

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Herbert Friedman
June 12, 1992
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PREFACE

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HERBERT FRIEDMAN

June 12, 1992

Q: Okay, for the record give us your name and a little bit about your early background?

A: My name is Herbert Friedman. And my early background is really very simple. I was born in New Haven in 1918. My father had migrated to the States from Vilna, my mother from Riga, good stock. The two of them, they met and married in Connecticut I think it was, and that's where I grew up. I went to high school there, I went to university there, and graduated from Yale in 1938. Two brothers, both of whom are still living. A strong, tight, good Jewish family. Conservative congregation in town. Quite modern in those days, from my parents, men and women sitting together, organ in the congregation. The Rabbi, a wonderful person, himself Vilna-born, but took a Ph.D. at Yale, writing three volumes of the history of the Jews of Russia in English. I mean that was a man, good brain, good human being, and working in this small middle class ordinary congregation, nothing famous about him, but very impressive to me.

Q: What was your awareness of the rise of Hitler as you were growing up?

A: Well, that's the whole story. The whole story of my life revolves around that. In college between the years of 1934 to '38, formative years, fully cognizant of what was happening, as fully as anybody could be who watched carefully. The argument that people didn't know what was going on in those days has never never seemed valid to me because you could read it in the *New York Times*. I did. If I did, others did. But at any rate, it bothered me when I looked around '34, '35, '36, in '36 the Nuremberg laws were passed. It was quite clear what the intent was. Hitler's book was out. He had been in jail in Landsberg, he wrote it there back in 1925. The book was available to be read. I read parts of it. It's turgid writing, it's not easy, *Mein Kampf*, but never mind you've got the picture. So that I could not understand the silence of the whole American Jewish Community around me. I did understand some of the politics. There was a difference quite clear in those days between the "Ost-Juden," the Russian-Polish Jews and the German Jews. The American Jewish Committee was in correspondence with people in Berlin who were advising them quiet, don't raise a fuss, you'll make it worse, don't organize protests, no, don't listen to Stephen Wise, don't have a parade down Fifth Avenue, and they were attracted by that kind of advice, they were even enchanted by it. It gave them a perfect rationalization. Now, there not the only villain in the piece, everybody latched on to that. So I don't want to be misunderstood about the American Jewish Committee only or specifically. The mood was (a) we're not sure of what's happening, (b) it can't be as bad as some people are saying it is, (c) what can we do about it anyhow, and (d) the American Government isn't disturbed, and Franklin Roosevelt is a great friend of the Jews and he isn't upset. Nobody is upset. All of these factors seemed to me to be leading to a dreadful conclusion. So on the specific point of how I was reacting in terms of what I saw around me, I was getting more and more furious, that's a worthwhile word, and frustrated and that was the condition that I felt I was in when I was 19 years old and had graduated from the

university, okay.

Q: You graduated as a young man?

A: Young, yes.

Q: And then what did you decide to do?

A: Well, don't forget we were at the tail end of the Depression, and a man in New York by the name of Samuel Leidesdorf, a big accounting firm, and a major factor in the New York, UJA -- well, it wasn't yet the UJA, it was the Palestine Appeal, said to me I'll give you a job as an accountant for \$25.00 a week if you'll go to Columbia Business School and learn accounting. So, okay, \$25.00 a week, and so I went to Columbia Graduate School of Business, stayed one year, couldn't stand it for another day, couldn't dream of myself as being an accountant, so I quit.

Q: \$25.00 --

A: A week.

Q: -- was the equivalent today of what?

A: Oh, gosh, I don't know. 30 times that amount, \$700.00, \$800.00 a week. A very good job.

Q: So it was a nice starting salary?

A: Oh, yes, a nice starting salary, perfectly acceptable. Tuition was \$450.00 at Yale. Today it's \$23,500.00. So that there I was, I was at the end, I owed money to Yale, I owed money to Columbia and it's now 1939, the war has not yet broken out in Europe but it's imminent, and America is in a totally isolationist mood, no thought of participating in it. Roosevelt was jockeying like mad to give the British some support and so he was making these funny deals called lend/lease, we will lend you some of our destroyers on lease, you will pay us rent for our destroyers, but we're not going to get into your war. So it was really so ambivalent and so confused and so costly in the long run. At any rate my personal requirements were that I had better go and get a job. So I went back to New Haven and got a job in a factory working at a sewing machine making blankets. I worked two shifts, 16 hours a day, and I earned enough money to pay back all the debts. And I also did the most important thing at that stage in my life, I decided what I really wanted to do.

Q: Which was?

A: I tried to figure out during all those mindless hours at the machine where all you're trying to do is keep your hand away from the needle which you're just feeding cloth through and

it's robot work, and I said why should I continue being so frustrated. If the American Jewish Community isn't awake why don't I try to awaken them, but how do you do that. That's when I decided that I would become a rabbi, not because of any theological sudden insights, I had no epiphanies, I had no -- I conceived of myself really as a civil servant. And if I had a platform from which to speak I would use that platform to try to wake people up. It was sort of simplistic, very idealistic, but satisfying to me. On the other hand, again I felt I'm stopping myself for at least three years from getting into any action mode and yet I'd better do that or else I'll be frustrated the rest of my life. So I finished with the factory, backed off, went to rabbinical seminary with Stephen Wise in New York, and we did four year's worth of work in three, no summer vacations, no nothing, 11-1/2 months you worked, two weeks off, and kept going that way.

Q: What was the mood in rabbinical school, were students preparing for a career, was there a sense of --

A: Well, Wise being the person he was and focused the way he was, every one of the students in the school became acutely sensitized to the current events around us. So, sure, everybody was preparing for a career, you needed to get a pulpit or a job somewhere to earn your living, but the ideology was developing among this group before the school merged with the Hebrew Union College out in Cincinnati. It graduated about 220 reform rabbis, but reform rabbis of a totally different kind than Cincinnati was producing. I sat for all those years next to a fellow by the name of Osher Krishblu- (e or m?) who later became the Chairman of the Misrachi, and he sat with his kippa and I sat without a kippa and the whole faculty liked it that way and Wise liked it that way, and the dean, Henry Slominski liked it that way, it was a school in which "Klal Israel" or pluralism or whatever word you want to use, which is so fashionable today, was really being practiced in the '30s and '40s, the only school in which it was being carried out as a definite ideological objective, and every student picked it up.

Q: Tell us a little bit about Stephen Wise, his school, what was his role in this, what was his role in the American Jewish Community at that time?

A: Well, his role in the American Jewish Community was superb. He was the leader of the protest, the ceaseless effort to try to persuade Roosevelt, to whom he had automatic access, Rabbi Stephen Wise was acceptable to Roosevelt at request, and saw him frequently. He failed to convince him of anything, but Wise was the pusher, Wise was the aggressor seeking to have a large protest meeting in Madison Square Garden, and we'll get 25,000 people there or 20,000 whatever the Garden holds. And he filled it every time, talking about the fact we must do something. He sounded -- he was the only one who sounded the tocsin, the call, he was the bugle. Almost no response except in those of us who were listening to him very very carefully and very closely. I adored him, I admired him, I respected him. The personal impact used to come on Thursday mornings. Thursday morning he had a class called problems of the ministry. A big round table, seminar table, 18, 12 students around the table. And problems of the ministry or how do you conduct a

wedding how do you conduct a funeral? Nothing of the sort. He would go into his pocket, he would take out the latest telegram that he got from the World Jewish Congress, Riegner in Geneva, and because he was a key player in the World Jewish Congress he started the American Jewish Congress, he believed in Democracy and he had hoped that those organizations would really be democratic in the sense every member would vote for its officers. It never happened that way in practice, but in theory it was at that time the most democratic, and still to this day the most liberal organization I think in existence in the panoply of our alphabet soup. So he would take the telegram out and tell us what was the latest stuff going on in Europe in this camp or that camp, or this ghetto or another.

Q: So you were with him in the period of '39 through --

A: '39 to '43. I left in '43. I graduated, I went out to Denver to take a --

Q: Did you know of the existence of Riegner telegram?

A: Sure. We students knew it. He read it to us.

Q: And what was the its impact?

A: On us?

Q: Yes.

A: Devastating and confirming. It confirmed us in our desire, because I wasn't the only one who felt this frustrated and who wanted to get out there and try to wake up -- so we were getting confirmation to our own personal feelings from him. And I think that if he felt that he was failing to arouse the street. He was succeeding in arousing us. That was, I think, the greater of two contributions which he made. And we were champing at the bit. And so many of us in those classes spent the one year which the Army required for you to go and be an intern, that is by medical metaphor. You graduated medical school, now be an intern in the hospital for a year, and then we will take you into the Army and we'll commission you as a medical officer. The same with clergymen., go out, get your congregational experience, what good that was going to do you in the Army I have no idea, but that was their bureaucracy. And so each of us was impatient to get out, get the congregational job, spend the year and then get into the chaplaincy.

Q: Let me focus for a moment on the Riegner telegram. Do you remember when you heard the Riegner telegram --

A: Well, it was in '42.

Q: -- August of '42?

A: Aug. '42. I didn't remember which month exactly. Well, so then it would have been a week or two weeks thereafter. Remember I said school was continuous, there were no summer vacations. So let's call it -- yes, it was before Rosh Hashanah. Yes I remember it now. So I can't tell you the exact date, but we all used it in sermons that we made. I used it. I remember I used it. But who was listening to us. I mean we didn't make any ripples. Students make any ripples out in the big world. And if you were a student-Raggi at -- where was I? It was a place in Virginia. So you're talking to one group of people and you're reading this telegram to them and you're saying wake up, wake up. The impact was quite limited, quite personal. And, you know, the Riegner telegram of 1942 became such a big sensation later as proof that we had evidence and everybody chose to bury it. Wyman in his book talks about the fact that the State Department didn't want it transmitted to anybody, they wanted it just kept secret. They were afraid of what impact it would make and so indeed it didn't make any for a long time. But Wise had it. We his students had it. We tried to get it out. I don't know when it hit the press.

Q: How did Wise see his own role?

A: I don't think he stood still long enough to see his own role. He was in constant motion. He was in furious motion. And the fact that he would meet us every Thursday morning at 11:00 o'clock week after week after week, year after year meant that that was a holy moment for him, a crucial moment. If you can transmit something to your students then at least your mortality becomes less important. If you can't transmit anything to anybody and it's all bottled up in you, then it's dreadful that you are going to die with that. But he never had a sense of dying. He was vigorous and always moving, speaking outListen, he was the prime spokesman to the non Jewish world not just to the Jewish world. In the first half of the 20th century every clergyman in this country knew the name of Stephen Wise. And so his satisfactions came from that. Toward the end he developed cancer in the throat and died in '49 never having set foot on the sovereign soil of the State of Israel. At the very end I remember seeing him once and he said that was the greatest tragedy of his life. He spent his whole life working for the cause of Zionism and when it reached its fruition he never had the joy and the glory of setting foot on that soil.

Q: Let's go back to '42.

A: Okay.

Q: You then finished -- this was the Jewish Institute of Religion?

A: Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. Later after he died in Cincinnati, I think it was still Nelson Glick who was the president out there, came and pushed for the merger. Some of us fought against the merger. We had a different conception of what the reform movement was then they did. Rabbi Morton Berman of Chicago, I remember, and Rabbi Philip Bernstein of Rochester, those were two of my very close friends. They were a few years ahead of me, a few years older than I was, but still we became very friendly. We

fought the merger unsuccessfully, because Wise dead and no fund-raising -- he was the prime fund-raiser, he kept it going. So the merger took place. We scattered. I left. I was graduated and went out to Denver in '43. Wise said to me, you go to Denver. Wise used to think that if he could place a man in a pulpit somewhere that he would then have a right to go to that man and to do some fund-raising in that congregation in support of the alma mater, the school you went to. So he was always desperately seeking good congregational placements. Well, this was a congregation out there that had a thousand family memberships in 1943. The congregation was older than the State of Colorado. Colorado came into the Union in 1876. Centennial State, that's the name of the book *Centennial* that what's his name wrote, Michener. The congregation was 1874. It was started by Simon Guggenheim, later Senator Guggenheim, American Mining and Smelting Company, a powerful, big German classical reform (Temple). So Wise pushed me as, I guess one of his favorite sons, into that congregation. Stay there and we'll always then have a foot in the door.

