay down and we're eating. We're waiting, it's

quiet, nothing happened, SS is there, the Hungarians outside

the fence with guns and they're wearing the white arm bands.

So in the afternoon around the 14th, they said to us: You

know what? the loudspeakers announced: Tomorrow morning at

nine o'clock, the Swiss Red Cross is going to come in and go

take you over. We will nothing to do with you anymore.

Tomorrow morning nine o'clock. Nobody believed it, because

they were lying to the last minute all the time. So why

would the Swiss Red Cross, why would they put white arm

bands when the Swiss Red Cross is going to come tomorrow

morning? While we were debating that--it was about 3-4

o'clock in the afternoon--the sun was out and the fourteenth

of April. Suddenly we hear the tremendous roar, noise,

roar, uh, heavy artillery or tanks are moving from

somewhere. And it comes louder and louder, so one of the

officers, a Polish officer was in civilian clothes; he never

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let anyone know he was an officer. He said according to the

noise what he can hear, they're not German tanks. They're

either Americans or English. So sure enough, the noise was

so loud, we looked out the windows, we were not afraid

anymore, to look out, and sure enough, in that road to the

woods you could see tanks, with stars on it - white stars

and all kinds of markings but no Germans.

S: We've gotta stop and change the roll...

ALAN ZIMM: As we looked out the window and noticed those

tanks, there were all the tanks, everyone was jumping up and

down, hugging and kissing and now we finally believe we're

free - we gonna be free! What was happened, they didn't

come the camp; they passed by and went to the small town of

Bergen to secure the radio station. And then the SS told

us, "You have to line up tomorrow morning exactly at nine

o'clock in front of the barracks." [At Palank], we couldn't

sleep hardly that night; we wee so agitated, we're so

anxious to see what's going to happen, because even the

[less many] people didn't believe they would be liberated.

So in the par - the next day in the morning, 9 o clock,

exactly. The gate, far down the camp was a gate. The gate

opened up and a jeep with British military police, dressed

in red with red hats and white belts and white gloves and

all, green and white. Everybody said, "What, who are these

people?" Nobody could - they'd never seen any soldiers

dressed up in a war like that. And the jeep with machine

guns, 4 soldiers and two soldiers behind, and they came into

the camp and disarmed the SS. Took the guns away from them

and put the men aside. And behind them was a truck with

loudspeakers,every language, they were speaking to us, "My

dear friends, you are now liberated by Allied forces. And

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the German army , the German SS has nothing to do with you;

you are free people and you are now liberated with Allied

forces." It was so emotional, that moment, that everybody

was crying. And they were jumping up and down and running

to the English soldiers and they were throwing cigarettes

and candy to everybody. And we were hugging and jumping

around in front and then behind them were coming trucks with

soldiers. And they were right away taking over the whole

camp, and setting up microphones with music was playing,

like that, and we were, this was the liberat-, they were

liberation. And we were, everybody was running around, we

didn't know what to do - where to go, what to say. We were

jumping and hugging each other and kissing and embracing.

And they disarmed all these Germans and the Hungarian SS and

they took over the whole camp. And they took the guards

with the SS and the Hungarians as prisoners. And there was

a fenced-in area and they put 'em in that fenced-in area.

What happened after the liberation actually, the Russian

kapos set up a tribunal. I couldn't go there and I didn't

want to bother with it, and took all these kapos, the German

SS, and they sentenced them to death. While the British

took over the camp, they let the prisoners rule and do what

they want. And they executed about 50 of them, at that

time. I couldn't watch it; they did all kinds of terrible

things to them. To the guards, the SS guards. So we stayed

there about two days, where as no, the British didn't bring

any food. They just took us some crackers and cookies and

and candy. That's all they had, the soldiers. I said,

"Where's food?" The prisoners demanded food, they, we

didn't eat. They said: The ships hadn't arrived yet. They

have to bring..the ships ar coming to Hamburg and we'll

unload the food for you. But by the time the food comes

here, we're all dead. So the Russians war prisoners there

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which were liberated, they said: We don't have to wait for

the British to bring food, there are Germans living outside

the camp in their villages--we're going to take it. And

sure enough, they had jeeps, and trucks the Russians right

away took over German trucks and went out to the villages.

