

Rudolf VRBA

BOBINE 260 (in Central Park)

NY Vrba 93

Q: Mr. Vrba, you...you escaped from Auschwitz the 7th of April 1944, and it was a successful attempt. I would like to know two things: first, how many attempts of escape from Auschwitz did exist, how many were successful, and last question, why did you do it?

A: Well, the statistics about the escapes from Auschwitz exist and I have read various. They say that there were eighty successful escapes and four hundred attempted escapes which ended with death, but I am not so sure if their statistics are true, because from those eighty people who escaped supposedly, we didn't hear very much. We don't know about them, so I don't know. What was your second question? How...

Q: My second question were how many successful attempts?

A: Successful attempts - before Wetzler and I escaped?

Q: Yes.

A: I am not aware of any to my knowledge. There might have been, but I don't know about them.

Q: You don't recall the escape of Lederer?

A: Oh yes. I do recall it now. This was shortly before I escaped. But if that escape was successful or not, at that time I did not have any possibility to check on it. Because if he didn't return within three days or within four days, there was no way of saying that an attempt was successful or not. But the Lederer escape I remember very well.

Q: Yes, but I think it was a successful one, as a matter of fact.

A: It was, yes. As...looking back on it I can say that it was a successful escape.

Q: Yes, we know it. OK. And my question is now: why did you escape? Why did you do it?

A: Well, naturally everybody...

Q: I don't say HOW, because I know that.

A: The reason for escaping?

A: Yes.

A: Well, it was my intention to escape from the first moment that I have seen where I am. But at that time, it was

particularly urgent because I knew that all was prepared for the murder of one million Jews from Hungary. And because it was close to Slovakia, I thought that it would be possible to give the warning. Naturally, I wanted to live too. I mean, I knew that if I escaped successfully that I might survive and naturally I was interested in surviving myself.

Q: Yes.

A: But not at any price.

Q: You could have been killed too.

A: Oh yes. The risk... There was some risk involved.

Q: Yes, but... as far as I know, you always, since the very beginning, even before being shipped to Auschwitz, you had always the idea to... es... to escape, not to let (unclear)

A: Well, when it was announced to me from the Jewish Community leaders, that I have come and let myself shipped into some waggon to an unknown place, naturally it didn't come into my mind to obey such a stupid instruction. And I tried to escape first to Hungary, and for certain reasons....

Q: But this... this was at the very beginning?

A: This was before they got me to Auschwitz. Then...

Q: Can you explain how it was announced to you by the Jewish Community leaders? Can you describe the... the situation as it was at the time?

A: It was....

Q: ...in Slovakia?

A: Looking backwards, looking back, it was done in a very... in a way which could be called rafiné, because they said first that only men from sixty to thirty will have to be 'resettled'. Because.... and if they go voluntarily, nothing will happen to their families.

Q: Yes.

A: But there was already talk about.... and only those who were not married were supposed to go. Now this was announced... The Jews were by that time organized in such a way by the authorities that there was no direct contact between the official authorities and individual Jews. All the contact was channeled through the so-called Centre for Jews. And that was the Jewish

Council.

Q: Yes, but....Ah, yes, Judenrat.

A: Judenrat.

Q: Yes, go on. You said that you didn't want to obey such a stupid order. You said.

A: Yes, well,...

Q: And...but the others obeyed?

A: Yes, I was surprised how...that they did obey.

Q: And what is your explanation for it?

A: My impression is that the Jewish communities were trained very much to obey always somebody with authority. And there was an enormous amount of conformity among them. They always tried not to be different. They were always afraid to be different.

Q: Yes?

A: And...everybody somehow knew too well his place. For instance if I would come and say 'don't go - this is stupid' or 'this is nonsense to go voluntarily', they would say 'who are you'. I mean, big people say you should go, important people. people.....and who were those important people? It was usually people who had some social substance, had some doctor degrees and property, and preferably both. And people with those qualifications or higher religious qualifications, a good position in the synagogue and so on, they had to be obeyed by the rest of the community, it was just for them unimaginable not to obey those characters.

Q: Yes? But OK, we will come back to...

A: Yeh,

Q: ...this later on. OK, you say that you escaped on April '44 because...mostly because you wanted to give a warning.

A: This is coming back now to Auschwitz.

Q: Yes.

A: Well, obviously that....to give it a meaning, to the two years which I spent in Auschwitz and to escape only for my own sake, would be ridiculous. And because I had the information in considerable detail that the Hungarian Jews are going to be murdered en masse in a very short time, this means that I expected that it should start in May, and it

did start in May, And I thought I would see the whole murder machinery could work only on one principle: that the people came to Auschwitz and didn't know where they are going and for what purpose. And I assumed that the natural instinct of self preservation, if nothing else, will create, if nothing else, if not resistance, then at least sufficient panic, that this organized transport of human beings into a centre like Auschwitz, where they are being slaughtered like pigs, only less humanely, and with the efficiency of a <sup>big</sup> slaughter house, say in Chicago, that this process could at least be slowed down if those people would have been warned in advance and panic. Because once there is a panic, you see, I thought that...of course I hoped that there might be resistance, armed resistance, or any sort of resistance, because the Germans were so sure that no resistance is possible, that they became cocky. I mean, it wasn't so difficult to hit back. And they would have been probably very surprised, if...if there would have been a resistance. But even if there wouldn't have been a resistance but only a panic, see, it is a big difference, to slaughter pigs or hunt deer. If you have to hunt each one separately, hunt him down, it never goes so fast like if you drive thousands, ten thousand or fifty thousand pigs in a well organized, fashioned manner into a slaughter-house. Once they are in the slaughter-house, obviously nothing can be done. Therefore I thought that a warning to those people.... Characteristic in the whole time in Auschwitz was whenever we asked people who came there and lost there their wives and children and fathers and mothers, we asked them 'we are here already a year or two, why did you come here?' and they always told us: 'well, we didn't know what's happening. If we knew what's happening, we wouldn't have volunteered for this journey.' So the secrecy of the operation was.....

Q: I don't think the word 'voluntary' is right. They didn't volunteer.

BOBINE 261

NY 99

Q: Yes, I...I agree completely with what you said, that in order

to have a smooth process of destruction, the Nazi needed to have people completely ignorant of their fate. But in another way you said that the people came voluntarily to their death. I discuss the word 'voluntarily', because as a matter of fact, they didn't know. If they would have known, maybe they would have done something against it.

A: Well, by 'voluntarily' I mean that when they given the information via the channels of the Judenrat, of the Jewish leaders, to come with 25 kilogram of their belongings for a collection place which is on such and such street, they went there. So I don't say that they went there with pleasure, but they went there without any particular resistance. This means, they went there basically in an orderly fashion, according to facts.

Q: Yes, this is absolutely true. But there is something that I don't understand very well, you say that you escaped because you wanted to warn the Hungarian Jewry of impending fate. But during the two years that you spent yourself in Auschwitz, you saw a lot of people already arriving and being immediately killed and gassed.

A: Yes. Those....

Q: And why did....it's not a polemic question - but if you wanted to warn, why did you wait for two years?

A: Well, when I saw what the Nazis are doing there, this means, when I could see that Nazis with bamboo sticks in their hands were driving children or old women or old men into the gas-chambers, it was my opinion that it is my duty to jump at the neck of the first one, no matter what the cost would be.

Q: You thought this really?

A: Yes, this way I was convinced. I was convinced that nobody is supposed to stay, to tolerate the sight of anything of this sort. But of course, I know also that the moment I would have made the first move, that there...I would be killed and that many would be killed in reprisal - from the prisoners there. For this is one problem - the reprisal. And the reprisals were of such a nature, that final death

of those who were subjected to the reprisals, was only the end point, it was only the liberation. The reprisals.... Nazis were very inventive with that, they have got quite a bit of imagination. So there was another possibility how to cope with the situation, and that possibility was to die in a meaningful way, if it is necessary to die. And I thought that my life would have some meaning there, that my tolerance that the way that I kept quiet while seeing all this, would get a meaning, if I would manage to carry the message out. And of course it is easy to say post-factum, and....but of course the....it was clear to me that if I risk my life in order to bring out that message, that my survival was justified.

Q: ~~You~~ mean, to survive for two years?

A: Yes. That it was justified...it was justified to survive.

Q: Because as a matter of fact, the people who jumped at the neck of the...of the killers were very few. Nobody did it.

A: No, there was no resistance, there is no case recorded, until much later, and those cases are only very few. And I think that the main reason was, of course, the fearful reprisals against other prisoners, who were....hostages. If somebody moved, the Nazis would kill say the next hundred or something like that. And there was already in the camp a certain sort of ....feeling of responsibility to one another.

Q: Among the survivors, the people who...?

A: Among the prisoners, yes.

Q: Yes, who had not been immediately killed.

A: Yes, yes. There developed a certain of feeling, among the prisoners, that they are something different from those victims, who being constantly murdered, day and night, in the same camp. And it was something like....Those...the others were called 'the civilians'. This is a peculiarity of the camp.

Q: Who were the civilians?

A: Those who came into the camp and never became prisoners and were straight forward murdered. And they were considered....

Q: Ah, they were called the civilians.

A: Civilians. The same, the Poles...for instance there was an unrest among the Polish political prisoners. When there were very often execution, every Monday morning a hundred fifty or two hundred of them would be executed in the Block 11. And...

Q: In Auschwitz Eins?

A: In Auschwitz Eins. And an unrest developed among them, which could have lead to a revolt, and somehow the Nazis spread the rumour that nobody from the prisoners will be anymore be executed, there are only civilians. This means people who were coming from the Gestapo in Kattovitz or in Krakau and so on. They were brought to Block 11 and murdered. And once it was said that it's civilians, it had somehow a different ring. Because the Poles in the camps said: 'well, we are not responsible for the civilians, we are responsible.....

Q: It quietened? It quietened the....

A: Yes, yes..

Q: ...the prisoners?

A: Yes, it quietened the prisoners.

Q: Well, I would like very much now...because - for how long did you work at the ramp when the civilians, precisely, arrived?

2/ A: I worked there from August twenty....from August eighteen, 1942 until June seventh 1943.

Q: This means almost one year?

A: Well, it would.....

Q: Ten months.

A: Well, it would be about nine to ten month.

Q: Yes. And could you describe exactly what was the work at ramp. But in details, please.

A: In details?

Q: Yes.

7/ A: Basically, we were belonging to a command, to a working detachment, I was put in August 1942, which enabled me to have a close look on what was actually happening in auschwitz. There was a place called the ramp, where the trains with the Jews were coming in. And they were coming

day or night. And sometimes one per day, and sometimes five per day, from all sorts of places in the world. And so our detachment was brought to...there...this Canada Command to deal with the property of those people.

Q: Yes?

A: So what happened was the following. [Say a transport of Jews was announced to come at two o'clock. So when the transport came to the close stations, say Mislowitz,....

Q: You got the announcements yourself?

A: Pardon?

Q: The inmates got the announcement too?

A: No, [the announcement came to the SS.

Q: Yes.

A: Now, once [the announcement came to the SS, One SS-man came and woke us up. We had to get up and move to the ramp. We immediately got an escort, in the night, and we were escorted to the ramp, say we were about two hundred men.

Q: In striped clothes?

A: Yes, in zebra clothes. [And the ramp was sort of a platform, which was about a mile long, one and a half kilometers I would think, more than a kilometer long. [Now before the train arrived, there came another detachment, of SS, who first surrounded the ramp, in a rather dense way. You see, there was one every ten yards with a gun in the hand.

Q: This means many people?

A: Oh, yes. There was a detachment of SS which could be...say the ramp was surrounded by a hundred, one hundred of them. [And lights went on.] So once they were brought in, into this circle of this ramp, then our own guards could go away, because we were inside a strictly guarded circle. [There was the ramp, around the ramp were lights and under those lights were the cordon of the SS. So we were in the middle, the prisoners. Then later....and we were waiting.

Q: Waiting for the train?

A: [Waiting for the train, waiting for the next order. I mean, for the train. So there were....the prisoners were lined up in...per five, you know. And we had to stay there. And then came the SS officers, sort of higher entourage. Those were not the guards, but that were the people who were



supposed to deal with the transport itself. You must understand that in Auschwitz there was a system by which the guards who had nothing to do but to watch that nobody escapes, were completely different detachments than those who were then acting in the middle of this guarded place. So now came the gangster elite, all dressed up as officers, in military uniforms. And there was usually...one of them was a doctor, who had actually a medical degree. And they came, say there were about ten or twelve of them, fifteen, twenty - depends how...what the weather was and how big the transport was supposed to be. When all this was done, and everybody was there, the transport was rolled in. This means in a very slow fashion, the locomotive, which was always in the front....

Q: At the front?

A: At the front. Was coming to that ramp, and that was the end of the railway line. That was the end of the line for everybody who was on the train.

Q: Who...who was driving the locomotive?

A: It was a civilian and I cannot....I never had an opportunity for a discussion with him, so I can't tell you anything about it.

VRBA

NY 100 → 109.

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BOBINE 262

NY 100

Q: All right, you go...you go on describing this arrival. I would like to know what were your feelings when you were waiting for these trains and knowing that most of the people who would be in, would be immediately sent to the gas. But describe.

A: It is very difficult to describe feelings. But I have seen it so many times, that it became a routine. I wouldn't think that I have been in any way particularly moved or....I mean, it was not time for feelings. It was more the thought which I had behind it. You see, I saw those transports rolling in one after the other, one after the other, and I am sure that I have seen at least two hundred of them, in this position.

Q: Two hundred?

A: At least. And each transport had sometimes thousand people and sometimes five thousand, you know, it varied and what was for me very difficult to....difficult to comprehend was that those people are disappearing from somewhere.

Q: From somewhere?

A: Yes. They are disappearing, and that people in this mass, and I know of course that within a couple of hours after they arrived there, 90% of them will be gassed, or something like that. And somehow in my thinking, it...I could...it was difficult for me to comprehend that people can disappear in this way. And nothing is going to happen, and then comes the next transport and they don't know anything about what happened to the previous transport. And that this is going on for months and months, on and on. And of course I developed a certain...certain attitude to all those people, who themselves never asked the questions: and where are those who were deported before us?

Q: Who never asked - when and to who?

A: Well, say....

Q: When they arrived or before.....

A: Before they arrived, before the departure. Constantly people were sent from the heart of Europe and disappeared somewhere into nowhere. And they were arriving to the same place, with the same ignorance of the fate of the previous transport, each time. So this was puzzling. I couldn't understand it. And...well, it became clear to me that they simply....everybody was so interested about himself, and not interested in what was happening around him.

Q: Ah, yes, but you said that you developed a kind of routine, yourself.

A: Well, I would think so, yes.

Q: But not only you?

A: Oh, it was...who didn't develop a routine...I mean, the...the first sign of surviving was accepting the different mentality, accepting the reality, which is so very different from the text book from which we were educated.

and still living. I mean, the number of survivors is a very small percentage, we don't know what were thinking those who didn't survive or who didn't choose to survive. Among those who...you see, from the prisoners, fifty per cent from new arrivals of prisoners, those who were not gassed but came into the camp, would live only very short time, two or three months. And I am not so sure if it was only a physical....physical reasons which caused the death. I suppose that....the difficulty to change the mentality completely, a loss of will to live, I don't know.

Q: All right. Can you go on describing now the....

A: But inertia against what you are seeing, this had to develop.

Q: Yes. I understand very well.

A: Well, what was happening when the transports arrived.

Q: Ok. There was the lights, everything was lighted.

A: Yes. Now that...again it was a routine, but this routine had variations. Now I will give you a typical example: once a train arrived naturally the SS who were standing around the platform, they wouldn't move, but this elite inside, all those German gangsters in officers' uniform they all were wearing walking sticks, not clubs, elegant walking sticks, white gloves. Now the train stopped. And the gangster elite marched on the ramp, and in front of every second or every third waggon, and sometimes in front of every waggon, one of those Unterscharführers was standing with a key and opened the locks, because the waggons were locked. Now, inside the people of course, and you could see the people looking through the windows, because they didn't know what's happening, they had many stops on the journey. Some of them were ten days on the journey, some of them were two days on the journey. And they didn't know what this particular stop means. Now the door was opened and the first order they were given was 'alle raus' - everybody out. And in order to make it quite clear, they usually started with those walking sticks to hit the first or second, the third, who were....they were....they were like sardines

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in those cars...in those...in those, those waggons. So the rest got the point. I mean there was never much explanation. My handbag? is there, OK. Sorry. There was never much explanation, and so the people got out from the waggons....

Q: They jumped?

A: Well, they were driven out with sticks, with bamboo sticks, with clubs, they were driven out. However, sometimes the SS if it was a good weather, they used to deal with it differently, and I was not surprised if they were in a different mood and....and exhibited a lot of humour. Like say, 'good morning, Madame, will you please walk out'. ]

Q: It happened?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And 'how nice that you arrived. We are so sorry that it wasn't too convenient, but now things will become different.' Things like that.

Q: Really?

A: Yeh. There....There was a variation. I mean, they were bored too. I mean, they...if they had time. I mean if you had a transport, a day on which five or six transports would come, then this wouldn't happen because whenever a new transport came, the ramp was cleaned absolutely to zero point. No trace of the previous transport was allowed to....

Q: to remain.

A: to remain.

Q: No one trace.

A: Not one trace. Therefore, if they expected on that day four or five or six transports, the pressure on getting out from the waggons was high. They they used sticks, clubs, cursing, etc, etc.

Q: They had to go very fast.

A: Very fast. On the other hand, when they had time, and when the weather was good too, well, it could go a bit slower and they exhibited a lot of good will and sort of a subtle irony (unclear). A typical Prussian humour.

Q: Prussian Humour?

A: a Prussian humour, yes. They would...They would...they would be extremely polite and...and....having a good time. I mean, things were sometimes different. Well, so the people came out, and were ordered to immediately.... to stand up in file, in columns. They were organized in a column, in rows of five. Now there was always an amount of people who could not get out from the waggons. Those were those to die on the road...

Q: you mean each waggon?

A: In...not in each waggon. There were no rules about that. You see, there was a great variation, because if the train came from a place in winter, and the train was ten days on the road, and there were eighty - ninety people per waggon then you could have as many as one third of the people dead on arrival. On the other hand, if the train came from a place like Prague or Vienna, where the Nazis had to sort of keep better appearances, or from Paris for instance, and the train wasn't too long on the journey, then it was possible that there was only in every second waggon a dead. So sometimes there were in a transport already hundred two hundred, three hundred dead people, and sometimes only three or four. So this was very difficult to say. Then, there were others, who...a number of people in the waggon, who in spite of the clubs could not be persuaded to get out because they were dying. They were not yet dead....

