

-  
Interview with Claude Brunswic  
Falls Church, VA  
April 1, 1992

- A: How far did I get, five children?
- Q: Right, you had three brothers and two sisters
- A: Three brothers and two sisters. The oldest brother is Henry and after him I have a sister Dorothy, a sister Analaura, myself and I had a younger brother, H.N. (6) He was born in 1927, 1926.
- Q: He was the youngest?
- A: He was the youngest, yes. We lived in Heidelberg. As you know we have, I don't know if we have this, no we don't. We lived in Heidelberg. It was a very beautiful town. I lived there for only 12 years.
- Q: Is that where you were born, in Heidelberg?
- A: I was born in Heidelberg. It's a very beautiful town. We lived -- I remember the address, Und\_\_\_\_\_ no. 12 A. My father was a very successful physician.
- Q: Did he have a particular type of practice?
- A: Yes, an internist, internist. With this, several other things. But he mainly is internist. My mother was his assistant, that's right. My mother was his assistant, that's how she got married.
- Q: So he had a private practice in Heidelberg?
- A: He had a private practice in Heidelberg. We lived in the same house as his office was. It was all in one, the office and the people lived upstairs.
- Q: Was this just a two-story building?
- A: No, it was a three-story building, four-story building.
- Q: The practice was on the ground floor?
- A: Practice on ground level. There's something below ground, ground level, first floor, second floor, third floor and fourth floor too. Everything up to the attic. Was very fine. My mother was very active in the women's movement. She was very active in the women's movement in Berlin already where she was born. She

was active in women's political movement. Of course, they didn't get to the politics at all in Germany but you saw here how it turned out.

Q: Was she still working with your father in the practice?

A: Yes, she was. Yes she was. She was working with my father in the practice until of course, he died, really. She was always working. She was always working in the practice, even in France, all the time. Well, it says here --. I had a very happy childhood that's right. We played piano, we were interested in the arts and music. That was my main field, music.

Q: Really? You took piano lessons at home?

A: I took piano lessons at home, yes. There were two, to have piano. My brother and me, we took piano lessons and the girls did, I don't know what. They did fine.

Q: Were you a religious family?

A: We were more or less, my grandfather was very religious but my father was very much less religious. My mother was completely free but we were always observing the holidays. We went for the holidays to my grandfather.

Q: This was your father's father?

A: My father's father, yes. The other people did not observe at all. If you can see her over there, I have a portrait of my mother's grandmother. She's behind you there. No, no, you can't see it from this side, from the other side you can see it. I had this picture here. I was in high school up to the age 12.

Q: Was this public high school?

A: Public high school up to the age 12. That's when Hitler came and my father decided that they destroyed his apparatus, his x-ray apparatus and they destroyed it. My father said that's the end and he quit.

Q: What provoked them to come destroy his equipment?

A: Oh, these are young fellows, these are young fellows. Absolutely nobody told them anything. They just came and destroyed. They just were young people.

Q: Were they specifically targeting Jews at that time?

A: You bet, of course. Only Jews, only Jews.

Q: So your father had the apparatus in his practice?

- A: Had the apparatus in his practice, sure. They threw in the windows and they threw in some of the apparatus and my father said, no more.
- Q: So that was in about 1932?
- A: '33, January 1933.
- Q: Okay, just after he became chancellor?
- A: Yes, yes. I know the whole family left Heidelberg at that time. I myself went first to Switzerland, to Basel where we had some relatives and friends that took me up. Where the others went, I really don't know. But for about three months, I didn't know where they were. My father found a place in Holland where he could go to and he even opened a practice in Holland but it was undercover because he did not have the doctor's license in Holland. So it was undercover in Holland.
- Q: Your father said no more, we're going to leave Heidelberg and everyone split up?
- A: Well, yes. I don't know where my sisters went.
- Q: But they told you, you're going to Switzerland?
- A: I was in Switzerland and I don't know where the others went. We were reunited in Holland in about May of 1933. Was it three months? Maybe March.
- Q: In March of '33?
- A: April, maybe. I don't really know for sure but I was prepared in Holland for my bar mitzvah. That's right, it was May and I had to prepare for the bar mitzvah in two and a half months. It was very difficult. I really didn't know much about the Jews at all but I'm circumcised and I didn't know any further. The people, the rabbi in Holland who taught me, I don't really remember him at all. He prepared me for the bar mitzvah. I was bar mitzvahed in August 1933.
- Q: Where in Holland were you?
- A: We were in The Hague. We were in The Hague, t-h-e h-a-g-u-e. The Hague in Holland. I even remember my address it's \_\_\_\_\_, 37. I remember that. We lived there and more or less okay at that time. You don't really know when you're so young like I was 12 years old and my brother who was then seven years old, six years old, he was very small. He didn't know either. I remember that I was in this house, in the highest room there was in the house, I was there. That was my room, the very highest.
- Q: So you had a house, just your family had a house?

- A: We had one house and we even rented a room to a boarder.
- Q: Was this a Jew, do you know?
- A: The boarder was not, no. He was very strongly not Jewish at all. Andrew von Ameron. I heard of him later. He was not a Jew at all but anyway, I was bar mitzvahed. A little bit later I went to Hachshara which prepared people for Israel with a different instruction such as for instance, I did cabinet making. I was for Hachshara, I was there four years.
- Q: Where was that?
- A: In The Hague, that was in -- well it was out in the \_\_\_\_\_. Not very far from Texel, T-e-x-e-l. Again the name is the Texel, t-h-e.
- Q: So you were intending to go to Israel or to Palestine?
- A: At that time, yes, at that time. But then after a while my father became a Frenchman. His grandfather was a Frenchman in 1820 or 30. Also his name was Adolph and I remember that he is the one who gave us the French nationality because he was an Alsatian and my father was able to get his French nationality and we too got the French nationality. We moved to France.
- Q: When was that?
- A: We moved to France a little bit between 1933 and '36. About 1936 and I came in '37. Father was already in France and he was very well established.
- Q: Where were you in France?
- A: In Paris. After Father came to France, his practice was very, very well known and well received by the people.
- Q: There he was a legitimate physician?
- A: A legitimate physician, yes. There were lots of people there even though he didn't speak too well French. He did very well, he did very well after that. I spoke very well French, afterwards. It took me a while to get the French accent.
- Q: I guess you had been speaking Dutch?
- A: Dutch. I was so good in Dutch that a Dutch person said I didn't know you were from Germany. Apparently I didn't and I also remember what car this man was driving. Was a LaSalle at the time, was 1937.