Within a few hours they brought in chickens and all kind of

pigs and cattle and goats, you name it, they brung in more

than food. ? fires and kitchens were cooking and everybody

had food to eat. They were preparing food for us. So this

was the way we stayed in that camp a couple of weeks until

they organized everything. They gave us DP identify cards

and they disinfected everybody, you know, gave care, took

care, and then different people came from different

countries. The French came in French officers and soldiers,

they took them home right away, about a week after

liberation. Trucks came in for the Frenchmen, trucks came

in for the Danish, the Hollander, the Belgium, there were

prisoners from everywhere there. And all the nationalities

from western Europe, they were taken home right away after

the liberation. But eastern Europe, like we were from

Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, they didn't take nobody

home, the war was still on, the fight was still going on

there. And we were staying in that camp Bergen-Belsen until

the war was over

and when the war was over, it was June the 8th, before the

war was over after the liberation, the German ? found some

airplanes while the war was still on, five days after we

were liberated they came to this camp, dropped off bombs,

five prisoners got killed by these bombs after the

liberation. So finally we were ready to go leave the camp,

the war was over and they say we cannot go to Poland now,

cause why? They said: Now all the leaders are in Berlin, in

Pottsdam. Truman came to Pottsdam, and Churchill and Stalin

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and the French prime minister, and all around Berlin is all

blocked off, you can't move nowhere. So finally we had

bicycles, five of us, to Poland together. We drove the

bicycles into the city of Magdeburg, which was occupied by

the British all of it was British zone. We stopped there,

and the British were nice to us and the Polish, there was a

Polish army there working also, ? with the British. They

took us under their wing, so to say, and they put us in a

hotel and we stayed in a hotel until the conference was

over. And they gave us food and shelter and everything. And

then finally we went back to Poland, took us two months to

reach Poland after the liberation. I went back to the city

of Lodz, where I was in the ghetto before there. I arrived

in Lodz, they told us there is a place to go where you

register. we registered with the survivors, all the

survivors coming from all over, different places. Then I

met my wife there also after I came back to Poland. You

want me to go on still?

Sandy: I want you....wait, wait. OK.

ALAN ZIMM: I was very, more afraid to go to Poland than

staying in Germany. Because I had already at the time after

we were staying in Magdeburg for two months. There was

something going on in Poland against Jewish people returning

from Germany or from Russia. As a matter of fact, there was

a city called Kelze?? Poland where some young Jews coming

back from Russia wanted to go to Palestine, as no Israel

then. They had a kibbutz like. The Poles attacked the

kibbutz and killed most of them. It would be -- in the

resistance ? they were fighting, they killed some Poles too

and there was a panic among the survivors coming back to

Poland and among those which were liberated in Poland also.

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There were people, the Poles were making pogroms, so they

somehow, I don't know if it was the American government

intervened with the Russians--the Russians occupied Poland

also, there was a Polish army also. So they took strict

measures, the Russians, then after that. And we were, then

I came back to Poland and met my wife in Lodz. She worked

in a store, a delicatessen store. The owners of that store

were my friends during? the war when I was in the ghetto,

in Lodz. They survived, they saw, they were mesmerized.

They said: How did you survive? I said: I came from Germany

back. They had another store there, I met my wife. I said

to my wife: I'm not going to stay here in Poland very long.