Q: They were dying?

A: Dying people. or people who were sick to such a degree, that even a persuasion with violent beating wouldn't get them moving fast enough. So those people stood....remained in the waggons. Also the people were driven out from the waggons and....everybody....it was told to them: 'Don't take anything with you. Alles liegenlassen'.

Q: They had their belongings in the same waggon?

A: In the same waggon. [You see, in the waggon was the belongings and the people, you know, somehow in some way, pressed. So when the people were already out of the waggons and separate from other prisoners, because it was very important for the Nazis, that we, the prisoners, should not be able to communicate with those new arrivals.

BOBINE 263

NY Vrba 101

A: So, great care was taken that we do not get, the prisoners into a direct contact with the arrivals. were organized in such a way, that they were in proper columns: women, children, men. The first thing was to up into a proper column, and this proper column was standing. Then, the command came to us, prisoners, to move towards the waggons. And we were, of course, lead on by all sorts of Kapos and Unterkapos with clubs in their hands, and behind them were again the SS, with walking sticks in their hands, and we were supposed now to....the first thing was to deal with bodies. Dead or dying. So our first job was to get into the waggons, to get out the dead bodies, or the dying, and transport them in Laufschrift, as the Germans liked to say, this means running.....

Q: Laufschrift?

A: Laufschrift, ja. Never, never, never walking or something. Everything had to be done in Laufschrift.

Q: Immer laufen.

A: Immer laufen. So, very sport....they are a sporty nation, you see. And we had to get out those bodies, and on the ramp, running, to get them on a truck which was at the head of the ramp. There were already trucks prepared... trucks were ready. Say, the trucks were five, six, sometimes standing there, sometimes more, there was no iron rule. But the first truck was for the dead and the dying. And as....

Q: You were...you were running?

A: Yes, we were running. Not more than two people were supposed to carry a body. This means that one got the hands, the other the legs. But sometimes....and of course it had to be done fast, and in order that we don't lose time, the Nazis were around with their....with their walking sticks in their hand, and giving us a bit of enthusiasm to this sort of job.

Q: To you?

A: Yes. I mean, they hit here and there. And...so we came to the...to the truck and the trucks were...they were very peculiar trucks. Those were trucks like for sand, which could be lifted, you know. But at that moment they were not lifted, only the rear part of the truck was open and there was a small platform, staircase, and we had to run up with the body to the...up the staircase and then already in the truck, were other prisoners, who would take over the body and somehow accommodate it in the truck. And we were immediately supposed to turn and as rule... sporty rule was, in Laufschrift back to the wagon.

Q: And you put the dying...dying people with the dead?

A: Dying and the dead. We had...the job was to get it to the truck, and the job of those on the truck was to place the in the truck. I mean, there was only usually one truck available for this purpose, and there...there was not much medical care taken to establish who is dead and who

to be dead. I mean, you know, who is only simulating. So they were put on the trucks and those trucks went then...once this was finished, this was the first truck which moved off and then straight to the crematorium which was about two kilometers to the left from the ramp...

Q: At that time it was two kilometers...

A: At that time....

Q: ...it was before the construction of the...

A: Before the construction of the new ramp. Yes. This was the old ramp. I mean, through that old ramp, the first one and three quarter of million people went, through that old ramp.

Q: One and three quarters?

A: One and three quarters.

Q: This means the majority.

A: The majority, through that old ramp. The new ramp was only built for the big business with the Hungarian Jews. That was the particular purpose and the whole thing had to be better stream-lined. However, we are keeping on the old ramp. When this was done, and the dead and dying were transported, we had to move into the wagons and take out



all the luggage, absolutely everything. And this was all out on the ramp, in sort of big heaps. Meanwhile, the Nazis...

Q: You said...this was...this could be at night and in day-time...?

A: This could be at four o'clock in the morning, at twelve o'clock lunch-time, at one o'clock night. I mean, there was, there was no rule to it. When the transport arrived to the...about distance of twenty kilometers from Auschwitz, the signal came, and we were...had...this particular detachment was always ready there for the transport, of prisoners. And obviously there was always ready for a...arrival of the transport the particular detachment of SS, for the cordon around, for escorting us, prisoners, to the ramp from the camp. And of course there was always a group of the...Nazi officers or whatever they were, for the inside work. Can you under...follow what I am saying to you?

Q: Oh yes.

A: So this was always prepared. And it was...there was no particular hour of arrival. Also, I must say that most of the arrivals, but not all, most, were when it became dark.

Q: When it became dark.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. With the light?

A: Eh...

Q: I mean with the...electric

A: With the electric light. Yes. And...most of the work was done under electric light.

Q: But there is one thing which is very difficult to grasp: when these people arrived with corpses inside the...waggons, and when there were many corpses. I mean, how could they still have hope to come in a place where they would work, survive, live. I mean this should have been a sign for them, no?

A: It is very difficult for me to answer this question, because I never went voluntarily into such a wagon.

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Those trains were guarded minimally on the road to Auschwitz:

Q: Minimally?

A: Minimally. But when I was transported there, they special two guards standing by me, who explained to me what is going to happen to me if I move. Because I had already two escapes behind me.

Q: Because you were coming from Majdanek, from another camp?

A: Oh, this is a different story, I don't want to confuse it..

Q: No, no.

A: ....veřy much.

Q: Yes.

A: But as the people were....you see this depends from where they were coming. If the people were coming from a relatively civilized place, this mean civilized, this means from a place where the Germans were careful not to show their real face....

Q: From the West?

A: So-called west, say they came from Paris or if they came from Vienna, or if they came from Prague, or from Bratislava then those people were probably thinking that it is: thanks God we are already somewhere, all this is an error, somebody organized the transport wrongly, things must now become better, this is intolerable. And now obviously, things will become better. And of course when it was not...nice day and not too much to work, the Nazis, of course, had a good time in saying: 'Good God, in what state did those horrible Slovaks transport you. This is inhuman.' I mean, this sort of humour was there.....quite common.

Q: And this of course quietened the people?

A: All this of course immediately....Oh yes, that's very nice I...I....I remember how some people even said: 'Oh here are German officers, finally we are in....' I mean, people had a lot of naivi...naive imaginations about what an officer is, and what a Nazi officer is, and what the world was about at that time.

Q: But would you have the...the possibility, which is ast... very far-fetched question, to talk with these people, would you have talked?

A: Well, there were attempts to talk to them. You see, any attempt to talk directly with a new arrival - the new arrivals were supposed to be kept without panic and orderly marching into the gas-chambers. Especially the panic was dangerous from women with small children. Or for whole families. So, it was important for the Nazis, that none of us give some sort of a message, which could cause a panic in the last moment. And anybody who tried to get into touch with the prisoners, was either clubbed to death or...clubbed to death, or taken behind the waggons and shot.

Q: But this happened sometimes?

A: Not infrequently. not infrequently. But of course all the prisoners who were for sometimes...You see, in this command, in this Canada Command, which was working there there was a very high mortality.

Q: Yes?

A: Very high mortality, because many people of the prisoners liked to be there because there was a possibility to steal some food. This means we were not hungry. Because those people brought food with them, and we naturally tried to steal something for us too. So there was something to eat and that's what was the attraction of it for the...many prisoners to work there. But on the other hand, the slightest deviation from the routine by a prisoner, was punished by death.

Q: So you remember, do you recall cases....

A: Oh.

Q: ...when people tried....

A: There were so many cases, You see, there was a great mortality in this group among the new-comers, who were new, who didn't know yet. You see, one of the principles of Auschwitz was, like in many other places, that nobody explained to you, what the <sup>rules</sup> are. Either you got the rules, or you didn't get them. And if you didn't get them, that was a bad luck.

Q: Yes, very bad luck.

A: That was very bad luck. So people who thought that they

*ff*  
*Sound out to end of*

could sort of flout the order and just walk there and *roll* say something to the new-arrivals or so, I mean they were....they were killed. People who couldn't keep on the tempo of the work, they were killed. And it was not necessary to kill him on the spot, sometimes they were just beaten to such a way, that the next day or two days, they couldn't walk anymore and couldn't move any more. They somehow got into the selection process in the camp and it was not necessary..... as the Nazis used to have a special expression. They didn't say: 'kill him - Schlag ihn tot' - never - they said 'mach ihn fertig'

Q: Mach ihn fertig?

A: Mach ihn fertig.

Q: Mach ihn fertig.

A: Or...or...or they said: 'Den habe ich schon fertig gemacht'. This means the guy was beaten until he couldn't move. He was finished.

BOBINE 264

NY 102

Q: You...do you recall precise cases where people tried to warn the...arriving.

A: It is...

Q: (unclear)

A: *AS* There were such cases which I can recall. There... there were many cases with various histories. Now one case I recall that a transport came from a...from Theresienstadt, from Czechoslovakia. And those transports usually came in reasonably good condition. And some of the people were even reasonably well dressed. And once a woman came out, with two children by the hand, and tried to...made some remarks to the SS that thanks God we are already here, and so on. And a prisoner who was running by, and who was Czech, tried to give her a warning, saying that....

Q: A man of the Canada Kommando?

A: Yes, yes. 'you will be dead soon', or something like that. You know, what can he say in fast, running. But

he tried to convey a warning and she simply went to the nearest SS officer and said in fluent German, that one of those criminals - because we looked like criminals, and those SS officers looked, of course, like proper gentlemen - 'one of those criminals said that we are going to die.' And the German was in a good humour and said: 'Aber gnedige Frau, wir sind doch zivilisierte Leute. - We are civilised people. Which gangster said it to you? If you will just point him out.' So she painted it out, in her stupidity or naivete or whatever it was. And it did not help her, because she was molified for the next hour or so, and before she was gassed with the children. And the boy was simply taken behind the waggons and shot. And that was the last we heard about it.

Q: Fertig.

A: Fertig gemacht. Not...Not even fertig gemacht, shot. You know, this was already a strong case. Erschossen. But usually....

Q: But what was the meaning of this warning, as a matter of fact, because she was powerless. She...even knowing, she couldn't do....

A: Well, the thing was the following: if a panic would have broken out and a massacre would have taken place on the spot, on the ramp, it would already be a hitch in the machinery. The next transport...you can't bring in the next transport with dead bodies around, blood all over the place, because will only increase the panic, and so on. In other words, I don't think that this would have changed the situation very much, but the...the Nazis were concentrating on one thing: it should go in an orderly fashion, in a...so that it goes unimpeded, one doesn't lose time. Secondly, if a panic arises, there were two-three hundred prisoners sometimes, there were only a hundred SS, all sorts of things can happen. I mean it would be possible that a couple of those SS would be killed, overpowered, that some escapes would take place, all sorts of unpleasant things which disturb the daily order. I mean, they were very concentrated that no disturbance....

Q: But...Do you remember, did exist some cases of unrest, unrest?

A: Unrest? Once - remember a considerable amount of unrest when those people were lined up. And there was a habit, that when the....From Auschwitz in the night, around midnight, they used to carry out the bodies of prisoners died during that particular day. And sometimes it was so much, you know, that the...the truck on which they were carried, now it was sort of overloaded with bodies, with naked bodies. And once...whenever the truck was passing by this ramp,...

Q: Near the ramp?

A: In front of the ramp. I had to cross the ramp on the way to crematorium, from Auschwitz I to Birkenau.

Q: And with the people waiting in line?

A: And the people were waiting in line. And it happened once...whenever this truck went by, with those dead bodies, while the people were in line, the lights went off. They went off for say, two-three seconds, just to let the truck go by, so that the people don't see the dead bodies. However, once the lights didn't go out and the truck got stuck on the rails. And as the truck got stuck and under the reflectors - and it was a French transport, it was a transport of French Jews - and the car tried to get off the truck, and the truck was....off the railway tracks. And the car truck was overloaded with the dead bodies, and there was a movement. You know, the bodies started to shift and all was a bit macabre. And the people suddenly saw it. And there was an enormous outcry among the waiting, those who were waiting, suddenly a wail. And then suddenly the truck managed and pulled off and disappeared, and everything became quiet. I mean, people thought perhaps that it is a mirage or something.

Q: A mirage.

A: Yeh, so this is one case when almost an unrest took place. Another case of unrest, of course, took place when a transport of mentally ill, heavily mentally ill people arrived there.

Q: Jews?

- A: Jews, yes. This was from a mental institution or they collected them from all sorts of mental institutions, and the whole transport was full of people who were mentally sick.
- Q: From which country?
- A: From Holland.
- Q: From Holland.
- A: Yes. This must have been in January or February 1943. And there were about forty or fifty nurses with the transport, and of course they were a long time on the journey and most of them...a good deal of them were naked, and so on, they behaved like schwere....heavy...heavily mentally handicapped people. And the SS...no way could they move those people, with shouting, with beating, with nothing. Because they were just simply mad people, and they didn't understand anything.
- Q: They were not reasonable enough to...
- A: They were not reasonable enough. That's right. They were not reasonable enough to understand the SS orders. And the SS...really I could see that they became nervous, because there was such a...there was such a disorder on the ramp, that to shoot them or something like that, this would create difficulties - it was a night of several transports. And the SS found a way out. There were forty or fifty nurses with those people. And they suddenly started to behave very nicely to the nurses and firing the nurses on to get the transport going. And so it was the nurses who somehow managed...who knew how to deal with those people. There were suddenly no shouting, no beating of those people, and so on. And the nurses dealt with those who could walk.
- Q: The nurses made the work.
- A: Yes, they could manage that. But the whole thing was so lousy, I mean - excuse me the expression - but they were already in such a horrible state, physically and semi....from the sanitation point. Because the nurses spent the whole time, several days, in the same waggons, so that the nurses looked really like tough girls. They were gassed with them, because there

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was a danger...the SS expressed the opinion somehow that lice, things like that, and infection and so on...they gassed the whole thing.

Q: The nurses too?

A: The nurses too. Obviously they needed the nurses until the last moment, until the gas-chamber. Because who could deal with people who are unreasonable. Obviously this at least passive resist...this sort of resistance was better than nothing. The crazy people know it.

201

Q: It is very interesting....point. It is true, they rounded the mad Jews too.

A: Oh yes. Because they had all sorts of... of...of ways of organizing those transports. Different....

Q: Do you remember the arrival of the Greek Jews, of transports from Greece?

A: I remember many because in the time when I was on the ramp, at least 30 - 40,000 people came from Saloniki. And they came....those were very unfortunate people, because more than others;....because they didn't speak any of the Central European languages, German for instance. They spoke...they didn't probably even speak Greek, or if they spoke it...I don't know, I don't speak Greek, but they spoke between themselves Ladino, which is a Jewish dialect which they used, which is a sort of a Spanish. And....

Q: Because it's very strange, when I was in Poland, in Treblinka, the Poles who witnessed this, had a very vivid recollection too of the arrival of the transports from Greece. And I wondered always why;

A: These people were very different in many ways: they were more colorful, already by dress. Secondly, they have a very sort of philosophical approach to life, a bit, a touch of orient was in them. Many of them were very religious Jews, with beards and so on. You know they kept this religious appearance.

Q: Yes?

A: And on the whole, I could see that those people were more ~~light~~ mild mannered, less prepared for

mild

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Q: And they came from a very long journey, From Saloniki to Auschwitz or from Athens to Auschwitz, this was a... nine days, I think, and nights.

A: Well, they probably attracted attention among the Poles and among everybody there....they are somebody to be remembered, because they were so very different from Central and West Europeans, in their habitus. There are very few survivors among those who came into the conc...into the camp.

Q: I know, And how did they behave when they arrived?

A: Just like any other transport, basically. Just like any other transport. Once they were lined up, then the commission came and they started to sort them out. The men were sorted out separately. Women with children were automatically for the gas-chamber. Older people were automatically for the gas-chamber. And children were for the gas-chamber.

BOBINE 265

NY Vrba 103

silent shots on the bridge in Central Park.

BOBINE 266 (in the hotel)

NY Vrba 104

Q: Can you tell me what was the (interruption) ...what was the meaning of the name 'Canada'?

A: Well, official name of that working place was actually Aufraeumungskommando, which means cleaning kommando, But because this was a place, you see, this Canada Kommando were all the property of the people who came to Auschwitz was collected. This means those parcels they had in the trains, they were loaded in the same trucks which took them to the crematoria. They came back early, they were loaded with those parcels which...with those luggages, and stored in a particular place in Auschwitz I, in the main camp, which....

Q: In the beginning it was in Auschwitz I.

A: Yes. During all the time I worked in that group. That

means...even until...until my escape from Auschwitz.

Q: Yes, afterwards it was in Birkenau.

A: Yes, but this...when it was transferred to Birkenau, I don't know about that anymore. Now during these years 42, 43, 44, it was in Auschwitz, and there the parcels were collected. And...mind you, from such a transport like 5,000 people, had at least 5,000 pieces of luggage. So you can imagine. And then the luggages were opened, ripped up, and the contents were sorted. I mean, there was glasses on one side, tooth brushes on the other side, coats on other side, etc. Everything was nicely, like in a big store-house, on the one side came an enormous amount of luggage and on the other side it was beautifully sorted out...sorted out materials for clothing and other utensils, consumer goods, actually. And that's what they shipped to Germany as...under the title of Winterhilfswerke. And even those clothes which were not usable anymore, I mean they had them graded - grade one, grade two, grade three, the worst grade, this was shipped to paper factories. And there were many trains full of those...

Q: There were grades?

A: Of course, yes, it was beautifully graded. I mean, it was well run. Now why was it called Canada? You see, in the mind of a Central European Canada was a land of plenty. There was a lot of immigration from Slovakia, from Poland to Canada, before the war. It was known that say peasants who couldn't make a good living in Slovakia or in Poland because of the catastrophic economical situation which sometimes prevailed in Europe, found land in Canada and a better opportunity for life. And the rumour came, you know, that it is a land of milk and honey. And obviously in that Canada Command or in that Aufräumungskommando in Auschwitz, there was everything. I mean, you c...there was money, there was food, there was...anything you can imagine was there, in the middle of the war.

Q: There was much money?

A: The money, is difficult to describe how much. But there were enor....there was enormous amount of money. Because those people....that's why it was called Canada actually,

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because - land of plenty. It was sort of a camp jargon. money. You see, the people were often mostly robbed before they entered those transports, but those people who knew they are going to be transported to somewhere they tried to....exchange or to sell, as long as it was possible, their property for a currency which would always value. This means either....especially hard currency: dollars, English pounds, yes? This was before the inflation of the dollar, you see. English pounds, German marks were no good at that time, you see, nobody would care for those, a lot of gold coins, this were dollar coins, napoleons, so-called napoleons (because they carried picture of the...of Napoleon. And then there were the Russian coins, with a picture of the Tsar. They were called the swines, because of the swine on coin. And those were in great surplus there, in the Canada command, because as the clothes were sorted out, before it was sorted out, there was a special group of people looking through the clothes.