- Q: That's when you were leaving to go to France?
- A: That's when later on I left France. I saw the International Exposition in France which was starting in 1936 to 1937. I was much more impressed by the Germans at that time, cast a one-meter block of steel. That is a difficult thing to do. A one-meter square, cube, a one-meter cube, block of steel. Now that's a difficult thing to do. They did this and I saw this. They had everything, the Germans had everything at that time. Well, when I came to France, I just didn't have very much to offer the people. I worked in a couple of shops. One was the piano factory, Pleyel, and I worked in several places.
- Q: Here you were tapping your skills as a cabinetmaker?
- A: Yes. I worked as a cabinetmaker in Pleyel and I made radio enclosures which at the time were made of wood and very fancy.
- Q: This was at another factory?
- A: No, no it was the same factory Pleyel, yes. We also made the composites of upper deck of the pianos and all those things. I did those at Pleyel. After a while I got sick and tired of that, I enlisted in the French army. That was 1939 and I enlisted September and got called up in October, 1939.
- Q: Did you enlist because of the war? The war had begun already in Poland?
- A: Oh, yes. The war had begun in France too in September 1. I enlisted in the French army in October or November. Anyway I got assigned to the artillery in Orleans and I remember my father came to Orleans and I had to ---. He took me out and gave me all of the things that they would like, the grown-up persons and I didn't like at all. Like how do you call these mussels that you eat?
- Q: Escargot?
- A: No, the mussels, escargot are snails. I hate them.
- Q: Oysters?
- A: Oysters, oysters! He gave me oysters and champagne.
- Q: Your father brought this for you?
- A: My father invited me to eat oysters and champagne in Orleans and I couldn't eat that. I could not eat that.
- Q: Just didn't like it?

- A: I never did try it before and this was the first time and I just couldn't eat it at that time. I was a lot thinner at that time too.
- Q: Was your basic training in Orleans?
- A: The basic training was, no the basic training was -- we were shipped from Orleans to some other place. We went into the Maginot Line, and were trained there. After I enlisted in Orleans and I guess we were educated in military manners in Orleans, then we were shipped to the Maginot Line. Then I drove a car that was absolutely 1919, unbelievable with its handles, unbelievable. It was 1917 I think, it was unbelievable. I said I drove a car to the instructor, I said I drove a car. But that car I could not drive.
- Q: He was looking for somebody to drive?
- A: That's right, that's right. I tried and I tried and I could not so I was shipped to the Maginot Line anyway.
- Q: If you could have driven the car, you would have stayed in Orleans for some time?
- A: No, no. I would have been in the Maginot Line to drive that thing. That was when I did that. Later on, it was a much better car, I had a transporter that get munitions to the line. That I could drive, that I could drive.
- Q: I guess it was a newer model?
- A: Was a newer model, correct. They also taught us 175 gun. Yes, 75 mm gun, yes.
- Q: Do you remember the feeling at that time? Did those with you in the army feel that there is going to be a war with Germany? That is a physical war with Germany?
- A: There was a physical war with Germany. You're mistaken. There was a physical war declared by France in 1939.
- Q: But the invasion wasn't until '40.
- A: The invasion wasn't until 1940, that's correct. I think it was May '40, May 10<sup>th</sup>.
- Q: Did you all feel that you would be actually seeing battle?
- A: No, we didn't see any battle until May, 1940. At that time, the Germans attacked us from Germany and at that time, I --... Was a funny thing, there were no more officers. I was not promoted at all. I was not promoted at all and I was in charge at the end of four guns.

Q: Of these 175 mm guns?

A: Seventy-five mm guns. I was in charge of four of those. I don't know how but I shot until there was no more munitions and that was the end of it. There were no more officers, there were no people around to instruct us this, to instruct us that. Once we got rid of our guns after a while, the Germans were very close at that time. I mean with a 75 mm you shot up to about those hills over there. That's how we did it. We shot at them, I learned how to do that. Then we were out of munitions, no more officers, nobody else.

Q: So we're in May 1940?

A: That was towards the end of May, yes.

Q: The officers left or were captured?

A: I don't know. The officers apparently left. As my brother gave me an account of that time, is that the officers had cars and they left in cars. We didn't know what to do. We were left alone. A few days before the Germans arrived really. I got out and put my identification which I had -- which was at that time, I was then called Kurt Braunschweig. That was the German name, Kurt Braunschweig.

Q: That was the name you were born with?

A: That's the born name I was born under, Kurt Braunschweig. When I saw that the Germans are going to come, I better get rid of my military identification and changed the name to Brunswic. There comes the name Brunswic.

Q: You just didn't want them to know that you were --?

A: Well of course not. These are our mortal enemies. It was very difficult to keep up the time anyway in captivity too.

Q: So shortly before, you took your ID and revised the name on it?

A: No, no. I buried it.

Q: You were able to obtain a new one?

A: No, I had nothing.

Q: You had nothing?

A: I had nothing. I had absolutely nothing. I know that the Germans they drove the people in front of them. They fired on the people from planes, just like in -- just

like Mr. Picasso showed it in his famous picture. The famous picture from Picasso, -- my mind is not so --.

Q: Vernacov?

A: In Vernacov. They drove us down the road and they shot at all of us, everybody.

Q: Describe to me the capture, how you were captured.

A: Well they drove us all together in one big place. The soldiers are on one side and the civilians are on another side. They did separate us. I still had my soldier's uniform at that time. Well, I was a French soldier at that time and was taken prisoner as a soldier.

