United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Herbert Katzki
June 2, 1995
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PREFACE

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HERBERT KATZKI
June 2, 1995

Question: I'd like you to start by stating your name, your date of birth, where you were born.

Answer: My name is Herbert Katzki. I was born October 4, 1907 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Most people don't know where Elizabeth is, but there is such a place. I come from there.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family and personal background in terms of -- a religious home, a politically active home.

A: Well, let's see. I moved from Elizabeth to New York, and it was in 1917. We -- it was a combination of households. I lost my father at that time, and we were going to move in with my grandfather, and he passed away. And so we were there along my -- my mother with two children and her mother. And so we had to get along. My education was in the New York school system. I went to New York University, got a degree in finance, did graduate work in economics. Went to school at night, worked during the daytime, various jobs. One job, though, that I took in 1929, I was working in the credit department of a mercantile firm. Working in the credit department decided me on becoming a credit man. And so in school, I studied credits and collections. That was the subject of my major and accounting. In 1929, though, I switched over from this particular firm and went into the banking business. As part of my banking training I was going to become a banker and a businessman. Went into the Manufacturers Trust Company. I started working for the Manufacturers Company a few days before Black Friday in 1929. And I guess that probably influenced my career. Anyhow, I was with the bank until 1936. They got looking around to see how things were going. Somebody suggested that I see the JDC, Joint Distribution Committee, and they asked me to come in to do a special job that needed doing. And in due course I was prevailed upon to give them one year out of my life to do this special job. The one year out of my life turned out to be about 60 years. That was a very long agreement. I worked in the New York headquarters office of the Joint Distribution Committee. Then until 1939 -- I was there until November. How come? The war began in September. It became apparent to me as it did to others that

circumstances will have changed in Europe, and JDC would need all the help it could over in Europe. I volunteered to go overseas. I was accepted, and I went overseas. And I arrived overseas in December 1939. My first permanent job, we thought would be in Paris, the headquarters in Paris, where I served as the secretary of the European Executive Council of the JDC and did my job there. The head of the overseas operations at that time was a man by the name of Morris Troper, T-r-o-p-e-r, who was the director general of the overseas operation of the JDC. He was joined by a man by the name of Schwartz, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, who came over to Europe at that time to join Mr. Troper. Joe Schwartz landed in Italy, joined Troper, who was going to Eastern Europe, who at that time was making a visit around in Europe to make plans with the agencies with which the JDC was cooperating for the event that war would ensue and we would be cut off. While they were overseas, war did ensue. While they were traveling around in Europe, war did come along. That was in June 1940. They were traveling around. The Germans were practically knocking on the door in Paris. I was in charge of the office. It was the European headquarters, I was in charge of the office at the time. After making diligent inquiry, I came to the conclusion that the JDC has to move its office. It couldn't remain there. Having arranged with other Jewish organizations working in Paris at the time, like ORT-HIAS, the French-Jewish organizations and so on, none of us would move without advising the others. I came to the conclusion on a Sunday that we were going to move out, having consulted with the American Embassy, who at that time were following up the French, who were making up their minds as to whether they wanted to get out of Paris or not and so on. Decided to close up the office and to move out. That was on Monday -- it's Monday -- that was on Sunday. I guess that was on June the 8th or -- if that was a Sunday. Anyhow, that Sunday around June, decided to close the office. Closed the office, moved -- intended originally to move to Tours. Couldn't go to Tours because the French government had decided that they were going to evacuate from Paris to Tours, and they occupied the city to such an extent that nobody else would be permitted to come in. In that same Sunday, when we decided to close the office, I had to phone the staff to ask them to come into Monday, prepare to travel out, we're leaving Paris. They came in Monday to leave the office with their baggage and so on, and they went over to the railroad station.

I came there when I -- as I began to say, in that Sunday I phoned around to tell the other agencies we decided to move to discover that they had already left without telling us. And the JDC was the only Jewish organization, welfare organization, in Paris, all by ourselves. Well, Dr. Schwartz and Mr. Troper came back to Paris on Monday. The rest of the staff had left. I had kept the office open. There were just one -- two secretaries, myself and -- no, three secretaries, myself and then the two gentlemen who came back. We closed down the -- closed down the shop on Tuesday, and the Germans came in on Thursday. As I said, we've started out for Tours, we couldn't get in, had to change directions. We ended up in Bordeaux. We moved the JDC headquarters over to Bordeaux --

Q: Can I interrupt you here. I have a question.

A: Yes.

Q: You were in Europe already when there had been quite a build up, and the war certainly had started --

A: Yes.

Q: -- in Europe. What was the mood? What did you think was going to happen?

A: The mood in Paris was very confusing at the time, because when you walked down the Champs Elysees, you had the impression there was absolutely nothing going on, everything looked normal. And you couldn't tell by looking around the streets that anything was happening at all. And I think that up to that point the French had the feeling that their army was invincible, and they were going to stop off the Germans. Well, it was misplaced, as you know. So that -- we ended up, then, in Bordeaux. We moved the office down there. We sent out the cables to all the agencies in Europe with which we had been operating to tell them where our new office was in Bordeaux, to discover later on that the center had held up the cables, and none of them had gone out. They were held up by the center, by the military people in Bordeaux. We were in Bordeaux (ph) for about four or five days. Government in the meantime had moved down to Bordeaux. The Germans knew that, and threatened to bomb the city. As a matter of fact, they did drop a couple of bombs around the railroad station to let the French know that they're still around. And the French, then, had sat down