I'm going to stay here just a week or two at the most, I'm

going back to Germany. I went back to my town, my home town

for a couple of days, and I was very much afraid when I went

back to my own town. I stayed only there 2 days and slept in

a hotel and I went back to my street where I lived and

nobody was there. I could find nobody, my relatives, no

Jewish people were there. I meet two people--they also came

back from Germany. So I went to one of my neighbors, a

Polish neighbor, and asked him: Did anybody come back from

Germany or from Russia? He said: No, Nobody is here. When

he saw me, he crossed himself. He said: How did you come

back? He thought I came from somewhere out of the world.

from outside, from heaven. He couldn't believe anybody

survived. So I stayed only there overnight in a hotel, ????

to Lodz. And from Lodz my wife has two sisters. One sister

came from Germany, one was there liberated herself?. She

was not in a camp, my wife, she survived as an Aryan, as a

Polish Catholic. She had paper. She survived in Warsaw

after the uprising she survived in there and came to her

home town. That's where we met. I said to her: Let's go

back, I'm going to take you to Germany back. Had two

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sisters, I took all of them together and went to Germany, to

Berlin and there is Berlin was a camp what was set with

Americans, Schlatchtsee, a camp for DPs. And they went into

the camp and we registered there. And they stayed there

until the sisters were evacuated when the Blockade of Berlin

was, they evacuated to West Germany. And I went while I was

in Poland somebody came back from Germany. They told me

they saw my brother. I said: What brother? My older,

Salomon, he saw him somewhere in the French zone of Germany.

I went back to Munich. That as the headquarters for all

survivors of Germany.

Sandy: Why don't you tell me about the ...brother, ok?

Start from the beginning.

ALAN ZIMM: Well when my wife;s sisters were evacuated to

West Germany to Landsberg, a camp Dp camp, my, I married the

youngest sister, is my wife. I wet with her, she was, we

stayed in Munich. I said: I wanna go see the lists of all

the survivors in Munich they had the headquarters, the lists

were printed on all the wall around the building inside. So

I looked fort my town. Poland, and then by town. I noticed

my brother is living, one of my brothers survivor, and also

noticed a sister of my best friend, I went to school with

before the war is also a survivor, and she is in that camp

where my two sister-in-laws are there in Landsberg. I said:

I'm going there by right away by street car it took about 20

minutes to get there to the camp. I went there, I looked

her up and when she saw me, she unbelievable, she couldn't

believe it, it was a very emotional reunion with her, I

said to her: You know what, my brother, Soloman is living in

the French zone. I don't know how to get there where he is.

You see? your brother Solomon is here. He here? Yes, he

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came here, and he is in the camp. As a matter of fact, he

stays in my room here. But the went out for the night to

see a movie, they had movies shown in the camp--this is the

American zone--so there are movies shown. I'm so exhausted,

I said to her, and I want to go to sleep. She said: Well,

lay down on the cot--she had cots all over--that's your

bothers cot, but we managed to get another one here. so I

lay down and fell asleep and by 11:30 at night he comes

back. He noticed I was a sleep--he didn't know who I

am--I'm nothing. She said to him: Why don't you go over and

see who's sleeping there. He looked, he sit down, he walked

back to her and said: I don't know. I haven't seen him for

6 years, my brother--She said: Look again. And he goes

over to the other side of my bed. He said: That's my

brother! He woke me up form my best sleep. The reunion was

so emotional, we both cried without stopping. And that's

the way I met him after the war. In Munich , in Landsberg,

I mean in the camp. And from then, I had to go back to

Poland, I went back to Poland again from there. And later

on I came back to Germany and stayed with my brother in the

French zone--he lived in the French zone--and I took my wife

there also--she wasn't my wife yet, but we got married in a

small town in Germany Saldau, a very small town not far

from Constance an Bodensee, I don't know if that is a

familiar town--and the wedding, we had to bring a rabbi from

another town, from Ulm, also a DP camp, a big camp, they had

a rabbi there. He came in to perform the wedding, it was

outdoors. The small town came to that wedding, the Germans,

because they hadn't seen a wedding like that for 50 years,

they say in that little town. And we got married from and

from there we went back we came to the United States.

Sandy: Tell me...

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ALAN ZIMM: Yes, the rabbi performed a real orthodox ceremony

we break the glass and everything. They say it was for them

so unusual, the people were so anxious to see it, I mean, we

lived with a German family there, and they say they haven't

seen it for 50 years a wedding like that in that town. Very

few Jewish people lived there before the war even. Only one

person lived there, very famous person, Albert Einstein's

first cousin lived nearby in a little town, in that little

town and I speak with Einstein, I met him, I met him, he

came to the wedding, we invited him. He was at the wedding.