Q: How long did you actually hold the line? How long did you actually fight before you were overrun by the Germans?

A: That was about two days, 2 ½ days until we learned how to get the thing going. There were four guys that got the ammunition. We had 80 rounds, how long does that take for a 75 mm gun?

Q: Probably not long?

A: Not long at all. I took maybe an hour. That was the actual resistance, an hour. Then we stayed around there and then we went there, I don't know. I don't really know.

Q: Did you have any idea of what was really happening? Did you know where -- was there anybody reporting to you, telling you what was going on? Run, the Germans are coming?

A: That's about the size of it. Run, the Germans were coming; run the Germans were coming. Everybody ran and I did too. I remember that I got a bicycle on which there weren't any tires on it and it just -- it worked.

Q: So you were able to ride away?

A: I ride a little bit, not very long. Then I gave that up too and I was taken prisoner. They were just coming, so many of them. So many Germans come through and they were well organized, well organized. They were not on horses at all. Everything was motorized, everything.

Q: What did you see first in terms of the German army? Did you see infantry or --?

A: Infantry, always infantry and planes, yes. Always planes, always overhead. The infantry came after the planes, the planes strafed us and then came the infantry.



They were as if they were on a picnic, these guys. They said, well these are the French army. That's all there was at that time, there wasn't very much. I know that I went to -- I was evacuated at that time. I don't know how I got there but I got to Bacarah and that's about 30, 40 miles off there. From Bacarah I was transported in the forty men, no, a hundred men, 50 men and 10 horses on these trains. They had us on those trains and shipped us back to Germany.

Q: So you were in there with horses?

A: No, no, not me, not me, not with horses. The train is called either 50 men or ---..

Q: Oh, in terms of the size? I see. This is a boxcar of some kind?

A: A boxcar, it is a boxcar. We were in there. We were moved to Bacarah, from Bacarah to -- I don't know where. We ended up we ended up in Trier and that's where I was registered as a prisoner of war.

Q: How long was that journey?

A: I don't think I can remember. I'm sure it was longer than one day, I think two or three days. From Bacarah to Trier, it's not very far really and that's where I was registered, 10,088, my number. I remember my number.

Q: You were with other prisoners?

A: Oh, plenty, plenty.

Q: You were with people, you still, anybody from your company was with you?

A: They were not from my company, they were all mixed up. There was nobody from my company. Really I don't understand how it was around there that I was not together with permanent people but I always changed so quickly. Anyway it was a hard time. This was definitely one of the worst times I passed in Germany when I was shipped out from that camp to get the barbed wire out of the west coast of Germany to the east coast. We got the wire from the west coast and rolled it up and they transported it to the east in preparation for the Russians. They took us right away. Finally they learned that I spoke German and from then on, it was better time.

Q: So how long were you held in Trier?

A: Oh, I was all the way in Trier until late 1944. In the meantime I was shipped back and forth to a farm in Trier.

Q: Just for forced labor?

A: Forced labor and I was shipped back into Trier to cure me of an infection and then back to Laufeld that's where the camp was, Laufeld.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: L-a-u-f-e-l-d, Laufeld.

Q: What do you remember about the conditions there, at the camp?

A: Once we were back with the peasants, we were pretty well off. Once we were back with the peasants, we had much more liberty.

Q: That is working on the farm?

A: On the farm, yes. Much more liberty and at that time, again I didn't speak German at all. Again after a while, they learned how I spoke it, what can I do huh.

Q: But that worked to your advantage?

A: It worked to my advantage, yes, it worked to my advantage.

I can't say that it didn't because if I said that, it wouldn't be true, it worked to my advantage. But the Germans are our enemies, they are, they were and they will be. The Germans are our enemies, they do not like Jews. I remember one time when we were in 1943 when we were in that camp, there came a delegation of German soldiers and they asked us, which one is a Jew? Which of you is a Jew? I didn't speak German at all at that time? When they came, I didn't of course. I don't know why the other guys didn't tell these guys, I don't know.

Q: Tell them that they knew that you were or --?

A: Sure, they knew that I spoke German at that time. But they didn't tell the other guys and I don't know why. Anyway there was a delegation there looking for Jews. They were looking for Jews, which one of you is a Jew. My friend Jacques de Fren, good John, came forward and said, there are no Jews here. We are all French soldiers. I thought he'd shoot us right away but he didn't and they left. I don't know who was what and where but I spoke German when I was in this farm, in several forms. I worked in one, two, three, four different farms. At the end, I even got a tractor. This one I was able to operate, a tractor with the plowing and all of that. He gave this to me, the foreman gave this to me. The foreman couldn't work anymore so he gave this to me to operate, so I operated it.

Q: What was the nature of the work on the farm? Was it just -- were these all to help out the general farm work?

- A: General farm work, yes, general farm work. I think that the hardest work was to pick up potatoes. When you cut the potatoes out of the ground, you have to pick them up into these baskets and I tell you it was very, very hard, very hard work. When the foreman on the farm gave us something to carry around, he wanted this oats to be moved up -- from downstairs to upstairs. He gave me a little less. He gave me a little less.
- Q: These were sacks?
- A: Sacks of oats. Gave me a little less. Transport the oats. This is the oats from I don't know how many fields, I don't know. Five of us carried the stuff upstairs. This was quite a bit of drudgery but we did it.
- Q: Did you sleep at the farms?
- A: No, we slept in a camp. We had to come back from these peasants, back to camp every day and we slept in a camp. There were eight of us, Laufeld had 8 prisoners.
- Q: Oh, that's all?
- A: Yeah, it's a small hamlet.
- Q: Where did they hold you?
- A: They held me in one of these little barrack type of thing.
- Q: All together everybody was?
- A: Yeah, eight of us altogether. It was a small room, smaller than the outside of this, not very large.
- Q: So each morning you'd be woken up --?
- A: Sure and the soldier, he was very proud to wake us up. He said rous\_\_\_\_\_.
- Q: Did you work every day?
- A: Yes, well except Sundays. Sundays we did not. As a matter of fact, most of the time when I was in camp, I went to church on Sundays. But no longer when I was in Laufeld, I didn't go to church. Also we were not supposed to go to the peasants on Sundays because apparently Sunday was their rest day. Six days we worked, that's all right with me.
- Q: Let me switch the tape.