and said, "Anybody who wants to leave Bordeaux, must leave by midnight of a certain day or you can't get out." So we were there. Troper, the couple of secretaries and I, Schwartz (ph), we were in Bordeaux. We decided to get out. We made the midnight deadline, slept out in the fields, just to get out of Bordeaux. As a matter of fact, the road were so crowded at that time with refugees -- who were coming down from Belgium into France, and from Northern France going down to Southern France -- that the automobile trip that normally took seven hours from Paris to Bordeaux, it took us three days to get down there. The roads were that crowded with refugees. And we had hardships along the road too, ran out of gasoline and shelter and all that sort of thing. So we decided then to get out of Bordeaux. We did that and headed for Lisbon and decided that the Lisbon was the furthest west one could go in Europe to still be in European territory, and that's the place to have the office. That was all right because the United States was not yet in the war. This was in -- when we went to Lisbon, that was in June, July 1940. So we didn't go to the war until December [1941], so it was all right for us to stay in Lisbon, and that's where we were going to make our new headquarters. I went back to Marseille after the armistice to see whether there was any work that the JDC could do with the French-Jewish population, especially -- particularly the refugees, who were coming down there from the north and from Belgium. Decided that there was work that the JDC could do, and I opened up the office for the JDC in Marseille for unoccupied France.

Q: I want to backtrack a minute.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because I have a lot of questions. In 1939 and 1940 before Paris was occupied --

A: Yeah.

Q: Where were your efforts directed? Where were the JDC -- were you sending money into Germany or --

A: No. Starting with 1933 with the advent of Hitler, we did not send any money into Germany. We had worked out an arrangement with the German Rifentrajung (ph) and the German Hoopsverine (ph), which were the agencies in Germany with which we worked, whereby they would collect to the extent that they could the cost of passage for people immigrating to the United

States. They would collect them in Marks, and we would buy their steamship tickets for the dollars. Consequently our dollars did not go into Germany, but the counter-value of local currency, which was already in Germany, was made available to the agency with which we operated. So if you ask if we sent money in, we did not. We operated that kind of a transaction. And when Austria was over-- office was the anschluss, we did the same thing with Austria. And in due course we even worked out by financial ledgerdomain to get money into Poland. We didn't send money into Poland either.

Q: You went over with this purpose?

A: No, I went over for the -- I didn't go over as a financier. I went over as a -- as a generalist, who happened to know something about finance, but that isn't why I went over. I went over, as I say, as a generalist.

Q: Is that what --

A: You ask what did we do out of Lisbon. And Lisbon, since we were not in the war, and Lisbon was neutral, we could still communicate with any of the agencies with which we had formally been in contact with, by phone or mail or whatever. But of course, by mail we would not have tried to get in touch -- or any other way -- with Germany, because anything that a name like Jewish, who would have been -- tripped us _____ in Germany, and it wouldn't have gone through anyhow. And the same thing with Austria. But with the other countries we could still work. There weren't many countries left where the Germans -- of course they occupied everything. So that while we were at liberty to do it, we were rather restricted in what we could do.

Q: Now, being that you were in Europe.

A: Yes.

Q: You, I assume, had a lot more information about what was already happening in Germany and Austria than the people back in the United States had.

A: The curious thing is this: People thought that since I was in Lisbon -- back in Lisbon in 1943 -- that we knew all about what was going on with the stories that were coming out from the concentration camps, which later became known. We did not -- I did not know that in Lisbon. We

didn't have that information. The information that was coming out on that was being sent out by Riegner from Geneva, and it got over to the State Department through the help of the American Mission in Berne. And they suppressed it, because they said they wanted proof that the stories that were coming out were accurate, and they were going to hold up the information until they got that proof. Well, as you know, it took months before the story finally was released what was going on. But in Lisbon, we didn't know it, because the Portuguese papers certainly didn't carry it. They didn't know it either. They had no reporters running around loose, going into the camps or something. So we didn't know it. And only Riegner's reports brought the information out, and they were suppressed. So the information wasn't generally known. So we worked then. We stayed in contact, which was all right until December 1941, when -- everything got stopped off when we entered the war, and then we were fighting with Germany and with Austria, and the Italians came in in June 1941. And so we couldn't communicate with them and so on. We had to find other ways then for remaining in contact and communicating with them. We got in touch with a man in Switzerland. You may have heard his name, Soudymiah (ph). His name keeps coming up. He lived in up in St. Gallen in North Switzerland, who was president of the central Swiss welfare, Jewish welfare organization. And he agreed temporarily to act for the JDC in Switzerland. He finally gave up that position with the Swiss agency in order to devote all his time to JDC. So he became JDC's representative in Switzerland. And it turned out that he was our delegate for all these countries which the JDC itself as an American organization could not come in contact, which meant that he was in contact with Hungary, with Romania, and even with Shanghai, with France, occupied, and so on. And he did the things for us. Communication with Soudymiah was easy enough by telephone. From Lisbon you could talk back and forth -- you could talk to Switzerland. That was all right. You just had to be careful about routing the telephone calls, because if they crossed -- going to cross France, that was Germany. Do it by _____; they were more liberal. And you could make your telephone calls that way, and even send mail that way in Lisbon. So that's how we kept in touch, then, with the countries with which the JDC -- which the United States ultimately was in war with.

Q: When you were in Southern France in, I guess, 1939, 1940?

A: I went there --

Q: Were the refugees there?

A: Yeah, sure.