Q: You went out to Denver, what happened then?

A: Well, I had a lovely year there, fighting hard with the congregation. Their previous rabbi, also named Friedman, had been there for 50 years and taught then anti-Zionism, anti-Hebrew, anti-Bar Mitzvah, anti-Oriental ceremonials like putting on a hat, etcetera, etcetera. 50 years, two generations, I couldn't dream of upsetting that in one year, but I got close to it, split the congregation. I said why don't you guys go off and be homogeneous in your anti-Zionism, I'm going to take this congregation and turn it around. So you're going to be listening to stuff that's going to irritate you, and your presence out there in front is going to irritate me, so take a Safer Torah and goodbye. Today Denver has two big, big strong reform temples. The anti group has long since come back. So I think I did a good thing. That was the year. And then I went to the Army.

Q: Let's talk for a little bit about the American Jewish Community at that point from the vantage point of Denver. You've already mentioned one division between Zionism and non Zionism.

A: Yes.

Q: And you've mentioned a second division between an activism that Wise was pushing for in a much more conservative posture of don't rock the boat or something like that. How did you experience the division of the Denver Jewish Community during the year 1943 which after all was the height of the holocaust?

A: I'm not sure what you mean by how did I experience the division. I exacerbated the division inside the temple by splitting it. And on the basis of this ideological definition of Zionism as being compatible with reformed Judaism, '43 was the crucial year in which the Central Conference of American Rabbis passed a vote on the resolution "Is reform

Judaism compatible with Zionism." That's the way the resolution was framed and the votes were taken, roll call vote name by name by name by name. You had to stand up, it was not a secret ballot. The vote was three to one in favor of that resolution. Yes, these two ideologies are perfectly compatible, three to one, 300 to 100. And the 100 guys went off and formed the American Council for Judaism, the anti-Zionist organization. The 300 guys controlled the future growth of the reform movement. But it wasn't only on the Zionist issue, it was on the issue of ritual. What is a Bar Mitzvah? What a silly, stupid thing. That boy isn't a man at the age of 13. We do not have Bar Mitzvahs. Well, and that was the practice out in Cincinnati. That's the way those graduates were being taught. Our graduates were pushing greater ritual observance, so we were accused of being Orthodox. Well, in order to validate that accusation which I thought was the ironic way to handle the whole thing, my best friend in town was a Rabbi Manuel Lederman who was the Orthodox rabbi in town. It used to delight my supporters when they would see the two of us walking down the street together. It used to infuriate my enemies and gave them visible proof that I was a traitor to the reform movement. We were friends all our lives. And his son, Paul, who lives in Jerusalem now, I still see once in a while.

Q: In Denver was there a move for political activism at that point on behalf of the European Jews?

A: No, there was a move on behalf of Zionism. You know the accusation which is made against Ben Gurion himself and all the Palestinian-centered Zionist officials, that they didn't pay much attention to the holocaust, they didn't express their outrage at it, they didn't do very much except the Haganah, the military arm of the Jewish agency which tried to do something about it because, and these are the theories, because the Zionist leaders felt that the battle over saving Jewish life in Europe was lost, but that the battle for creating a state which would harbor whoever would be left alive had yet to be won. So of the two battles, why fight the one which is already hopeless, you must fight the one which contains the hope for the future. Now that was pretty much Ben Gurion's philosophy. We talked about it many times and he wasn't cold, he wasn't calloused, his heart was as wounded as everybody's was, but he was a terribly practical and pragmatic person. And so he said I've got to concentrate on Zionism and building the state. I want a Jewish army. He was fighting for that as part of the Allied armies in order to stake a claim afterwards to be able to sit at the peace table.

Q: Which period of time did you first meet Ben Gurion?

A: Well, I first met him in Paris in '45. So in '43 I didn't yet know him, but I knew the Zionist concept that concentrated instead on trying to persuade the as yet unconvinced American Jewish public that that's where the future lie. 1943 was only a year after the Biltmore Resolution was passed. The Zionists themselves never dared use the word "state" until 1942. They were also groping their way toward the definition of their own movement. Courage finally prevailed. Again, Ben Gurion at the Biltmore Hotel, that's the name from which the resolution was drawn, had a big conference there. Ben Gurion

stood up and said we must pass a resolution that we are trying to create a country, a state. This was quite revolutionary in '42. In '43 in Denver we're all arguing about that. And I was preaching sermon after sermon about state and army, army and state, independence and sovereignty, these are the only answers to powerlessness. We're powerless without them.

Q: And why did you decide to leave Denver and join the Army?

A: Well because the fight was there. I mean the point is that I could continue trying to argue with these Jews in Denver, and I made tremendous strides with them and I knew I would win the fight or history would win the fight, not I, but I wanted to be where the history was. So 365 days to the day, like the prisoner scratches the nail on the cement wall of the cell when the calendar -- and my old friend Rabbi Bernstein, Phil Bernstein, was the Executive Secretary of the Chaplaincy Commission of the Jewish Welfare Board, which certified to the Army that this rabbi yes indeed is sane and etcetera and we recommend that you take him and commission him First Lieutenant. I think it was \$1,000.00 a month. That was better than the \$25.00, which was the last offer I had.

Q: That was \$1,000.00 a month?

A: Yes.

Q: \$12,000.00 a year?

A: Sure.

Q: In '45?

A: Sure. What do you think I was being paid in the congregation? \$75.00 a week, \$75.00 a week, \$3,600.00 a year. So Army pay was fabulous, it was great. \$3,600.00 a year. The Army was the Mecca. And then you go through the process. You go to a chaplaincy school in Fort Devens? in Massachusetts. You go to an infantry training regiment in Camp Blanding in Florida. And then you are assigned -- I was assigned as an infantry chaplain and you get -- we sailed from Boston and were put into a replacement depot up in Belgium in a little town called Namur. And then you get assigned to a regiment. I was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division which was part of the Third Army which was General Patton. They were fighting over in Germany. We were in this depot in Belgium. So then I was in already and feeling less strange about a uniform and saluting and shooting and all that stuff.

Q: This was when?

A: '45, spring of '45. I mentioned Namur. I have to tell you a story. This was a small town in Belgium and we are in a big camp outside of town and thousands of officers being

shuffled around and it's paperwork and that takes (x) number of weeks before everybody gets sorted out. So one day I was walking through this little village, hardly more than a village, and I see a store front with a Magen David on the window.

Q: Jewish star?

A: Yes. A Star of David, yes. Well, okay, wow, what's this! I went past it a number of times until one day I saw that it was open and there were people inside. I walked in and in the second room, in the back and not visible to the street, I realized that this was a synagogue. There was a little Ark and over the Ark there was a picture of a catholic priest with a collar and no name, no designation. So I found one old man there who was sort of the caretaker and he told me the story. What are you doing over the Holy Ark, this catholic priest? Well, his name is Father Andre and we respect him because he saved so many Jewish lives, and the story pours out. The Gestapo headquarters in Namur was in a building that was right next to the church, and in the back of the church was where the priest was living and he had his bedroom and he had a kitchen, and the Gestapo officers, many of whom are catholic, half the population of Germany, many of whom used to come to sit and drink wine with the priest. And the priest figured that his bedroom next door to this kitchen was the safest place to hide Jews. And he was one on the network of an underground railroad that was passing Jews through town trying to get them -- the ultimate safest destination was Portugal, neutral country, so it was always moving south. Two Jews, four Jews in his bed, under his bed, in the big wardrobe. Four Gestapo officers, five meters, ten feet away. Risky! I mean the material that movie pictures are made out of. Not a single Jew was caught. Crazy things would happen. Four kids would show up at the back door. He had to excuse himself, run, take them, push them under the bed, go back to the Gestapo guys. Never a problem, never a failure, never a death. Hundreds of Jews were saved going through his bedroom. When it was all over they decided they wanted -- the few remaining Jews wanted to give him a present so they bought him a new bed to replace his bed which had gotten so badly smashed in, which he had never slept for two years. And put his picture up over the Ark. And that was the first time I ever learned about "Hasidei Umoth Ha'olam," the righteous Gentiles of the world. And more and more today we're beginning to hear about them, and he was one.

Q: What did you know of the Holocaust in '43, '44, '45?

A: Auschwitz was at its height in '44 and '45. Treblinka, '43 after the ghetto, that was the end of it, so Treblinka was at its height '42, '43. Sobibor, Etc., all of them. '43, '44, '45, they were at the height of production. So when you say what did I know about it, I knew those facts. I knew the facts that the Americans had refused and the British had refused bombing Auschwitz even though both Air Forces were over-flying the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania which were about ten minutes of flying time away from Auschwitz. And they were using the excuse that they did not want to jeopardize Allied equipment and manpower. But it was an excuse, they were already flying past Ploesti, they could have. This just increased the sense of powerlessness. We can't convince anybody so we're

going to have to do this ourselves. And the "this" has to be a firm determination to get the state and get back into a situation of power over our own destiny. But there was nothing that could be done about it.

Q: You were a chaplain, when did you first encounter the survivors of the Holocaust?

A: Dachau was liberated. I say Dachau because the division that I was with was down in southern Germany and we were at that time posted over in a little town called Wasserburg am Inn which was between Munich and Salzburg. Dachau was right outside of Munich. Dachau was liberated by the 42nd Division, I would say about May of '45, okay.

Q: April 29th.

A: April 29th, okay. It's good to have a real expert here. Now, the first encounter I had with refugees was shortly thereafter, some matter of days or weeks. From Munich south, all through Bavaria were a whole network of underground German factories that were producing goods for the Army, everything from simple bullets to very complicated Howitzers. It was all done with slave labor. These people emerged. They were wondering around the roads and forests and the lakes. It's heavily wooded area, and heavily infiltrated with lots of small lakes. I used to take trucks out of the motor pool, 9th Division motor pool and start driving on these small country roads looking for people and determining that they were Jews. The process is very simple, you just drop their trousers and that's that. And putting them into the trucks and trying to find a place where I could gather them and (a) let them be safe, and (b) get some food in and get some DDT powder and get some simple medicines. Penicillin had just been invented but it was ferociously expensive and available only for syphilis. That's when I first encountered them. And I remember an episode where we were driving down and we had about a half a load of people and we saw two children on the side of the road, this just remains locked in my head, and I jumped out and I wanted to talk to the children. You talk to them in a combination of German or Yiddish or Hebrew. You find one of those three languages would work. But the kids were frightened. They saw a soldier in a uniform and they started to run across the field and it's a little boy and a little girl, and they're holding hands and they're running and they're stumbling. And I didn't want to threaten them by running faster than they were, so I kind of followed them and they were gasping and they were crying, and finally they ran out of steam and they stopped, and so I stopped. After I got my arms around them and I tried to explain to them and I pointed to the chaplain's insignia on the uniform which was a little Ten Commandments thing and they quieted down. I scooped up the two kids, they were about 10 or 11 years old, and I scooped up the kids and put them in the truck. But the fear was so palpable. And whatever experience they had been through was so utterly real that they were shocked out of any knowledge of their own names, where they came from, what they were doing there. I mean it was like total amnesia. And there was obviously already a medical condition; they could not remember their own names. It was the anonymity of those two survivors, they didn't

know who they were, what happened to them, where they came from that really impacted me. Because I don't understand the six million and I don't understand the one and a half million children or whatever the number is, but two children that's real, that's real. And I said to myself, every single one such we have to try to save and rescue. What's dead is dead. It's all gone. It's ashes, and it's blown off in the wind. But what's living we can't leave them wondering around Europe. And that's what I did for the next two and a half years. So I still remember it. So that was the first encounter. And when you would get a truck full of 50 people, then the trick is to find some structure with four walls and a roof. So I remember once we would find a barn that had three walls, and you would find an abandoned airfield with a hangar. You would find something. I remember once I found a city hall in a small German town. It was a beautiful building in perfect shape, fully occupied by German clerks, all busy working at the typewriters, and I said hey this is a great building. Well, a Colt .45 is a heavy piece of equipment. You turn it around and hit the butt on the table and you can break the table. So a few knocks like that got the attention of the Burgermeister. It was a city hall so he's there, upstairs, second floor. And in nice German I told him this house was now beschlagnamt, this was requisitioned in the name of the United States Army. I had no more authority to do that than you do, than you would have, but the uniform was its own authority and the .45 was its own authority. So that, okay, I want this place empty and I want it "sauber" and clean and I want it ready tomorrow morning and everybody out I am bringing in some "Fluechtlinge," refugees. He doesn't have to know who they are. And, you know, sure enough tomorrow morning it was clean, it was empty, it was available, it was warm. He had some wood in the back for a wood stove, and 50 Jews had -- now, this is called a camp. I mean you've got to designate it. You've got a location for it, you give it a name, it's got a population. And to cut a long story short by the time we got all through there were 64 locations in Germany, another six or eight in Austria, and even two in Italy, all where the American Army was housing quarter of a million people. The starting number that I was aware of when Dachau was liberated, that were a few months earlier, was 35,000 Jews alive on German soil either in camp, liberated from camps or from slave labor in German factories, 35,000. That number was determined by a fellow named Abraham Klausner, a chaplain who was with the forces that got into Dachau right after the camp was liberated.