A: Yes, do that.

End of Side A, Tape 1.

Q: You'd work six days a week on the peasants' ---, on the farms?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What about food?

A: The peasants gave us very good food. I mean it was probably Russian, whatever, but to me it was plenty. Anyway I didn't eat too much at that time. It was just fine with me at those four places.

Q: Those four places, were they all in the same area?

A: They were all around Laufeld.

Q: So Laufeld was your hub?

A: That was the hub, yes, that was the hub. I stayed in Laufeld until late 1944 at which time the soldiers said, now you have to out and you have to repair the railroad tracks in Trier. That's where we went first, in Trier. Of course the railroad tracks was a mess. That lasted for a couple of months.

Q: They were destroyed during Allied attacks?

A: Yeah, Allied attacks, sure.

Q: You probably heard those attacks?

A: Oh yeah, sure. No problem at all. I mean we saw them come over every time. We were even, we bucked this German guard a little bit but not too much. Otherwise, boy, he was so nasty, would have kicked us or something like that. But we showed him the planes going through. We were in the right area between Trier and the Moselle River, on the uplands of the Moselle River. It's called the Scnei, the snow \_\_\_\_\_. The planes came over there, not very far and we saw them, yes. At the end, we were moved from there, from the railroad tracks to -- I don't really know where. Anyway, I don't know what happened then and I don't remember very well because between September or October, 1944 and January, we were moved on and certainly moved in several places that I don't remember at all.

Q: Many prisoners were moved?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: Again in cattle cars or --?

A: That was marched, we marched a lot at that time. The winter came, the winter of '44, '45 and how was it that I got into a hospital. I got into a hospital at sometime. We had enough to eat in that hospital for us to eat, several prisoners and several Soviet refugees and all that. There was such a mix of people, I don't know.

Q: What kind of hospital was this?

A: It was a hospital in -- it was bombed -- a bombed out hospital. The lower floors were still going, were still intact and the top was bombed out.

Q: Were you just being held there?

A: We weren't held any more. That was between September, October, November and then the snow came. I know that one of those planes, from the British plane, shot up one of those trains going through the rail that we were guarding or whatever and they were shot down terribly. They were saved for their lives so I felt through with them, that this was going to be the end. Then I got into that hospital. The hospital finally in January or February, no January 1945 was liberated by American troops.

Q: So this hospital, the Germans left?

A: Most of them, yes. There were some nurses there.

Q: They had supplies? These were---?

A: They had supplies, I don't know, I just don't know.

Q: But it was within Germany you were still?

A: Oh, yes, oh yes. I was still within Germany. As a matter of fact, at the time I finally left Germany it must have been the end of January, 1945. There were a lot of people, a lot of girls too on that train that finally left Germany. I think I was liberated according to -- I was demobilized on February 7 1945.

Q: What do you remember about the liberation?

A: The first guys that came to us, to me anyway, pointed the gun at me and said who are you? I said I'm a French citizen and we are all prisoners here and we can't do anything and we are not against you at all.

- Q: This was an American?
- A: An American soldier, yes. He accepted that. I guess I'm a little bit forward so I spoke to them first. Then they came to us from a French -- not that time. anyway I know that I was demobilized in France. We had gone by cattle cars and whatever to get to Paris. We were demobilized in France February 7 1945.
- Q: Were you shipped back with other French prisoners?
- A: Lots.
- Q: Lots of everybody?
- A: Lots. They didn't ask us anybody who is what. They asked us what's your nationality? You say French so you get into this car. The other ones go in the other car.
- Q: Once you got into Paris ---o"
- A: No, I got to my parents by way of the Red Cross. They find out where my parents were and I went there about the 10<sup>th</sup> of February.
- Q: Where were they during the war?
- A: Oh, my parents were, first of all my father was hidden in pension in the south, way in the south near the Pyrenees. My father, mother and my sister they were in -- I'm sorry I have this stuff over here. I can't get it because I gave it to my daughter to read it. I didn't preclude that you would interrogate me on this. My sister was in the resistance, in the French resistance. She was in danger very often. Her husband was in danger very much so.
- Q: Also in the resistance?
- A: Also in the resistance and my brother-in-law, which is my sister's husband was going to be deported from France too. It was a matter of minutes that he was going to be deported. He managed not to be deported and they married later on. Yes. That was quite an interesting thing.
- Q: When you came back into Paris, where did you go from that point?
- A: When I came back to Paris, my brother said he saw me and I was full of filth when I came to Paris. I was just full of filth. It was from every place, it was not very good. I was not very nice and clean.
- Q: When you were first taken prisoner, had they issued you a uniform to wear?

- A: Yes. They gave a form of despates. In France you have these colonial troops, despates. This you don't want to see because these are very large trousers that are attached to the belt. This is very funny, this is ridiculous and I had the despates uniform on for at least three months, four months.
- Q: The same uniform?
- A: What do you think, the same uniform. What do you think of?
- A: I think that -- I like to make sure we get it on the tape.
- Q: Oh, sure absolutely. There was no way to wash the stuff. There's no way I could wash it. As you know, even at that time we wore one shirt and then we wore the next shirt and when that was more dirty than the first shirt, we wore the first shirt. This is what there was, there was not very much. But once we were out with the peasants we could wash our shirts, we could even prepare some food here and there. When we were with the peasants, we were treated very well. One thing that we were always afraid of is that one German soldier.
- Q: What was his name?
- A: I have no idea, I have no idea.
- Q: Had he beaten other prisoners?
- A: Oh, yes. But he didn't touch me; why, I don't know.
- Q: Did you speak German with him?
- A: Yes. I spoke German with him and why they didn't say that I actually originated in Germany, I don't know. I can't tell you.
- Q: Did you hear any news from your parents?
- A: Well, we were prisoners of war. Mail was collected every several months. I do know that I wrote to my parents. First of all, I didn't write at all because I didn't want my name in the German files. In 1943, I did write and the parents answered. They were already in Poland and they changed their name to Bactel.
- Q: How did the letter ever get to them?
- A: Huh?
- Q: How did that letter ever find them?