A little town called Buchau, it is the only town in Germany

where a synagogue had a bell, a ringing bell like a church.

It is the only synagogue in all of Germany that had a bell a

ringing bell.

Sandy: OK. Now go back a little bit to liberation...

ALAN ZIMM: After we were liberated, what happened is they

segregated everybody by nationality, Frenchmen in this

block, Poles in this block, Russians in this, Czechs in

this, Belgiums--there were so many blocks, every block, it

was many more that had two blocks for certain groups. So

our group was very small, so we stayed with the Poles

together, we hanged out the flag the Polish flag, and a blue

and white flag, Israeli flag, in front of the barrack.

Everybody had to hang out their flags they had made out from

different pieces of cloth. So the Russian soldiers,

officers were from the honor guard, and marched in unison, a

group of about 30, to every block, saluted and had a speech,

the captain spoke, and when he came to our block--it was

very moving--he said, the officer, he said he knows what

happened to the Jewish people, knows what the Germans did.

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And he knows there are few of the survivors here, he knows

also we don't have a home where to go to. And he finished

and saluted it. It was very moving, we all cry. [long

pause] It was the incident what happened after the

liberation.

Sandy: Tell me a little...

ALAN ZIMM: Afterwards. But two weeks later, they brought in

food and supplies and feed, fed everyone, and kitchens were

set up, we get food and they processed you, you know, the

name with country you came from where you were, they gave

you DP cards, identity cards.

Sandy: What about..?

ALAN ZIMM: They gave these things out, yes, everybody. and

they had put up running water in the blocks so there was no

running water before. And they had disnin--and also

disinfection, delousing, you know, of people, white powder

like sprayed it everybody all over. And constantly, every

week, they were afraid of typhus breaking out which in other

camp typhus broke out, was disease, killed a lot of people

then after liberation. And also another incident, there was

a group of musicians in the camp, musicians in the camp

during the war, Germans had prisoners, musicians. They were

Poles, ???, The camp we are in was a military camp,

actually. There was a drug store there in the camp. I

didn't care about going to drugstore looking for medicine.

What happened these poles went into the drugstore, into the

basement. They found barrels with alcohol, loaded up, took

out the alcohol from the barrels and bottles and started to

drink. They didn't realize it was wood alcohol. Poisonous

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alcohol. And all of them got poisoned after the liberation.

30 of these people died in the camp from wood wood alcohol

poisoning. That was such a horrible scene, for here, it

was, it was screaming and and convulsions was, we couldn't,

we had to run away and hide in the rooms. What was going

on, it was after the liberation these things happened.

Sandy: ??

ALAN ZIMM: After the liberation what happened, when we

stayed there, we stayed there a couple of weeks in Bergen

Belsen. We stayed there after liberation. First of all the

war lasted another three weeks, but we stayed there about 6

more weeks. When they found out in a small town nearby

called Celle, C-e-l-l-e. It was a small town where a German

family, a German family, was a small synagogue, they hid it

from the nazis all these years and protected the Torah, the

scrolls, the holy books in the basement. And the British

came in and liberated it. They went to the British and

told them: there was a small synagogue. We protected it.

Sure enough, the synagogue was a little ? of this house.

And the British told us: You have to go there, looking out

only for the Jewish prisoners, war prisoners, we were

liberated. So we went there and we told them, they took us

by truck there to the little town, it was about 10 miles

away, and on Friday services, it was a British chaplain, a

Jewish rabbi from the British army in uniform. He went to

the basement and took out the scrolls, the Torah, and he

walked up with the Torah where the arc was, there was no

scrolls in there, and made us walk behind him. And each row

of the whole synagogue was British officers, soldiers and

they were making films of this. We walked up and ? more

like a stage, you know, where the Torah was sitting under

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the curtain. And there was table where he lay down the

scroll on the table and he conducted the service right in

that service. It was very moving even the English cried.