Q: You used the word "we," who is we? So far you've only described operating really on your own intuition.

A: Yes.

Q: When did it get organized?

A: Okay. It got organized somewhere in a higher echelon unbeknownst to me, probably three or four years earlier because the Haganah organized it and it was called Aliyah Bet. Aliyah Bet meant --

Q: Haganah was?

A: Haganah was the military arm of the Jewish Agency, underground Jewish self-government while the British are in mandatory control of the country. So you have an underground government administering the affairs of the population, 600,000 Jews in the Yishuv, and that underground government had an underground army. And at its height the Haganah had about 25,000 men and women. Just so you should compare it to the other two underground organizations, the Irgun which was Begin's organization had about 3,000 people, and the Stern Gang, which was Shamir's organization had about 300 people, so that gives you a scale. Now, the Haganah organized two departments to work outside of Palestine. One was called Aliyah Bet, which obviously is different what what, from Aliyah Aleph. Aliyah means migration to Israel or Palestine. Aleph is number 1, Bet is number 2. Number 1 is legitimate, legal. It's what the British permitted. The British permitted 1,500 Jews per month to receive certificates to enter Palestine. Well, at 1,500 a month we were going to be many, many, many decades cleaning up what the remnant was in Europe. Therefore Aliyah Bet, method number 2, illegal, was somebody going into Europe, organizing groups of people, sending ships in to try to take these people to Palestine against the wishes of the British or anybody else who might try to stop them, including the Nazis. They started earlier in the game. They were taking ships out of Rumanian port, for instance Constanza on the Black Sea, in '41, in '42. These were efforts that were so desperate and so futile, a few hundred here, a few hundred there, and so sad in the ending, many of those ships sunk, many of the people drowned. So that was the start of the whole thing. But when the war ended in '45 the Haganah guys came in to Europe in what was for them force, maybe as many as 100, and it might have been 150, I'm never sure of the whole number, and they recruited me. That's the "we."

Q: Well, how did they recruit you?

A: Oh, it's a crazy story. I was in a little town down in Bavaria called Bad Tolz and the telephone rings and there is a lady on the phone, and I was 27 years old, unmarried, and this lady invites me to come to see her in her hotel room in the Royal Monceau Hotel in Paris. So wouldn't you go, I mean under those conditions? When we finally met face to face I was quickly disabused of all such ulterior motives on my part and we got back to good old idealism. She said that she had heard what I was doing and she wanted me to come to meet her and she wanted me to -- she wanted to talk to me. That was the phone conversation. I agreed. I got orders and went a few days later. The British flag was hanging from the front of that hotel. It was right near the Etoile, Avenue Foch. What's the British flag doing on this hotel? She answers the door, she keeps me waiting out in the hall. She says will you work for us. So your question "we." Will you work for us. Who is us? She says the Haganah. Now, sometimes in life you make decisions on the basis of careful evaluation of all the fact involved. There were no facts here and you operated by intuition. And something told me to say yes and I said yes and it changed my life. She kind of went across the room, I'm still out in the hall, but I can see she goes to the door at the far end of the living room. A short white-haired man comes out, walks across. She says to him, Friedman will work for us. He comes over, shakes hands with me, says thank

you, turns around and walked out, and I didn't see him for a year. Aside from the fact that I didn't know who he was at the moment. So then she said that's Mr. David Ben Gurion, and I said who's he. I didn't connect in my mind that this was the Ben Gurion who is the head of the Jewish Agency. He's supposed to be in Jerusalem or in jail in Rhodesia somewhere where they scooped up everybody when the British did that Black Shabbat. No, no she says, that's Mr. Ben Gurion. I said what's he doing here in the British hotel? So she said you never read Poe. The purloined letter is right under your nose, and that's the safest place to put it. Beautiful. So then I sat down and I said okay, and she gave me a cup of coffee and I took off my coat, and what have I committed myself to? Okay, well what you were doing down in the woods in southern Bavaria is fine, that's one thing, but we need you, you've got to go to Berlin, you've got to get yourself settled there. You get a big house, you get six trucks in the backyard, you get enough gas tickets for a year, you're going to run the route from Stettin up on the Polish border, north almost up to the Baltic, way northeast of Berlin, Stettin down to Berlin. I said that's all Russian territory. Berlin is an island in the middle of the Russian zone of Germany. She said that's right. I said we're going to run trucks for 150 miles through the Russian zone, across the Polish-Russian border, come down through the Russian zone to Berlin. She said that's it, that's what you're going to do. I said that's what I'm going to do. She said well, we'll send over some Chayalim, some soldiers from the Palestine Brigade who are on bivouac over in Belgium. The British didn't want them to go back to Palestine. These were 30,000 guys, well armed and well experienced in infantry warfare, which by no means did the British want to have in Palestine. So they were keeping them there in Belgium doing nothing. So we'll send you 12 fellows and they'll ride the trucks with you back and forth.

Q: Let me see if I understand this for a moment. You are at this point a soldier in the United States Army?

A: A captain in the United States Army, yes sir.

Q: So how do you move to Berlin and what do you do?

A: Well, I said to her -- she said I don't care how you do it, it's not my business, you get yourself transferred to Berlin. If you don't know any of the ropes of your own Army by now then what good are you going to be to us. I mean she was sort of mocking even. She said don't bother me with these details. I had to get myself transferred to Berlin Headquarters Command. There was one stroke of luck. There was a guy occupying that post who was ready to be de-mobilized and go home. His name was Joseph Shubo, an Orthodox Rabbi from Boston. And Joe Shubo was just leaving, so I put in an application to take his place because we didn't need a chaplain in the 9th Infantry Division anymore, we needed somebody up in Berlin Headquarters Command. The personnel department bought it, okay. So I was officially transferred to Berlin. Now, as far as a house is concerned, we found in Dahlem in a very lovely residential section of Berlin a nice big house relatively undestroyed. The big holes in the roof, we got them repaired. One whole back wall knocked out, we fixed it up. This is easy, you know. You pick up craftsmen

and bricks and cement all inside your own Army headquarters. And I stole the trucks from the motor pool, that's relatively easy if you want to take the risk. And I stole the gas tickets, that's easy if you want to take the risk. And I called her in Paris and I said okay send -- so the Chevrah came over and they lived in the house. It was called the Jewish Chaplain's Center. On the military side there were 2,000 Jewish troops in the city of Berlin in four armies.

Q: The American, the British, the French?

A: American, British, French, Russian. Did you ever see that old movie "Four Men in a Jeep?" The patrolling of the city was done with the four soldiers of the four Allied Armies. It was called the Allierte Kommandatur, the Allied Command. Okay, and the reason we knew what there was because when the Sader came now, the first Sader after freedom was in 1946, Passover, so we started to prepare for it, we wound up having 2,000 guys in the Schoeneberg Rathaus for Seder, the first Seder in freedom. The same building from which Kennedy once came and spoke from the balcony, "Ich Bin ein Berliner," "I'm a Berliner," he was sympathizing with the German population. That was the same hall in which we had the Seder. And so there was a big group of troops from whom to draw what I needed which was cigarettes. That's why we called it the Jewish Chaplain's Center for the Allied Command of Berlin. It wasn't just the Americans.

Q: These soldiers, your groups that you were able to draw from clearly cooperated. How did Jewish soldiers feel being in Germany, what was going through the minds of some of the people you were dealing with on a professional basis in the military life?

A: Well, you know, how do they feel about being in Germany? Those who were consciously Jewish, and that was not all of them by any means, you'd be surprised. Even, you know, we talk about assimilation today, 1992, let me tell you something, assimilation was already beginning to take its toll in 1945. People who were not denying that they were Jews, but not consciously caring Jews. They didn't have any feeling. See, Germans to them were the enemy. Nazis were the enemy. Germans were exploitable. A carton of cigarettes would buy you a Leica camera. A carton of cigarettes cost 70 cents in the PX, no tax.

Q: What about the Jews who were consciously Jews?

A: Oh, so they were distraught and they were upset. They knew because the Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* was printing the whole story of all the revelations. Eisenhower visited the camp with his chief of staff, Walter Biddle Smith, that's on the front page of *Stars and Stripes*. And Eisenhower says this is shocking and this is awful, and there is a long story on the front page, and a long story inside. And the guys who cared read those stories and they were constantly in the Army indoctrination lectures that they listened to once every week. They heard everything, they knew it. And the ones who cared were distraught. And I used to try to, again do what I did all the time, turn their

thinking away from the negative and on to the positive because they didn't yet make the connection. And I found that the way that you got them to understand was to demand something of them. If you don't demand anything of people they don't respond. Nobody lines up in the window, at the window, to volunteer. When you do demand, when you ask people suddenly realize there's a sense of discipline somewhere. Somewhere somebody is planning something and needs your help. And that always evokes a response.

Q: Let's use this perfect to break and change tapes.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

A: Okay.

Q: They recruited some people from left field.

A: Well, I'm glad you're here.

Q: That's why I pushed on the Riegner thing and on the Wise thing.

A: No, good, good, good.

Q: Because now we have -- I mean I already see how it's usable.

A: Wonderful.

Q: So we'll go with that.

A: Okay.

Q: Let me just catch you up before we begin. Yes, okay, let's catch up for one second. We're talking about now your double life, you were demanding things of the troops.

A: Yes.

Q: What did you demand of them?

A: Of the troops?

Q: Yes.

A: The specific thing that I needed in order to keep that operation going, the operation of bringing people in from Stettin down to Berlin, the specific thing I needed was cigarettes. Cigarettes was the currency of the black market, it was the currency of choice. A package of cigarettes was worth \$15.00. A carton, ten packs, worth \$150.00.

Q: And you were buying it for what?

A: I wasn't buying it. How would you possibly buy it? That's what it was worth. If you paid 60 or 70 cents in the PX for a carton of cigarettes and you could sell it for \$150.00, and I came along and I said to you "Soldier, I need a carton of cigarettes," it costs me one carton per Jew. Now, I'm running six trucks every night, 50 people on a truck, that's 300 people.

Q: You sold this to soldiers?

A: Certainly. To the ones who cared. I got 300 people a night. I've got to pay 100, 300 cartons of cigarettes, \$150.00 a carton, that should be that's \$45,000.00 worth of cigarettes every single night, every single night. We used to leave Berlin at dusk. It took about until midnight to get up to Stettin, that 150 miles. We loaded in about ten minutes. The Haganah guys on the Polish side of the line had their people all ready, 300 people. If we had 320 we took 320. If we had to throw away the baggage, the poor crumbling pieces, suitcase, a valise, that mostly had in it things like photographs, diaries, what did you carry? You didn't carry an extra pair of socks or underwear. We used to throw the baggage overboard to get three more people on. Kind of ruthless. And then leaving there at about midnight, getting back into Berlin by dawn, so this was an operation that took place at night totally. I said now this is what I need, and so you've got to give me a carton of cigarettes. I've got to get 300 cartons a night prepared. I need thousands of cartons of cigarettes. So if the guy paid 70 cents for it, but he was giving me \$150.00 because if he took and he sold that on the black market even for currency, not for a Leica, a set of china, he sold it for currency, occupation Marks, go right over to the Army post office, buy a money order in U.S. Dollars, send that money order home to his wife or his mother or whatever to put it in the bank for him, every single week if he didn't smoke he was saving \$150.00. So for him to give that to me was an authentic large gift. My father used to send me thousands of cartons of cigarettes a week which he collected from his shul, from B'nai Jacob up in New Haven. And I had the postal inspectors on my doorstep at the Chaplain's Center because this is cash and they want to know what are you doing with it, Chaplain. And I'd say if you guys find me doing anything illegal with it then you arrest me. Until that time do me a favor and don't worry about it. Well, you know there's a certain power of the cloth, you know, that works, and so I took advantage of it.