- A: I don't know. I don't know what happened, I don't know. I always wrote to Brunswic and I don't know how this worked. It never was very regular but I did get a letter about like once a year, twice a year.
- Q: From your parents?
- A: From my parents, yes. My father signed P, papa.
- Q: Just the letter "p"?
- A: Nothing else, but that was just enough for me. I knew it was them. After we saw the planes coming over in September 1944, we were out with -- there was absolutely no correspondence at all. I don't know where they went. I just don't know. You just told me the thing that I didn't know. I didn't know how to address my father. My father's Bactel name. I never addressed anybody to the Bactel name. No letter came to Bactel name. I was always Brunswic. I don't know how they got it but they did get it though. They did know that I was a prisoner, they also did not know where I was. Of course, there was nothing to tell them where I was because the Germans didn't give out any information whatsoever.
- Q: So you would write a letter but clearly it was looked at, information was taken out?
- A: It was very much looked at. Yes, sometimes, I don't know. I never knew that.
- Q: They knew you were a POW though?
- A: Yes. They knew that after about 1943. I know that from 1943 on, they got more regular, every six months or so, they got a letter.
- Q: What do you remember hearing about the progress of the war when you were a prisoner?
- A: Oh, yes, we heard about it. We heard about it and we were very happy by the newspapers. For instance, I was very happy when I was in camp in Trier. When I translated, I didn't translate at Trier. It was not Trier. It was another camp that we were there first and I know that the Germans had a hard time in northern Africa. That was 1942 and I also know that I was in four years in that Laufeld place. It was first in a different place. It was in a different place, there were American ---, they're less than an officer, what do you call them?
- Q: Enlisted men?
- A: Well, not enlisted men. What d you call that, higher than an enlisted man?



Q: Officers?

A: No. In between. You're not very informed either.

Q: I don't know what would be in between unless they were sergeants or ---?

A: Sergeants, right! That kind of thing. The Germans got the sergeants out of the enlisted men's quarters and at that time I got out of the enlisted men's quarters too because I spoke German.

Q: So these were American?

A: No, no. This is in the German camps, this is before I got to Trier.

Q: Your first capture, before you go to Trier, they hold you someplace?

A: They held me someplace, yes. That's where we got the barbed wire to the east front.

Q: They gave you this task of ---? This was barbed wire they already had, they were using?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: This was barbed wire on the western front?

A: On the western front and we tore it out from where it was and shipped it together on rolls and shipped it together to the eastern front. That was definitely so.

Q: That must have been horrible work?

A: That was the worst time. The first time, that was the winter of 1940, '41. That was the worst time, even I think part of it also '42.

Q: How much barbed wire did you collect? It must have been thousands of feet?

A: Millions, millions. The Germans had everything and we just didn't have --very problematic was to grab the barbed wire and tear it out. We had leather hand things, leather gloves to tear it out and that was the hardest time I spent in a German camp.

Q: What did you pull it out from? Was it nailed into ---?

A: No, it was not nailed. It was staked in. We pulled out the stakes too. The stakes were -- everything was well designed. The stakes were so well put in that you

had to take them out with a shovel. With a shovel you could get in; it took a while to get these things out. Boy, that was the hardest time I ever had.

Q: This was all in Germany?

A: This was all before, before Laufeld, yes. Before I found Laufeld. When I finally found Laufeld, I think that was the end of pretty good for me.

Q: So you cleaned up, prepared this barbed wire to be shipped to the other front for several months? Then you went on to Trier?

A: Then I went to Trier, yes.

Q: Was it there they formally registered you as a prisoner?

A: Yes, in Trier. That's right, I was not registered before. I was not registered before.

Q: Where were they holding you in that first camp? Was there some kind of barracks or were you sleeping outside, do you recall?

A: No, there were barracks and just too many people in each barrack. You can't do that to -- there were -- all those people were in barracks and we were in barracks too. After that, yes, I spoke German and then I got a bit better off. As a matter of fact, I told you that we first got the barbed wire off in Germany. Then later on they found out I spoke German and I got freed from this task.

Q: They felt they could use you in some other way, I guess?

A: Right, to get the wires (?) around.

Q: You translated for --?

A: I translated for the Germans, yes. Even then we knew how bad it was in North Africa and how bad it was in -- and how it happened. No it did not because North Africa was later. North Africa was 1942, '43. I don't know really, I'm sorry, I just don't have my reference now. But that was the worst time I had was the first year I was in camp in Germany. It was the baddest time I ever had. The food was bad.

Q: What was the food like?

A: Whatever. I don't know. I just don't know but there was some food just to keep us alive and working.

Q: Do you remember anyone ever trying to escape?

- A: There was very little escape. Why was there very little escape? Because at first everybody was under German power. The second one was there was a very great anti-Jewish community in France. I never forget them but I do know that the Jewish community in France, they didn't like us very well. But people escaped, yes. I did escape twice. The first time I got as far as the end of the camp, really.
- Q: This was the first camp?
- A: That was when I was tearing up the barbed wire out of the ground. The second time I escaped from Trier. From Trier we had two people, three people with me. We tried to go through France to Switzerland. The Alsace people, the people from Alsace-Lorraine, we got as far as Alsace-Lorraine ---.
- Q: So you were able to cross the river?
- A: Yes, yes. No problem at all. We got over the bridge and into Alsace-Lorraine and we were caught by a person who didn't like the prisoners in Germany. Because the Frenchmen didn't have much to eat and they thought that we were too fat. That was from Trier south to Alsace-Lorraine and we gave it to the German officials.
- Q: This was a Frenchman?
- A: A Frenchman, yes. He gave it to the German officials and they caught us and that's when I was in prison. I was in prison one month for escaping.
- Q: They took you back to Trier?
- A: Oh, yes. They took me back to Trier.
- Q: Did they march you back or ---?
- A: I don't remember.
- Q: So this man who turned you all in was a Frenchman who was -- sounds like he was jealous that you weren't thinner, that you weren't treated worse?
- A: Yeah. They didn't like us and they gave us up to the Germans. The Germans came and they picked us up. I mean it was so easy, too easy.
- Q: Where were you when they picked you up?
- A: In the barn, in the barn.
- Q: Just hiding there?