Q: Inside?

A: Inside. And it was palpated, of course. And the money was collected in a luggage and the luggage was carried away every evening, after the working hours were finished. And I several times remember...it was everything possible there, in this so-called valuable luggage, in which it was collected. So there were wads of dollar notes, pounds notes of various denominations, diamonds, gold rings, gold watches, in other words it was called valuables. And sometimes the SS who was carrying it away, because he couldn't close the luggage - it was a rich day so to say- he stamped it in with his foot in order to be able to close the luggage. I mean, millions were involved. millions of money. I mean, not everything went into the luggage. I remember once I, during the work I...we were sorting out a transport from Grodno, you know, which was of poor quality, and I picked up a bread, and the bread was....it sounded to me sort of that the bread is not having this consistence it has, and broke up the bread, and there were perhaps twenty thousand dollars

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in, in hundred dollar notes.

Q: Inside the bread?

A: Yah. So the whole risk was to take this package of notes and to risk the trip to the lavatory. Once nobody stopped me on the way to the lavatory, it was done, because all I had to do was to throw it down there. So, this was sort of the right place for that money, I suppose.

Q: This means you threw it?

A: Yes, yes, I....

Q: not to keep it?

A: No, I threw it into the lavatory, you see. To carry it out from there....I didn't need money there. There were some who tried it, but this was connected with a grave risk, because whenever you went back into barracks or so on, or even during the work you have been subject to inspection by the SS. and if any valuables were found on any prisoner, the death was for sure. And the smallest thing to happen, actually. So, the risk was involved only to get it to the lavatory and to throw it in. And a part of the values obviously ended that way, that we tried to destroy. I mean....

Q: as an act of resistance?

A: Well, as an act of spite, perhaps. I don't know. I couldn't see any good reason if I found that money, why I should give it to the Germans, if it could be destroyed. The owners of the money were destroyed, you know, it was right to destroy the money in my opinion. But of course only a fraction was destroyed. Most of it went into the luggage.

Q: But the...the people of the Canada Kommando were divided into several parties, in several shifts, and...they were the same people who were discharging the...the trains and counting the money, and...?

A: Well, there was a sort of rotation within that working group, you know. the...those who were taken to the trains it was considered very hard work, it was pretty dangerous there was a considerable amount of mortality among those, because of the SS losing their patience and so on, they wanted everything done fast. So, when the transports

the Command...the Arbeits...working group was working on sorting out those goods, this means: breaking up luggages and sorting it up. I mean, several hundred people. There was a detachment of women, for instance, there were about twenty women, who did nothing else but press out all tooth paste which was brought in.

Q: Press out?

A: Press out the tooth paste.

Q: Ah, the tooth paste.

A: Oh, yes. They were sitting on their benches, you know, and taking one tooth paste after the other and pressing it out on the...on the...the bench, you see.

Q: It was a full time job?

A: A full time job, yes, for about twenty women. You see, and in one out of ten thousand tubes, there was a big diamond. Or a roll of bank notes in condome.

Q: This was the reason for the pressing?

A: Right, right. Because why should they destroy the tooth paste? They...they have found out that part of the money is hidden in the tooth paste, or valuables, so they put twenty prisoners to it, and...who didn't have anything else to do but to...to empty the tooth paste of all those who were gassed. And then, once upon a time, more often than you would think, brilliants, diamonds, or wades of...or coins or wades of...hard currency, which was usual in a condome and put into...into...into the tooth paste you know, and in the hope that they can carry the tooth paste ~~the~~ through the various controls, and so on. Because the valuables the Jews were supposed to deliver long time before they were deported, this was a slow policy, you know, first the valuables, etc, etc. But this was a... the last station.

Q: Yes, at the end....

A: That was the end of the process, and there was a suspicion which was quite justified from the sides of the Nazis, that those Jews might have been clever enough to hide the money somewhere, instead of delivering it.

Q: They had time, they could wait till the.. till the end.

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- A: Yes, yes. And they brought that money with themselves... with them to Auschwitz.
- Q: No, I mean the Nazi had time. They knew that at the end of the station they would find the rest of the....
- A: The rest they will find at the end of the station. I mean the sums involved were just horrendous...horrendous. You know, there were various silly people who thought that they...among the Jews who

BOBINE 265 A  
NY 105

- Q: Well, there was at least one case in the story of Auschwitz where the people knew what their fate would be, that they would be gassed. And it is a very difficult story to convey. I agree, but I would like you to..to help me. This is the story of the Czech who came from Terezin...from Theresienstadt, and who stayed a long time in Auschwitz, for six months, in a special camp, called the Czech family camp, and who were gassed after six months. And they knew what was in store for them. And this is one of the most mysterious points of the story of Auschwitz for me: why did they keep them for six months and how did they handle the killing of these people.
- A: It's not so clear cut. I know the case which you are referring to, but it is not such a clear cut matter, as far as their knowledge. The substance of it is approximately as follows. In September 1943, a transport of Czech Jews from Terezin, from Theresienstadt or what is it called, from the ghetto near Prague, was brought to Auschwitz. The number of the people was approximately four thousand, close to that number, take or give another five hundred. They came into one particular part of the camp which was called Bauschnitt IIB - two B. At that time I was not working in the Canada Command anymore, or in the Canada detachment, but as a registrar in IIA, this was an adjacent camp and only an electric wire fence separated me from...  
Q: Excuse me, I cut you. What is exactly to be a registrar?

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A: Well, the Blocks...the...all the...what you would call now barracks. In each barrack there were say several hundred prisoners and there were certain functionaries: one who was the head of the barrack who was the Blockaelteste, and then there was Blockaeltestevertreter - his second in command, then there was a person who was called Schreiber, and this was sort of a person who would have a record of how many prisoners are in the Block, how many portions of bread should be collected, how many portions should be issued, who died, he would make a sort of...he would be responsible for giving an account of what is...that means of the administrative side.

Q: But it was a lot of red tape, it was....

A: It was....yes, yes, because every...each time, you see, in order to prevent escapes from the concentration camp, they have to have constantly the exact numbers of prisoners. This number has been constantly checked and the Nazis developed a very ingenious system for checking say among thirty thousand prisoners if someone is missing or not. I mean, within one hour they would know if someone is missing, and who is missing, and who are his friends, etc etc. It was well organized, I mean, the Nazis were thorough with anything. They liked order...sort of, if you call it order.

Q: But it was a privileged position inside the camp....

A: Well, you had to be a long time in the camp before you got to a position like that. And how those privileged positions have been distributed in the camp is, of course, a story for itself. There were a lot of...lot of...lot of... interests intersecting, you see, and some of the privileged positions went automatically to professional criminals, that's what the Germans preferred most because those were tough guys and they could be relied on to do the job better than the Nazis. I mean, they were collegues sort of. In...the tradition in the concentration camp, of course was that...in German concentration camps in general, that there was a considerable amount of political prisoners who exerted a pressure, one way or another,

passive resistance, intrigues, etc, to get these criminals out from their positions and replace them with political prisoners. Now, also I was not qualified...crossified as a political prisoner really, I suppose that they arrested me for no good reason at all. But in the process of this inner resistance, when a resistance movement has been formed, by various manoevers the resistance movement managed to shuvel me into a position where I was able to collect considerable amount of information and was also able to convey this information and carry out various tasks which the resistance movement at that time needed. or whatever their objectives were. I have been rather obeying the orders of the resistance movement, being rather a small cork in this whole machinery, For certain reasons, especially because my opinion was not always the same as theirs, Now, that about the registrar job. What it involved too...the red tape was not so big, I mean, the number of prisoners on the particular barrack had to be constantly recorded and the...their numbers were kept in a special file, and who died had to be very exactly recorded.

Q: This means, at this time, when you were registrar, you said that you were living in a Block near...

A: Yes.

Q: ...the one where...

A: Because this was in the Bauabschnitt IIIA, this....and the Czechs, or Czech Jews, or Jewish Czechs, or whatever you want to call them, they were brought into Bauabschnitt III. This means it was Two B. And the division between IIIA and II B was only one electrical fence, through which nobody could climb, but you could speak through it, and could see what happened in the next Bauabschnitt. So, coming back to the point of the Czech transport, this was a bit of a surprise because this was the first time, I was at that time already over a year in Auschwitz and what you can call an old hand, because anybody who lived longer than a year was called an old prisoner. I wasn't so old at that time, I was, I think, 19½ or something like



that, but it was considered an old prisoner. And there was a surprise, suddenly I heard that the Bauabschnitt IIA there is a lot of movement and I could see immediately that they are bringing in women and children. This was the first thing which struck me.

Q: Together?

A: Women and children instead of....they used to carry them straight to the crematorium. And suddenly I see that they don't go to the crematorium but they come into the camp, with considerable amount of noise. And there were a number of other surprising circumstances. In the morning I could sort out the whole situation I could see that those people were put into empty barracks in the Bauabschnitt IIB which was empty until then. Then, the families were kept together.

Q: Families, this means men, women and children?

A: Yes. Yes. It is the <sup>wrong</sup> way. The families, this means: men women and children were taken together and nobody was gassed. They took with them their luggage into the camp, and they were not shorn - their hair was left. So they were in a different position than anything which I have seen until now.

Q: This never happened, this was completely unusual?

A: Unusual, yes. So, I didn't know what to think about it, and nobody knew, but in the main registrars office - and there were other registrars, just like me, but in a higher position, there was a main registry - it was known that all those people have got special cards, which are called.... their cards had a remark on them - this time it is the right way - that remark said 'SB mit 6 Monaten Quarantanz'. SB, we knew what means: Sonderbehandlung, which meant gassing. And quarantine, also we knew what means. But it didn't make sense to us, that somebody should be kept in the camp for 6 months in order to be gassed after six months. This was rather an unusual twist. And therefore it was left open to interpretation if SB - Sonderbehandlung - always means death in gas-chamber or if perhaps it has got another meaning, perhaps they mean sometimes in a different way, in a different coding.

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BOBINE 267

NY 106

A: Well, the files then, as we knew very well from the central registry, of this family...of this whole family transport were marked: 'SB mit 6 monatiger Quarantäne', which meant in normal language: gas chambers after six months. But it was so incongruous that they would keep somebody for six months in the camp, in order to gas him, that we left this question open - the interpretation. The six months were supposed to elapse on 7th March. I can remember the date very well, because that's the birthday of President Masarik, who founded Czechoslovakia. So it was.... one of those mnemonic things, you know. Now, in December, and I think it was close to 20th December, another transport of...from Theresienstadt came, also about four thousand people strong, which was added to the first transport into the camp BIIIB, also men, women and children were left together. Families were not torn apart. Old people, young people, everything was remained intact, and their hair was left and their personal property was left. They could wear civil clothes, whatever they had. They were given as sort of a different treatment. A school was arranged for the children in a special barrack, the children soon made a theatre there, and also it was not really very comfortable life because of they were cramped and from the first four thousand people during the first six months the mortality was about thousand.

Q: Thousand?

A: One thousand.

Q: Were they obliged to work?

A: Yes, they had to work but only inside their camp. They were making a new camp road, and they were ornamenting the barracks, they were induced to write letters.

Q: Induced?

A: Induced to write letters by the SS to their relatives in the Theresienstadt ghetto, saying that they are all

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together, etc.

Q: And they had better conditions of food?

A: Definitely better conditions of food, better conditions of treatment, I mean, their conditions were so good, that within six months, including the old people and children only one quarter of them died. I mean, this was a very unusually good condition in Auschwitz. And to the children theatre the SS used to come there, play with the children, personal relationship was struck up. And of course one of my tasks as a registrar was to find out the possibility of people who are resistance...who have got a mind for resistance and to struck up with them a relationship, and contact. And....

Q: You were already a member of the resistance...?

A: ...the resistance. Yes, yes. And that was my job as a registrar, that I had the possibility of moving a bit around under various pretexts, to carry papers from my part of the camp to the central register, and at that occasion to meet other people, to give them messages, take messages from them. And one of my tasks then was, because I was closest to that camp, to find out if among the members of this transport are people who are suitable for organizing a resistance nucleus. What resistance was meant by, I don't...I didn't know at that moment, but it was in the first line a mutual help, and it usually centered...one had to find people who are absolutely trustworthy and reliable and able of some action. In the first line, one had to help them in any possible way: medication, finding them easier jobs, in other words preserving them for the moment to come.

Q: But what was the meaning of resistance inside an extermination camp?

A: Inside...inside concentration camp, you see. Normal...This you must understand as the difference between Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

Q: This is what I mean.

A: Auschwitz and first now, apart from being an...industrial centre - a mass murder centre, was a normal concentration

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camp too, which had its order, like Mauthausen, like Buchenwald, like Dachau, like Sachsenhausen. But where as in Mauthausen the main product of prisoners work was stones - there was a big stone quarry - the product of Auschwitz was death. Everything was geared to keep the crematorium running.

Q: This was the aim?

A: This was the aim. This means that the prisoners would work on roads leading to the crematoria, they would build the crematoria, they would build all barracks necessary for keeping up prisoners, and of course apart from that, there was a element of a normal German concentration camp, because the Krupp and Siemens factories moved in, and utilised slave labour. So that Krupp factories and Siemens factories were built partly directly within the concentration camp of Auschwitz. So you have there the element of a normal concentration camp, and you have the the element of the-what they call wrongly an extermination camp, but I think this is a word coined by the Nazis - I would prefer to call it execution camp, where the product was....

Q: Why, why? Can you explain me?

A: Yes. I beg your pardon?

Q: Can you explain me the difference for you between extermination and execution camp.

A: Well, I suppose that the word extermination camp comes from the word Ausrottung, which means extermination is used....Ausrottung is used in this connection with... with...elimination of unsanitary insects. And this was of course a code name for mass murder of various people who were either labeled as Jews, or they were Jews, or they were other sort of unwanted human material in the German Reich. And this word Ausrottung - extermination, I find perfectly unsuitable for description of their murder. And I would prefer to call it was...the German word would be Hinrichtungslager, and the English translation I suppose would be execution camp. In other words, the main product was execution of people, which was carried out mainly by gas-chambers. Yes, but this

Disturbed...

Q: All right, excuse me for that.

A: Yes, it doesn't matter. Yes, to return to the special position of the family camp. So, in December 20, another transport came, again left the property, the children, wives, mothers, grandmothers, everything. And they lived this idyllic life in Bauabschnitt IIB, with a school for children, with special milk for children and white bread. Children had to get milk and white bread as a special ration. A sort of a reasonably almost human treatment, I mean, unusual for anything we have seen until then in the...in the execution camp of Birkenau. Now the March 7th started to near, and this was supposed to be the sign of what is supposed to happen.

Q: This means they arrived the 7th of September?

A: Yes.

Q: And you were sure that on March 7th...

A: Well, they said 'SB mit sechs Monaten Quarantäne', SB with six months quarantine, so something was supposed to happen after six months. But what, we did not know for sure.

Q: But you were expecting.

A: Something unusual, we were expecting. But meanwhile my job was to find out who is suitable for any resistance in that camp. And our practice was that people who have already shown their reliability and ability to resist to Fascism in one way or another, and this was usually centred around the ex-members of the International Brigades in Spain. Now, once we found one or two, once I managed to find one or two by careful inquiries around with those people, speaking through wires, and also by other means. We soon found several members of the International Brigades being among this family camp, and they in turn, knew other ones from the resistance movement, and so in no time, I had a list - of course not on paper - but in my mind, of thirty to forty people, who had a record from the past of developing some sort of resistance against the Nazis. And with those people we kept contact and one of the people with whom I kept contact was representative of the

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resistance...was a man called Hugo Benk - Lenek. He is from Prague. He is still alive in Prague, for reasons which I will explain. Now, apart from that, a special figure took sort of...emerged in the family camp, and this man was a man called Freddy Hirsch. This was a German Jew, or Jewish German, I don't know how you call it. He was from Germany officially, he emigrated from Germany to Prague and in Prague he was active as a sports man in a Jewish sports club called Maccabi.

Q: But he was a Zionist, I think.

A: If he was a Zionist or not, I don't know. He was a sports man who found a job within a Zionist organization, when there was no other job available for him. He was an emigre living in Czechoslovakia, finally he was transported into the Theresienstadt ghetto and came with this family on the first family transport into Birkenau. Now it turned out that he has

BOBINE 263

NY 107

Q: Well, I repeat my question.... (interruption)...Je peut? Well I repeat my question: what was the aim, the goal, of a resistance movement in an execution camp. I think there is a big difference between Auschwitz in this respect, and concentration camps like Dachau, Oranienburg, and so on.

A: Well, obviously Auschwitz was run as a concentration camp as I explained, only the objective of the concentration camp was death. But otherwise it looked like any other concentration camp in Germany. And in those concentration camps there was concentrated from Europe...they were concentrated men who already have shown in one way or another a resistance towards Nazism, trade-unionists, Social Democrats, Communists, anti-fighters from Spain, - a very important element because they knew internationalism...you see, they...they knew various nationalities and

could....

Q: The International Brigade.

A: International brigades and from there the acquaintance started. Now, I was picked up by the resistance movement approximately five months after I arrived in Auschwitz, that it came to my notice that anything of this sort exists. And I was picked up by them for a number of reasons. It was very dangerous for them to pick me up if they didn't trust me that I can keep my mouth closed under unpleasant conditions, if necessary.

Q: Torture, you mean?

A: Yes. And because I had already some sort of...after five months stay in the camp, a bit of a record that under torture I didn't speak, and also I...So I was approached by a man from Slovakia called Farber, who later after the war became also known, because he was the personal secr...first secretary of the minister, vice-minister Arthur Indin. But this was much later, after the war. At that time, Farber was member of the resistance movement, he was an ex-member of the International Brigade, and he approached me at a time when I was dying. I had such a time in Auschwitz. I was down to 42 kilo and I was unable to move, that was shortly after I survived Typhus and I was in a pretty tough position, also because of wounds which I received from the hands of the Nazis, and I needed medical help, also other sort of help. And at that time Farber approached me, and offered me help which consisted of getting to me medical qualified personnel to take care of me and supply of medicaments which were stolen obviously from the property of the transports, and additional food, which I needed to recover. And in no time I was recovered actually, and obliged with similar service to the resistance movement. From the first moment, the resistance movement meant a mutual help among people who have some connection from the past or shown in the past that they are willing to resist Nazism; for purposes of...which were not clearly defined, but meanwhile to keep together. It

was a mutual help. You can call it anti-Nazi mafia, if you want to call it that way.