Q: Clearly people knew about it?

A: I didn't get the question?

Q: Clearly people knew, people knew what you were doing.

A: Of course.

Q: You couldn't keep an operation like this concealed.

A: No, no, no. And I always adopted the -- General Barker was the commanding officer in the Berlin Headquarters Command, American General. I told him. I always adopted the policy of telling the top echelon, the very top of any given Army unit, because if the guy at the top knows and if he decides to be mean about it, he can shut you down. And if he decides to be benevolent about it he just passes word down the line to leave you alone. And the Army is absolutely the most rigid hierarchy in the world and if you turn that to your use.

Q: Tell me about walking into the general and telling him you were working for an underground organization to save Jewish lives?

A: I never said underground. That word wasn't necessary.

Q: Talk about the conversation, tell me about the conversation?

A: Well, the conversation by the way was not only with him in Berlin, I'll jump ahead and say later on down in Frankfurt it was with General McNarney who succeeded Eisenhower, and it was with General Lucius Clay who succeeded McNarney. So all down the line I always went to the top. How do you do it? General, you know about the problem of what Hitler did to the Jews? Yes. You know about the fact that there is a remnant of refugees, wanderers, survivors here in Europe?

Q: You were using the language roughly Jews. Were survivors introduced at that point?

A: Sure, people who survived Hitler, people who survived Hitler. Every camp that was liberated. There were a lot of dead corpses around, but there were people who walked out of there alive and they survived. So we used the word then, sure. As a matter of fact I used to teach them the Hebrew "She'erit Hapletah," the surviving remnant of the -- now, these people want to go home. The General says yes, well all these displaced persons they all got to go home. There were 10 million of them and the Army is repatriating all of them. Right, General, the Army is repatriating all of them, but there is one group that the Army doesn't know what to do with and that's the Jews because they have no home. They're not going to go back to Poland. If you talk citizenship, that you're going to repatriate people according to their citizenship, if it's a Belgium slave laborer or a French or a Norwegian or a Dane or anybody who has been conquered by the Nazis, held as a slave laborer you repatriate him back to his original home. Jews are not going back to their original homes, all of which are cemeteries. So the Army isn't going to repatriate Jews to remain in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, where do all these people want to go? So sometimes the Army guy knows enough to say well, I understand they all want to go to Palestine. And if he doesn't know that he says, well where do they want to go. So you tell him, and then you go off on the Zionist story. The American Army didn't have any more sympathy for the British Army than Britains had for Americans. So you painted the British as the bad guys who were trying to prevent these people from going home, and you depict home as something that every Bible-loving American, you're not talking to Jews, you are talking to Protestants largely and some Catholics. Catholics are mostly urban and not as well acquainted with the Bible, Biblical impulse, as rural or small town Protestants. And so you've got his sympathy. I never once ran into an inimical officer of high rank, never once. I've run into them on lower ranks where I'm not discussing anything with them, but I'm listening to kind of a, you know, sort of profane kind of vulgar anti-semitism, but I always discounted that, it didn't bother me.

Q: So you tell them about the Jews want to go home?

A: And therefore, and therefore we are collecting them. Who is we? Well, there's an organization of Palestinians that's collecting, collecting the means. They're moving from east. Don't forget that the Russians took hundreds of thousands of Jews eastward as the Nazi armies moved eastward, okay. The Russians for their own reasons, not altruistic, they're not pro-semitic, Stalin didn't love Jews, but this was maybe a half a million or to a million people whom he used as labor out beyond the Urals in Central Asia cutting timber mostly, sending back railroad ties. Well, okay, the war is over. Three quarters of them are dead of starvation and hunger and over-work, but there is a good chunk of hundreds of thousands. How can I have brought them from as far out as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and Turkestan, moving them westward, all the time westward toward where the American Army was in Germany and in Austria. So I said there is an organization of Palestinians that is trying to round up these people and bring them together because if you get them all collected someplace you can handle them easier. I mean that's a very clear approach to a mechanistically-minded Army General. That's how he thinks anyhow. So I said now there is a whole -- they've come as far west as the border of Germany and a bunch of them are up in a town called Stettin, that's the collecting point, and at that point these Palestinian guys can't come into the Russian zone of Germany or the American zone of Germany, so there are some of us here who are helping them. Now, if he wants to be really very very GI, well are you doing this at the expense of your Army duties? No, sir. No, sir. I'm running my services, I've got 700, 800 guys coming every Friday night, every Saturday morning. Why don't you come over, General, and you'll read the Torah portion of the week. And okay, okay, you keep doing a good job. So what are you telling me all this for? I said well, look I think you ought to know it because it's happening in your command, in your territory for which you are responsible. There might come an episode where the Russians will raise hell with a truckload of refugees, and you don't want to be caught short not knowing what's going on. Right, good, thanks. I love a guy who keeps me informed. Again, straight Army mentality. So, yes, and that policy always paid off. It paid off in hundreds of ways. It paid off with 2,000 calories per day from the Army to every DP in every camp in Germany and Austria. And the JDC Joint Distribution Committee brought in supplementary rations of 1,200 so the DP who had been starved for years, the displaced person, is eating now 3,200 calories a day, great. Most of it Army food. And so every night we'd run up there and take our load and --

Q: You would go with them every night?

A: Oh, no. I couldn't go every night, but once a week. Because most of the time I was hustling for the cigarettes.

Q: Who would be your drivers?

A: The Palestinian guys, the Chayalim, with one driver and one guy running shotgun, so it's

two fellows on each truck, so that's the 12. She said get six trucks. So I have six trucks and 12 guys and they were on every night. Every once in a while I get some really gung ho American sergeant, Jewish guy, and he'd say hey I want to ride the truck. I'd say listen, you know, it's your tachat, and I'm not going to translate that.

Q: The exterior.

A: Yes, your exterior, anything happens, buddy, I can't help you. So he'd come on board, you know, with his carbine or his M-1 and he'd feel that he as doing -- and he was, he was guarding 50 people. Our drivers, we had wonderful, wonderful cooperation from Jewish guys in the Quartermaster pool. They were all good drivers. Enough good drivers so that it was a delight to have them. Well, you know, you run 300 people a night, a night, a night, every night and well we ran almost 100,000 people through Berlin that way. But when you bring them in you've got a problem what do you do with them. And not only how do you handle them, but you've got to get them out because Berlin is an island don't forget. So that was all part of the game. We opened two camps in Berlin. One was at Schlattensee out near Wannsee, southeastern part of the city, and one was at Templehof Airdrome, right on the airfield. We had 10,000 people in the Schlattensee camp and 5,000 people in the Templehof camp, so I had places for 15,000 people.

Q: Where were you getting 300 cartons of cigarettes a night?

A: I'm getting it from the GIs, I'm getting it from my father, but the bulk finally came in from the JDC. The first port in Europe that opened up where you could get massive shipments in --

Q: The JDC is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee?

A: American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, that's a long name, but the short name is "the Joint," the Joint. A marvelous organization, 75 or 85 years old. I don't know how old it is. It goes back to World War I. Brilliant professionalism. If I were asked to describe it in two words "Brilliant professionalism." No ego gets in the way. No politics get in the way. Just plain what is the task, how shall we do it most efficiently and most cheaply, and don't use the excuse that you haven't got the money. Define the task, figure out the methodology, figure out the cost and the UJA supplies the JDC with the money. And there never was an insufficiency, there never was an argument.

Q: So the Joint shipped in the cigarettes?

A: Car loads, freight car loads. Then I was free. Antwerp opened up. The first port ships came into Antwerp. Trains were already working through Belgium up to Bremerhaven. From Bremerhaven down to Berlin. And I got all the cigarettes I needed. And that's what kept it going. My improvisation was at the beginning. But when Antwerp opened and I got in touch with the Joint and they immediately responded.

Q: And they knew what you were doing?

A: The director of the Joint was a fellow by the name of Schwartz, Doctor Joseph Schwartz, and he was working hand in glove with the Haganah who was paying for the whole operation. It wasn't just this one little bit of the cigarettes. If you had a hundred Palestinian guys, the Haganah back in Jerusalem didn't have any money. The Joint was financing that whole thing. Throwing 1,200 calories per person per day into the camps was -- in the campaign the UJA campaign in the United States, of 1946, in 1947, more UJA money was being given to the Joint for use in the camps among this population than was being given to the Jewish Agency for work in Palestine because the greater need was there in Europe in those two years. By 1948 it shifted and the greater share of the money was going to the Palestine operation, then Israel. So that was Berlin and that was the camp at Schlattensee and that was the camp at Templehof, and then the trick always was to organize trainloads to go out of Berlin southward through the Russian zone and come down to Frankfurt which was in the American zone, and go into one of the 64 permanent camps that were in the American zone and there catch your breath and sort out whom you wanted to send further south to the Mediterranean to the French and Italian Riviera, both of them, where the Haganah ships came in to take the people who were willing to run the risk of the British gauntlet and most of whom were caught out on the high seas in contravention of international law, it didn't make any difference. And the people were put by the British on the island of Cyprus which became an end goal in itself because it's only eight hours to Haifa. So the people are on Cyprus and the ship is being collected and lined up in the port of Haifa. Now, I never saw it with my own eyes, but I saw a photograph, 57 vessels caught by the British lined up there. They were old tramp steamers, Greek ships and Turkish ships.

Q: How many of your colleagues, did you speak to other chaplains, were some of your colleagues involved, did you do any recruiting for the Haganah yourself?

A: No, I didn't do any recruiting. And the answer is yes I did speak. There were only a few. There was a fellow who was for a long time a rabbi in this town, in Washington, Eugene Lippman, a good guy. He was in on it with us. He worked over on the Czechoslovak border, on what we call the southern route. Stettin, Berlin, was the northern route. The southern route was from a town in lower Silesia, part of Poland, across Nochood, across to a town called Klaus?? in Czechoslovakia, to Prague, all the way eastward over to about Bratislava in Hungary, westward back to Vienna, Vienna to Munich. That was the southern route. Lippman worked the southern route. He was wonderful. Who else was? I've got a fellow by the name of Meyer Abramowitz, a conservative rabbi, now retired in Miami. He followed me in Berlin. We had closed the route down by then. He didn't have that much to do, but he maintained a large camp population, and later on he moved down to Italy to work in camps for the JDC. Married his wife, a DP lady from a camp in Italy. So Mike was in, Mike Abramowitz was in it. Eugene Lippman was in it. Klausner was in it at the beginning, not for long, but for a few months. There were another dozen men

whose names I don't remember who were demobilized, whom we re-recruited to come back because on that southern route, which I described, we wanted to put a chaplain on every train of 1,000 people. A Jewish chaplain riding that train from Prague to Bratislava, to Vienna to Munich. All kinds of episodes occurred, all kinds of interferences, all kinds of problems, all kinds of strikes from the people themselves, personal problems. One authoritative American Army officer on the train in uniform with his chaplain's insignia had a very sobering effect and a very salutary. So we didn't have the manpower, and the Army called back to active duty a dozen chaplains for a half year and we had the advantage of their services on that southern route. So I have to say they helped. I don't remember names. The first three guys I remember very well and very clearly. No, I didn't recruit because there was one, there were two fellows whose names I shall not mention who when I told them that we could use their help and asked them if they wanted to participate, they gave me such a chicken answer, we are here to serve the Army and we're not going to do anything else, we're not going to get mixes up in this business, this is political.

Q: And you felt no incompatibility between your Army service and this work?

A: No, it was a delightful synergy. It was wonderful. First of all it was good cover, and secondly every time I involved GIs in this thing, I was teaching a bunch of Jews about their responsibility. Come on, it was great. What am I going to do, give them lectures about VD. I mean or go visit in the stockade. I never was very good at that anyway.