Q: What was that operation about? What did you do there? Tell me more about it.

A: Working out of France, that was strictly for France. The refugees who had been up in the northern part -- it turned out to be the German-occupied area -- to the extent that they could, they came down to the southern part. Who were they? The ex-Germans and the ex-Austrians and the ex- other countries with which the Germans -- the Germans were at war -- so they came down south. The Belgians came down south, so there were plenty of refugees in the unoccupied zone. Also came to Marseille the agencies with which we had been working in Paris. They were evacuated the same as we were. They ended up in Marseille too. The office was in Marseille with which we worked, they were there. The Ose -- you may have heard about them -- O-s-e. That's _____. They were down there. The agencies with which the JDC had operated in Paris were over in Marseille, so we just resumed contact with them. And we knew how they operated, they knew how we operated. We were back in business again --

Q: So what were you able to do down there?

A: -- in Marseille. The assistance which was given in the unoccupied zone was mainly a cash relief assistance program, because it was still possible for people to buy things in the stores and so on. And their big problem was that they had no jobs, and what they needed was some money with which to live. And the JDC provided that. The OSE was a medical assistance organization, and they cared for children. So they did their job. They had misunderatret (ph) -- installations where children, unaccompanied children were. And they had a medical program. The HIAS (Hebrew Immigration and Sheltering) -- what the HIAS -- you know what the HIAS -- you know that?

Q: Yeah. What I know is that's sort of a few.

A: We just had to provide -- we just had to -- we provided them with funds so that they could continue operating in these various fields which I have just described to you. And we worked with welfare organizations too. There was a Jewish welfare organization in Lyons, which was pretty

large. And the other thing that we did out of Marseille was to continue sending assistance up to Paris. Of course we had left behind in Paris there some Jewish people who remained up in Paris and kept the organizations going and so on. And there was a woman who was active in the International Social Service, a non-Jewish lady who used to travel back and forth between the two zones. And we would give her a sum of money, and she would take it up with her back to Paris. And she would bring back the reports from Paris so that we knew what was going on up there at least and could follow up on their household and financing arrangements and so on. And so that's how we kept in touch with Paris. And so out of Marseille we were able to keep things on some kind of a fairly even keel in France. That went along reasonable all right until November 1942. In November 1942, the Germans came down and occupied the unoccupied zone and so on. And then things became a little bit topsy-turvy, because the Jewish refugees, they had no particular resource to which they could turn back on. And our office in Marseille became peripatetic, because they couldn't afford being around with the Germans and _____ looking for Jewish people and so on. So it became peripatetic and so on. But the work continued, and during the whole war period the JDC programs continued. Of course there was problems connected with it. It didn't necessarily work smoothly, but to the extent possible, continued in both zones.

Q: Did you get at all involved with the French-Jewish resistance? Did you give them any kind of assistance?

A: When I left Germany -- when I left France, I came on home leave -- I left Marseille in the end of September, I think, or beginning of October of 1941 for some home leave. And I was on my way back to Lisbon when we entered the war. My assistant, who remained in Marseille, who was French, he took over then, when I couldn't go back. It subsequently developed that this assistant was active in the Jewish Army of Resistance. We didn't know it at the time -- extracurricular activity. And we didn't know that until he left France and came down to Barcelona. So that if you ask were we in contact with the resistance, sure, we were. As a matter of fact one of the things that we financed in France was the -- we helped the local organization -- we didn't do it ourselves. We didn't work in our own name in France. We worked through local organizations, which as you

know is a matter of policy of the JDC. We worked through local organizations. And one of the organizations with which we worked had a business of providing false documents through Jewish people. As a matter of fact, I'm told -- I didn't know this until later -- I'm told that these things were printed at the office of the _____. But they worked with our money.

Q: You worked with organizations, were they Jewish organizations?

A: Jewish organizations, yes. They worked with our money. Most of the agencies, Jewish agencies, in France were working with our money. We might not have had our own personnel there, but -- you see, one of the advantages that JDC has -- we have been in business for a long time. We started in 1914 with this first shipment to Palestine. We learned something from the first war. And the first war was that we should do things in our own name, but to work through indigenous organizations. Because if we do things in our own name with our own personnel, the day we pull out -- and we thought we were temporary -- the day we pull out would be the day the agency would collapse. The work would collapse. So we developed local organizations in all the countries in which we operate, and we always worked through them. And our advantages that we had that when the JDC was not present, they knew enough about what the JDC -- how it operated and what its desires were and so on that they were able to function _____ without our actually being there, but they carried on. And that's what kept the JDC going. "JDC" quote, unquote had all of these countries in Europe from which the JDC had no direct contact, but they knew enough about what they had learned from us, which we had learned after the first World War to keep on going. And there was always some embryonic JDC around in the countries of Europe that keep things going. And so that's how the work continued in France for the refugees and kept on that way, I guess, in 1944, when our Paris office was reopened, when Paris was liberated. We went back to Paris again on the same premises which we had, which we had closed up in June 1940, went right back into the same premises.

Q: Now, you took a little bit of a detour before going back to Paris?

A: When did I go back to Paris?

Q: Didn't you go for a while to the War Refugee Board?

A: Yeah. Well, I went back --

Q: Or that was afterwards?