Then they took us back to the camp. We stayed there,like I

told you, and later on we left.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: After everybody, you know, grabbed the potatoes

and turnips and went to eat, it lasted only for about a day

and a half. Following day everybody is hungry again, no food

and we're not liberated yet. So when everybody was walking

around in the camp looking for something to eat, so the SS

came and said to us on the loudspeaker: We have some bread

and canned goods for you on tucks waiting there. So

everybody is running to that area. So the major from the

SS, a doctor, you could tell he was a doctor, he wears

special insignia, he came and he stood in front of these

trucks and said to us: Please do me a favor, do not touch

any of that food, do not touch it, don't take it.

Everybody says: Why? It's all poisoned. You all gonna die

if you eat that. So I just moved to my friend and said:

Forget it. I'm not gonna eat that. I'm tired? of waiting

here. A lot of them were screaming their head off: We're

going to die anyway from starvation. Better to die with a

stomach, some of them were saying that. So the German was

pleading with them, the doctor: Please, wait another 24

hours. You're going to be free, the English are going to be

here. Nobody believed him either. People in those days

were cynical???. We saw so many things in the past where

the Germans would talk and doing were two different things.

They always lied to you, the Germans. They tell you're

going to unlousung, the Baden, and they were killing there.

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That's why a lot of people really don't understand how could

so many people go without resistance to fight against them,

because they misled people. They didn't tell you what they

were doing. They had false signs on the doors, Badanstalt

it was gas places, they were gassing people. I wa aware of

these things I had heard it before. I was the first one

actually to notify what the Germans were doing to human

beings, before Auschwitz existed. The day the Russians, the

Germans invaded Russia, June 1941, the same day they started

to kill the Jewish people in the town where I was born

nearby a place called Chelno. I was the only one actually

with another man to escape from that place from Kolo. When

I arrived in Lodz, in the ghetto, to tell those people what

happened to the people, they never believed it--even the

people in the Lodz ghetto didn't believe what they were

doing with them. They were going outside, nobody,

volunteered. The Germans were telling: we need volunteers

to go to the Russian territory, we occupied so much land, we

need people to work on the farm. And they believed it. They

took them to kill them. That's the way they misled the

people, they made people also lay down their clothes and put

their names on their clothes and made people pay money for

the trucks, for the gasoline. They made them pay 4 marks

for the gasoline to take them to the extermination. Not

really, so everybody was saying: If they were going to kill

us,why would they take money from us? Why would they make

us pay for gasoline? They made such tricks, they used such

psychology, how to get the people to be exterminated. so

the people didn't realize it what was happened to them. But

I knew already then, I knew already then not to trust them.

Because I had the experience from ? from Chelno where they

were exterminating the people. But when I came to the

ghetto in 42, the people the people, the leadership in the

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ghetto made me be quiet: don't make panic, be silent--they

knew, I told them what happened, the leadership. They

survived the war because of me from the Lodz ghetto. I met

them after the war. In Lodz where I met my wife.

Sandy: ??

ALAN ZIMM: I wasn't taken to Chelmo. What happened is. In

the Kolo, in the city of Kolo, they started to take our

groups, 300 a day 400 a day. So I grew up with Polish

people in the ghetto, I lived with them together next door

neighbors were Poles, my best friends were Poles, went to

school with together. So one of those boys, my friend from

school, his brother was taken by the Germans as a

truckdriver to take the people from the town to Chelmo.

They say from there they are going to the Russian territory

to work on farms. When he came back he noticed,they were

taking the people from his truck into putting the gas, to

truck with gas, carbon monoxide. They Germans had built

special vans in the beginning, big vans, they could put 50

people in a van, and the exhaust pipes from the trucks, from

the gas, from the trucks would go in the vans inside was

hermetically closed. The carbon monoxide was killing the

people inside. And from the trucks, from those trucks,

vans, those truckdrivers had to take the bodies out, take

them into the wooded area where they had ? many people from

the towns strong people had already prepared ditches, dig

ditches, big ditches and threw bodies in, they covered them

up. And he came back and he told me, listen tome, my

brother could not sleep all night; he wouldn't talk to

nobody, he couldn't eat what he saw there. So he crossed

himself: Please, I give my honor to my brother not to tell

nobody, but I'm telling it to you: do not go there. He

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wouldn't tell me the rest of it, but I found out later how

they were doing it, they were killing all these people

there. They killed 380,000 Jews there, Germans at Chelmo.