Q: Did you visit the DP camps themselves?

A: Oh, come on. I was asked after the Berlin thing by a man whom I mentioned earlier, a rabbi by the name of Philip Bernstein who was a key figure. First he was the executive director, I told you, recruiting chaplains. All right, now we're not recruiting any more chaplains, but the commanding general in the German theatre beginning with Eisenhower himself, realized that he had to have at his disposal a person of high stature in the Jewish community to serve as his advisor on Jewish affairs. That was the bureaucratic name, title of the job. Because you're accumulating now thousands and thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of people, problems are going to develop, the Army commander says hey give me somebody here who can help me or without saying it, but on whom I can dump some of this stuff and I don't want to take the heat for it. I don't want to have the Army get into an adversarial position with these DPs. So there was a consultative arrangement agreed upon among five major Jewish organizations in the United States and the Department of War that whomever they would designate as a candidate whom they all agreed upon, the Army would designate that person, give him the simulated rank of a Two-Star General although he was a civilian and remained in civilian clothes, but for purposes of access in the Army Two-Star General puts him up there. You get two cartons of whiskey a month from the PX, and you get a certain kind of car, and you get a driver, and you can call up anybody and you can say this is advisor Bernstein calling and the fellow looks at the list and he sees advisor to General McNarney or General Clay, oh this

is a two-star guy, well you know, I've got to listen to him. Bernstein was brilliant. The first advisor was a chaplain, a man by the name of Judah Nadich, a conservative rabbi in New York. He remained with Eisenhower for about three months. Eisenhower went home, Nadich went home, okay. That's when the Army decided it better institutionalize this thing. Bernstein came and stayed, I don't know, a year and a half or something like that. Bernstein gets assigned to Army Headquarters which are in Frankfurt in the IG Farben building, a great German industrial combine, huge, huge headquarters building. Frankfurt bombed to pieces and this building didn't have a window broken because this building was designated prior and so informed the Air Force don't touch it. We've got to save something for eventual Army headquarters, okay. Bernstein's office was two offices away from General Clay. I mean literally, couldn't be closer. Bernstein called me in Berlin and he said hey listen, I don't know anything about the Army, Major-General Heichmoten, that doesn't mean anything to me, I am entitled to a military aid, I need you, will you come down to Frankfurt and be my military aid. And I said I will be happy to on one condition, that he understood that I have Haganah responsibilities.

Q: And you were able to say that directly over the phone and clearly?

A: Well, all Army, at his level, all phones are what are called secure. They're constantly tested electronically for taps and you didn't have the kind of surveillance by satellite where today you listen to every long distance phone conversation in the entire world. NSA here listens to every single long distance phone conversation it wants to. If you want to talk to your wife anywhere and you say you don't want your privacy invaded, they say oh well we didn't invade your privacy, I mean the satellite was not working over your district today. I mean let's not get into that. Technology wasn't advanced in those days. So he said well I don't know what that means but, you know, come on down and tell me. So I came down because I really liked him. We were intellectually close and spiritually close, we were on the same wavelength. That guy was as Zionist as I was from the day he was born. I came down and I explained it to him and he said well that's fine, I'm all in favor of that, just don't tell me about it. Because the theory always is if the superior officer doesn't know or it works on the principle of what's called "The need to know." Phil said, I have no need to know so don't tell me, so then I can't be guilty of making any mistakes and I won't have to lie or anything. Very good, good arrangement. But anything that was to help Palestine or Israel or the cause was fine. And so, yes we were in DP camps all the time. The DP population we decided should get itself with some kind of authoritative, authorized base. What does that mean? There was something in existence which had gotten started right after the war called the Central Committee of Liberated Jews, and then there was a huge fight as to the preposition. Liberated Jews of Germany, Liberated Jews in Germany. Now, those two words tell the whole ideological difference. So the fight raged and finally they settled on of course "in Germany," right. Central Conference [committee??] of Liberated Jews in Bavaria became broadened as the camp population grew and grew to "in Germany." We then arranged a ceremony in '46 for a charter of recognition to be granted by the United States Army to the Central Committee. And the ceremony was held at Headquarters, Farben building with a half a

dozen of the DPs who were the chief officers of the Central Committee and half a dozen Major-Generals and so forth, and the photograph exists where General McNarney and Rabbi Philip Bernstein are side by side signing the charter of recognition. Now, that meant that the officials of the Central Committee could travel on Army vehicles, it meant that they could -- quarter of a million Jews in the camps.

AT THIS POINT THERE IS APP. 1 MINUTE OF INTERVIEW MISSING

Q: Were you with Ben Gurion when he visited a DP camp?

A: I took him into one camp, yes I was. He was on his way to the 1st Zionist Congress that was being held after the war and he remembered me from the first episode even though I didn't know him at that time. So again I got a call from Paris from his bodyguard, a fellow by the name of Mordechai Circus (Zirkas?), who said Mr. Ben Gurion wants to come into Germany and will you get him the necessary pass etcetera, and he wants to visit a camp and you decide where. We had had a very terrible episode at a camp called Babenhausen which was near Stuttgart. Let's say either Jews from the northern route or the southern route a trainload of a thousand Jews comes in. And the trainload passed through Munich and comes up to Stuttgart and the train is on the track and their going to be put in this camp. Now, what is this camp? It's a former Russian POW, prisoner of war, camp maintained by the Nazi Army. As a prisoner of war camp the Nazis didn't care how they treated the Russians so there were no beds, there were no bunks, there were concrete floors with straw thrown on them, and totally encircled by a heavy chain link fence, barbed wire, guard towers, machine guns, heavy search lights, the whole apparatus that looked like a bloody extermination camp. I'll never forget it. The train comes around the curve, many cars, freight cars, the same kind of freight cars that were used, a thousand people on it. They've been on the train now three days. And they're being taken and they know by now through the grapevine that a DP camp in Germany was a place where it was not good, but if you had patience someday the problem was going to be solved, and if you kept your hope up. So they were not resisting the idea of going into a DP camp, but they resisted the idea of going into this camp which looked to them like an extermination camp. And the bloody officer who had been told to tear down the barbed wire, take down the guard towers, get some cots in there or some mattresses, none of it had been done. It was a typical bureaucratic slip-up, okay.

Q: Not malice, just --

A: No, not malice, just ineffectiveness. Sit down strike on the train. We're not going to get off these cars. And boy there were enough agitators among them who were exercising the right of freedom for the first time to talk about their own fate and they say we're not getting off, and, it didn't take three minutes before that mood froze. And I was there, at a new camp I like to see. When you asked the question before, I was in almost every one of those camps all the time traveling, working for Bernstein out of the advisor's office in Frankfurt. I set up a microphone alongside the track and tried to talk to these people.

Nothing doing.

Q: In what language, Yiddish?

A: Yiddish. Yes, Yiddish. I learned German in high school and in college. By the time my parents were married English was the language in the house, by the time I was born. So I didn't know any Yiddish, but I knew good German. And so every time I would appear before the DPs I would use German. One fine day an episode occurred which taught me a lesson. There was a little fellow sitting in the front row and he folds his arms like this and I can see he's annoyed. And I can hear him say in a low voice: "Red nicht kain Deitsch", "Don't speak German." I keep speaking German. A little bit louder he says "Ich forder a Yiddish wort", "I'm demanding a word from you in Yiddish." I don't pay any attention to him. Finally he stands up and he shouts: "Oder Ihr red Yiddish, oder ich laeuf arois fun dannen", he says "Either you're going to talk Yiddish or I'm going to run out of here." So that taught me a lesson. And I tried to twist my German around and ultimately I learned Yiddish. So, yes, talk on the microphone to the people on the train in Yiddish and nothing doing, nothing is happening. General Keys, a Lieutenant-General, Three-Star Commander of the Third Army, Patton's successor, comes out to the track. Nobody will ever believe this story, speaks in English over the -- I translate for him, and they see all the stars and all the fruit salad on the uniform and they know, you know, who he is, I've told them who he is. It doesn't make the slightest -- they were polite but. Colonel Ed Martin, the Catholic Chief Chaplain of the Third Army, a full Colonel, comes out. Nothing doing. Abe Heiman, a Major, the guy on our staff, the lawyer we had. The staff was three of us, Phil Bernstein, Abe Heiman and myself, nothing doing. Okay, the first night they sleep in the train. By the second day they're getting a little hungry. We pass food up and down the train and bring out a whole bunch of Army field kitchens to feed them. I mean that you could do with the snap of a finger. When the Army wants to cooperate it's easy. After enormous efforts in which they saw whole bunches of soldiers coming out with wire cutters cutting the barbed wire off, knocking down the towers, they saw it physically with their own eyes, and they realized they were not going into any kind of a trap, they dismounted from the train. That was the beginning of the camp. That is not designed to create good morale thereafter. That's the camp that I decided to take Ben Gurion to. So I said, Zirkes, you want me to take Ben Gurion to one camp, I'm going to take him to Babenhausen, but you have to tell him that that's a very problematic place. The episode of the initial strike took place some months earlier, but the mood in the camp is still lousy, it never did get repaired. So okay, it's all right, the old man has been in tough situations before. We come in, there are about 5,000 people in the camp, there is no auditorium, there is no place for 5,000 people to sit, they're standing in what was the stable where the horses were kept, a big huge room like an airplane hangar. There's a microphone, there is a wooden platform. Abe Heiman and I climb up on the platform with the old man and he stands there, and we introduce him. And there is a loud, cheerful, happy welcome because he, you know, he was a figure. And the camp chairman came up and said we want to tell you how we feel and started to talk about the fact that life here is not physically dangerous, but life here doesn't have any meaning, what are we doing

here? We are trying to teach the children in the school and we are trying to take care of the sick people and we tried to build a life and we have now our own camp police. They had bicycles and they had whistles and they had arm bands, they kept order. It was a sign of independence. We're doing everything we can, but it's all nothing. And so you're coming here today brings us the greatest hope in the world and we hope you have something to tell us. He stood up and he started to talk about what he was trying to build in Palestine and what the efforts were that were being made on the great international political scene with the British and the Americans the Commission of Inquiry and somebody else. "Noch a mol a Commission", another time a Commission of Inquiry, who needs it. You know, we got a little heckling from the audience. But he tried to explain that there was a major push on in historic terms to get a state created and a free government to which they could come. But he wasn't going to offer them any immediate panacea, and he wasn't going to offer them any immediate results because he would be kidding them. He talked firmly, he talked beautifully, he talked honestly because that was his strong, his forte. He wasn't a manipulative politician. He was an ideologue. He had his own ideology, but he never tried to say anything to give people false illusions, false hopes. When he got through there was silence, no applause. And finally he said "Listen, I have no certificates in my pocket for you, don't you understand that? But I am telling you that I do bring you hope. Now, let's sing the song of hope. I want to hear Hatikva." He had a monotone and he couldn't sing. I have a monotone, I couldn't help him. The crowd slowly started kind of a crackling, crack, off key, but it began to build, it began to build some momentum and then it came out into full burst and there was a big singing of Hatikva by which time he was crying. And that was the end of the meeting and he walked off and he was shaking his head. And we got outside, got in the car, he said "My God, I don't know what's worse, people being burned up in the camps or people waiting in these camps without hope. I don't know how to say which is worse." And then years later I read in his, you know, he wrote voluminously in his diaries, and I want to read here, I have just one paragraph, and I don't want to take his words. This is what he wrote "The people of Babenhausen finally understood that their unloved camp was not the end of the line, but a way station on the road to freedom. The distrust and bitterness I had faced that day in October gave way in December to patient hope." December was the Zionist Congress in Basel in 1946. So he sensed the mistrust, he sensed the bitterness, he sensed everything, he understood it, but he said he believes that he gave them hope that their stay there was a way station on the road, it was not the end of the road. And he and I for years after that, we saw each other very often in the course of the whole UJA career and the course of the years that I lived in Israel after that, and every once in a while he would get a glint in his eye and he would say let's talk about Babenhausen. Sort of a symbol to him, the way station. So, yes, we used to go to visit lots of the camps and there were lots of problems and riots and Jews breaking out of camps.