A: No, no. I'll tell you. So I went on home leave, as I told you, in 1941. I was on my way back to Marseille when we went into the war, and we were -- there was so -- little uncertainty that the Germans were coming down into Portugal that our New York office sent their message over to Lisbon, all the Americans had come home. So I landed in Lisbon on Monday, and on Friday I was on back to the States. And it took me a good couple of months before I could have permission to go back to Lisbon again. I was in Lisbon there until the end of 1943, when I entered the army. But my military service was on Detached Service as a special attache (ph) to the American Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, which I did as an army man. And that was for the War Refugee Board, when I went back to Turkey. Turkey was an area through which there could have been -- and to a certain extent there was -- movement of refugees to Palestine. The people who were coming out from Hungary, from Poland would come out via Varna, which is in Bulgaria or via Constanta, which is in Romania. They would come out by boat down through the Black Sea as far as Istanbul and then over land to Palestine. I was attached to the embassy in Ankara, but I was stationed in Istanbul for the War Refugee Board. And that was part of my job in connection with this movement going through. The work for the refugees in Istanbul was divided in three ways. There were three agencies involved. The Jewish agency was there to control -- to have something to say about people going to Palestine and issuing certificates for that purpose. There was another group of individuals from Palestine stationed in Istanbul representing the different political parties _____ that the Mossad -- you probably have heard. The Mossad spoken about, they were the Mossad. They were there. So you had the Jewish agency doing the technical work. You had the Mossad organizing these transports. The JDC was there. They did the financial work. The War Refugee Board did the political work. What was their political work? The Turks would not give transit visas to anybody. In order to get through to Palestine, you had to go via Turkey. Turkey wouldn't let them through. Why wouldn't they let them through? Because the British wouldn't let them into Palestine, no place to go. So there had to be discussions and negotiations and one thing or another with the British and

with the Turks. That was War Refugee Board business. And finally the Turks agreed to give a transit visa to any refugee who could put his foot on Turkish soil. So the job was to get the people to Turkey. So they got them to Turkey. They came from Ubea (ph), which is an island off Greece. They came across, and they landed in Ismea. They came by boat from Constanta and Varna through the Black Sea to Istanbul, and a couple of transports even came through by train to Istanbul. And since they got their foot on Turkey soil, they got transit visas -- the place agreed to let them in, and so they -- I don't know, about 9,000, 10,000, something like that -- got into Palestine that way through the -- it was an effort of the War Refugee Board and the political angle. When I finished with the job in Turkey -- because you remember Bulgaria and Romania turned around in 1944 and entered the war on our side -- they didn't need the War Refugee Board anymore in Turkey. And I was reassigned to the mission in Berne, Switzerland for the War Refugee Board. I was stationed in Geneva. What was my job there for the War Refugee Board? There was a group of Hungarians -- I don't know, about three or four hundred Hungarians -- who were admitted under certain circumstances, permitted to leave Budapest and ended up in Bergen-Belsen. And we tried to prevail upon the Swiss to let them come in to Switzerland instead of sitting up in Bergen-Belsen. And we gave the Swiss a guarantee that at the earliest moment, if they would let these people into Switzerland, we will evacuate them. So we worked that one out, and they had these three or four hundred people came down from Bergen-Belsen, and they landed in Switzerland. And then it was my job to get them out of Switzerland, and I had to do that through the army and field telephones, all kinds of things. Anyhow, they got out of Switzerland, and they went to Palestine.

Q: When you say "got them out," can you tell me a little bit more about how you did that?

A: Yes. For instance, when we got them out -- the army controlled the transportation. Anything that moved -- that involved transportation had to do through the army. So I would go from Geneva into France, where there was an army host on their field telephone, to get through via the field telephone from Annacey through Lyons, from Lyons to Paris, to talk to the transport people in Paris. The transport people from Paris moved. They moved from Paris to Rehon (ph). That's where the treaty was signed, the peace was signed. So then another operation I had to go through to get

through Lyons -- after the armistice, they moved to Germany, and they ended up in the Archifaven (ph) building in Frankfurt, had to get through to Frankfurt. All this by telephone, the field telephone and so on. Anyhow, that's how I got them out, by working it out with the army transport that they would take them, because they had to go by boat through the Mediterranean -- by land you could get them to Italy. They went down by train -- Italy, but they didn't control the boats. The boats, you had to do that through the army. So that's how they -- how this particular group was moved out.

Q: What time period are talking about here?

A: Swiss trains.

Q: What time period?

A: This was in 19 -- 1945. I would say about July or August 1945.

Q: So I just want to ask you questions for my own clarity.

A: Yeah.

Q: You started with the War Refugee Board --

A: Yeah, then when the war was over, I got out of the army. When I got out of the army, that released me from the War Refugee Board. So that ended up the War Refugee Board job, which I told you started in February 1944, and it landed until I got out of the army in October 1945. That finished me with the War Refugee Board, that finished me with the army. I went back to the JDC. I went back overseas again.

Q: Okay. Back to the War Refugee Board. How large of an operation was this?

A: What with the War Refugee Boards? We had -- there were exactly four people in this dembo (ph) in Turkey. It was Ira Hirschman (ph), who was the chief of mission. There was myself, two secretaries. That was the whole War Refugee Board in Turkey. And we worked through everybody else, through the Jewish agency, with the Joint (ph), everybody we worked through. But that was our job.