- A: Just hiding there. We were asleep. There wasn't very much and they didn't do much about it. They knew exactly what we were doing, knew exactly where we were going. They knew exactly everything about us, they knew exactly. They knew who we were also or did we give them our names? I think we did, give them our prisoner names and that was it. I was one month in prison. In prison, it was pretty bad because I was --. This was an underground prison and I know that the people above ground, they were all Russians. They put me into this thing, into the Russian camp because, not because, I don't know. They put me in a Russian camp, I was in prison in a Russian camp. If the Russians had not given me cigarettes and food, I might not have survived, who knows.
- Q: Were you in a cell by yourself?
- A: In -- pretty small, yes. About the size of this.
- Q: These were Russian refugees or ---?
- A: No, no, Russian soldiers. This was 1943 or after.
- Q: Your buddies who you escaped with? They also were --?
- A: Yeah, and I don't know where they went. They were shipped to somebody else, someplace else.
- Q: They threw you in this little cubicle, they really weren't feeding you?
- A: Well, they gave me something, yes.
- Q: But the Russian soldiers --?
- A: They kept me and I speak no Russian or whatever. They were really very good pals, these guys. They gave me cigarettes too.
- Q: They just passed them into you?
- A: Well it wasn't that way. The thing was underneath, underneath where the Russians were. I heard the Russians play to the tunes la-la- etc. And the guy came to the -- between two of these floorboards and passed a couple of things down.
- Q: Is that right? Extraordinary.
- A: Extraordinary. I really take my hat off to those guys. I really do, I really do.
- Q: So they kept that up on a regular basis, passing down?

- A: Yes, every evening, not during the day. In the day they could not do anything.
- Q: Were they working during the day or they just ---?
- A: Apparently, yes. They were out. When they came back in the evening, I got all of this stuff.
- Q: What kind of food did they pass to you, do you recall? Anything especially memorable about --? How were you released from the prison?
- A: I was shipped back to Trier.
- Q: Were they interrogating you during this time?
- A: Yes, oh yes.
- Q: Was this a daily routine?
- A: No, it was just one time. One time and he said I should stay for a month. I served for three weeks.
- Q: This was a junior fuehrer or head of the camp or some --?
- A: Junior fuehrer, what you said, exactly, a junior fuehrer. Under those circumstances I did not speak very well German. I did not speak very well because they would have cut me off. I was sure that this was very dangerous, very dangerous.
- Q: Speaking German was --?
- A: In that place, in that place. Back in Laufeld, I spoke German to the camp. No, no I spoke German, I didn't speak very much German at all in Trier. In Trier I did not but when I came back to Laufeld, I start speaking German to the German guard.
- Q: What was your fear about speaking German there? That they would find out where you were from? Assuming you're Jewish?
- A: Find out where I'm from and assuming I'm Jewish, sure, right away. The thing I was scared of was drop your pants. That's what you were scared of, huh. Because that's what they did at the time. Drop your pants, that's it. Right away you're off. Eight prisoners and one German guard, yes.
- Q: At Laufeld?

- A: At Laufeld. At other lager camps, then February 7, 1945 while it was -- I remember yes. My brother said I was so dirty when I came and my other brother, I met him in the stairway and I didn't recognize him, because he was then 19, I was 25.
- Q: Years had passed, right?
- A: He was 18, almost 19, that's right . He was a youngster when I was taken, when I went to Germany. He was what? He was 12.
- Q: You were just 20 when the war started?
- A: I was 19, yeah. My twentieth birthday I did in Bacarah. I was a prisoner in Bacarah. There were so many prisoners, so many, the Germans had more prisoners than they could really handle, they had more prisoners. I don't know, they managed to.
- Q: When you returned to Paris, where did you stay? Did you have to go back to where your home was?
- A: No. My parents were in Poland, they were some place in the P \_\_\_\_\_. Very soon I was a prisoner of war and I was assigned from the government, an apartment. The apartment that I was assigned to, we all moved to.
- Q: This was a privilege as a prisoner of war?
- A: We all moved to that apartment and I don't know what else happened there. Anyway from that apartment I went in the UNRRA and became a messing officer. At that time, the UNRRA advertised all over. You'd be good in the UNRRA and they'd take anybody with some military thing. I just went there and I enlisted in the UNRRA and was enlisted as a messing officer, that was for the food, you know.
- Q: Were you assigned that or did you ask to do something like that?
- A: No, I was assigned there. What can you do here? I said I can do whatever you want me to . They said messing officer, fine with me. I first knew about food after several years as a messing officer. I learned about food from my wife, really.
- Q: Where were you an officer in this? Did you stay in France?
- A: In Stuttgart, Esslingen where I met my wife and then to Turkheim in Bavaria.
- Q: You spent some time with UNRRA?

A: Well, she was with me, yes.

Q: How many years did you \_\_\_\_\_?

A: Two years, two full years, yes. From the summer of 1945 I started up in --. Well the war was finished on May 8 in France and what am I going to do afterwards. Afterwards I intended to stay some place with ---. No, I wanted to go again into UNRRA and they said it would be in Germany. I spoke German and I said that was a good opportunity. I did and --. In June '45, no that's not, it was much before. It was June 1938 or '39. In June '45 I was hired.

Q: By UNRRA?

A: Was hired by UNRRA, right. As an employee by the UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association as a messing officer. It says here and we emigrated to the USA in January 1946. We emigrated to the United States in January 1946.

Q: Did you have a sponsor here in the U.S., relatives?