Q: When you look back on this period what do you see from the outside was happening to the survivors in their journey? You mentioned hope.

A: Yes, that's what we concentrated on. We tried to concentrate, we tried to build up a sense

that (a) there was a large group who cared, a group of institutions and individuals who and which cared for them, there was somebody caring for them, there was somebody looking after their welfare, there was somebody trying to take care of their immediate daily needs, and somebody trying to build a future for them. And that was the basic message and we reinforced it all the time by active conduct. The Jewish Agency would give us a singer or a piano player or somebody. I remember a lady, Paula Padaney, a great pianist, and put her on the circuit and send her through 30, 40, 50 camps, as much time as she could give us. We did all kinds of things. The Agency sent over about a hundred school teachers. It grew even to more than that I think. And we put Palestinian school teachers in the schools which were organized in each camp to keep the kids busy. You did everything you could and you kept publicizing through the camp newspaper network every time a ship would go so that -- there was a dreadful thing called the Va'ad Aliya, the Committee on Immigration, I call it dreadful because it was operated according to the Zionist political key.

Q: The Maftach

A: You know, okay. This Maftach, the key. Depending on --

Q: I don't want to be flip about it because our people listening to this are not going to. Tell us, and I'm being flip and it's a very important story. Let's go back and --

A: And with every reason to be flip about it or to be more than sarcastic. I called it dreadful. It was not a humane way of handling this, it was a purely political way. The committee had on it representatives of every Zionist political party. The committee fought ferociously that if a ship had room for 600 people each political party fought for its share of the 600 berths. No consideration of women and children first okay. That doesn't go anyway because you don't want to separate families. No consideration for family need. I mean we knew the populations in each camp so intimately. We never treated them as a mass, we always treated them as much individually as possible. So it would be very easy to know if there are 600 places, give us the 600 neediest people in camp A, or give us 100 people each from six different camps so you'll build a moral in six camps that indeed the ships are going and maybe someday they'd get on a ship. There would be ways of doing it. No, the political key operated. Namely, each party argued what its relative strength was and demanded the number of berths on that ship according to its strength. My party is 13 percent of the Jewish people, I want 13 percent of the seats. If you ask him who he cares about, he didn't care about the individuals, give me 13 percent of the seats because when they get to Palestine they're going to be voters for his party because his party took him out of Germany.

Q: Let's go back for a moment, you say you knew the people intimately in that real sensing their needs. What were the needs?

A: The needs were simply spiritual and non-material. They were psychological, spiritual and

psychological. The people needed to believe that they would not be in these camps forever, that this wouldn't be the end, that there was a different end. Now, they knew that they could always be repatriated back to their original land of citizenship. All they had to do was say to the Army, hey, I'm Hungarian so send me back to Hungary. That's not what they wanted. So they were waiting, waiting, waiting. Now, they're not hungry, they're not in danger, their medical needs are cared for, so what do they need? They need an uplifting of the spirit. They need belief and confidence that there would be a successful end.

Q: Did they want to come to America?

A: Well, there was always some number. And HIAS at that time, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, was responsible for taking to America those who wanted. And some small number went to America, but the number was really very small. I don't know how to quantify it. HIAS every once in a while, some every few months, there would be a ship and the trans-Atlantic vessels always had room for 1,200 people, 1,500 people. So I don't know, if there was a ship a month you were talking about 15, 20,000 people per year compared to the large number. I say I can't really quantify it, and I don't know if anybody has got a statistic.

Q: What of Palestine representatives?

A: Oh, Palestine. Listen, Palestine, you talk about if you recite the Schmona Ezrei every day, if you do, then you're talking about rebuilding Zion and rebuilding Jerusalem. I mean it was bread into the bone from these people who came out of the small towns and villages of Eastern Europe. And even the sophisticated ones from the bigger cities had some memory of that tradition. I'm not saying that there was a lot of religiosity in formal sense of that word. Yes, there was a synagogue in every camp and there was a rabbi in every camp, and he took care of second marriages which were very frequent, people who married during those three and a half years in the camps, but you're not talking about a devout, you're talking about skeptics as far as religion is concerned. Belief in God, where was he, and maybe, and you know. But the ethnic and the folk traditions, the memories of holidays and the memories of food and the memories of basic prayers. So they were all oriented toward rebuilding Zion. If you recited the blessing after meals, in the blessing after every meal, if you said it, is the "Benei Yerushalayim" etcetera, "in our day quickly." So that was their orientation. I remember once there was a camp outside of Frankfurt called Saosheim and Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit. She stood up there and she was trying, she was kind of a good rabbel rouser, she always could get the crowd to respond to her. She thought that awakened the crowd out of any lethargy. That's the way she explained it to me later. We became friendly. She said "Perhaps you do not want to go to Palestine, perhaps it takes too long, perhaps the British don't--perhaps you'll lose confidence, you'll lose faith in it. Do you really want to go to Palestine?" You know, the way the question was phrased was in order to evoke that massive roar. But she couldn't have evoked it if they didn't feel it. They were almost homogeneously, almost

unanimously zeroed in that that was the only future they had.

Q: When did you leave Europe?

A: Leave Europe, let me think. Let's see, there was the Exodus. No, no, I left before the Exodus. The Exodus sailed in, I think it was September, I'm not sure, but I think it was September '47, so right before that, August, July, summer of '47.

Q: Why did you go home?

A: Why did I go home. A very interesting story. Professor Scholem, Gershom Scholem from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem had come to Germany. We got a pass for him.

Q: He's the great authority on Jewish mysticism?

A: Jewish mysticism, a German Jew by origin, intellect to the nth degree, a warm Jew, loved to be in Israel, was not against his will, he was not dragged there unwillingly. And he came on a mission in the uniform of UNRRA, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation. So strangers who came in on specific jobs will have to be in uniform. It was a military empire there. So he wore an UNRA uniform and he had a 90 day permit and he was working in a warehouse in Offenbach across the river from Frankfurt where Alfred Rosenberg, the philosopher of the Nazi movement had collected several million volumes --

Q: We're going to break here only because it's too precious a conversation to lose. We have to change a tape.

A: Okay, another tape, right.

Q: I don't want to lose this.

A: This is a great story.

Q: No, I don't want you to go any further.

A: Okay.

Q: I know part of the story.

A: Okay.

Q: So is this hour even worth it?

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

- A: The other thing besides the Talmud story is the story of the Kielce Pogrom, that's a very crucial story.
- Q: -- that's from the --
- A: Crucial story. Okay.
- Q: Yes.
- A: But we're past it in point of view of time.
- Q: Go ahead please.
- A: Okay.
- Q: Tell us a little bit about Gersham Scholem's visit?
- A: He received permission to come into Germany to visit and work in the Offenbach depot of approximately 3,000,000 volumes which Rosenberg had collected. The intent of which was to form a basic library of Judaica which German scholars would study and find in the very Jewish sources the words with which to condemn the Jewish people as being parasites and destroyers and anti-Christ and everything else so that you would condemn the Jewish people out of their very own mouths. What came out of their mouths would condemn them. But somebody had to find it and collate it and synthesize it into one simple volume that then would become the property of every single decent person on earth. And after we have killed their bodies we will then also kill their soul and their spirit. So this was the intention of Alfred Rosenberg and this was the process. Now, what was collected, literally actually collected physically, in that warehouse were mostly claye kodesh and repetitious forms of the same prayer book in different languages.
- Q: By claye kodesh¹ you mean the holy books?
- A: Holy books, the holy books. But among that mass of 3 million fairly unimportant volumes, from his point of view, there were 1,300 priceless incunabula, manuscripts handwritten from early Middle Ages and Scholem worked for 90 days like a beaver, slept in that same warehouse, sorting out 3 million volumes and had these 1,300 precious, priceless, irreplaceable items set aside. He packed them into five large wooden packing crates, each five feet by five feet, not impossible to handle, not gigantic, and labeled them. And that's where the fear started. Because a couple of days before his time ran out he came to me and he said what are we going to do. I have applied for permission to take

¹ "Claye Kodesh" are literally holy utensils.

these to the Hebrew University, the monuments and fine arts section of military government in Germany of the American Army, monuments and fine arts section, has refused me permission. They're the ones who allowed me to come and do the sorting. They now refuse me permission to take these to Palestine. And at first they wouldn't give me an explanation for that refusal, and then I finally pushed and I got it, and the explanation was that there is a rabbinical seminary in New York, I'm not sure of the name of it, I think it's the Theological Seminary which says that there is no reason why all of these precious things should go to Palestine. All of them or some of them should be placed in our library, the greatest Jewish library in New York, the greatest Jewish population in the world. This is a clear reflection of the absolutely indifferent or neutral, I don't want to say anti-Zionist position of the seminary. I don't even want to say the whole conservative movement in 1946. And I state this publicly and it can be interpreted as a condemnation. I'm not trying to condemn anybody, I'm trying to say that they had a letter from the chancellor saying, and that had to be I think at that time, Finkelstein, that the Army should not allow, they should not send all these documents to Palestine. They had been collected from all the locations in Europe whose descendants are either dead or have migrated to the new world. So that was their sort of cool, cold objective reasoning. The Army didn't want to get into an internecine Jewish fight so it put a hold on it. And he was distraught because his time was up, could not be renewed, and he didn't know what to do. Here he's got the stuff in five packing cases and what does he do with it. Again you have to make a decision at a certain moment in time and you make it, and I said Professor, go home, relax, don't worry about it, I'll steal them, I'll get them out of the warehouse and I'll get them to you, and don't ask me how because I don't know yet myself. I was sorry that he had labeled them because what was happening in Germany at the time was a very active black market in pages of Beethoven and pages of Mozart, and one page was bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Much later on when the story finally broke on the front page of the *Stars and Stripes*, and I can show you the issue which I have kept to this day, it listed the value of this treasure as \$5 million. He went home. What I did very simply was on New Years Eve when it everybody was off duty or drunk I took a JDC ambulance, drove it to the back loading dock. There was a Jewish captain in command of the warehouse, his name was Benkovich, he was from some place in Texas, Jacob I think. I said listen turn your head the other way, I'm going to sign for these as though I am a man by the name of Koppel Pinson who was no longer in Germany, he had gone home four months earlier --

Q: Koppel Pinson was the professor of Queens College, a very distinguished historian?

A: Right. And he worked for the JDC, the Joint, and he had permission to draw from that warehouse in Offenbach books to be distributed through the camps to any children's school or camp libraries that wanted any of these books so long as the officer in charge of the warehouse certified that they were not irreplaceable, that they were just common ordinary books. So Pinson had the authority to sign to draw stuff out. I signed his name, put my initials underneath his name. He hadn't been in Germany for four months already. Benkovich concurred with me, conspired jointly with me, and I said turn your head the

other way and I'm going to take the boxes. So I took them out in the ambulance, they just fit. And I hid the ambulance until such time as I could get the boxes on to a freight train to Paris where I intended to go to 135 Avenue, Wagram, which was the Office of the Jewish Agency, give them the boxes and say hey, deliver to Scholen. They refused to take them. They wouldn't have anything to do with it. But they gave me a tip that did turn out to be useful, they said that Chaim Weizmann's library was being shipped from England to Palestine and it was stopping in the port at Antwerp and I could get my boxes of books on to the ship and mix them in with his boxes of books. They would get in to Palestine probably without being recognized. The British didn't care about this. This was Weizmann's library and Scholem's name is a professor, it was on the outside of the boxes so it would go okay.

Q: And Chaim Weizmann was the leader of the World Zionist Movement and later became president of that --

A: That's the same gentleman. He lived in England for decades and had accumulated a marvelous library there and at this point in his life decided that he wanted to get it shipped over to Palestine. An antecedent, precedent to his eventual move himself. So the thing was neatly executed, neatly done, and I went off on a short leave to Denmark because I wanted to see Hamlet's castle. And a few days later I came back and found two CID guys sitting in my office waiting for me. CID, Criminal Investigation Division of the United States Army. Very nice, sympathetic, friendly guys, not threatening, but very firm. And they said listen, Chaplain, you are now under investigation seriously. This will lead to general court marshal. We would just like to tell you that we have you dead to rights, but what we really do is we need your confession, that's all. Now, here is your signature on the paper you signed to draw the boxes out. Here is the number of the ambulance of the JDC which you used to transport. Here is the number of the freight car on which you loaded them and on which you slept overnight from Frankfurt to Paris in the boxcar with the boxes. Here is the number of the truck you used to go from Paris to Antwerp. So, you know --

Q: They had done their homework.