Q: Did you work with other U.S. organizations like the State Department or the OSS or --

A: Yeah, yeah. The War Refugee Board consisted of three people with the secretaries, the treasury, which was Morgenthau. There was Secretary Stimson. I think he was war. And I think Hull was

Secretary of State. Anyhow, there were three Secretaries of State with the War Refugee Board responsible directly to the President. So we were in that channel with the War Refugee Board. That was our contact, that was the backing that we had. And then in consequence of that, we were practically unique, because we had permission to deal with the enemy that was going to be of any way to help the refugees. So we were entitled -- normally American citizens could do that. We were authorized to deal with the enemy in order to do what we had to do to rescue people. The War Refugee Board, they had a representative in Stockholm. That was Iva Olsen (ph), who had worked out the deal with Raul Wallenberg, who ended up in Budapest. You've heard of Raul Wallenberg. The War Refugee Board had a representative in Lisbon, they had one in London. That was about it.

Q: Did you --

A: We did the work -- what?

Q: Did you have the support you needed from the State Department in war --

A: Yes.

Q: You had what you needed?

A: The War Ref-- well, as far as we were concerned, out in the field, our contact was the headquarters of the War Refugee Board in Washington. Let them worry what they're going -- but they were helpful, because we had the three Secretaries of State, and so they were helpful. We got help from the OWI and others. We had to have that kind of -- had to have that kind of help, because we were only a facilitating group to get things done. We were dependent on other people. One of the big problems of the War Refugee Board was that the government gave them no money. The government gave them money, only enough to cover their administration expenses. And the other requirements of the War Refugee Board was paid by the Joint. You find the Joint all over the place. We were paid by JDC. For instance, example, Raul Wallenberg -- you know what he did in Budapest with our money. JDC was our money. JDC was helping me, War Refugee Board. I was wearing that hat at that time. But the JDC was all over the place. They were very helpful. In any event, then I went back overseas, then, to JDC. And when I went back overseas, then, I went to the Paris office, because the Arab -- the Paris office had in the meantime then retransferred to Lisbon

back to Paris after it was possible for us to go back up there. I got back to Paris in December '45, was there for a couple of weeks when I had to go into Germany to relieve Jake Trobe (ph). I think I told you about that inside before. Jake Trobe (ph), who was in charge of our office -- our operation -- in Germany, he got mixed up with this -- the General Morgan incident -- and he was withdrawn. And I went in to take over the German operation from him. That's what got me up to Erolson (ph), and got me --

Q: Okay. But you need to tell me about this, because people may not have seen the other parts of these interviews. So I need you to tell me when we're talking about, when you ended up going back to Paris and how you got up to Erolson and when that was -- just very briefly.

A: Well, I got back to Paris in December 1945. I would like to make a break to tell you something else. In 1943 when I went back to Lisbon, after a great deal of effort the United States finally agreed to accept 5,000 -- 5,000, it was 10,000 -- Jewish refugee children in the United States for safekeeping during the war, the same way as they had permitted the English to come over here. You remember when the English came in. They agreed to take them into the United States. And one of the things I was supposed to do when I went back to Lisbon was do some work with this project. I went back with another JDC member, the name is Soeboe (ph). And there was an American agency involved in that, German-Jewish Children Agency, I think it was. So then we went up to -- the effort was made with the French to give exit permits to the people to leave France who had come out from the unoccupied zone, leave France -- former unoccupied zone. Laval refused it. And Laval wouldn't let them out, and so the thing fell through. So they couldn't get the kids out. And the kids that we did bring out were kids who were already out, either in Spain or in Portugal or those children who with their parents were smuggled over the border from France into Spain, so acquired a couple of kids. Instead of having the 5,000, we only got about 2-, 300. That's all, because Laval put his foot down on it. So that's one effort we made with the refugee -- to help refugees, and discovered then it didn't pan out. So then I went back to Paris, then, and took over there from Jake Trobe (ph) in Germany. And in order to get back into Germany -- they ran a very tight operation. The army, of course, was responsible; the American army for the American zone,

the British army for the British zone, et cetera. And they were responsible for everything that went on in their particular zones. Responsibility for the American army in the American zone, keep peace and quiet and so on. And while technically they were responsible for the welfare of the people in the zone which they occupied, they said in effect, "We're soldiers, we're not welfare workers." And they gave the job to the UNRRA as a subcontractor, so to speak, to provide care for the refugees and the displaced persons who were in Germany.

Q: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but you went back, then, to Paris in November '45?

A: Yeah, I went in November -- December '45, yeah. I left in November, yeah. And then went back to Paris in 1945. I was in Paris for a couple of weeks, and then were sent up to Germany to take over from Jake Trobe (ph), who was reassigned. How do you get into Germany? Army had subcontracted to UNRRA to provide basic care and maintenance for the refugees. The JDC was -- in order to get in, we had to come in under the umbrella, then, of UNRRA. And UNRRA's headquarters at that time were in Herxt (ph), which is outside of Frankfurt in Germany. A couple of weeks after I arrived in Herxt (ph) then, UNRRA's entire headquarters operation was sent up to Erolson (ph) and so on. Since I was at JDC headquarters -- and at JDC headquarters, I was attached to UNRRA's headquarters -- the office had to move up to Erolson (ph) too, so that the headquarters for the operation in Germany was in Erolson (ph). Headquarters for the American zone was in Munich. Headquarters for the British zone was in Bergen-Belsen. Berlin was Berlin, and the French zone was in -- oh, shoot -- I forget the name -- around Constance someplace. I don't remember the name. Anyhow, and so the work that I did in Germany was to travel around the offices to try to things going along smoothly. The JDC -- I mentioned this before, I guess -- ran a rather decentralized operation. The JDC proceeded on the ferry to trust the men in the field, where the men were sent out to the field and certainly given the responsibility for maintaining a country-wide operation. He was carefully selected, because he had to make decisions on the spot, couldn't go to Paris every time. He had to make a decision. Times were changing too quickly, and Paris couldn't know the local conditions as well as the men on the spot. He had to make the arrangements. So I traveled around the various offices, try to keep in touch, if I could help them