That was before Auschwitz existed, before anybody knew

anything. In 194.. after..it happened in December 42, they

start to kill the people. And I knew it already then and I

told to my brother and my sister, two sisters I had. She

survived in ? Lodz ghetto. And with me. The rest of my

family was killed also in Chelmo. So that's what happened

that wy I knew how what they were doing. When I came to the

ghetto, I already knew then. The people in the ghetto

didn't know anything, the leadership didn't know it. When I

was working in the ghetto, it is a long story..

Sandy: Going back to liberation...did the people...??tell

me about that?

ALAN ZIMM: When we were liberated, it wa so, everybody was

so enthusiastic,so they they so emotional. The people were

so happy they grabbed this jeep, carrying this jeep, the

British soldiers got out, they were carrying the jeep in

the air. All these prisoners, yeah. They were so happy to

see the British, they say: We're free, finally we're free,

we are really free?? Then they start to believe they are

free. They were carrying this jeep in the air like they are

walking through the camp all around. That day is

unforgettable, unforgettable day. That we were so, I was ..

On the other hand hen we realized later that we had nobody

to go to, there was a different story, but the first two

days, the emotional outburst, the happiness was

undescribable, you cannot describe this,the emotions of the

people of the prisoners from all the people when they

announced to you the first time in all these years that you

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are human beings,m that you are people. You are not treated

like nobody, worse than animals. The Germans were patting

their dogs while hanging people. They were patting their

dogs, making nice to their dogs while the people were

hanging. It's how brutal they were,how cynical. There were

thousands of them then doing like that. After the war, they

disappeared a lot of them.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: Yes, for awhile. Bergen-Belsen. I stayed there

for about six weeks.

Sandy: ???

ALAN ZIMM: No, only the sisters stay there. I went away

from there. I lived in Berlin for a while and with a

civilian?? family, was a Jewish, the wife was Jewish, the

husband was German. That's how they survived the war,and

they had one son. He was a friend of mine,that's how we

stayed together a lot. I lost track of him and the family

after the war. I lost track of a lot of people I haven't

seen since then. I hope when we go to Miami now we have a

gathering there next week, I'll meet some people I haven't

seen for so many years.

ALAN ZIMM: When we looked out of the window, and we saw the

tanks passing by, some of them white stars, some of them

British markings, with British flags, we all jumped up and

hugged each other, we were so happy to see this

happening,that we were finally to be free. We waved

handkerchiefs out of the window to them. They saw us, they

were standing up, some of them, and we were waving to them,

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but they didn't come to the us, they went to the town the

railroad junction, to Bergen to liberate that town. And we

said. why? Everybody was had a big let down. Where are

they? they went and they didn't see us probably. They went

by to the little town. so the following day in the morning

they came into the town to liberate us. the cap. They

liberate first the camp, the town, Bergen, and the next day

in the morning nine o'clock they showed up in the camp.

when they arrived, that was the most emotional phase, time,

we were liberated. When they arrived the German say??, they

told us something different. The told us the Red Cross is

going to take us over from Switzerland. They were scared we

were going to lynch them, the prisoners are going to lynch

them. But in the morning 9 o'clock when the gates opened

up, we saw the jeep coming in with the military police and

the British, the way they were dressed. Everybody looked

and they said: Who are they? Then the loudspeakers with

the trucks behind them announcing, and calling us people,

everybody, eh, eh, we are people again, humans. And they

said, they announced in every language, Polish even in

Yiddish, it was something, the Jewish people, and they said

from now on you're free people, you are liberated with

allied forces. The Germans have nothing to do to you, they

have nothing to say about you, they are our prisoners now.

You are free. That's when the all pandemonium broke out.

They were throwing cigarettes and behind them was a truck

with soldiers coming in and they set up microphones with

music right way playing and they took over the whole camp.

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