A: Oh, yes. My wife's uncles were here. They were sponsors. My father even had some relatives with military personnel in Paris who he knew, who got us on the plane. As a matter of fact, my wife was pregnant at the time and that's how we got on the plane, anyway. We flew from -- first we had to go to Frankfurt. Our friend Levitan got us to Frankfurt and then we got to this registration officer. I told him who my father was. He knew my father and everything was hunky-dory and I don't know how it happened but we arrived in the United States without any paper whatsoever. Without any paper, I think there was a receipt on a board, a receipt . . .

End of Tape 1.

A: Before we went to Frankfurt, we did have a religious marriage. My father insisted that I have one and we went to Paris. We returned to Paris and the religious service took place in the house of my parents, which is not really the house of my parents, which we borrowed from somebody. The marriage took place there. My brother-in-law, Dr. George Lu\_\_\_\_\_ officiated. He's a rabbi and afterwards we emigrated to the USA, afterwards.

Q: You returned to Paris?

A: We returned to Paris and went back to Stuttgart. From Stuttgart to Frankfurt and from Frankfurt we were put on a plane. The plane went to London, Shannon, well a regular trip is two days; it took us five days. We got there, my wife was so sick. I was very happy to go there but my wife was very sick. The island in between Shannon and -- Iceland, then Canada and down the coast.

Q: Quite an airplane trip?

A: Quite an airplane trip, took us quite a while, almost five days. How many days did we take from Frankfurt to the United States? (Wife's voice from background). Three days. We were so sick. Stopped in Ireland, Shannon. Then Iceland too, then Canada someplace, I forget where. I remember that plane I tell you. (More info from wife). I don't know what he did, he didn't do anything like that. I wrote that thing down. He went to college, life experiences. This was the first flight. People took flights before that. At that time it was sweet territory and it still is, sweet territory. Went just say-so, not having a piece of paper, nothing. Here of course were my uncle and aunt in Queens. They came to La Guardia, that's where we landed, La Guardia. That's where I kissed the ground. I tell you it was \_\_\_\_\_. Not only that, was just wonderful being there, just the first few days. Hector's New York! Saw this plate of ice cream and cake and stuff, all over, unbelievable. We just hadn't seen this kind of stuff never.

Q: Can we go back a little about your childhood? We still didn't talk about when you still lived in Heidelberg. Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood there?

A: No. Was not really Jewish neighborhood, but was mixed. I know that our doctor was Dr. Hirsch and he lived across the street about two blocks away.

Q: You didn't go to Dr. Brunswic?

A: No. My father, I know that he did my finger. I had a BB gun and shot my finger with the BB gun. My father took the bullet out, it kind of hurt. No, the doctor doesn't treat his own. My sister, my brother, they always went to somebody else but I had a very happy childhood. But I did know my father liked dogs. The dogs that my father liked were very large dogs. I was about 8 years old, maybe 7 years and I was given a dog to walk around. He didn't walk, he took off and had me on the leash for the longest time and I finally got him to arrest. Somebody arrested the dog, I don't know. I couldn't take it any more. Somebody who knew the dog stopped him.

Q: This was you and your family's dog?

A: Our family's dog yes, our family's dog. It was very big.

Q: Was just a little too big for an eight year old?

A: Oh, yes. Much too big.

Q: What kind of dog was it, do you recall?

A: I don't remember.



Q: Remember the name?

A: Caesar, that was his name. I don't think that he had such a big dog after that. Didn't have a dog at all after that incident. I was very sick and tired of dogs for the rest of my life. I just don't like dogs, that's all. It was a very, very good living in Heidelberg. My father was very respected. I was well liked too, I guess.

Q: You said, you especially like music?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you have ambitions to become a musician?

A: No, no.

Q: It was just something you enjoyed?

A: It was just something I enjoyed. I also remember that later on when I was in Holland, my father and that German violinist, oh my head is very bad, my head is very bad. Honey, maybe you remember the German violinist my father and I went to see in Amsterdam from The Hague in Amsterdam. He is a very famous German violinist who also wrote a lot of tunes. Not\_\_\_\_\_, Kreistler.

Q: He wasn't Jewish?

A: No, he was not. He played in Holland. He was visiting in Holland. My father took me to that and I will never forget that. My father took me once to the opera in Germany. Isn't that something, everything I remember but not Mozart's opera. I know its opera. I mentioned it many times to you but I don't remember it. He took me to that I just remember the – I know that I went to the opera just when I was about 10 or 11 years old.

Q: Just you and your father went?

A: Me and my father and my brother.

Q: In Heidelberg?

A: In Heidelberg.

Q: You lived right in the city?

A: Right in the city, yes. Mozart, no, no, M\_\_\_\_\_. The Abduction of \_\_\_\_\_. That's what I saw first. It was very impressionable. I was then 11 years old and was very much impressed and I also was in a castle in Heidelberg. My sister was

one of the -- Dorothy, she was Puck in -- no, that was something different. That was the wedding of my sister. Anyway my sister was going to a castle in Germany at which I was not entitled to go and I was completely disappointed. She played Puck at that time when she was 12 and I must have been 8 or 9 at that time. I guess after 10, you can go, before 10, no.

Q: Do you remember besides the time when -- after Hitler came to power -- besides the time when the Germans came and destroyed your father's office, do you remember other periods of anti-Semitism in Heidelberg?

A: Not very much. Really that town was not very anti-Semitic. I know that some people that I know then were very anti-Jewish but I avoided them. I was 12 years old. Heidelberg was a university town.

Q: Was your father educated there?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Got his medical degree there?

A: Was in Berlin. My father was in Berlin first, that's where he got his girlfriend, you know.

Q: What else do you remember about your childhood in Heidelberg?

A: It was very nice, very nice. I can't complain to anybody that people didn't like us. I know that we went -- I was swimming in Heidelberg. As a matter of fact, one thing I do remember is that I was excluded from the swimming club in Heidelberg, was excluded from swimming in November, October, 1932 because I was Jewish, yes

Q: The city swimming pool?