with some kind of guidance, you know, how their programs were going and so on. And I did that for about a year, when we decided to decentralize further. Hence, having a central office for Germany, we had the zones, Munich, Belsen; report directly to Paris. And we eliminated the overall office for Germany itself. Berlin, I think, at that time headed into Munich. And that was an operation which we did for the refugees, for the displaced persons. And did our work, whatever it was, to feed the people, to clothe the people. Actually, the UNRRA, they had the responsibility, then, for the basic feeding of these people, which the army had subcontracted to them. But that was the limit of their responsibility, to keep the people alive, to give them some medical help, to give them shelter, give them some clothing. But there was a plethora of assistance, which the people required, which UNRRA didn't give them. There were questions of education and entertainment -- good Lord, anything that you could think of, UNRRA didn't do it. In addition to that, the food rations, which the refugees got -- the displaced persons got -- was so very low, and the diets were so monotonous and so on. So the JDC, to put it very crudely, put the fringe on the embroidery. We provided all these extra amenities that were supposed to make life more bearable for these people, which were terms of educations and lectures. And we had traveling entertainers and legal aid and everything that was required _____. It wasn't a job, we had to do it. So that was the JDC's job for all these people. That included immigration assistance too. How did we get into the immigration business? I was on the telephone up in Erolson (ph), and I got a telephone call from Dr. Schwartz, who was the head of the whole overseas operation -- telephoned the -- from Paris to ask me to get in touch with our representatives in Stuttgart, that she should help a certain woman to immigrate -- some problem and some papers or something. And so I said to Dr. Schwartz, "Why come to us? We're not in the immigration business." And Dr. Schwartz said to me yes, we are, beginning now. And that was of the immigration business.

Q: Now, was that in '46?

A: That was in '46. We had been in the immigration business before that. When we were in Lisbon, there was these people who were coming down from Germany and Austria and other countries. Now, the HIAS was operating in Lisbon too at that time. But the HIAS, they operated

with individual cases. If a relative in New York or Kenosha, Wisconsin came to them and said I have a relative, so and so, can you help them get out. And the HIAS would say give us the money for the transportation, et cetera, et cetera. And then they would work on the case. We couldn't afford that luxury. We were in the wholesale business, because as I explained to you before, the Hoofsverine (ph) and the Rifeserine (ph) and so on in Germany sent all their cases down to us, because we were paying their transportation as I explained. So consequently, we would have to buy all the passages on a ship in order to make room for these people who were coming down. So while the HIAS, they were in the retail business, we were in the wholesale business. But we were in the wholesale business because Lisbon was the only port in Europe for which people could sail. All the other ports were occupied by the Germans -- or I take that back. Spain had some ports too that were open. But Lisbon was the main port.

Q: You know what, we need to change the tape.

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Q: You were talking about the fact that the Jewish --

A: Yeah, we were in the wholesale business.

Q: Wholesale immigration business.

A: Yeah, so we -- when I said Dr. Schwartz said we are now in the immigration business, we were in it before, but on a different level.

Q: What other -- how else do you see the scope of your operation? What other kinds of aid did you give?

A: Did JDC give?

Q: Yes.

A: To characterize the work that we do, we do everything from prenatal care to care for the aged. We don't quite bury them, but everything in between we do, with the prenatal care and postnatal care, kindergartens, educations -- public level education. Ted mentioned to you about the scholarship for the university students. The work that we're doing now in addition to care for the aged -- in Israel, for example, we have training programs for principals of the ministries and municipalities to try to give them some notions as to how they might improve the services that they give.

Q: But back -- actually, I really need to focus a little bit back on the postwar years in Europe.

A: Oh, yeah. Well, with the -- well, that was about the work that could be done in Germany from the cradle to the grave, but you know, the people who survived what they had gone through, I think that there was a principle of natural selection that was involved, and the people who came through, managed to come through. So that what we had to do did not have to be ground down so finely. The broader, simpler things we didn't have to do. So many of the things that we would do in a country, as I say -- like Israel which is much further advanced. So that's what we did in Israel, was supply -- we had this big supply program going --

Q: In Israel or in Europe? You just said Israel. Do you mean in Israel or in Europe are you talking about?

A: I'm back in Europe again, yeah.

Q: Okay. Thank you.