A: -- what are you kidding about now, so would you just sign this please and then we'll get on with it. I went to Bernstein. I stalled them and I said well listen, come on fellows, you know, I mean this is like a bombshell, I don't know what you're talking about, I haven't got any idea what this is all about, so let me try to rock it and sleep over on it and, you know, I'll meet you tomorrow. I went to Bernstein and I said you remember our principle of need to know, well I think this one you need to know, and I told him. Without any more ado he picked up the phone and he called General Clay. We're two offices away. He says General, I've got to come in and see you about something, and Clay always took him in immediately. And it worked so well for us all the time normally. And he told Clay and then he brought me in and Clay looked at me and he said why did you do it? I said because I didn't want the stuff to get stolen and lost a second time. Those boxes wouldn't

be secure in that warehouse, somebody would rip them open, somebody would see the stuff, somebody would recognize it. An antiquarian would be approached, the stuff has value. And it was lost once. Its owners are gone. The Jewish people collectively is concentrating in Palestine. Palestine will be free one fine day. These should be in the National Jewish Library in Palestine, that's the successor, inheritor of all this stuff. That's why I did it. He said I have to ask you a formal question, did you have any intention ever of diverting any of this to your own use and selling it for your own. I said no. He said I believe you. He knew me reasonably well. He said well, all right then here is what I'm going to do. I am going to order that the boxes be brought back here because I am not going to get into a fight with the seminary in New York, and I am going to let the monuments and fine arts section decide on the distribution and that's the Army way. I said, sir, for God's sake don't do that, don't subject them to another voyage. An airplane can go down, a ship can go down, they are irreplaceable. Don't do it. There is an inventory, Professor Scholem has it, he knows what he put in the boxes, there are 1,300 items. Have the boxes opened in Israel in the presence of any authority you trust. There's an American Council there attached to the British Headquarters, take somebody, an American, a military or non military, have him stand there as the boxes are opened and check the inventory, and then leave it there. If you want to leave it for future eventual distribution, good. I'm not going to argue with you about that, but leave it there, don't move it. So he looks at me, he said yes possession is 9/10ths of the law isn't it? Once it's there it's there, isn't it? I said, sir, don't get me into that discussion. So we immediately we had an understanding. So he said okay, it's a very reasonable suggestion. So ordered, and I will so organize it. Now, what do we do about you? I mean this is a long answer to your question about what provoked my leaving the scene. He picked up the phone, called head of the CID, said I want you to kill the court marshal, that's out and over, I'm sending this officer back to the ZI, back to the zone of the interior. That's what the United States was called as far as the Army overseas. The United States is the interior. So this officer is being dismissed from my command and will be discharged from the Army and so you kill the court marshal. Finished just like that. And he came back from the phone and he said, and the boxes will remain there, are you happy, he said. Perfectly satisfied. Now, it's between Scholem and your surrogate, whoever your person is over there in charge, and I'm satisfied that it will work out the way we hope it will. So I was given orders to go back and be discharged. That story ended. I went to Fort Dix in New Jersey and the customary procedure there is that when you're being discharged they ask you a bunch of questions, have you returned your gas mask, have you returned your rifle, blah, blah, blah. And one of the questions is, do you wish to remain in the United States Army Reserve Corps retaining your commission and advancing in rank. So the Sergeant who is reading all of this to me, you know, he's doing it by rote. All of a sudden he stops himself, do you wish to remain and he said oops, he said that doesn't apply to you. There is a note here that you are not authorized to remain in the Reserves, you are out. That's how that ended. That was after being four days in the stockade for a whole other story because Morgenthau. Henry Morgenthau who was the head of the UJA said I need you to go around with me making speeches in America and you've got stories to tell that will help raise a lot of money. And I said but I have to go to Fort Dix and be discharged. And

he said well, I'll call the Secretary of War and I said no, sir, call the 1st sergeant at the separation center and he said I don't deal with sergeants, I deal with cabinet members. So I said well then get something in writing. He did indeed call Secretary of War Patterson, who told them over the phone yes you want to keep this man with you 30 days, absolutely, in uniform on detached service to you, I'll write the orders. I never got a copy of the orders, Fort Dix never got a copy of the orders. I had gone back 30 days later and I'm arrested at the gate for being AWOL, absent without leave, and the Chaplain of all people to be absent without leave, I mean how can you do this. It took me four days to convince them to give me a dime and let me make a phone call. And then the commanding officer, general somebody, was told by Morgenthau yes I had the man on duty with me and I will get you a telex from Secretary Patterson and you'll have it in ten minutes, this guy came back to me in the cell, he gives me a cigar and he says don't hold anything against me. I said come on, come on, you don't think I know the racket well enough. No, of course it's not against you, it's against stupid Mr. Secretary Morgenthau, he didn't get me anything in writing, the Army goes by what's on paper. The end of the story in Israel, in Palestine was the American guy witnessed the opening of the boxes, agrees that not a piece is missing. They nail the boxes up again and they take them up to Mount Scopus to the library. Now, we are talking about 1947, okay. In the war in 1948 we lose Mount Scopus, don't we? So the boxes are up there now once again in jeopardy.

Q: Mount Scopus was that section of east Jerusalem that the Hebrew University was built on?

A: Originally.

Q: That the Hebrew University was built on originally, and during the '48 war between Israel and Jordan --

A: Was lost to Jordan.

Q: -- was lost to Jordan, but an Israeli contingent remained on Mount Scopus but there was no access to them.

A: Okay, so this Israeli contingent, 140 men, were allowed to inhabit a trench between the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the one side and some other marker on the other side which was on the apex of the hill on the top of the ridge. And these 140 guys were a symbolic Israeli presence to validate Israel's previous ownership, and hopefully ultimate future ownership, and it was one of those cockamamie arrangements that was part of the armistice treaty and this group of 140 men sat up there for two weeks and played cards and twiddled their thumbs, couldn't do any training, couldn't do anything. They were in the trench. It was dreadful duty. You could only keep them up there two weeks. Every two weeks they came down under supervision of a UN convoy team which escorted them down the hill to the UN truck at the bottom which took them away and replaced them with 140 other guys who stayed up there for two weeks, so there was a rotation, okay.

The end of the story is that it took several years for the 1,300 items to come down, one by one by one, tucked under the shirts and jackets of the rotating platoon. And every piece came down finally to: "Sof hadavar": At the end of the story. And Scholem had the privilege of putting them all in the rare book room of the new campus at Givat Ram, what was then the new campus. I don't know what it is now. And I saw him, the last time I saw him was a couple of years ago before he died, and I said I have to make sure. I saw a story once in the *Jerusalem Post* by Abraham Rabinovitz who wrote the story telling about the bringing down, did it all work out, did you really get them all in the end. He said every last one. And we shook hands and that was the end of the story and it was the last time I ever saw him. So that's what happened to the books, that's what happened to me, and --

Q: Then you went on a national barnstorming tour on behalf of UJA?

A: Yes. I went back to Denver, the original congregation. I went with Morgenthau who was the chairman, and then I went with Edward Borger?. For the next several years, let's see, this is from '47, for the next eight years, the next eight years, I was a volunteer chairman of the Speakers Bureau for the National UJA and I was out three or four days a week, Monday through Thursday. I got home for the weekend, Shabbat. Anybody wants to get married we collect all the people and we do it on Sunday. Anybody wants to die better do it on Sunday. By Monday I'm off again and running. And eight years. Twice in that interim they came and asked me if I would become the professional director of the organization and I turned it down. But then after a while Mr. Warburg and Mr. Rosenwald who were the two ranking chairman of the of the UJA, both from those aristocratic families they really said look you must do this, there is nobody like you, nobody has your background, nobody has your experience in the United States, not only what you did in Germany, what you have done here, the public knows you now in every city in the country and you know the leading big givers in every city in the country, you've been talking to them as a volunteer, now become our professional head. And there was a big shuffle, a long story, I don't want to get involved in that, about the bonds and the newly organized bond organization of which I was one of the founders and fully agreed to and didn't see why there should be any fight in any community between the UJA and the bonds, and that was a very precious attitude to have because so few people had it at the beginning. At the beginning there was dreadful fear and competition. One lay leader sticks in my mind as a man who rose above it and that was a man from Baltimore by name of Joseph Meyerhoff and he said, he was marvelous, he said the way I will prove this is that I will be the chairman of the UJA drive in Baltimore and I will be the chairman of the bond drive in Baltimore and I will do them both in the same year and I will separate them so that they don't impinge on each other, and he was role model number one of what a good lay leader should be. And we trotted around the country together for years, he and I. And his son now is the Chairman of the Council of the Holocaust Memorial Museum. So the bond organization needed somebody to run it, and the UJA organization needed somebody to run it, and the big boys in Israel got into the act because this was, we're talking heavy money, so Eshkol got into the act, Menachem

[Nahum?] Goldmann got into the act.

Q: Eshkgol was the Finance Minister and later Prime Minister?

A: Later Prime Minister. And then Menachem [Nahum?] Goldmann was President of the World Zionist Congress following Chaim Weitzman.[?] [Nahum Goldmann was president of the World Jewish Congress] So when the heavy weights got in and came pressing on me I really couldn't say no. I shifted in the interim from being the rabbi in Denver to being in Milwaukee, and they came to Milwaukee and they spoke to the board and they said you've got to release this man. So they did, and I did and that was it. Then I switched over from being a volunteer to being the executive, the CEO, of the UJA, and did that until the '70s when we left and moved over to live in Israel for a period of years, with every intention of remaining. Got diverted because of some family illness and wound up back here.

Q: Let me touch on two issues we haven't touched on, on the European experience. What was the attitude of the DP population toward the Germans, and what was it like for them to live in Germany? And let's start with that for a moment.

A: It's really a serious question and it's easily answered. The DPs lived mostly in camps. There were no machine guns aimed at them and there were no guards at the gates, but they were in an encircled area, they were in a camp. A few of them were out and were living freely in rented quarters among the German population, they were comfortable doing that, but 99 percent were in camps. They used to look through the wire around the camps and they used to see Germans going on buses, carrying little briefcases, going to work. The town was working and everybody was living a normal existence except they. They hated the Germans. They resented them. They didn't envy them. They just would like to have torn every German apart if they could get their hands on them. Now, they could because as I said they were not confined, they went out into the towns near which these camps were located. They bought goods in the German stores. They learned to speak German, many of them did. But you could see the look in their eye and they hated every German. Every once in a while some episode would flare up and you would see the expression of it in a physical form of rebellion. And I'll just tell you one story which illustrates many many similar things that happened. It was in the camp at Landsberg. Landsberg was the town where Hitler was in prison. In that very same German Army barracks in which he was imprisoned in 1925, yes, '24, '25 when he wrote "Mein Kampf," are now living Jewish displaced persons. So you can imagine what an irony that was. Okay, in this camp at Landsburg one day a rumor spread through the camp that a Jewish child had been kidnapped and killed by the Germans. Immediately a riot started through the whole camp, and a wave rushed out of gates of the camp into town and started to break store windows, start buildings on fire, over-turned buses, attack and pummel any German passerby, quickly the town turned into an armed camp. The purpose of the Army was to keep law and order. Here it was breaking down between Jews and Germans, okay. That's dynamite, that's incendiary. So the Army pushed the Jews back into the camp and

closed the gates and padlocked them. Okay, now you have U.S. troops ringed around and a couple of 50 caliber machine guns are brought and set up and a tank is hovering delicately in the background but present, visibly present. And so the Jews start yelling "Amerikanische SS, you American soldiers are acting like the SS. Amerikanische Nazis." Well, now the lieutenant in charge of this platoon says whoa, whoa, we're not Nazis and we're not here to hurt you, but you can't come and tear and town, and the dialogue goes and the Jews boom!, burst out of the padlocked camp once more and break the gates. Then the scuffle starts between American troops and Jewish DPs and Germans ringing around looking at it with great pleasure, okay.