A: Yes, the city swimming pool. Maybe my father said to me, we shouldn't go there or something like that. I was very good at that. I was training for a lot more.

Q: For swimming?

A: Oh, yeah. That was a very good time for me. In the summer I went to \_\_\_\_\_ and in the winter I went to the swimming pool. I was very good at that, very good. I just had a wonderful life.

Q: Did you have any responsibilities at home?

A: Not much, no.

- Q: Pretty much went to school?
- A: Pretty much went to school and I read everything under the sun. Anything I could get my hands on, everything. As a matter of fact, we had private watchmen, security man, always came by and noticed that I was always\_\_\_\_\_. Lisien, he inherited it from my grandfather. Sure absolutely.
- Q: This was a nanny?
- A: She was a nanny, yeah. She was a nanny to my father. Absolutely.
- Q: What was her name?
- A: Lisien. That wasn't me, that was my brother. Wasn't me, was my brother.
- Q: That's what you said then.
- A: Big skirt, that's right. A young man then, a young doctor.
- Q: Your father came from a fairly well off family?
- A: Yeah. That's my grandmother, yes. The brooch she had, they all diamonds from that one brooch, they all diamonds. Was a lot too in Toronto. Oh, yes, they were but not me.
- Q: What was their business?
- A: Paper and paper products. They were extremely well off at that time. They had a factory somewhere, I don't know where. My mother had a piece of land in East Berlin. Still trying to get money out of it but we can't. I think that they are not going to give it. I know that you were also well off. Oh, yes, they had land in Brazil, that's right.
- Q: Who had the land, your grandparents?
- A: My mother, my mother's parents. They had land the size of New Jersey. Brazil and they never got it because the people wanted land. This is where you invested something in another country say from -- say Berlin. You invested something in another country, you bought land, territory. They said the size of New Jersey. It's too late, too late.
- Q: Do you remember visiting your grandparents?
- A: Yes, I remember my father's.
- Q: Where were they? Were they in Heidelberg also?

A: No, my father's father was in \_\_\_\_\_. A town not very far from Heidelberg about 110 kilometers, that's about 60, 65 miles, something like that. I remember him and I also remember the calf's knuckles. Tried the calf's knuckles, my grandfather gave me the calf's knuckles and made me----- I tried to eat it; I couldn't get the stuff down, no way. I went to bed, had no supper. I must have been 6 or 7. As a matter of fact, I didn't like oysters for that matter. That was when I was 19 ½. I was in New Orleans. In France you start at age 20. You are in the army at age 20 to age 50. I was still -- in 1957. I was still in the reserves. I was 37 years old. Absolutely, hey, I got a letter from the Consulate. I was supposed to go --. As a matter of fact, you never get rid of the French nationality, you have this for the rest of your life. But not when it comes to pay money which I saw the other day because when I applied for my pension, they didn't want to give it to me. French Legion of Honor, very good, but that's my brother, not myself.

Q: Did you ever go to your father's practice? To watch or to help him?

A: Not only did I not go but I was forbidden to go there. I was only 12 years old then. My brother who then was already a student in medicine, that's Henry. He was a brother in Germany, did his studies in Germany, in Hague and in Paris. Now he's something else. But you see this was a wonderful time at that time, it was interrupted by this presence of war, was very bad, very bad. Just \_\_\_\_\_ barbed wire always. Barbed wire out of the ground shipped it to Russia.

Q: Rolled it up on the spools?

A: On the spools, yes. One guy who knew how to put exactly on there; I don't know what he was. He was not trained in the military, I am sure. But he knew how to put the barbed wire on spools, knew how to train the men. One guy I was just the turner of -- pull the barbed wire out of the ground and after I was tying the next one. That was the worst time, that was the worst time.

Q: Before liberation, I guess they took you and marched you to the interior of Germany?

A: Oh, yes.

Q: You don't recall though the name of the town where you were liberated from? Do you think you know about how far inland the interior was?

A: It probably was bombed because we were not in the outside of the hospital. The hospital could not be penetrated by the bombs. This I can't understand because today you can make bombs that can penetrate anything but at that time, the bombs just went up to about the ground floor. Everything on the ground stayed pretty

well. There were approximately in that house probably a hundred prisoners of war and about 20 nurses.

Q: You were just being held there, you weren't ill or injured or anything?

A: It was at the time when American troops were very close and I was just being held there.

Q: Still under guard?

A: Always. Can't help that, Germany under guard, always. You have to be always, you always have to watch. The German guards understand what you were talking about even if you're talking in different languages. Even if you're talking English or French or whatever in the camp and in the hospital. G-d help us, that's what the ladies said when the bombs were falling.

Q: So one day you got up and the soldiers were gone?

A: One day and two days, took a few days for the Americans to arrive, took about four days and then they came. I thought I was somebody and I went out and I opened my arms, here you are guys. They didn't think that, they put their rifles in my stomach. They said who are you?

Q: What language did they ask you in?

A: English. French and English. I remember that in Germany already I had French, English, Latin and Greek in high school. That was part of our curriculum. Greek, I wasn't very good at, Latin I was okay. In French I don't think so and English neither but in Latin I was pretty good. I remember I had my marks sent back to me, pretty poor. I did this in the United States, I finally went to college, City College and I graduated cum laude there. At that time you see, I didn't study for nothing. I was 26 when I got here, 27. First my wife came, we were organized there. My boss said you have to go to school. I have to first do my high school because I wasn't with high school yet. I went to high school and what is the teacher that taught me high school English? In New Jersey. Prepared me for high school diploma. I didn't have much from Germany. Prepared me very well because I had no problems I didn't have money enough to -- so I dropped out. We couldn't pay, we dropped out because we couldn't pay. The college suggest that we move to New York State so that I could go to City College. That's right in 1948. So we were forced to move to New York. Lived in Astoria, matriculated right away in college.. Yes, not only that the professor of music in college, his name was Brunswic. Said you're joking, says I'm not. Okay.

End of Tape 2.