A: With the supply program, what we did. We had a representative up in Stockholm. We had a representative up in Copenhagen and another one in Oslo. And at least one could buy food and other things in Sweden, which were not available on the _____. And so we bought food up there. We bought dairy products in Copenhagen and whatever, and we loaded trucks and sent them down through. Some stopped off in Belsen. Others went to Berlin. They went over as far as Bublee (ph) with the food stuff. They went through Krogg (ph), and we left food, which we had acquired in Stockholm and so on. When the supply line from the United States wasn't open, we had to be content with what we could get up in the Scandinavian countries. And that went along all right, excepting that there wasn't enough of it, but we couldn't give anymore than we got in, than we could acquire and so on. What else did we do? For the education side we had to print our own books. We had an education -- he was principal of a school up in, I think, in Newton, Massachusetts. He was principal of the school. He _____ to come over to the JDC to go overseas as our education guy. So he was traveling around in Germany, stopped at one of the camps, spoke to one of the ladies who was trying to do some educational work, a teacher. And she told him what a problem she was having. She didn't have a blackboard, she didn't have any chalk, nothing. What did he do about it? Where was he going to find a blackboard? He remembered that down the road a piece, he had passed a building, which had been evacuated. And all the shades were in the windows. He took these green shades down, gave them to the woman, which she used for blackboards. And he went around to a supply guy in the PX and got chalk, and she was back in business, and she was able to teach. Well, we had to have people who could use their ingenuity in that way to make things out of nothing. So it was that sort of educational work that had to be done. Oh, there were all sorts of things. There was the big election in Frankfurt and Ufumbah (ph), where the Germans had stored stuff, which had been looted from the private people, from Jewish libraries and things like that. It was all in there. And the job was -- not doing any good there, whatever. So arrangements had to be made for moving the stuff out and distributing --

stuff which was in the Ufumbah (ph) _____ deposit. Those are things that came up. They were very helpful to people whom we were trying to serve and what contributions which the JDC could make to welfare in general.

Q: What about helping to rebuild religious communities?

A: Well, we did that in Germany too. Well, we did that all over. We did a couple of things. In several of the countries, there weren't many rabbis, for example. The rabbis had been killed off and immigrated. Yugoslavia at that time had one rabbi who was in Sarajevo. Stockholm had one rabbi, and he was aged. We had to do something about that. We gave scholarships to train rabbis. The fellow from Sweden went over to the United States, a fellow from Yugoslavia went over to Israel, a fellow from -- who was working in Romania, he went to Israel, to help rebuild the communities. Two things: First, we had to train rabbis. And secondly, we imported rabbis on contract basis, who were willing to give a year -- or a year and a half or two years, whatever it is -- to go into a county and do a job.

Q: What about in the camps?

A: In the camps? There were rabbis in the camps, who were among the internees -- is that the right word to use? -- in the camps itself. And if there was no rabbi, there would be people -- men, who were sufficiently educated in Hebrew that they could conduct the service. And you may know, in the Jewish religion you don't have to be ordained to conduct a service. A lay person can do that too. And so that was done in many of the places where there -- in the camps, where they needed a quasi-religious functionary to run the services. But the JDC provided funds. You probably heard a story from Tetfear (ph) about a mikvah. There was a question of a mikvah, which came up in Vohrenwald, which was a camp. A very well known, world known, Jewish rabbi ended up in Fohrenwald, and he insisted on having a mikvah in Vohrenwald itself. There was one, but it wasn't kosher enough. He wanted to make his own. All right. So finally a mikvah was built for him by the JDC, but then there was the question of water. You know the water has to be rain water, pure -- it's all described in the Talmud about the water. There was no such water. JDC staff member in Vohrenwald, he went up to the hills with a truck, and brought back a truck full of snow and melted

the snow, and the snow was pure, that was fit for the mikvah. So the rabbi had his mikvah and the water, because our guy went up into the mountains and brought snow back, but it was pure water. You had to do that sort of thing. And then in the communities themselves there was a business -- we had to start Sunday school classes. We imported staff from Israel to do that sort of thing with Sunday school classes and do things for adults, who might have forgotten about their Jewish backgrounds and so on. We didn't get very much money for the rebuilding of the synagogues. We felt that that was a responsibility of other people to do, and we weren't so anxious to put funds into bricks and mortar when people didn't have [enough] to eat. You couldn't feed them bricks and so on. And so we didn't do too much of that. But where something was mobile, anything that a person could carry with them, that, we were interested in doing. Health, they could carry with them; education, they could carry with them; vocational training, he could carry with them -- good for the JDC. But we didn't involve ourselves particularly in the rehabilitating of the graveyards. You can't take that with you. And while it may have a great deal of religious significance, other people could do that. Family members or people from the same town or something could do that. We had other things to do with our funds. And so then I was in Germany, then, for a year with our program there. Then I went back to Paris and undertook other functions there. For awhile I filled in a blank in the immigration department of the JDC. The immigration, that was really a tough business, because -- as you have heard -- everybody wanted to get out. And you had people in Eastern Europe; Poland, Romania and Hungary, Czechoslovakia. They were all to come to Paris to wait in Paris until they could get their visas. And you know the difficulties which existed in getting visas. Nobody would let people in. Even to come to the United States, visas were issued in the order of priority of your registration. And according to priorities in Poland, you could have waited for eight years or ten years before you had _____, because it was all done on a quota basis. So everybody wanted to come down to Paris. Paris got all clogged up with refugees who were sitting around. Of course, we had to maintain them. What were they going to live on? We had to maintain them while there were in Paris. And so we had to arrange for them to be held back in the countries from whence they came and sent messages back to Poland, Czechoslovakia not to let people come into Paris until they

are called forward by us. Called forward meant that there's transportation, there's a ship. At that time the ships were all clogged up. There were no passenger boats going between Europe and the United States at that time. When I say "no," sure, there were -- every once in a while there would be a boat. And there was a great deal of competition to get on those boats. So there were so many places that we could get. So we had to tell people -- keep them back where they are, keep them out of Paris, because the authorities in Paris were after us, to keep the influx down. And so they had to stay back. On one occasion we had to take a whole boat, the Shohan Newbit (ph), to send that to Australia. There were so many Australian visa holders that we had to put them all on one boat and send the boat down to Australia to get them down there. And so we were in the immigration business starting -- as I told you -- until 1954. And in 1954, a couple of the agencies that were involved with immigration merged, which included the JDC too. So that took us out of the immigration business and this merged organization, of which the JDC was the principal anyhow -- at least took it out of our office and took the responsibility away from us. Another operation that we had was the American Joint Reconstruction Foundation. The foundation was established during the wars to help in the establishment of moon (ph) cooperatives for poor people -- or people who couldn't go to the bank. Banks wouldn't necessarily lend to Jews or the interest rates were so exorbitant. So we provided capital, got the local people to provide capital, and these cooperative banks were established by the American Joint Reconstruction Foundation, which were all over the place, all over Eastern Europe, had these foundations. And then of course, there were people who couldn't even pay the low interest rate that was being charged by these local banks. So we opened up free loan societies and provided the capital for that. As I said before, anything that you touched, the JDC was in there somehow or other in trying to make life more livable, to bring people back to normal as quickly as possible and so on.

Q: Was the primary goal to bring people back to normal, to sustain them or to get them moved out?

A: Yeah.

Q: Which was the primary focus if there is one?

A: That's a difficult one. I think it was more important to move people out, because they could be brought back to normal in the country to which they were going. And I would say if one had to make a choice, whether you bring people back to normal or move them out, move them out. Although it was difficult to move them out if they weren't normal. So which comes first, the chicken or the egg? It's a difficult one to work on, but it was done.

Q: When you arrived, when you were Erolson (ph) --

A: Yes.

Q: -- overseeing that, did the situation you found yourself in, in terms of the numbers of refugees, numbers of people with great needs, did the situation seem overwhelming?

A: I don't think that's a good term to use. We knew that we had a big job. If you're overwhelmed, you stay home. We had a big job, but maybe the job got bigger. And you had to do it, but you couldn't be overwhelmed. Maybe you were underwhelmed. You certainly couldn't be overwhelmed. The job might have been considered overwhelming. I think there's a nuance between the job being overwhelming and being overwhelmed by it. You know? We weren't overwhelmed --

Q: But the job was --

A: But the job was overwhelming.

Q: Can you describe that a bit?

A: Look, the JDC had a job to do. And there wasn't any question of weighing things, can we do it or can't we do it, do we have staff or don't we have staff, do we need that or don't we need that, whatever. You just dug in and did it. Now, that sounds very simple, but to use a vernacular, we surrounded ourselves with a group of "can do" people, and they did. We had to do it. There was no choice.

Q: Was the situation something more than you had ever encountered before?

A: Of course I'd never encountered it before. Nobody had encountered in before. This was the first time in history that you had a problem like this. You certainly didn't learn how to handle it in school. You certainly didn't learn it in the school of social work when the people were social

workers. You talk with a social worker and you say listen, did your social work help? They say it did not. But again, we had people who were working for us who didn't come out of the social work field at all; teachers, for example. We had -- the man who ran our camp in Cyprus -- you know about the Cyprus business -- he was a school teacher. He wasn't a social worker. But he had social instincts. So we knew what to do. We didn't have the formal training, but he knew what to do, social work. People were the way they were -- their characteristics.

Q: Do --

A: Well, I wonder whether I can take a time out to go to the men's room.

Q: Sure.

A: Where was this Joint successful? I would say this: I think you have to look at it a little bit in terms of the times. What had happened to the Jewish people in Europe was really so horrible. As you think about it, it's incredible. You can't even talk about it. How do you kill billions of people just like that? And I think that stirred up a lot of the younger people and some of the older people too, who want to do something to try to -- not make amends, because we didn't do it -- but to try to do something to relieve their plight of people involved a little bit. And they were willing to put in their time and their energies to do something about it. You had to have certain characteristics of the individual, I think, to begin with. It had to be people who were interested in doing things for other people. And when these stories got out as to what had happened, a decent feeling, decent thinking young guy

would really want to do something to try to help straighten the world out a little bit. And so they were willing to devote part of their time at least to making a contribution to bettering the lot of some people at least. And _____ concerns on trying that outlet in the JDC and going overseas and doing something about it. And I think that probably motivated many people who came overseas to work with us, and I think that that accounts for the quality and level of work which they produced for JDC and contributed to our success. And I think that the JDC could feel some satisfaction that it really did contribute something to Jewish life. Whether it's the fellow who landed back on his feet in Europe or immigrated overseas, I think we did a lot to help people. They were in far away

places; South America or elsewhere. JDC followed them along and did what it could to give them some kind of break. I think people are entitled to a break in life, and if you can do something to help them if they didn't have a break, I think you should. And I think that motivated a lot of people to do what they did. And I think that accounts for JDC's success. And then when you add to that the personalities in the United States, the lay people, who were behind the JDC and the thought that they give to it, they're entitled to a lot of credit. They helped create the atmosphere which makes people happy to do it. And that's all one's asking, _____. I don't think I have to add anything to that. I think in words of one syllable that would account for JDC's success that there isn't much that can still be done, there's always more that can be done. Lots of people, they had this tendency, when they look at the brick wall, they don't look at the bricks, they only look at the hole in the wall. They don't see the accomplishments. They only see what was undone. They see the hole, they don't see the bricks. Every once in a while we sit back and we look at the bricks too, and you get a certain feeling of satisfaction out of doing it, doing something for somebody else, whatever. You don't get wealthy at it, but the satisfaction that you get remains with you. I think that the success that the JDC has had accounts for it.

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