A: Yes. A beautiful saying.

A: So that was to clear to me, but it was also...the tasks which I had in this connection were of course simple, I mean, I have to steal the medicaments I could during my work on the ramp, I could put the hands on it within Canada, and supply with medication...supply the medication which was needed for others, while I was healthy, and which I got before. And of course to carry messages from one to another. But for me, in my mind, resistance meant destruction of the execution camp, that's what I understood, in my naivete perhaps, but I thought that people who take those risks, that they are preparing for striking out.

A: But were they in fact preparing for striking out?

A: Well, what happened was a very peculiar development. Some of the members of the resistance, and mind you, the resistance leadership was concentrated in the hands of German speaking anti-Nazis, for natural reasons because say the anti-Nazis who were German by birth, were considered racially pure by the Nazi hierarchy, only sort of mislead, who had to be kept in the concentration camp. But they couldn't be simply executed or something like that. There was necessary always...I mean, they could have

better treatment than the rest of the camp. I don't say that they were treated with, with gloves, with white gloves, especially not in Auschwitz - this was the worst concentration camp. But they managed with time to gain influence over various Nazi dignitaries from the SS, and slowly improve the conditions within the concentration camp. They, by hook or crook, even by using blackmail against them, by knowing about various petty thefts they committed, because the Nazis liked to steal, no matter how high they were in the position, you know. This was characteristic for Nazis that they were corrupt, money they liked. And the money of the victims of Auschwitz was supposed to go to the SS to be bank, but quite a bit



remained sticking in their pockets, and they liked good life. So, there was something of a possibility of black-mail in one way or another. And to use up rivalry among the SS, and the leadership of the resistance managed to use it in a way which lead systematically to an improvement of conditions within the concentration camp itself. For instance: It was forbidden to beat prisoners from a certain time onwards, from '43. This doesn't mean that prisoners were not beaten, this doesn't mean that prisoners were not murdered, but I can say with good conscience, that in the year 1943 the situation in Auschwitz-Birkenau improved drastically, which means that murder and torture was less common than in the year before.

Q: In the concert...

A: In the concentration camp. And...

Q: But in the same time the machinery...

A: Consistently with that, the mortality in the concentration camp started to decrease. Whereas in 1943...42, in Birkenau in December and January a death rate of 400 prisoners per day was common, by May 1943, not only because of the weather improvement, but due to the activities of the resistance movement, which slowly changed the criminal, professional criminals from the positions of Kapos, registrars and so on, and managed to replace them with politicals, the improvement was so marked that the mortality grossly decreased in the camp, and they considered it a great victory on their side. In other words, their ideology was to resist Nazism by any means, and to behave in a dignified way even in a concentration camp. And by dignified way meant to preserve one another, and to create this sort of what they called mafia, anti-Nazi mafia, and use this anti-Nazi mafia for humanisation of the conditions in the concentration camp. That was the objective in the first line.

Q: OK, now let's come back to Freddy Hirsch.

A: Yes, Freddy Hirsch became in this camp...

Q: In the Czech camp.

A: In the Czech camp, a rather respected figure. He showed a considerable amount of interest for the education of the children who were there, personal interest. He knew

each child by name. Each child called him Freddy. Soon he became very popular among the whole camp. A very respectable sort of personality. And by his upright behavior and obvious human dignity, which he had, he attracted the attention of SS too. I mean, the SS liked people with sporty behavior, he was a professional sportsman. The food was better in the family camp than elsewhere, he kept up his....

Q: Spirit.

A: ...spirit, and soon he was sort of a spiritual leader of the whole camp. In this family camp, when there was a quarrel or something like that, he would act as a judge he would sort it out, he would try to mollify those quarrels. And if somebody was maltreated by Kapos from outside, or even by SS, he had sort of an influence, and he was a man to be...who was trusted, not only by the resistance movement but...

Q: OK.

BOBINE 269

NY 103

Q: Well, you said that the, the resistance movement succeeded to improve drastically the conditions inside the concentration camp of Auschwitz, as you said yourself, Auschwitz was not only a concentration camp, it was an execution camp. And what did he succeed to improve in what regards the execution camp?

A: Well, this is a very proper question. This was the first thing which I...which started to worry me when I have seen quite clearly from my position, on the ramp, that the process of mass executions goes more smooth and better, if there is a orderly concentration camp behind it.

Q: Exact.

A: And that this improvement of living conditions, within the concentration camp, was perhaps not so against the policy of the higher echelons of SS ranks, as long as it did not interfere with the objective of the camp, this means production of death on the arrivals, which were

not prisoners of the camp.

Q: Well, I think it is a most important point.

A: I could see it on the ramp, from a different light than many of my comrades from the resistance movement, who were sitting in the registrars' offices or in the hospital and so on, so-called hospital, or in various positions. I must say, I don't doubt their integrity in many ways, but I could see the position differently for... I give you a small example: I have been present at many occasions, at the ramp, while the SS was selecting the people for the gas-chamber, or better to say: often it was not a selection for gas chamber, it was selection for people who should go into the concentration camp, not prisoners - that's what they were selecting, rather.... In other words, the selection was...

Q: The gas-chamber was the rule of the...

A: Yes, there was a rule that if those people in the transport who can be utilised for work, who are in good physical condition, they are not too old, they are not too young, they are not children, they are not women with children, etc, etc, they looked healthy, they should come into the concentration camp for replacement of those who were dying in the concentration camp, as a fresh force. And I could see the following discussions, I once overheard. A transport came from, I think it was from Holland or from Belgium, I do not guarantee you which one it was, and the SS doctor selected there a group of well-looking Jewish prisoners, new-comers, from the whole transport, which should be gassed...which was gassed. But the representative SS from the concentration camp said he doesn't want them, and there was a discussion between them, which I could overhear, in which the doctor was saying: 'why don't you take them, they are ausgefressene Juden auf der holländischen Käse' - this means, Jews full...well-nourished on Dutch cheese- they would be good for the camp. And Fries it was, Hauptsturmführer Fries answered him: 'Ich kann sie nicht nehmen, heut u Tage krepieren die ja im Lager zu langsam.' - I can't take

these people, because nowadays they don't kick the bucket so fast in the camp.

Q: It means that they don't die fast enough.

A: That's right. In other words he explains that the stand of the camp was say thirty thousand. If five hundred, or five thousand died, they were replaced by new force from the trans...Jewish transports which came in. But if only thousand died, well, only thousand were replaced, and more went into the gas chamber. So, the improvement of the conditions, within the concentration camp itself, made a higher death rate in the gas-chamber, straight into the gas-chamber. It decreased the death rate among the prisoners in concentration camp. So here it was clear to me that the improvement of the situation of the concentration camp does not impede the process of mass executions, of those people who were brought into the camp. Consequently my idea then of the resistance movement, of the sense of the resistance movement, was that the improvement of the conditions within the camp is only a first step, that the resistance movement actually wants...is aware that the main thing is to stop the process of mass execution.

Q: The machinery of the killing.

A: The machinery of the killing, and that therefore it is a time of preparation of gathering of forces for attacking the SS from inside, even if it is a suicidal mission, but destroying the machinery. And in this respect, I would consider it as a suitable objective, worthy objective, and it was also clear to me that such an objective cannot be achieved over night, that there is necessary a lot of preparation and a lot of circumstances, about which, being a small cork in the whole machinery of resistance could not know or decide. But it was clear in my mind that the only objective of any resistance within the concentration camp of the type of Auschwitz, has to be different from that in Buchenwald or Dachau. Because whereas in Buchenwald and in Dachau, this policy of resistance improved the survival rate of political prisoners, the same very

Q: noble policy improved and oiled the machinery of mass annihilation, as practiced by the Nazis within the concentration.

A: Well, I think it is very well said. I agree with you. And now to...about the Czech family camp, because I think this was connected precisely with an attempt of resistance.

A: Well, in the Czech family camp, then we built up this unit of resistance, and we built up one unit which was in the first Czech family camp, with the first transport. And we built up another unit which was in the second transport. In the first transport we built it around people who today are not...none of them is alive. In the second transport it was built around a man called Hugo Lensk, from Prague.

Q: But you now, we approach the 7th of March.

A: Yes. On 7th of March, before the 7th of March, approximately by the end of February, a rumour was spread that the family transport will be moved to another place, to a place called Heidebeck. The resistance movement of course became nervous about it, because the file was marked as Sonderbehandlung mit 6 Monatsige Quarantäne, this means special treatment after 6 months quarantine. And special treatment meant gas-chambers. And the question was, what is going now to happen. The possibility that gas chambers are envisaged was considered, but it was considered to be so illogical,

Q: Illogical?

A: Illogical. Why should they keep six months those families together, make special portion of milk and bread for children, and make a school for the children and all sorts of things. And then decide to gas them exactly after six months. I mean, this didn't make a normal sense.

Q: And when did you know precisely that they would gas them?

A: Well, then came the moment, close before March, when

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the whole camp was moved - those who were supposed to have.. the first transport of the families, Czech families, was moved from B II A, B (?) into BIIA. The first move was to separate the first family transport from the second family transport. And this they did by transferring them overnight into that quarantine camp where I was the registrar. So I could now speak with those people directly, without impediment. And the resistance movement obviously got some sort of informations on the basis of the facts that no... in the offices, in the offices there was no record of any transport being prepared to move out from Auschwitz or from Birkenau. And therefore the suspicion aroused that this SB means what it is meant to mean, namely gas-chamber. And so I was given the task to inform the resistance movement within the family camp that the possibility of their being gassed on the March 7th is perfectly real. Although not yet fully confirmed. And that because...nothing because I was supposed to transform...transfer this information, that this possibility is real.

Q: And you did it?

A: Yes. I contacted meanwhile Freddy Hirsch, who was sort of ...you see, in this resistance were ex-communists, ex-Social Democrats, ex- International Brigade, anybody with some sort of record. And Freddy Hirsch because of his seniority, he was a potential for a leader for revolt, because he had the manly qualities necessary.

BOBINE 270

NY 109

Q: Did you talk to Freddy Hirsch specifically?

A: I talked to Freddy Hirsch specifically, and I talked to him about the possibility that the transport has been, his transport, the family transport of the Czechs, has been transferred to the quarantine camp because of the possibility their being predestined to be gassed on the March 7th.

Q: And what did he answer?

A: He asked me if I know that for sure. And I said I do not know this for sure, but it is a serious possibility, because there is no record of any train going away.

Q: From Auschwitz?

A: From Auschwitz. And usually the offices, the registrars, where the resistance movement had their people, would get wind of such an information, of a transport being prepared out of Auschwitz. And there was no such information, and I explained him the circumstances, and I explained him what it means. And the possibility then would advise that for the first time, there are encamped people, who are relatively physically preserved, who have some sort of a morale retained, who are certain to go to die, in other words to be subject to the normal execution procedure, anonymous ma...major execution procedure as usual...

Q: And knowing it.

A: And they will know it, they can't be just tricked, and this is perhaps the time to act. And the action of course will have to come out from them. Because there are others whose death was imminent, and these were the people from the Sonderkommando, who worked in the crematorium which was periodically replaced. And they showed a willingness that if the Czechs, before the gassing attack the SS, they will join them.

Q: Ah, the people of the Sonderkommando were ready for this.

A: Ready for that.

Q: And where should the attack take place? Already inside the crematorium?

A: Well, the attack...where the attack should take place was not so clearly formulated, because it was not yet clear if they are going to be gassed, but the whole possibility of an uprising within the camp was first time seriously considered. It was explained to those Czechs that they are going possibly to die, and it was expected from them to take the first move, for the Sonderkommando to take the second move, and then rest...once they started things going, then the rest will join in, because there is no way out.

Q: Ah, then, what happened?

A: So, Freddy Hirsch sa...called me...objected. He was very reasonable. He said it doesn't make sense to him that...

the Germans would keep them for six months, and feeding the children with milk and white bread in order to gas them after six months. And after all this personal relationship which he managed to struck up, with a number of the officers, and...who used to come frequently there and play with the children...

Q: The theatre.

A: ...and that they wouldn't allow it because there was already a personal relationship between the SS and...and those children, for instance. It was a very macabre situation, and rather unusual. Nobody knew what to make out of it. However I explained him that there is a possibility, and on the next day I got the message, again from the resistance, that I should explain them that it is not possible that they are going to be deported from Auschwitz in other camp, that it is sure that they are going to be gassed, that the Sonderkommando already received the coal for burning the transport. And you see the Sonderkommando knew exactly what were...how many people are going to be gassed, what sort of people, because there were certain rules of work too. In other words....

Q: Through the amount of coal or....?

A: Everything was calculated to the last drop, everything was organized. I mean, this was not just a disorganized sort of....sort of slaughter-house, it was an organized slaughter-house. There was...the organizations were made for this particular transport.

Q: And the people of the Sonderkommando....

A: Knew it, right. That's right. And of course....in other words, the resistance movement knew suddenly, on the sixth of March, for s...on the fifth or sixth March, that 'Sichs monatige Quarantäne mit Sonderbehandlung' means: death in gas chambers on seventh March. Everything coincided: the coal was already issued, etc. So now my task was again to explain to Freddy Hirsch the situation because it was considered to be important to have the right man to start the thing. The resistance movement



at that...before that considered a man from Paris, called Charles Unglueck. But Unglueck - also he was....he was... he was considered a reliable man for this task - but Unglueck was killed on 25th January, shortly before that happened, during an attempt to escape. So suddenly the leading personality was missing, and Freddy Hirsch was considered to be a suitable candidate and my job was to explain him the situation...

Q: OK, go on.

A: ....and what was expected from him. So I called up again, to Freddy, and explained to him that as far as this transport is concerned, including him, they are going to be gassed on the next 48 hours. And that the situation being what it is, it is necessary to hit now, this is a chance which doesn't, i...which never occurred before, to have such an informed group in front of the gas-chambers.

Q: Informed?

A: Informed. So he suddenly started to worry, he said what happens to the children, if we start the uprising. He had a very close relationship with....

Q: How many children were there?

A: Could be about hundred. Alive.

Q: And how many people able to fight?

A: Well, the nucleus was about thirty, and now it was not necessary to keep any precautions, and this depends. I mean if it comes to fighting, even an old woman can pick up a stone. Anybody can fight. I mean, this is difficult to predict. But there...it was necessary to have a nucleus and it was necessary to have a leading personality.

Q: Yes.

A: You see, these are small details which are extremely important. And so he said to me: if we take the uprising, what is going...no matter...what is going to happen to the children. Who is going to take care of them.

Q: But they.....

A: I said: the children, I cannot say you anything except that there is no way out for them.

Q: They will die.

A: They will die whatsoever. That's for sure. He...This we-

cannot prevent. The question what we can do is: who is going to die with them, and how many SS are going to die with them, and how will it impede the whole machinery, plus the possibility that a part, during the uprising, will find the way out of the camp, which is possible in such a situation.

Q: To the woods.

A: I mean, to break through the guards. Because once the uprising starts, some weapons can be expected to be had. And I explained to him that there's absolutely no chance for him or for anybody from that transport, to the best of my knowledge and everybody else's knowledge whom I trust, to survive the next 48 hours.

Q: This took place inside the block?

A: Inside the block in my room.

Q: In your room.

A: And I told him also that the need of the personality, and that he had been selected for that. Of course he explained to me that he understands the situation, that it is extremely difficult for him to make any decisions, because of the children. And that he cannot see how he can leave the children just to their fate. He was sort of their father. I mean he was only thirty at that time. But the relationship between him and the children was very strong. And he said to me that of course he can see the logic behind my argumentation, and that he would like to think about it for an hour, if I could leave him alone to think for an hour. And because I had at that time a room of my own as a registrar, I left him in my room, which was equipped with a table, a chair and a bed, and some writing instrumentation, and I told him that I will come in an hour's time back. And I came back in an hour, and I could see that he is lying on my bed and that he is dying. He was synotic in the face, he had froth around the mouth, and I could see that he has poisoned himself.

Q: He took poison?

A: He took poison. But he was not dead. And because of his being so important, I ... I didn't know what sort of poison

he took, but I had again a connection to a man called Dr. Kleinmann. This Dr. Kleinmann was of Polish origin and a French Jew, and medically qualified. And I cabled Dr. Kleinmann immediately to Hirsch, and asked Kleinmann to do what he can. Because this is an important man. Dr. Kleinmann inspected Freddy Hirsch and he said that he thinks that he poisoned himself with a big dose of barbiturates, that it might be perhaps possible to save his life, but he won't be on his feet for a long time to come. And he is going to be gassed in the next 48 hours and he thinks - Kleinmann - that it would be better to leave things as they are, and to do nothing. And so... nothing was done. And he was slowly dying on that bed. I don't think he was dead by the time the transport went. So, faced with this situation,

BOBINE 271

NY 110

Q: Well, do we know how this 4,000 people died after the suicide of Freddy Hirsch.

A: Well, the story after the suicide of Freddy Hirsch developed very fast. The first thing, I informed the rest of them what I told to Hirsch. Secondly, I moved to the camp IIB to establish the contact with the resistance there, with the resistance movement. And they gave me bread for the people.

Q: Bread?

A: Bread, yes. Bread and onions. And said that I will get... they don't know any... no decision has been made, and I should come later for... for instructions. The moment I distributed the bread something happened: namely, an especial curfew was made within the camp. All administrative activities were stopped, all guards were doubled, machine guns, etc. were spread around the perimeter camp, and I was out of contact. The transport, the Jewish family transport as they called in the evening, they were put on trucks...

Q: And all of them knew.

A: All of them knew. They were put on trucks, they behaved very well. We didn't know, of course, where the trucks are going. They were being assured once more that they are going to Heidebeck and not to be gassed. and we knew that if they are going out of the camp, the trucks will turn right when they leave the camp. And we knew that if they turn left, there is only one way; five hundred yards, and that's where the crematorium was. They were loaded on the trucks, they sang the Czech national anthem - some, some - the Jewish national anthem.

Q: the Hatikvah.

A: The Hatikvah. Depends on the taste of people. And the trucks then moved and turned left. They were gassed on that night, and the next day I heard from a member of the Sonderkommando that there was no resistance, except of a few girls, who refused to go into the gas-chambers and were beaten in with clubs. So, that was this event. That's how it ended with the first Czech family transport, and it was quite clear to me then, that the resistance in the camp is not geared for an uprising, but for survival.

Q: For the survival of the members of the resistance.

A: Yes. For the survival of the members of the resistance. And that...I then decided to act what was called by the members of resistance as anarchic and individualistic activity, like an escape and leaving the community for which I am co-responsible by that time.

Q: Because you escaped Auschwitz one month later exactly?

A: Eh...Exactly one month later. It was quite clear to me... I had various preparations for escape made, but of course the...the decision to escape in spite of the policy of the resistance movement at that time, was formed immediately and I started to press on with the preparation for escape together with my friend Letzler, who was extremely important in this matter. And I...before I left, I spoke with Hugo Benek, and Hugo Benek was in command of the second...of the resistance group in the second family transport.

Q: Ah, yes, the second Czech...

A: Yes, and I explained to him that from the resistance movement they can explain nothing now....

Q: Expect.

A: ...expect nothing but bread. But when it comes to the dying, they should act on their own, as for my ? is concerned, I think that if I successfully managed to break out from the camp and bring the information to the right place in the right time, that this might be a help, that I might manage, if I succeed, to bring help from outside. And also it was a firm belief in me, that all this was possible because either their victims who came to Auschwitz didn't know what is happening there, or if somebody had the knowledge outside, that the knowledge was....I would say that they didn't know, that's it. And I thought that if this will be made known, by any means, within Europe, and especially within Hungary, from where a million Jews were supposed to be transported to Auschwitz immediately in May, and I knew about that, that this might stir up the resistance outside and bring help from outside directly to Auschwitz. And thus the escape plans were finally formulated and the escape took place on April 7th.

Q: And this is the main and the deep reason why you decided....

A: Suddenly at that moment, to press on with it. In other words, not to delay anything but to escape as soon as possible.

Q: And this means to inform the world...

A: to inform the world.

Q: ...about what is going on.

A: right.

Q: ....in Auschwitz.

A: right.

Q: tu coup maintenant.

NY 111

A: All right, Mr. Vrba, now we come to the very difficult point, and I want to try to figure this out and I need your help for this. Precisely, after two years, more

than two years even of this hell of Auschwitz, you succeed to escape, which as a matter of fact never occurred, in order to inform the outside world what is going on in Auschwitz. I would like to know, what were the first people you met, the first people you gave a report about Auschwitz, how did they welcome you, did they believe what you said, how did you succeed to convey what you had to say?

A: My objective to convey the material appeared to me simple, because the statistics of Auschwitz since I entered Auschwitz till the day I left it, the 7th April 1944 from 30th June 1942, were to the smallest detail my head, memorized. It seems to me difficult today to believe that I could memorize all this but it was by no means so difficult. We know by now that some people while they were in prison memorized whole books and could reproduce them after that. And it was nothing special to memorize a statistics which was not figures for me but behind each transport there was a picture in my mind, a particular circumstance, and I can say that I saw practically every transport, or at least some people from it. Secondly, I was perfectly aware that a million of Hungarian Jews will be murdered in Auschwitz within the next weeks. The preparations for that operation were perfectly ready in Auschwitz. And although they didn't make sense in Auschwitz in the start, it did make sense from 19th March onwards. Because on 19th March, the Germans, Nazis, occupied Hungary. So the preparations for the ext...murder of Hungarian Jews started in January, occupation of Hungary took place in March and confirmed the rumours which were spread in the Auschwitz concentration camp and confirmed the resistance movement, that it is the Hungarian Jews who were supposed to be...

Q: The next ones.

A: ...the next ones. With this information, which was both in my head and in head of Fred Getzler, my...

Q: Co-escapee.

A: ...co-escapee or co-conspirator, if I may put it that

way, and just as well we reached Slovakia on April 21st, on a Friday. We left Auschwitz...our official escape was on April 7th, on Friday. We stayed in closest vicinity of Auschwitz until Monday, which was April 10th, until the alarm...

Q: This I'd...I will tell it.

A: I reached Slovakia on 21st April, and I reached the town Peczaza together with Metzler on Monday, April 24th. In Peczaza I got the information that a Jewish doctor, called Dr. Pollack, is a military...is employed as a military doctor. I was dressed in Slovak peasant cloths, my appearance and my ability of sp... way of use...us...the way I am using the Slovak language made it perfectly possible for me to pose as a Slovak peasant, and I entered the military command in the town Peczaza asking for medical help, I came to the office of Dr. Pollack, waited for my turn, and got into his office. I knew him personally. He did not recognize me in my garb, which was not very usual for me, also he didn't see me for a long time, asked me what I want, I told him that I cannot tell it in front of the nurse who was present, -it is a discreet matter. so he sent out the nurse, and I told him what is my identity, that - know him and that I am coming from Auschwitz, that I was deported in 1942.

Q: Two years ago.

A: Two years ago. So, he became a bit pale, but kept the situation. And he said pro-forma I have to do something, and he was bandaging my leg so that it should appear that he is doing something for me, while the nurse is out. and asked me what...asked me what happened to others who were deported. So I told him, to the best of my knowledge, from the 61,000 Slovak Jews who were deported in 1941, were living now 67 men and about 400 women. So he asked me: where is the rest. I said: the rest is dead. so he asked me: what can I do for you, and I said to him that I must immediately get into contact with the representatives



of the Jewish organization which has channels to the rest of the Jewish population.

: OK, very well.

BOBINE 272

NY 112

: Well, what did you say to Dr. Lollack?

A: I...he asked me, what happened to those people who were deported at the time that I was deported, and those were 60,000 people from Slovakia. And I told him that of those 60,000 people, there are alive 67 men and 400 women...about 400 women - the men's number I knew exactly. And he asked me: where is the rest, and I told him that the rest is dead. And he asked me what he can do for me. Now, and I told him that I need immediately a contact with representatives of the Jewish organization and this was obvious for what. And he said that he can arrange that contact within 24 hours, and I stayed in Tuzasa for the night and next day, on Tuesday, on his instruction, accompanied by him, he went to the train separately, and Wetzler and I followed him, we boarded the train and travelled to Zilina, without any document the first time that used normal sort of civilian transportation again. And in Zilina, on a particular place, we met immediately a man called Irwin Steiner, who was....whose name I knew even before as an important member of the Jewish Council. In my naivete I thought that this is the right address to start with. I had the program to alarm the Jewish organizations, and to alarm all other organizations to which I can find contact and which are known for their anti-Nazi attitude. There I started with those who are mostly concerned with what was happening in Auschwitz.

: You seen the Jews?

A: The Jews.

: Okay, can you describe the first meeting with the representatives of the Jewish organization.

A: Well, we....

: It must have been something.

A: We...we met in a park, in Lilina, he was supposed to recognize us, we were with Fred Metzler enjoying us very much, we have been back in sort of our native country. And we had a bottle of Slibowitz already opened, which looked very innocuous, you see, it attracts so much attention to be with a bottle of Slibowitz in a park in a...in Lilina, that the police would look at other side. And this man Steiner came and took us immediately to the...to a house in which the Jewish... which belonged to...to the Jewish head-quarters, to the so-called Council of the Jews of Slovakia and immediately there were present the head of that council, Dr. Oscar Kras...Neumann, Mr. Engineer Oscar Krasnienski, Mr. Steiner, and a number of other persons who were in the Jewish council, active. They came over from Bratislava on a telephone call. And so we met.

Q: Okay, and what happened? Did they ask questions or...

A: Well, the first thing was...

Q: ...did you talk on your own?

A: Of course they asked questions. And for them, the first thing was to establish our identity, and this was the first surprise for us. Because they immediately could produce my card with my photograph, in other words, they had a file of all Jews who were deported in 1942, because they have organized those deportations. They had a book in which each person who was deported was recorded by the day on which he was deported, and in that book there was written who was deported with them, all numbers of the transport. And because they were the only ones who could...because once I have been labelled as a Jew in Slovakia, I have the right to deal with the Slovak authorities only through the Jewish Council services. Therefore my personal documents were issued by the Jewish Council before I left or was taken against my good will to the deportation camps in Poland or Upper Silesia. And the copies were in their hands. So they come up with a list of transports and with my personal documents, copies of my personal documents, and my...with my picture on it. I was a bit changed because some time elapsed since then, but they could recognize

me, and they could establish both we and etaler were deported on that day on which we were stating that we were deported.

Q: Did you show them your Auschwitz tattoo?

A: Yes, among other things, but the thing that this was a joke in Auschwitz. Because in Auschwitz sometimes people were speaking what will happen if the message would be brought out. They said, well, knowing the Jews, that's what they will admire most - the number - they will say: what a horrible thing, to put numbers on people like upon cattle. And big joke was: what approximately the synagogue would say to that. I mean, obviously the people were dead, who cares for the numbers on their hands. But, of course, I had to show the number. And then they checked on my knowledge who was in the transport.

Q: It was how they started?

A: That's how it started. Number one: what are our names. Number two:...

Q: I understand. But before you starting to explain what happened?

A: Oh no. He...there was some...some talking, polite, what have we got to say, and in we said something about gas-chambers, gas, etc.

Q: Did they know?

A: Well, they didn't say they know and they didn't say they don't. They listened to what I had to say, what they knew they didn't tell me. But from how they behaved, I would say that they didn't know anything for sure.

Q: But this is probably true.

A: That they didn't know for sure?

Q: Yes.

A: You see, it is certainly true, because what people don't want to know, they don't know. They organized the deportation of the Jewish community from Slovakia, which was 90,000 people, and they organized the deportation of 60,000. Those of the 60,000 - 30,000 died in Auschwitz, and from that place, when I was talking to gentlemen, with those gentlemen, to Auschwitz was a distance of 70 km.

And I could cover this distance without much trouble, although the whole German Reich was mobilized at that time to get hold of Metzler and me, with an international warrant. We still managed to make that trip from Auschwitz to Milina. If they didn't know, then it is obviously that they didn't want to know. Because if I could make the trip from Auschwitz to Milina, anybody could have made that same trip from Milina to Auschwitz, and LOCK. Therefore this question what they knew and what they didn't know, I do not consider so important. The question is what did they want to know.

Q: Well, and how did it go on? How long lasted your report? For how long did you talk with them?

A: Because of us trying to say not only what happened to the Slovak Jews, but about the happening in Auschwitz in general, we presented a statistic about all transports which arrived from 1942 to 1944 in Auschwitz, which was a statistic on approximately 30 printed pages. They took us, separated Metzler and me. And....

Q: You mean thirty printed pages - you came with the pages?

A: NO. no, everything was in our heads.

Q: Yes.

A: Now, they first separated us, then we put it out of the head. It amounted...then we sort of said what we had in our head, and it was typed, it was about thirty pages. Or sixty pages, if you double-spaced it. That doesn't matter. But we managed in that space to present the reality of Auschwitz from 1942 to 1944, and we did it separately. They brought lawyers from Bratislava, Jewish lawyers, who claimed to be experts in criminal investigations.

Q: It's not sure. I don't believe it. It's really true? Experts in criminal investigation?

A: Well, they were Jewish lawyers, who had experience in questioning a person who might say untruth, if you want to have it that way. So, the first thing they did was to question Metzler and me separately, and then to compare the statements. And it was soon obvious that

either we are saying the truth or we must be extraordinary able for being such liars. And because our social background was by far not as good as theirs, - after all, we were selected for the deportations, not them - they would not believe that our abilities can be any good. So, we must say the truth. They accepted it as truth, what we were saying.

Q: But how...I would to know how did they behave towards you? They were...first of all, were they shocked by what you said? Were they friendly? Had they compassion? Or were they...Did they look only like investigators, cold investigators?

A: My attitude was that it is better for me

BOBINE 273

NY 113

Q: Yes, but how did they react to what you said? Were they shocked? Did they show sympathy, compassion? This I would like to know because I cannot believe that they were...

A: I think....

Q: ...cold, no?

A: No, no, they were very excited about it. They showed great interest, and I must say that they were to us perfectly polite. Compassion, I think that they have got the message (phone rings in the room)

NY 114

A: If they were compassionate?

Q: moved.

A: They were excited. The human reactions for me of civilians were in general a bit humorous at that time, because I have been moving for the past two years in a completely different set of values. Compassion was something which in Auschwitz, if you wanted to survive, was the first thing we have to control. And a compassion of a bunch of fat Jewish administrators, lawyers and operators was the last thing we needed. But they were a bit patronizing,

which rubbed Fred Metzler the wrong way. My opinion was to take it with a bit of humour. And so, well, the relationship started to develop in a friendly atmosphere.

Q: To be?

A: A friendly atmosphere. What I tried to create was a friendly working atmosphere. I knew we have to do a work with them. We have to get through not only the message, but the consequences, as far as Hungarian Jews is concerned, and to make them feel that we have got nothing to say but the truth.

Q: All right, but my question is the following: when... when you described to them the arrival of the transport the gas chambers, and so on, even if they were fat Jewish administrators, I would like to know how did they react?

A: Well, I mean the leading personalities of them, they kept appearances, they reacted in a controlled way, there were no scenes.

Q: What do you call a controlled way?

A: They asked matter of fact questions.

Q: Only?

A: Yes. They didn't cry, or anything of that, there were lawyers among them, there were more than twelve people, they were more busy with checking the data, and how the data of me and Metzler co-incided. It was...It was a working atmosphere. It sort of...we sometimes were a bit rubbed against our skin because after two years of Auschwitz I must say that our standards of what we expect in behavior of people were a bit different from theirs at that time. But I don't think that there was anything but a working atmosphere, for the first two days.

Q: How long did it last?

A: Well, it lasted... In the first day we did the main part of the work, and on the second day we finished the work, because on the third day the thing was dictated. It was on 25 September...sorry, 25th April.

And on the next day, on 26th April, in the evening they departed in hurry, all of them, and left us two alone, in that house with a maid. And with some of their wives, taking care of us. This means, we were supplied with excellent food, and sort of treated like VIPs, I mean sort of in a very civilized way. And soon afterwards, of course; something happened very unpleasant. What we made clear was the following: that the information we have is absolutely important for the information of the Hungarian Jews. That to the best of our knowledge, and we trusted our knowledge is quite water-proof, the imminent execution of a million Jews is impending. That everything is prepared, that it can start any day. And that we want assurances that this information is passed on. And we were given the assurances by Dr. Neumann, by Mr. Krasnianski, by Mr. Steiner and by everybody who was there. There were at least twelve people.

Q: You were given insurance that the information would be passed on?

A: Yes, and that was the first time I heard the name of Dr. Kasztner, because I never heard that name before, He was in Hungary....

Q: Non, coup, pardon. Je m'excuse. C'est pas possible. Do this or I will do myself...

NY 115

A: Dr. Kasztner's name was mentioned the first time, it came to my notice that anybody by that name exists. I knew the members of the Jewish council from before the time of my deportation...

Q: of the Slovak.

A: ...of the Slovak Jewish Council. But I did know nothing about the Hungarian Jewish council. And I have been given to understand that Dr. Kasztner is an influential personality there, that because of my an Getzler's arrival, he is now already in Bratislava, and they are now going to give him the information immediately. And for his convenience, the information, the protocol the Auschwitz report has been translated from Slovak

in which it was originally conceived, into Hungarian and German on the spot. And secretaries were working. And I could see the Hungarian and German translations still in Zilina. There were a number of girls typing. Two or three. They were wives of those gentlemen, who were typists.

Q: And it is in this report that you draw...you drew already the map of Auschwitz.

A: Everything was drawn. The map of Auschwitz was there. What I am missing from the report....

Q: During the first two days?

A: Everything was just as the report has been recovered recently. What I am missing from the report, are warnings about the imminent deportation of Hungarian Jews. And this was reiterated again and again, by both of us, Wetzler and myself. And we were told, if I remember well, that it is good for the veracity of the report that we do not prophesize the future, but say only what we know. The rest...

Q: They said this in proper words?

A: I wouldn't guarantee that those were their words, but this was the sense of it. In other words, that the authenticity of the report would be somehow weakened, if we would speak about anything we don't know from first hand. In other words, we should limit ourselves to things which happened, not which will happen. We of course explained exactly that the machinery of murder in Auschwitz is based on the principle of no resistance and tricking of the victims into the gas-chambers. And that we consider it as of utter importance, that the content of that report should be spread among those...this part of the Hungarian population which is being immediately threatened by execution, this means the Hungarian Jews, or Jewish Hungarians, what ever you like. Because among them were all types, you know, who preferred one way or another. As far myself is concerned, I wouldn't care about it at all, because for me they were just normal human beings, you know, perhaps a bit odd sometimes, but we are all odd. I mean this...this



...this was of little importance. The importance was that there was a million people threatened immediately with death. And they explained us that Dr. Kasztner is not just anybody, that he is one of the great Jewish leaders.

Q: But did you ask to meet him, when they gave you the name?

A : They said that this is not necessary for us. And they made it plentifully clear that our job has been done, and now what we have to do is to enjoy ourselves. We will be supplied with money, with nice clothes, and we should play the gentlemen now, because we had bad times, and we should now enjoy ourselves. We deserve it, they said.

Q: But in....

A: ...it was very kind.

Q: In the report you made, did you recommend precise, specific things to be done?

A: Many things have been asked, and refused to be put into the report on the grounds that report should contain factual matter, not speculations, factual matter. But naturally the conditions were discussed. We explained the principle that the machinery can work only if the victims believe that nothing is going to happen to them which is outside the international law. That they might be badly treated, that they might get bad accommodation, that they might have a lack of coffee houses, they all knew when they went there. But that they were going to be gassed, or that their children are going to be gassed, or their mothers are going to be gassed, they did not suspect, and I explained to them that this lack of knowledge, this trust into values in which they grew up, that you can't execute a person

BOBINE 274

Vrba 116

Q: Well, what happened afterwards, after they left you?

A: They assured us that Kasztner is an extremely intelligent and expensible person, that they listened to our advice, but the decisions will be with Kasztner. And that it is sort of not suitable for people of our standing to say what should be done on a grand scale of politics. They will decide what should be published and when. They will do everything what is in their possibility to save those who are threatened. They assured me of that, that the information will be given to Kasztner on the same day that Kasztner is in Bratislava, that his movement from Hungary to Slovakia doesn't ? cause too much trouble practically, and we should wait for further developpments meanwhile in Zilina. They will contact us again, and they left us there in a comfortable place without shows, perfectly well dressed, they didn't give us shoes for some reason.

Q: No shoes?

A: No shoes. No shoes. They said that there are no shoes. We don't have to get out. The shoes might induce us going out, and that's now dangerous for us. I mean, they thought the shoes will prevent us escaping. ~~(unclear sentence)~~  
*It was a humorous attitude in their minds.*  
 In any case, we accepted that as a matter of discipline, and we were really fed excellently, They several times asked us if we miss anything, we said that we are missing only women. So, the situation was sort of satisfactory. And we were satisfied that things are rolling. At the end of the week, the cleaning woman, who was a Jewish lady, was coming to clean up the mess after us there, you know there were bottles around, things like that. And she was crying. So we were investigating why she is crying, if we didn't behave well or something like that. And she said: oh no, she's got no objections against us, we are very nice to her and in general we do behave, she said. But there is a horrible thing happening, two transports with Hungarian Jews passed through Zilina, and the gentlemen from the Jewish Council were here back in Zilina and they were on the station, because they were giving them, as usual, sandwiches and milk for the children,

or something like that, giving them some help on the road. But the gentlemen asked her very strictly not to tell us about this, because it would upset us, and that we shouldn't be upset by anything. We should...we should enjoy ourselves, and that she actually is guilty by saying us what she said us. And so we knew that the Hungarian action is starting to roll.

Q: Yes, but as far as we know the Hungarian tran...transports started only in the second half of May.

A: Yes, since then I have repeated this statement several times to several historians, who...who quarreled with me about this and thought that perhaps I am mistaken with two weeks. And interestingly in 1976 or 1977, a man called Biss, who was a member of Kaszner's entourage, published his memoirs under a sensational title about, I don't know what it..

Q: Yes, we know this.

A: 'The end of the Final Solution', or something like that. And you know, in every book there are not only lies, there must be also a grain of truth. And in that grain of truth, he publishes at the end of his book an informed statistics about Hungarian deportations and he states that before the wave of deportations started two small transports of mainly convicted Jews, convicts from prisons, not from Jewish centres, were transported to Auschwitz via Slovakia in April 1944. So, obviously, if one goes thoroughly into the history of those things, you will find informations.....

Q: How do you explain the behaving of these people of the Slovak Jewish Council?

A: Well, at that moment, it obviously was above my comprehension. And I didn't know really what to think of that. I mean, they were geared to believing that we escaped from Auschwitz, in order to get new clothes from them, or something like that, perhaps. Or perhaps their attitude towards us which from the very start, once we ended the official work, was sort of a patronizing rather than friendly, sort of patronizing. We didn't know exactly what to think of it. We have not been trusted to know what action is being taken on the basis of our information.

Q: Yes, but they delivered your report. Your report was sent

abroad.

- A: Yes, that's true, but who was deported from abroad? what do you mean by abroad, into the neutral Switzerland, or into England, or into America? That was a good thing to transport....to deliver the report there, IF they did, which is a questionable thing as I will explain to you later. How it get out is still a questionable thing. I can explain to you later what I did in order that it should get out. But I was not worried, or Metzler, we were not worried that anybody is going to be deported go Auschwitz from England, or from America. And we didn't want to *involve* the Allies into war against Germany. It came to our knowledge that they already declared war on Germany. We wanted that information to come in the first hand to those who were threatened immediately. Because you can rely in the first hand, in a dangerous situation, on what you can do for yourself, and then one can see what somebody else can do for you. The whole Auschwitz experience taught us that the slaughter house functions on the basis of the ignorance of the victim. To break this ignorance meant to break the slaughter house's machinery.
- Q: No, no, but it is...it was my question: how do you explain their behaving? Because you told me - out of record - this very strange answer you gave me about the money...
- A: This is a very good question, and here we are coming into a realm where I cannot claim such firm ground like when I claim facts about Auschwitz, because those people did not leave tape-recordings, and they made their dealings without the tape-recordings. We still have to find out what happened, and it is not at all difficult to figure that out. Let us take the whole situation. That Jewish Council and members of that Jewish Council *Wohl* very established Zionists, and they all were welcome after the war in Israel.
- Q: You talk about the ... people of Hungary.
- A: Also from Slovakia. Krasnianski, Neumann, all of them,

they were perfectly respected in the Zionist movement until they lived(?) or some of them are living now. The time is not so long as we think. Let us see the situation through the eyes not of those who were saved, but through the eyes of those who died. And perhaps I might see through those eyes better, because I was destined to die with them. After all I went with those in 1942 to Auschwitz who died. It is sort of a freak accident that I didn't. So I can imagine how they look at the situation and what happened. In Slovakia, there were 90,000 Jews, and those 90,000 Jews were one day deprived of the right to negotiate with the official authorities on the basis of the Nuremberg laws, and an intermediary between the Jews and the German authorities had been created.

Q: Yes.

A: And this intermediary was the Jewish Council which consisted of Zionists, of those Zionists who were approved both by the Zionist organization and by the Nazis. Those Zionists were then given the administrative task of resettling people, and drew up the lists and the... of who is to be resettled when. And....

Q: Yes, but on which grounds, on which basis?

A: Well,...

Q: ...how did they choose?

A: Definitely 60,000 were chosen not to stay in Slovakia, and 30,000 were chosen to stay. Who are those 30,000 had to be decided through the hands of the Jewish Council, because that was the only way by which a Jew had any sort of legal regress or report with the local situation. I obviously was not among those thirty thousand, I was among those 60,000 who went. I can't say that the Jewish Council saved me, or anybody.....

Q: Yes, but excuse me, most of the 30,000 were deported afterwards, they were deported in 1944.

A: Of those 60,000...

Q: No, of the 30,000 people which had been left.

A: Yes.

(end of first day of shooting)

BOBINE 278

NY 132

Q: All right, I would like to know who recommended specifically the bombing of the crematorium in Auschwitz, and the bombing of the railroad stations. Did you do this yourself?

A: This happened....

Q: And you did it when?

A: For that you needed plans of the...of the camp and this happened the first time I was discussing...this was the... with Rabbi Weissmandel in June '44 in Bratislava, after the report came in from two other escapees from Auschwitz, from Mordowich and Rozin....

Q: Who escaped after you?

A: After I...yes. That during May, when Wetzler and I were in Slovakia, approximately 100,000 Jews from Hungary were deported to Auschwitz and in such a speed that practically the crematoria and the gas chambers can not carry out the executions and that they returned to the old fashioned way of executions in ditches, without crema...without gas... without ....the expensive crematoria, and....often even came to scenes like burning children alive or shooting the people instead of gassing them, but shooting them in front of the burning fires. Because the success of the deportations from Hungary during May of 1944 was so big, that the Nazis just couldn't deal with it. The speed of the murder machinery....

Q: Was too fast.

A: was...was....the success was bigger than they expected.

Q: Yes, Okay, but to come back to this...to this map, to this plan which was...that you drew from Auschwitz. When did you do it. You did it in Zilina?

A: This we did with Wetzler in Zilina on April...on April 25th

Q: During your meeting?

A: During the meeting. That's right.

Q: With Neumann.....

A: That's right. That's right. That's right.

Q: But at this time, what did....Did you make specific recommendations about the bombing?

A: No, because this...It was known to me that the Jewish Council doesn't have bombers at his disposal, so I wouldn't come with such an idea. And they were playing down their connections and their facilities. They were listening to me without telling what they can do. What they could do, and I knew they can do, and which was within their facilities, and which was the objective which I wanted to reach, to pass on the information about the nature of Auschwitz to the part of the Hungarian population which is in immediate danger. This was clear to me that they have got this possibility. And That they.

....

Q: The JEWS of Hungaria?

A: The Jews of Hungaria, yes. Also, I explained to them that the...the fact...that the Jews of Slovakia from 90,000 - 60,000 were deported in 1942, but in 1943 .... There were originally 90,000 Jews, and those 30,000 Jews thought that the deportation is sort of a question of the past.

Q: That it will....

A: That they are already protected. For definitively. And I tried to explain them that nothing changed, only the deportation in the interim time came from France, from Holland, from Belgium, from Greece. Now they are coming from Hungary, but there is no reason to believe that those 30,000 will be finally an exception. In other words I wanted them to give the warning about the nature of Auschwitz and about the fate of the past deportations, about the fate of the people in the past transp...transports, to pass to that part of the population which is in ....in danger.

Q: But this is very interesting. You think that the... the Slovak Jews, enfin, the remaining Slovak Jews, the 30,000 thought that for them there was no danger anymore.

A: Well, they were very relaxed in Slovakia, also, that was quite close to Auschwitz, in Zilina itself is from Auschwitz less than 100 miles. Yes, they were a bit worried, but the atmosphere in Slovakia in 1944 was in

general much more relaxed than in 1942.

Q: True, yes.

A: You see, in 1944 the possibility of an uprising in Slovakia against Nazism was generally discussed among the population. So there was a force against the "azis. They... When I was deported in 1942, I was hunted ruthlessly by the Slovak gendarmes, but when I came back to Slovakia in 1944, and my mother, who happened to avoid deportation....I wanted to visit her, in 1944, but the gendarmes - the same gendarmes who were hunting me in 1942 - came to warn her, and said that the Gestapo is waiting in front of her house, that I shouldn't go home.

Q: And it was everywhere the same....

A: So in 4...Yes, that's right. So in '44, collaboration forces became less sure of themselves. The eastern front was coming closer, and with it a certain relaxation of the Jews, the fear of the next deportation was also much smaller.

Q: Yes, it was clear already that the "azi had lost the war. That the war was lost.

A: Well, it was clear to many people, but don't forget: there are certain people who believed from the start that the war of the "azis, for the "azis is lost because we couldn't imagine any other war. But obviously it was still before Normandy, before the invasion, three-four weeks, it was two-three months before the first attempt against Hitler, and the Nazi machinery was in perfect....

Q: Yes, the machinery.1..

A: ....Perfectly intact.

Q: ...was in a good state.

A: Yes.

Q: The Wehrmacht - less, as a matter of fact.

A: Well, you see, in this problem I couldn't see, in the Wehrmacht, but as far as the police, etc, SS - this machinery worked perfectly well.

Q: Yes. This is true. Okay, now, about Weissmandel, when did your meeting with Weissmandel take place. I mean, it was how many days or weeks after your first meeting



in Zilina with the members of the Jewish Council?

A: Well, for practically six weeks after that first meeting we were kept in ignorance about what is happening, they didn't give us any sort of information which they would have had, namely that the transports of Hungarian Jewry are rolling through Slovakia, and that nobody gives them the information.

Q: Yes, they started to roll in the second half of May.

A: They started to roll in the second half of May. And we were kept...we were told, Wetzler and I...and myself, by them that we should keep ourselves for the safety of us and because we are very important now, we should keep ourselves somewhere aside and we were kept in a place called Liptowski-Sweti-Miculas, through which those transports were not rolling, so that this information completely escaped us.

Q: It couldn't reach you.

A: ...couldn't reach us.

Q: All right.....

A: ...and the first time that we realized that during whole May, inspite the whole information, transports of tens of thousands of people were rolling through Slovakia, without those people being informed about their fate at the end of the line, this came clear to us only in June 6th, because on that day two further escapees from Auschwitz Rozin - Ernst Rozin - and Zeslov Morgowich arrived in Slovakia and we met immediately. We found one another immediately due to certain circumstances, and they could tell us what happened in the month May in Auschwitz.

Q: Did you know them before?

A: Oh, yes. We were very close friends before.

Q: In Auschwitz?

A: In Auschwitz, yes. And those both knew about the fact that we two are preparing the escape.

Q: But who requested the meeting with Weissmandel, you or Weissmandel himself?

A: Oh. Why should I request meeting with Weissmandel? I couldn't see any reason for that. Weissmandel requested

the meeting six or seven weeks after we were in Slovakia to meet us.

Q: Can you describe the meetings? How it take place, and why he wanted to meet you.

A: Well, Weissmandel's name...

Q: could you do this vividly, if you can.

A: Well, I can try to recall it, because it was....

Weissmandel's name was known to me from childhood, because from childhood his father-in-law was a rabbi... Rabbi Ungarn was considered a wonder-rabbi. And as a small child I lived quite close to that university of Talmud which they had, which is called a Yeshiva. Actually, I lived on the same street in Nitra.

Q: Ah, yes, You lived in Nitra.

A: Yes, I lived in Nitra and I was on the same street as a child.

Q: And you were yourself from a religious family?

A: My family....I was educated by my grandfather, and he was a very religious Jew.

Q: Orthodox?

A: Orthodox. Of course,

Q: Ah yes.

A: And lived on the same street as this...this Yeshiva, and so this rabbi Ungarn was of course considered a miraculous rabbi, and I remember as a child being sometimes with an errand in the kitchen of this rabbi, and I used to go quite often to....I saw the school as a child. So I knew of course that Weissmandel was his sort of legitimate heir, recognized heir, very respected in the community. Of the religious Jew, you know. From the Slovakian Jews only about 30 to 40 % were very religious orthodox, I would say.

Q: It's much.

A: ...and among those, Weissmandel was an enormous authority. But when I came back from Auschwitz I couldn't see any particular reason to look for him,

neither did I know that he lives, neither did I ask for him if he lives or not. Because so many people died, why should I specially enquire about...about a rabbi. I myself have never been very religious, once I was over ten years old. And they suddenly told me that: yes, there is rabbi Weissmandel, he wants to talk to us. So I thought that....

BOBINE 279

NY 133

A: Well, so I was approached by the Zionist representative or the Jewish Council representatives, which was practically the same, in the middle of June 1944, that if I would agree to see Rabbi Weissmandel. And I was of course surprised to know that Rabbi Weissmandel is alive, I was quite pleased about it too, because I was pleased if anybody was alive. However, I was supposed to go there not alone, but together with Morgowich, and the importance of the presence of Morgowich was that I was one of the two who came from Auschwitz in April, and Morgowich and Rozin came from Auschwitz in...

Q: In June.

A: In June. And so we both...we were told that the Jewish university where Rabbi Weissmandel is the president or rector or whatever this title was..

Q: A Yeshiva.

A: Yeshiva, that's right. The Talmudic school is now in centre of Bratislava, in the former Jewish quarter. Now, there was in Bratislava a Jewish quarter which was sort of an...in the old part of the city...

Q: But you mean a ghetto?

A: It was the remainder of a ghetto which was from... from two hundred years ago. But it was now in the centre of the city, and before the deportation it was inhabited by a colorful Jewish population, sort of very religious people, and simple. You know, this type of Jews. But they did not survive the deportation, they were all deported....

Q: In '42.

A: In '42. So, in '44, in June, they told me that we are supposed to visit Rabbi Weissmandel on...in that Jewish quarter which was practically quite close to the centre of the town, in Bratislava,...

Q: This means the Yeshiva at that time was not anymore in Nitra...

A: It was not in Nitra, it was in Bratislava, it went to the capital of Slovakia. Now all this was for me a bit surprising to hear. However, we were given the address and we went. So, we had to dress quite properly not to...in a certain style, you see; not to attract the attention of the Secret Police or of the police in general, because it was a...we were both, Morgowich and I, aware that the warrants against us have been issued. We didn't see them at that time, but we knew that the warrants exist. We knew how thorough the procedure is when anybody would manage...could manage to escape from Auschwitz, and we knew that the warrant is international, I mean all over occupied territory. So I used to dress at that time a bit flamboyantly and pretending to be a s...Slovak student, and Morgowich... Morgowich Szczescek who was a Pole originally, his...he pretended to be from northern Slovakia, which saw to his Polish accent used to come through, but he was a nice man, blond, blue-eyed, looked rather like a Gestapo man than a Jew, with his appearance, very self-confident and dressed this way. We went to visit the great Rabbi. So, we came to that Yeshiva, and the door was opened and we were...we were received by two polite Jewish gentlemen, two students from the Yeshiva, dressed up in their garb as usually, as I used to see them from the childhood, with Paies, you know, and with dark.... It was hot summer, hot summer, and with those wide brimmed hats, you know, in their folklore, which is, which is sort of....

Q: in their traditional...

A: In their tradition, yes, in their traditional folklore. For us, you know, it already started to be a bit peculiar, you see. There were.....during this whole visit I had two feelings: one, that it was comical, I have to keep my face straight. Because seeing for two years millions of Jewish people being gassed in....murdered in Auschwitz, it was sort of a very great surprise for me to see a small group of traditionally orthodox Jews, following their studies of talmud in centre of Bratislava. I...it was incongruous....it was sort of an...

Q: But it's beautiful too?

A: Well, it was...I didn't look at it as a beauty. I looked at it...Do not forget, it was June '44. We looked for logic, not for beauty at that time. And it did not make to me in the first moment any sense. It was...on the first moment it was to me a bit comical, on the other side it was to me a bit sinister. I didn't know what it means. We went...they were expecting us....in accordance to their tradition..the students did not know who we are, I mean, they knew that two men will come, and...who they are, the students were not told, and they took only great care that we shouldn't touch them, that there shouldn't be sort of hand-shaking or just direct contact, because according to their tradition they looked at us, and we didn't look to them sort of very Jewish or....they were not sure who we are. If we are from the police, if we are....they didn't know. They knew we will come, and they knew that we are supposed to be brought to Rabbi Weissmandel, and they treated us politely but with considerable distance, and we had to go through several rooms, we saw those students sitting behind...behind their benches, or standing behind benches - they study often in a standing position, with the high benches. and they didn't just take too much notice, giving us just sort of a suspicious look, but remained polite and brought us to the rabbi. And rabbi awaited us at the door of his office, and invited us to come...to come in. Now, while I was going....The rabbi looked exactly as

a wonder rabbi should look, I mean this was a tall man, which would attract anybody's attention, with a very sort of deep look in his eyes, penetrating look, very benevolent face, with a beard. He had a hat on, according to his tradition, and he was dressed like a great Talmudic scholar. This means: extremely sloppy, But relatively clean. That was the first thing which struck me....

Q: You hate them.

A: I don't know, I just...this is how he should...this is how he looked, I mean....

Q: Okay, go on.

A: I do not criticize anybody's way how he should look. I mean he chooses to look so, and it is the privilege of everybody to look as he wants and to wear his own folklore, and I am certainly not thinking that his appearances is anything which I should criticize. I can take notice of it, it was different from what was... what I was used to, especially after two Auschwitz, in the centre of Bratislava. I mean, the strict adherence to the old tradition, you see. I could understand that he is not sloppy, but that is to show that his mind is concentrated on higher things, that he can't think of such simple worldly things like the garb. I knew what that means, you see, but I looked at it with the eyes of a civilian, if I may say so, of a person who is outside, how it would struck a common civilian. It was perfectly clear to me, that with his old...the fact that on his perfectly clean shirt buttons were missing, or that his shoes didn't have laces, this meant only one thing, that he doesn't think about such worldly things, or it was meant...it was meant to mean that. I mean, I could also look at it in a different way: I could say, this is <sup>marvelous</sup> After two years in Auschwitz I should meet a real rabbi which looks just like from Hollywood. You know, It is...whatever way you look at it, you can find a new point of view. This is...not a sign of animosity that I take notice of it, because it was incongruent in 1944 in...a hundred miles

. from Auschwitz. That's why I am telling this.

Q: Okay, go on.

A: Yah,

Q: No comment.

A: Well, so he invited us for a tea, or coffee, and we started to talk. And it became quite clear to me immediately that he studied our report very thoroughly. He knew every word, about it. A similar report of events in Auschwitz has been drawn up by Morgowich and Rozin..

Q: After they escaped.

A: ...after they came to Slovakia. So that the report.... where as our report was speaking about the impending ex....execution of one million Hungarian Jews, their report already could add details about the execution carried out within May in Auschwitz which meant approximately...I don't remember exactly the figure now, but several tens of thousand, perhaps as much as a hundred thousand people were executed while Morgowich and Rozin were still in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Now with those figures, Rabbi Weissmandel was perfectly well acquainted, and I must say that...that I could see that I am speaking with a man who understands the problem and who showed an enormous compassion for this whole problem, During this whole discussion. I mean, in spite of the fact that we were sort of ...obviously...Jews who do not follow his particular brand of Judaism...that are not admirers of this, he behaved to us in a tolerant way, perfectly

BOBINE 280

NY 134

Q: Well, but I see according to what you said now, that ....there had been a great difference between your meeting with the Jewish Council and your meeting with Weissmandel. At least he showed compassion, in spite of the fact that you didn't care about compassion.

A: He showed first an enormous amount of compassion. He spoke in a moving style about the catastrophe

which took place and there was no doubt in our mind that he understands fully the significance of the figure which we had provided. As far his compassion is concerned of course; don't forget that we were coming from Auschwitz where compassion, display of compassion, compassion was dangerous, lack of control of compassion was dangerous, and the ethics develops in such a way that what was dangerous in Auschwitz finally becomes repugnant. This is how the...how the...how the human mind works.

Q: This is very good, yes, I think....

A: And so anything what was dangerous became in our mind sort of repugnant, and we were not interested at all in compassion, we were interested in what can be done for those people in s....and not for pitying them.

Q: All right,...

A: ...that was the question.

Q: All right, but you say that he knew your report by heart and he discussed the facts with you.

A: He discussed very much his emotional response to the facts, first. And this was what interested us least, what his emotional response was. What interested us was, what he can do in order to help to stop the catastrophe. Mind you, the first part of our...of our discussion which lasted several hours, was not too friendly from our side, because in my mind it...I had to be...remain cool, because in my mind there was constantly coming up the question: where was Raab Weissmandel when the Jewish orthodox community has been butchered in 1942, what was he doing for them in 1942 when his community and the small rabbis went to a martyr's death to Auschwitz, where they died in a way which not even a animal is allowed in a normal society to die. Where was he at that time. And the second thing.

Q: Yes, but you cannot reproach him that he remained alive, no?



- A: No, I didn't reproach him for remaining alive, I asked myself the question then, what was the German policy which kept this rabbi, the epitome of the Jew, against whom they made the constant propaganda, whose pictures they always showed in an exaggerated way in 'Stuermer' and in all other those dirty anti-Semitic Nazi propagand papers, why did they ... situate this rabbi into the centre of Bratislava in the middle of the Holocaust, hundred miles away from Auschwitz? I had to ask myself this question.
- Q: Okay, you did it. And afterwards? (interruption of the tape) We will come back later on to 1942.
- A: Right. So that's why it was not so...our....the first hour was not too...was not too ...
- Q: friendly from your side.
- A: too friendly from our side, we remained a bit cool. We waited until the compassion....compassion tyrade sort of goes past, and we could see that this is a man of considerable intellect, also in the way how he spoke. He suddenly asked us what can be done in our opinion.
- Q: He asked you?
- A: Yes. He said: Now, you are from there, it is my duty to ...to treat you like...like the ambassadors of those people who died there. Because you came back. And you are the only ones who can speak for them.
- Q: That's what he said?
- A: That's what he said.
- Q: Exactly this?
- A: With those words. And, You see, he didn't insist that we adopt any orthodox Jewish manners during...that we will wear hats or anything. I mean, this was from his side, in his school, in view of the fact that we were Jewish, already a great sign of tolerance, And I mean, he gave us ambassadorial treatment, nobody could sit like that in his office.
- Q: Ambassadors of all the Jews that were killed in Auschwitz.
- A: Yes, He explained to us, we are the only ones who came back from there, so we speak for them. So he wa...he

treated us accordingly. And he asked us what can be done. So, we went ahead to explain to him the principle, we explained to him that from all what we know and what we had seen, the principle consists in the ignorance of the people who are going to be slaughtered. That those people board trains, that the trains are not being even guarded, that they come voluntarily to the trains, and those trains come then to Auschwitz. And once they are surrounded on the ramp, there is nothing that can be done. So the only thing is that when they come to the ramp, then...the only thing which they can...could do, is to choose between being butchered on the spot or being driven into the gas chambers. That's the only thing which they have to choose, at that moment.

Q: All right, all right.

A: Therefore, I explained to him, the only thing is to explain them that they are not going to resettlement camps. That they should not board the trains. That they should not obey orders, that they should run away wherever they can. They should be hunted down like deer, not slaughtered like pigs.

Q: Did he agree with this?

A: Yes.

Q: He did?

A: Yes. He said, he understands that...you see, he didn't....

Q: And did you recommend other things?

A: Yes, he asked me what else can be done. And this was the first time where I understood, or he gave me to understand, that he has connections going to abroad and that he can master help from abroad to Auschwitz, say from the side of the Allies. He said, militarily, what can be done.

Q: He asked specifically?

A: Yes. specifically military. Now when I heard that sort of questions, first of course I thought that it is obviously quite clear to him that the principle of breaking the secrecy of Auschwitz to the people at large is the main thing. But I must say that he didn't say on it, he didn't make comments on our speeches in this way. He straight forward turned to the next page and asked us about military

Q: Militarily?

A: Militarily, yes.

Q: What...what can be done?

A: Yes. Militarily what can be done. So I explained to him that the main thing is to slow down the machinery. And this machinery can be slowed down by passive resistance - number One. Number two - the Germans obviously are not intending to murder the Jews in Central Europe or in Western Europe on the streets, because they are afraid of the reaction of the populations. So, it is necessary to do at least passive resistance, to run away, secondly - if they get the people into the transports, to cut the transport lines for Auschwitz. And because I knew that the functioning of Auschwitz was based on the fact that whenever a transport came to the vicinity of Auschwitz, say thirty - forty miles from Auschwitz, a telegram used to come, which would prepare...which would prepare the whole machinery for...for...for the murder. So if the train...the railway stations around Auschwitz, forty - fifty miles, would be bombed and the people wouldn't come to Auschwitz, but would have to be transported forty - fifty miles on foot, already this would slow down the murderous machinery. Because in Silesia, again, the Germans couldn't murder 100,000 people out on the street or in the fields so easily, as in the installations of Auschwitz. As far the installations of Auschwitz itself is concerned, I didn't think very much of their bombing as such, because I know that before the crematoria had been built, the gassing and the burning of people could be done in simple huts and in simple ditches with a bit of petrol. And I knew that if the crematoria will be eliminated, one can quite easily reconstruct the murderous machinery.....

Q: This means that you recommended, at first, the bombing of the railways?

A: The bombing of the railways at first, because the bombing of the crematoria were more or less an ornamental thing

for the Germans. Instead of the burning and.....so they wanted to have it elegant too, proper installations. But they were a luxury.

Q: This could have afraid them too, bombing of the crematoria

A: Pardon?

Q: This could have .... afraid them too.

A: Of course, I said, the bombing of the crematoria directly would indicated them that the world is taking notice, and would have been a moral pressure on them. Farther more, a bombing of the crematoria would have been an encouraging sign for the resistance which existed within the camp, and in a disorder of the bombing there might be that the resistance will pick up the opportunity and destroy the installations.

Q: Exactly.

A: Further more, I said, the resistance is...has got no weapons, and it would be a great help if weapons would be simply dropped in the camp, and there are already people - many inter-brigadists and so on - who know what to do with the weapons. So I suggested that....I suggested that even better: there would be a help if directly parachookis - I know that it would have been a very difficult mission, but I thought that a small group of parachootists who are decaded (and I thought of course that I might go.....

Q: Did he agree with all this?

A: Absolutely, absolutely. What I am surprised was that he could speak in those terms. I didn't expect it.

Q: Yes, this is a paradox. He was a religious Jew, as a...

A: Yes, yes.

Q: ...of fact. And he asked military questions.

A: Yes, and once it came to this sort of discussion, I had nothing but very warm feelings for him, because it was the first time we spoke with a man who asked to...who didn't just...wasn't just curious or investigating the dates when I was deported and how could I see everything. But he was discussing with me seriously the maps and the plans and the possiblity which could be done.

Q: You looked at the plan with him?

A: Yes, he had the plan in front of himself, because he had the whole report in front of him, and we were discussing it in detail.

BOBINE 281

NY 135

Q: Well, what did you think at the time, after this meeting with Weissmandel?

A: Well, we were discussing it all four among us the same evening, naturally. I thought that from everything one thing can come out, that they might give the warning out. I knew that they had the channels of communication to the Jewish population at large, I knew that our voice would not be listened too because we are not known to them as authorities and because we didn't occupy any particular strong social position, and didn't come from families with money, etc. They wouldn't listen to us. But we knew that those people who were in position of authority, they will listen. And if they tell them that it is true about the gas chambers, that they will get the point. And so we said that this might be one good point. About other things which he was speaking, you know, I was very dubious about it, because it was clear to me that the war not a phoney war in 1944, that it is a total war, an all-out war, that everything is being done to break the Nazi power, and also it was clear to me that the Nazi power is pretty strong at that time, and I thought something might come out of it. I didn't know how reliable the channels are. So...

Q: But it was the first time that you had the feeling that your report would be sent abroad?

A: Well, it was the first time that...that I heard it from some of the responsible Jewish officials, to be mentioned. But none of them mentioned to me that it will be publicized or it was already publicized among the Hungarian Jews. I mean, they tried to avoid us and tried to avoid talking about this in general. But this was the first time that somebody was saying these

words straight forward.

Q: It's what you thought at the...

A: It's what I thought, yes. And of course I wondered, of course I wondered how reliable that is, and of course I could see that incongruity of the whole situation. You see, Rabbi Weissmandel was obviously a person in the...even in my mind, who was highly trained in ethics, in Jewish ethics. And I knew something about this topic, and I was there in his school, and I could see all his students who were protected from deportation in 1942. And those students were carrying on studying Talmud, which is basically teaching of ethics, while their mothers, sisters, brothers were being gassed in Auschwitz, or deported to an unknown...unknown...an unknown destination. And I had to ask myself, what are they studying in their ethic, and how serious can those people be?

Q: It was your question at that time?

A: YES. That's what we were discussing. And I must tell you that we were discussing it with a certain sort of...we could see the humorous touch of it. I mean, we had seen a lot of humorous things in Auschwitz, if I may use this word 'humorous'. But one had to learn to laugh, if one could...wanted to live, or if one wanted to survive, or if I wanted to survive with any meaning.

Q: All right, now this was the meeting with the Jewish rabbi....

A: Yes.

Q: Now, afterwards you had a meeting with the delegate of the Pope?

A: Yes, the same representatives of the Jewish Council asked ask if we would be prepared to speak to the Popal Nuntius. And we said: naturally. I was prepared to speak to anybody, even to the devil.

Q: All right, now can you....

A: Okay, right. So we...they took us to the...a monastery about twenty miles away from Bratislava, told us that we are going to meet the Nuntius. We didn't know him

*Nuncio* personally, and as I know now, later, it was not the Nuntius, but a stand-in of his, who was representing him. And the situation was very similar, like with rabbi Weissmandel. The whole discussion was on very similar lines. Only the....

Q: What was his name?

A: eh....Well, he didn't say us his name. And I am not sure what his name was because he didn't show me any documents. But I have been introduced to him in a monastery in Swatiyur. He came with a...on a very elegant car, he was dressed in accordance with his status.....

Q: He was not sloppy.

A: He was extremely elegantly dressed, sort of in a black dress and high collar, white collar, You know, like reverend fathers are being dressed, like dignitaries of Vatican are dressed. I mean, extremely....

Q: Okay. Okay

A: pleasant, elegant, civilized man. And in...the coffee was served in silver, not in steel cup. But otherwise the situation went exactly the same, It was a beautiful salon in the monastery, and the development was the same. First, he in his language...he spoke very bad German, not good German, so I spoke with him partially, but Morgowich speaks fluent French. So the the gentleman spoke very well French, and that's how the discussion went.

Q: But he was Slovak, he was an Italian?

A: No, obviously he was a Spaniard.

Q: He was a Spaniard.

A: Yes, he was a spaniard in diplomatic services of Vatican. And he was explaining to us that he is travelling now, within this week, to Switzerland, and he is going to take our report with him.

Q: At the time, he read already your report.

A: Oh, he was acquainted with every detail of the report. He...his ways of showing compassion to us, I mean were a little bit defferent from Rabbi Weissmandel,

but similarly profound. He cried on the spot.

Q: He cried?

A: He cried, yes. And...he asked us...he didn't ask us what should be done, he asked us if we need personally any help. Which we said...

Q: You yourself?

A: Us personally. I said: no, we don't need it. that we.. don't need any help. And after six hours we parted. We were not alone with him. There were some representatives of the Jewish Council with us, too. I think it was Mr. Krasnianski and a certain Mr. Kald, and Morgowich and myself. *Kald*

Q: And did you talk about the Pope or not?

A: We talked....he was intersted about the fate of Catholic priests in Auschwitz, if we know something about it. And we knew about it. There were about 200 Catholic priests murdered in Auschwitz, Polish priests. And we said to him that as a practice, when a priest gets into the concentration camp, he is treated worse than the other prisoners. And we explained it to him. And I think a good deal of the time was spent about the possibility of how...if there is any possibility of helping those priests. I knew that to be a priest in Auschwit-z was a death sentence. They didn't last long, because any sort of people with spiritual content, who didn't hide that spiritual content, were the object of the German wrath.

Q: Yes, but do you know that as a matter of fact your report was absolutely passed abroad, and that it made a lot of noise.

A: I....this I heard only ten years after the war, the first time. I knew about the effect of the report the first time, when I could read the English copy of Hettlinger book's 'The Final Solution', which I read in 1957.

Q: Because we have all the documents, the telegrams, the cables,....



A: So, in 1957...

Q: ....through Switzerland, through several channels...

A: In 1957 was the first time that I heard about it. I heard about it a bit earlier, perhaps, but not directly, but indirectly, something like '51 or 1950, from some people who were going through the files of the Foreign Ministry in Czechoslovakia and they came across it. But this was a second hand information....

Q: What I want now is the following, because why did your report have such a consequence, why it was such a sensation? Because as a matter of fact, already at the end of 1942 everything was known, I mean here, in US, in England, in Switzerland - about the destruction of the Polish Jews, about Treblinka, about Chelmno, about the mass-murder, about the genocide in Poland. They knew everything, and this happens two years later; your escape from Auschwitz and your report. Alors, it's the reason why I would like that you help me to understand, why was it so important... obviously it was.

A: well, you see, we must ask ourselves one question: before I was deported to Auschwitz, I have made a very serious attempt not to be deported. I escaped twice, under various conditions, and they got me finally to that beautiful place. But if I knew that what is known in America and in Switzerland and in Britain, and in I.L. as you say, that's true - if someone would have given me that information, obviously, I would have risked a third or....a third attempt to escape, and I would have used already violence. Because in my former escapes I didn't use violence. I couldn't see murder, and I didn't think that I am entitled to murder, in trying to save myself. But if I knew that at the end of the line, there is murder, well, I wouldn't have hesitated to murder the next guard. And I had a number of chances for it. Because they were so drastic that there will be no resistance, that they didn't take precautions. I would like to tell you that from

Slovakia, 58,000 Jews were deported in 1942. And during those whole deportation, not one of those Jews were killed. In other words: it went smoothly. Would it go so smoothly if the information of the death waiting at the other hand.....?

Q: All right, I understand, but you don't answer my questions, at the moment.

A: Yes, what exactly is your question?

Q: My question: what was new in your report.

A: Well, it's not for me to judge, because I haven't been on this side in 1942. What was perhaps new, that in the report we didn't speak of great masses of Jews being murdered and we didn't speak...we didn't use any sort of ornamental language. We produced a statistics about the fate of 1,750,000 people, by place of origin

BOBINE 282

NY 136

Q: Well, I ask you again, what was new in your report, because already in 1942 the whole story of the mass murder in Poland was known at the end of 1942. They knew everything about Treblinka, Chalmno and the genocide of the Jewish people in Poland.

A: As I explained to you before, I didn't know at that time what they know in the west. And it...therefore I thought that is...everything new in my report. Of course...in our report, in Wetzler and my report...I of course there was a new twist in our report, because instead of describing in passionate words massacres, we provided statistics, and explained that the executions are...can be and are being conducted on an industrial scale....

Q: This is the main point.

A: In other words, that the production of death in Auschwitz goes without a hitch, just like the slaughtering of animals in any Chicago slaughter-house, Everything is perfectly industrialized. And the material, as it was called, the units - by the

Nazis - is being without a hitch continuously transported into this factory of death, from all corners of Europe. And smoothly. And of course I tried to explain, not with words, but by implication, the the principle of the success, that such a machinery can operate, is the secrecy of this machinery. And that the ethics behind this machinery are so foreign to normal people, that they do not expect such a machinery at the end of the line. And in my naivete, or not naivete - perhaps it was logic - I expected the if people were given the truth what expecting them... what is expecting them at the end of line, then - if nothing else - then the instinct of self preservation will come to its validity...

Q: All right, the truth was given.

A: Yes.

Q: ...The two things that you recommended: the first one, the bombing of the railroads leading to Auschwitz, and you named even the stations...

A: Well, yes?

Q: This was never implemented, we know this.

A: Yes.

Q: Yes. And the second thing, the warning of the Jews...

A: Yes.

Q: ...and do you think the warning was given?

A: Well, it is obvious to me that the warning was not given, but the trick was being perpetuated on them continuously. Because from Rozin and Morgowich, who have seen arrival of the Hungarian transports, we know that they went to their death as it was usual in an industrialized Auschwitz, and even it was at that time sped up. And those who were not immediately murdered but came into the concentration camps as prisoners, all of them said that they never heard about the existence of Auschwitz. However, before they were deported to Auschwitz, each of them was given an ....and issued various documents, entitling them.... giving them the right to go into the transport. And those documents were issued by the Jewish Councils. The same Jewish Councils to whom I gave the information

about Auschwitz....

Q: Yes.

A: So it was quite clear....

Q: Why, why did this happen? why they were never warned?

A: Why were they never warned?

Q: ...by the Jewish Councils.

A: Now, this is....

Q: By the Jewish Council of Hungaria. This is very important. This is a big problem.

A: Well, the next thing...

Q: Please, try to talk in a unpassionate way.

A: Yes, there is...you see, it is not happening today! We are speaking about it perhaps only in order to get the answer. And the answer is simple. To get the answer how come that millions of people can be transported to their death against any instinct of self-preservation. It's obvious: they were tricked. And the trick was - we know now how it was perpetrated. Now why the Jewish councils did not act, why didn't they inform? Why did rabbi Weissmandel not inform the...his own pupils? They went to their death in ignorance.

Q: Yes, but he was himself deported to Auschwitz, rabbi Weissmandel.

A: This is not a good argument.

Q: He escaped the train, we know this. And this came much more later. But lets talk about the Hungarian Jews.

A: Now, I think that the case of Hungarian Jews was the same like the case of the Slovakian Jews, and I would summarize it in the following way. The Nazis were well-prepared for their task, not only in mechanical ways and in their great propensity to murder, but also in an organizational way. They decided to carry out that murder in a way that it should not upset the European population by its inhumanity. So they needed to induce the Jews to go voluntarily to the transports. For that....

Q: I already discuss the word 'voluntarily'. Because they didn't go voluntarily into...in the transports.

A: Well, without much resistance.

Q: this is something else.

A: Without much resistance. Because, if I may say you something: Rabbi Weissmandel asked me....

Q: They were herded in ghettos before, in Hungaria, for some weeks.

A: Rabbi Weissmandel asked me during the discussion what should be done. I think the answer is clear: every.... anything could be done. One should shoot instead of going into the waggons. And he answered to me: If I had two pistoles, I would shoot with two hands. Why he said it to me, I don't know, but he could see on my reaction to the whole problem, that I can see that only answer with violence can be a help. But I must say that pistols were available at that time in Slovakia already, not...it was not difficult to obtain them, and it was two months before the Slovak uprising, and rabbi Weissmandel had two hands. He didn't use them for shooting. But we agreed that this should be a good policy. And the only one. Your question is: why did the Jewish Council not give the information to the masses of the people?

Q: Exact. And I am talking specifically about Hungaria.

A: You see, the Jewish Council could survive the Nazi period as long there was an order in the Jewish Community, and the Jewish...Order in the Jewish Community meant, that transport lists were drawn up by the Jewish Council and those transports went away in good time to Auschwitz. If that information would pass through to the Jewish masses and nobody would obey anymore the Jewish council's order to board the transports waggons, and a panic would arouse, what need do the Germans have after that to keep those Jewish Councils? If a panic would have arisen, the Germans would have had to start with a systematic massacre of the Jews on the spot, which is much more difficult than an industrialized massacre in Auschwitz. But for a massacre on the spot they didn't need Jewish councils. They could dispose of them....

Q: They wanted to save their skin?

A: In other words, the Jewish councils were a part of the trick perpetrated on the Jewish population at large, at the price of dealing their own death. Because whenever the population - and this we knew from Auschwitz where we had seen the liquidation of many ghettos - that whenever a ghetto was finally liquidated, the Jewish councils of those ghettos were liquidated too. In other words, it was what the Germans....

Q: You mean they were liquidated at the end.

A: At the end. So, the Jewish councils had to keep the transports rolling, but not too s...fast, so that the end is pretty far away and might come later than the end of the war, in which case they are saved personally. On the other hand, they couldn't do it too slow, either because the Germans would say: we don't need you, you are too slow. So it was a sort of a...of a collaboration. Treason. You see, the Nazis decided that the mass murder is easier with the help of treason, and because the Jewish councils consisted mainly of Zionists, and because a good deal of the Jewish population started to respect them because they suddenly came into power, into positions given to them by the Germans, by the... who recognized them as...as....an official....

Q: It is not true what you say. There were many Jewish councils who were not...which were not led by the Zionists. And I think it is much more complicated than...than you say it. Like you take the case of Kasztner, for instance,....

A: Yes,

Q: Its a...It's very difficult, Because it is true that in one way the Jewish Councils were tools in the hands of the Nazi, and I agree fully with you. But it was a very special kind of collaboration. Anyhow it was not an ideological collaboration. And they were led year after year, month after month, At the beginning they didn't want this at all. I think it's very difficult to judge them. And in the case of Kasztner,

. Kasztner was negotiating with the "azi, you know this. And in my opinion - and I don't want to exonerate him - but it is because he was negotiating, that he had his mouth shut. He couldn't talk. He couldNt talk to the Jews because he was negotiating in one way in order to save them.

A: Well, what do you mean, whom

BOBINE 283

NY 137

A: Well, Kasztner and the members of the Jewish council in Hungaria - this is absolutely true - knew everything about Auschwitz, and they knew thanks to you too, and thanks to your report. In spite of this they didn't warn the Jewish population which had been herded in the ghetto before the deportation. And it is true that the Jews boarded the trains. But we know that at the same time, Kasztner was engaged in an negotiation with Eichmann. We know this. What was the aim of his negotiation? he wanted to save at least a part of the Jewish population. And he didn't warn them. My opinion is, and it's very complicated, he didn't warn them precisely because he couldn't talk. And he couldn't talk because he was negotiating. Which means that trying to save at least a part of the Jews, he doomed them. This is what I think. I would like your answer about this.

A: I thinkd this is completely wrong. This is a favorite explanation to white-wash, white mandel, the whole affair. During the negotiations of Kasztner with the Nazis, the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to an industrialized death went unimpeded, according to the Nazi plans. Therefore, for ....those negotiations for the Nazis was proba bly an entertainment, macabre piece of humour. For Kasztner it was different. It was an alibi. Because by sacrificing hundreds of thousands of Jews, who believed him that he would warn them if the death would be imminent, he didn't warn them, and of course had to be paid by Eichmann in one way or another. Eichmann was not so interested in the

fate of one thousand or two thousand Jews, he was interested in keeping the murder machinery going. Even at the price of letting one thousand or two thousand Jews go. So, it was a piece of a macabre humour to agree with Kasztner for an exchange of a small community of his own choice. And if you will study who they were, you will find that they consisted of two groups or three groups of people which Kasztner chose: one, which were relatives of the Jewish council, two, people who had money, especially in foreign accounts, three, people who were prominent in the Zionist circles, four, people who were prominent in the Jewish religion. Saving those few, and himself including, provided the small group of traitors with a bit of money, on addition of their lives, and enabled the Nazis to feed the death machinery in an unimpeded way during the months when it was planned. They Nazis would not mind that thousand or two thousand Jews went safe to Switzerland, because according to the Nazi ideology, they will win the war, they really believed that they will win the war. And they said: well, with those who escape now, we will catch up tomorrow. But meanwhile, from the Nazis point of view, meanwhile we have to keep our death installations going. So it didn't matter....

Q: You think that the Nazi accepted to negotiate only in order to keep the machinery smoothly going?

A: Of course. What else could they have done. If...if Kasztner told them: if you don't agree with what we ask from you, from the Nazis, then we will divulge our information about the nature of Auschwitz to the masses. And that is...

Q: Now...

A:....the Nazis knew of course that that is....

Q: I have...I have a more general question: what do you think of the mere fact to try and negotiate with the Nazi, which happened very often, as a matter of fact.

A: Well, the last one who tried to negotiate with the Nazis was Chamberlain. This was in 1939 or 1938 in Munich...



- Q: No, no, we are talking about the Jews now.
- A: Well, I mean, it was ridiculous. It was ridiculous. For the Jews there remained nothing but resistance. There was no way out from dying. The question was how fast to die, and with what dignity. And in order to make it fast and shameful, that's what the "azis needed: The Jewish council and the Rabbis.- the big ones, the small ones were gassed. If the Jewish councils and the big rabbis would have told that the fate of the people at the end of the line is death - and they could have told them, As you say, the information was available in the west, and as we know, they had connections with the west, they could write impassioned letters to the west whenever they wanted, obviously. It was not difficult for them to transport my....
- Q: Allright, In Poland in 1942 it was much more complicated.
- A: Well, you know....
- Q: ...and there were ghettos and there were Jewish councils in each ghetto.
- A: You see, for instance with the Jewish community in Slovakia, where about one third were orthodox Jews. They would do absolutely what an orthodox rabbi, the top rabbi would say them - Weissmadel. They would not obey the nati....the Jewish councils because the Jewish council were Zionists and the orthodox Jews never liked the Zionists. The very fact....
- Q: Weissmadel was not a Zionist.
- A: Not at all. But the Zionist could not influence the orthodox Jews. And the Zionists...and the Jewish councils, as a tool of the "azis, had to induce not only the Jewish population in general, but also the orthodox Jewish group, in order to enter the trains. If the rabbi will tell them: don't enter the trains, but die here; or 'we don't allow our communities to be disrupted, we don't cooperate', well, they wouldn't go.
- Q: Well, what do you think of the negotiations....

A: So it was necessary for the Zionists, in order to carry out their job, to extend their protection to a part of the prominent orthodox Jews. In order to extend this protection it was necessary to protect in centre of Bratislava, 120 miles from a working Auschwitz, a complete Yeshiva, with the students and with a wonder rabbi.

Q: What do you think of the negotiations of Weissmandel with Wislizeny, with the Nazi.

A : It's ridiculous.

Q: ...and they started in 1942.

A: Well,...

Q: You say it is ridiculous, why?

A: Well, what was the basis of those negotiations? If you negotiate, both sides going to negotiations with something to offer. What had Wislizeny to offer to Weissmandel power. What had Weissmandel offered to Wislizeny? money. So Wislizeny's job was to pretend to be interested in that money. The money involved were relatively small sums with which Weissmandel could be...having at his disposal. So small, that it was humorous in the eyes of the Nazis, because millions were lying on the floor in Auschwitz. Everybody...every prisoner in Auschwitz knew it, every SS member would know it. So they could get that money in a much bigger amount there. Secondly, it was not only money which mattered, but property, real estate. By deporting the Jews from Slovakia to Auschwitz, or from Hungary to Auschwitz, but especially from Slovakia and from other countries, the real estate was not taken with themselves, they didn't take the real-estate with them. And that real-estate was auctioned in auctions where it was sold for pepper corn prices to the right sort of people. If Wislizeny wanted a particular house, or a particular property, he would go to those auctions, where every big Nazi could buy them for peppercorn prices.

Q: But you know that there are people today, followers of Weissmandel, who say that thanks these negotiations with Wislizeny he succeeded to stop the deportations from Slovakia in 1942.

A: This is utterly....

Q: They say this.

A: Yes, I mean this statement is absolutely ridiculous, if one looks at it from the point of view of what was happening in Auschwitz in the centre of the mechanized death. They look at it from the small angle as they see it and it is presented to them. For instance, the Nazis never evacuated the whole Jewish population from a particular country at a certain time, together. They always took only a small part. And then in a year later they took another small part. So that there is not... never a resistance of the whole endangered group of the population. So we saw in Auschwitz, that after French transports of Jews came Slovak transports of Jews, and after Slovak transports of Jews came Polish transports of Jews. And after Polish transports of Jews came Greek transports of Jews, and after Greek transports of Jews came French Jews again. So what we could see in Auschwitz was a continuous factory, but in those individual, particular places it looked as if there would be lull in deportation. It was not a lull. The Nazis had their limitations. Auschwitz could take only 5000 a day. I mean processed 5000 units a day. So...that was the Nazi terminology. And those religious people which you say were saved by Weissmandel, what happened was that while the Nazi machinery was sweeping around the Europe, and the Nazi machinery was not yet finished with the Jews of Europe when the war was finished. The war finished the Nazis before they finished the Jews, and they think it was Weissmandel who saved them. It was the British, the American, the Russian armies which defeated the Nazis. That's what saved them. Otherwise their time would have come.

Q: All right, Do you doubt the...the sincerity of Weissmandel when he was dealing with the Nazis?

A: How could he believe that he can pay off Nazis. I mean one can imagine that type of a rabbinical folly when a big rabbi thinks that everybody is foolish and he

is clever.

Willie: stop.

Q: Tres bien.

BOBINE 284

NY 138

Q: But do you think that Weissmandel was a mad man, a fool, a megaloman? What do you think?

A: I am not a judge, I am only a witness. I can only say what I know for sure. And I know for sure what was happening in 1942 and in 1944. If Weissmandel has done something wrong, it is not for me to forgive him, but for his God - if there is one. I don't know. But if you ask me about the whole situation, in my opinion and in my reflection it looked the following: the Nazis understood certain intricacies of ethnical structures of the people which they subjugated. They were by no means stupid, they were cruel and inhuman, and ruthless, in an unprecedented way in history, but stupid they were not. And they analysed certain characters, not only of the Jewish ethnic community as a whole in Europe, but also in its detail which were caused by historical development of that community in various countries. The Polish Jewish ethnical community was different from the Slovak in small differences and in many ways similar, Hungarian was different, the German was different, the French was different. It's obvious to me that the Nazis in their thoroughness have studied certain characteristic streaks of those communities, and also have studied the personalities within those communities before they could even think over a major plot, like an industrialized slaughter of human beings in Auschwitz and in other places. If I do not accept this hypothesis, then I must believe that everything was playing into hands of Nazis by chance, by accident. And this is not likely. There was a master plan behind it. Now, as far as the Jewish ethnic community, there is...one thing was and is especially..

here we see it, among the Jewish ethnic community in America: there appeared suddenly in this Jewish community, which was once a carrier of ethics in formal Judaism, and later in formal Prussianity (?), there appear, and I am sorry to say so, there appear signs of degeneration, which are just incredible. For instance when I look at the American Jews who constantly protest on the streets that the Soviet Jews should go to fight to Palestine, and they don't go there, I mean, I can not understand that. Now, you see...and nobody sees that there is something wrong with this attitude. This is only a small example. Now, if I go back to the Jewish communities in Europe, let us not forget that those communities were isolated from the rest of the world in ghettos for centuries, and the culture is relatively new, and not each in those Jewish communities is an Einstein or other wonderful Jews of wonderful achievement. The Jewish community has kept certain...certain...certain...standards standards, which from ethical point of view are difficult to understand

.....

Q: No, but excuse me,...

A: Yes?

Q: I think we are going too far.

A: Okay, yes, I agree with you, it's a philosophical question, but you asked me that.

Q: No, no, I asked you if you consider that Weissmandel was a fool or a megaloman or a stupid man, and I asked you before...

A: He was in a precarious situation, in my opinion...

Q: And I asked before...

A: The precarious situation....

Q: ....if he is with sincerity or not?

A: Yes. He was in a precarious situation....

Q: Because he conceived even a so-called Eupopa plan in order to save the whole of the European Jewry which was left. This is true. This is a fact. And I ask you, was he at least sincere?

A: I cannot see into his soul, I can say only one thing: he was in a precarious situation. Because while the Zionists were brooms which the Nazis used for sweeping the Jews in the oven in Auschwitz voluntarily, going with least resistance, he was a puppet in the hands of the Zionists. The religious Jews could not contact the Nazis directly, there was never a direct contact between the religious Jews, these extreme orthodox Jews, and the Nazis. The contact from all the Jews to the Nazis was done through those Jew....Judenrats or Judenverrats, or what ever you want to call them. Now, those Judenrats, or Jewish councils, they because of their Zionist background, had little influence upon the orthodox Jewry, must have come to the logical conclusion that it would good from the orthodox Jewry to create an aristocracy which will also get a delay of murder, and then the rest of orthodox Jews can be induced to a passive boarding of the trains to the slaughter house, just like the rest of them. And so once, an exception was created, say like rabbi Weissmandel, with his wife and children and entourage of students and a school was created in centre of Bratislava, so that it should appear that things are basically right. And as long those Jews were boarding the trains and rabbi Weissmandel didn't come out of the school and didn't tell them: 'don't go, you are going to your death', fine - then he has served his purpose.

Q: But you are...you are so severe with these people. You seem to exonerate completely the Nazis.

A: I do not exonerate the Nazis at all. It should be clear that the Nazis were the murderers. I only tell you, that to murder people is not so easy. A crazy murderer.... we have seen who is a crazy murderer, a guy in Texas goes up on a university tower and shoots twenty or fifty people, and then he is licked by the police. He is crazy. That's what a crazy person can do: to kill fifteen or twenty or fifty people, or God knows what. But to kill millions of people on a industrial scale

in a slaughter house, reasonable intelligent, reasonably normal people as you see them on the street, - well, this, no crazy man can do that, can es... extinguish the instinct of self determination given by nature into those people, making them...No crazy man can do that. And once those Nazis, this inhuman visitation upon this earth, conceived the plan of such a mass murder, they understood that such a plan can be carried out better with the help of traitors.

Q: I just say that they were a very special kind of trait...they were not traitors in the ordinary sense of the word. I don't....

A: Well, you see.....

Q: There were some traitors, absolutely...

A: I am not....

Q: ...but at the beginning these people didn't mean what they were at the end.

A: I am not a rabbi to explain differences and nuances in shades of treason on the expense of your neighbour. I leave this to the big philosophers.

Q: Yes, but I think that you have no nuances, in this respect.

A: I beg your pardon?

Q: I think that you have no nuances in this respect.

A: Then I leave that problem to them. It's bigger than for me...as Slovak proverb says: that this is a problem for a horse. He has a big head and can think about it. (pause) It's too complicated philosophical problem for me, to find out nuances of things.

Q: Why do you smile so often when you talk about this?

A: I am not aware that I am using that smile so often. But what should I do? Should I cry?

Q: It's a question.

A: I don't think that crying is helping anybody. But of course when you tell me, years after the event, that there are some people living in a civilized world, and claiming that they are living because Rabbi Weissmandel

Vrba Bob. 284-5 - 101

saved them with his negotiations, well, I can only smile.

Q: I didn't say this. I just asked....

A: For instance, I am givin you...

Q: And you smiled a lot of times, not only talking about rabbi Weissmandel.

A: I look also nicer when I smile.

Q: I am not sure.

A: I hope.

(plan de coup on Vrba)

BOBINE 285

MUET plans de coup on Vrba.