Q: Now you guys have your Jewish problems.

A: 19 young fellows get arrested. They were the ones at the front. So they were the activists, and one of them has a knife in his pocket. Later when they're arrested and they are brought into the police station and one of them has got a piece of lead pipe in his pocket, and one of them has got a hammer in his pocket, and anything that could be used as a weapon, okay. So they are charged with, I don't know what the technicality of the charge is, but it's disturbing the peace and it's inciting to riot, and nobody was murdered and nobody was killed. By then incidently it is discovered that the little boy who was missing was not dead, that there was a hole in the fence at the back of the camp going right into the woods, and he had gone out there and he had wanted to do whatever, maybe he wanted to smoke a cigarette, nobody knows, but nothing had happened to the kid and the kid had came back in. And so the whole rumor that had started the whole thing was of course inaccurate. But by now you've got 19 fellows in the stockade. Word of this gets back to the United States. There was a Congressman from Illinois by the name of Adolph Sabboth, an old guy, he was about 80 years old. He informed the press and the Department of War that he intended to go to Germany and himself make sure that these Jews got an honest and fair treatment from the American Army and the American Army wasn't going to treat them like the Nazis did. And he's shaking his fist in everybody's face. And of course word of this gets back to General Clay and this is exactly what he needs his advisor for, so General Clay says to me you go down to -- Bernstein says to me you go down to Landsburg, you sort this thing out, you make sure that these guys get a proper defense. They're in front of a court marshal of seven officers, so it's going to have to be a military officer who will have to defend them and there will be a military prosecutor, and I want you there as my personal representative. And you have all of my authority and you report to the commanding general that you are there on my behalf so he knows who you are and you follow this thing every step of the way because this is dynamite. Okay, the end of the story very quickly, I went to the Judge Advocate General and I asked him for the best lawyer he had in the United States Army. And he tells me that guy who handles all death sentences given by courts marshal for murder, rape, all the felony one kind is a captain by the name of Abraham Heimann, and I say fine, I want him. Heimann said if I get mixed up in this DP business I'll never get home for five years. I'm due to be demobilized. I said Abe, come on, come on, come on. And to make a long story short he came on and he came down and he was the defense attorney and he

defended them as well as he could and brilliantly.

Q: And he didn't get home for five years?

A: He did not. He wound up as the last, the final advisor when Ferinwald?, the final camp, closed in 1950 Heimann, the last advisor, went home finally in 1950. So anyhow, the trial ended. They were given three months which was, you know, the admonitory slap on the wrist with time off for good behavior. So they probably might have served, you know, three weeks, four weeks, something like that. However, Heimann pleaded and obtained for the right that they should not be put in a prison with Germans, they should not be put in a prison with American soldiers in the stockade, they should be put in some separate place where the Army can have a few guards and watch over them. And we find an old abandoned castle nearby, quite nearby, so their families could come and visit them, and within four weeks we had all 19 of them out and on their way through the Aliyah Bet and they were taken off Marseilles to a ship to Palestine and that was the end of that.

Q: Let's touch on one more question which is really more a historical question, but also part of your own experience. July 4th 1946--

A: Oh, Kielce, the Kielce Pogrom, is that the one you're referring to? Oh, that was a bitter one, bitter, bitter, bitter. 42 Jews were killed that day and the bodies were laid around the fountain in the center of this little medieval looking village, a beautiful little village, and the bodies were like cord wood in a circle around the fountain. A ripple went through all of Europe, and of course it reached Germany and it reached Army Headquarters. And General McNarney who was the commander at that moment said to Rabbi Bernstein, take my airplane, go over to Warsaw, go to wherever you have to go, find out what's going on there, find out what caused it, find out what its implications are, and what the consequences might be, if any, for us here in Germany. Because he knew, he was sophisticated enough to know that this was going to trigger off another flood of people leaving the east and trying to cross the border into Germany where they would be safe. We did, we went. Unbelievable. We went to see the American Ambassador whose name was Arthur Bliss Lane. There was only one hotel in Warsaw, and the Polonia, and it was half smashed. And he had two rooms, the American Ambassador had two rooms in this hotel. That's all he had. No embassy. And he had gout and his foot was up on a hassock and he was mean and he was miserable. And he said listen, this has nothing to do with me, don't talk to me about these Jews and what happened in Kielce. It's not an American problem, it's not an embassy problem, it doesn't involve anything, it doesn't involve a consular division, it doesn't involve reparations, nothing. And probably whatever happened to them they damn well deserved. That was his parting shot. Thank you, sir, Mr. Ambassador, very much. We went to see the Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Losupka Morafska. Quite bland. I really, you know, there is some latent anti-semitism among the Polish people, everybody knows that, that's historic fact, I don't know what triggered it off, I don't know what caused it, but it will die down the way it always does. And I mean there is nothing that the Polish government will or can or should do about there. There

are no culprits, we can't find anybody. We go to see the Cardinal, Augustus Cardinal Hlond, H-L-O-N-D, a bull-necked, cropped hair, tough as nails. He never asked us to sit down, the whole interview was standing. And his attitude was very simple, these Jews brought Communism here. The head of the Communist party running this country is a Jew by the name of Yacob Berman. Whatever the Polish people of the town of Kelts did to those Jews they did out of anger and fury and rage because the Jews have put this anchor around our necks. And the church will do nothing. We tried and we asked him if he would write a pastoral letter which should be read in every church and this would kind of put a blanket on the -- he wouldn't do it. So our fourth visit we went to Mr. Berman, and Yacob Berman says if the Jews are guilty of having brought Communism here to Poland it's the best thing that we could ever do for this country and I will take whatever consequences. And furthermore, if the consequences are that a few Jews get killed, well a few Jews get killed. It's just a few more. We are fighting for a whole new world. And he was a Communist ideologue and he believed it and he preached it. And we're fighting for a whole new world means for everybody and for a larger number of Jews, and even if there were a few casualties there always are in war. And the last point I want to make with you gentlemen is that they should remain here. If you came from Germany from the American commander to find out if the Jews here are going to flee, if I have anything to do I will see to it that they will leave this country nackt und barfuss, they will go out naked and barefoot because they shouldn't go out. Well, you know, this was zero for four. We had seen four people, the Ambassador, the Prime Minister, the Cardinal, and then the Communist leader, and you get no sympathy from any of them. But then when we started to go around and we began to talk to the Haganah guys who were working in the towns and we began to talk to ordinary Jews whom we were recommended to, we got the picture that they're packing and leaving. And we returned and we wrote the report to McNarney that he could expect, that the military command in Germany could expect over the period of the next year to a year and a half approximately 150,000 people to come flooding in from the east to the west. And the Army had better gear up for it and prepare it, and the Army would have a political decision to make, not a military one as to whether the borders should be closed or opened. And if you want to close the borders and you want to try to prevent these Jews from coming in then you're going to have to do it by armed force or setting up barriers and blockades. McNarney looked at that and he said well, whoa, this is way over my head. Bernstein, go to Washington please and talk to the President. A decision about whether the border of Germany is open or closed to 150,000 refugees is not for me to make. So Phil did, he flew to Washington and talked to Truman. It took about 15 minutes. He got an immediate green light, and he came back. Okay, McNarney has got a green light from the President, the borders are open. So Lippman is on the Czechoslovak border and blah, blah, blah, blah, the borders are all manned with our people and that is what raised the ultimate total to 250,000 people. It's just as simple as that. That was the final result of the Kielce Pogrom. Those 42 victims triggered off a major demographic shift. And the accumulation of that many people in the camps in Germany itself had the political influence plus the episode of the Exodus to produce that vote in the United Nations in November of '47. By November of '47 everything is falling into place.

Q: Let me push this phase to the close by asking a question. Where were you on May 14th 1948, or where were you on November 29th '47?

A: I don't remember the latter date where I was. I was probably -- no, I was still in Denver in '47. Of course, I was still in Denver. I was in Denver November 29th '47. May 15th '48 I was shuttling between Denver, New York and Wilmington, Delaware. Wilmington, Delaware had to do with DuPont. New York had to do with the Haganah headquarters in the United States which was in a hotel, 14th East 60th Street. Next door to the Copacabana nightclub. The director of the Haganah in the United States was Mr. Teddy Kollek, now the Mayor of Jerusalem, a world famous figure. So Teddy had ordered me when I returned to the States, he reminded me that I was still in the Haganah and never mind I was running around making speeches for the UJA, that's kid stuff. As far as the Haganah is concerned it's real stuff, and he wanted me to, contrary to the embargo laws of the United States Government, to buy, pack, ship out of the United States all the dynamite, brick production, of DuPont. A brick is a brick, the size of a brick, the size and shape of a brick, but this brick is a piece of dynamite. Now you take three of them, stack them up one on top of each other, and take three more, one on top of each other, and wire the six of them together and attach the wire, whatever length you want, to a detonator and you blow up that package, we called it a satchel charge because you took the six bricks, put them inside of a knapsack, you know, a canvas GI knapsack, it looked like a little satchel, it should have been called a knapsack charge more accurately, and it will blow a hole in a stone wall or it will blow a hole through an iron gate. And that was the main artillery that the Israel Armed Forces had. It didn't have any big artillery, it didn't have mortars, Howitzers. So I was buying the dynamite, shipping it to myself in Denver, transshipping it down to Tampico in Mexico, buying vessels, getting the stuff on board in cardboard cartons that said "Del Monte peaches, fruit salad, pineapples." We stole the cartons from Del Monte, California. And the ships were manifested to the Far East, but when they went out of Tampico they didn't turn and go through the canal to the Far East, they went to the Mid East, in the other direction. So that's where I was all through '48. '48 was a hell of a year with me and the FBI. But everything came out okay. No charges, no nothing, and a happy ending to the story.

Q: Herb, is there anything we haven't touched?

A: No, Michael. No, I think we've covered the main things. But the summary of the whole business is that you had a population that had the patience and the stamina to overcome all of the evil and the agony they had been through, all the losses they had suffered, and who had the hope and the faith in something they believed in that represented their future. So the patience and the stamina, the faith and hope characterized that DP population. With all the hatred boiling in them, with all of the stuff that many of them have never gotten out of their systems for their whole lives, that's one element. Then you've got the other supporting elements. You've got the group, you've got the United States Army, benevolent, friendly, cooperative. I can't compliment them enough. Number

two, you've got the group of American Jewish organizations that came in with dough and support. Number three, you've got the Israelis, the Palestinian personalities beginning with Ben Gurion himself and the whole mechanism of the Haganah and their support that they provided. And then lastly you have won over world public opinion so that you get that great ringing majority vote of two when the resolution was finally passed in November of '47. It won by two. The two countries were the Philippines and Guatemala, great big Democratic powers that pushed the ball over the line. But that was the combination. Now, we've talked about the DPs themselves and we've talked about the Army and we've talked about the JDC and the great organizations. We've talked about the Haganah and the Israelis. The world conscience, feeble as it was, did its trick and the State was created. And I sum that whole thing up when I think of myself and my life and where I am now and what did it all mean, I really believe the following statement, and it may sound strange to you, those three years from 1945 when the war ended until 1948 when the State was established, those three years I think are the single group of any three years in the entire history of the Jewish people, and I mean every single thing I can think of that we've been through since Abraham, I don't think there is another period of three years which has ever been so determinative. Because we came out of the death into the life and those are the two extremes, death and life. There aren't any others. There is nothing similar. Persecution and inquisition of this one or that one, or running from one country, running from another country, that's all blips on the screen. But this is the definitive thing. We could have passed off the stage of history. There's no doubt in my mind about it. One third of the people dead in Europe, one third of the people paralyzed and ineffective in America during the crucial years, almost another third of the people lost behind the Iron Curtain, you couldn't get to them, they couldn't be useful or helpful. The Jewish people almost died, I mean totally and finally and irrevocably. And out of that three short years later you find you're back into vibrancy and action and you're winning a war. That's a miracle. I don't know any other miracle, and I'm even talking about the crossing of the Red Sea, and I'm talking about anything else you want to mention, I don't know of anything else that's comparable to it. So if I had the zekhut, the merit, to live through those three years, work my way through those three years, add something, well then it was a life worth living. And that's how I sum it up.

Q: A story worth telling.

A: And a story worth telling.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview