

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

MAX METZGER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Fred Stamm

Date: June 21, 1981

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Gratz College

Melrose Park, PA 19027

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MM- Max Metzger

FS - Fred Stamm [interviewer]

Date: June 21, 1981

Tape one, side one:

FS: Today is June the 21. I'm Fred Stamm, student at Gratz. I'm interviewing Max Metzger, who is a survivor of the concentration camp era. Max is a member of my wife's family. The next voice you will hear is Max Metzger.

MM: I was born 1903 in Gross-Reken, Westfalen. We moved 1911 to Dorsten, Westfalen. I go to school in Dorsten, Westfalen. I learned cattle dealer in Durkheim, Rhineland. After that I got in a business with my father.

FS: In Dorsten?

MM: In Dorsten.

FS: Yeah. Now tell me, Max, when Hitler first took power, the first few weeks, what happened in Dorsten? Do you remember?

MM: It was nothing, nothing special. They marched into Dorsten. I was, it was not so, so great.

FS: There was not much antisemitism there?

MM: No, not in the beginning. It started in April after the, was murdered the...

FS: It started in 1934?

MM: No, later [tape garbled] after that it started. It was boycott for every Jewish store.

FS: This was an assassination of the assistant to the ambassador in Paris?

MM: Yeah.

FS: Yeah.

MM: That's correct. Then it start slowly.

FS: In other words there was not much antisemitism there from 1933 until about the passage of the Nuremberg laws, would you say?

MM: It was, it was, *Richtig* (Ger: right wing), but not antisemite, not so much. It was an Catholic town. It wasn't not so much after that, after the, what's it called...

FS: After the assassination...

MM: Yeah.

FS: In Paris.¹

MM: Then it started.

FS: Were you and your father able to do business?

¹Ernst Edward von Rath, a German diplomat, was assassinated in Paris by Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish Jew, 17 years old, whose parents were among those Polish nationals who were deported from Germany to Poland.

MM: Till 1938, they took the business from us. We was not allowed to do business any more.

FS: And when you got married, how old were you?

MM: 37 it was. I was born 1903...

FS: 34 years old.

MM: 34.

FS: 34 years old. And what was your wife's maiden name?

MM: Helda Norger [phonetic]. She was born in Dortmund. We lived in Elberfeld, in Rhineland. We was married 1937.

FS: And then she moved to...

MM: Dorsten.

FS: She moved to Dorsten.

MM: Yeah.

FS: And you lived in the same house...

MM: With my parents.

FS: ...with your parents.

MM: Then one-and-a-half year later mine daughter was born, Judith.

FS: In Dorsten.

MM: Yeah.

FS: And her name was?

MM: Judith, and her name, we could not name it. That was the law from the Nazis. They give us that name, Judith.

FS: And who gave you that name?

MM: The Nazis. The *Standesamt* [civil registration office] in Dorsten.

FS: Gave the name for your child.

MM: Yes. We had to call her that name. Only name. Cannot call her - only Judith.

FS: And where was your child born? Where...

MM: In Dorsten.

FS: In the hospital?

MM: In a hospital. At that time the midwife, had plenty [unclear].

FS: The mid-...

MM: We had lots of...

FS: The midwife was a local person?

MM: Yeah. *Aber* [but], it was an Catholic hospital, with nuns.

FS: Yeah.

MM: The nuns was wonderful there. Was very, very nice there. But that midwife was terrible.

FS: In which respect, Max? Do you remember?

MM: In the labor, they had to stay in labor so long, they don't, they don't come in the room and help you or nothing.

FS: Now, then, how did you support yourself? How did your parents support themselves after they took your business away from you?

MM: I, I go to *Zwangsarbeit*.

FS: And forced labor.

MM: Yeah. I...

FS: And where...

MM: Got paid, we got paid.

FS: And where, where was this taking place?

MM: In Burgsteinfurt, Westfalen.

FS: And what kind of work did you do there?

MM: We, we, what they call it? [German conversation with his wife].

FS: Digging ditches.

MM: Digging ditches.

FS: Digging ditches.

MM: Yeah.

FS: And how many hours a week did you work?

MM: We worked 48 hours a week.

FS: And all Jewish men had to do that?

MM: Yes. We lived there in, in, in a, in, over there. We could not go home.

FS: What did you do, live...

MM: Only there...

FS: In barracks?

MM: In barracks.

FS: And you could not go home?

MM: No, only on, sometimes soon as we got permission to go home.

FS: And this was approximately what time, what, which point in time, which year?

MM: From 1939 to 1942.

FS: For three years...

MM: Yeah.

FS: You worked here. And how frequently did you see your child then?

MM: Oh every week. On a Sunday.

FS: And how did...

MM: And sometimes...

FS: Your wife support herself?

MM: I gave her the money what we got paid for that. 55 pfennig per hour.

FS: Was it very hard physical labor?

MM: Yeah. Very, very hard.

FS: And what kind of work did your father do? Or was he permitted to stay home?

MM: Yeah.

FS: He was permitted to stay home.

MM: Yeah. And I had an brother. He was sick, it was asthma.

FS: That's not, you had a brother beside Ernest?

MM: Yeah.

FS: Your brother Ernest?

MM: Yeah. My brother Albert², he immigrate to Israel.

FS: Now Ernest, your brother Ernest, he was with you in this job?

MM: Yeah.

FS: And where, do you remember where you were when, in September the 3rd, 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland?³

MM: I was in Burgsteinfurt, in the barrack.

FS: You...

MM: We were all there.

FS: Do you remember how you get, how you received that news?

MM: It came over the radio.

FS: Did you see any significance in that, it might, that it might create intolerable conditions for you?

MM: No, it was the same conditions, no, that, I'll tell you the truth it was the same conditions.

FS: And how long did you work, then, on this job to dig ditches?

MM: I told you, it was...

FS: Until...

MM: From '39 to 1942.

FS: You remember the month of 1942?

MM: Yes, January 27.

FS: January 27, 1942. What, tell me, how did you get the news that the job was terminated?

MM: Couple weeks before already they sent us home, no job any more. Then we lived in Dorsten doing nothing.

FS: You lived at home then.

MM: Yeah, we lived on the money what we saved before Hitler. From, January 19, January 19, 1942 and 27th [January 27] in the morning the police came. And we had to be ready in two hours to get, you can take what you can carry. You go, now what they call it, *Einsatz nach dem Osten* [Charge to the East]. I cannot translate.

FS: And how much time did they give you?

²This is very hard to hear. Later he does mention a brother, Walter, on page 5.

³The invasion of Poland was September 1.

MM: Two hours.

FS: And what were you permitted to take?

MM: Everything what you can carry.

FS: And this was for your mother, father, who else was in the house, Max?

MM: My mother, my father, my daughter, my wife, Ernest, and Walter.

FS: Ernest was your brother.

MM: And Walter. My brother. Then we came in a bus. They sent us to Gelsenkirchen. It was a *Sammel, SammelLager* [collection camp]. It came all together. Then we was in there for three days; then we came in the train.

FS: Where did you stay? Did you get any food in these three days?

MM: Yes. Yes. We cooked there. And Jewish people they're did not, who wasn't in that transport, they bring us food. There was food.

FS: Did any *goyim* attempt to help you at all?

MM: When we le-, when we, when we got the order, a neighbor brought us *brot*, bread, sugar.

FS: This was in Dorsten?

MM: Yeah. The neighbors helped us and gave us something what we can take. He was a very good, good neighbor.

FS: Did the neighbor seem to know about this coming order of evacuation or something?

MM: Yeah, they heard it, heard it.

FS: I mean previous to you or your, did they know about it?

MM: Yeah. I think so. Then they came over and brang it in a hidden place, in back of my house they brought the food.

FS: And...

MM: In the front the SS stand in, front of the door. Could not go out the house. We got to all leave in two hours, can, yeah, the SS stand for the door, the house.

FS: And the, the goods you had in the house, the furniture, the linens, the silver...

MM: We could not take that. We, you couldn't take it out what you could not carry in.

FS: You left everything.

MM: Everything there.

FS: Were the women able to take some jewelry?

MM: Yeah.

FS: Do you remember what your wife took along?

MM: It was gone already, we, we put that away already. You had to, before, a year before, every, gold and silver had to be...

FS: To be turned in.

MM: Turned in.

FS: I see. And your mother turned all her things in, too?

MM: Everything. We brought it over to Holland. We was near from Holland.

FS: Yeah.

MM: Brought over there. We got never we got it back.

FS: Whom did you give it to?

MM: To *mishpochah* [family]. He wasn't in Holland but he came in concentration camp too, from Holland.

FS: And you went to Holland, or you handed this over to your relatives?

MM: Relatives, yes.

FS: And this is how these things disappeared. They eventually got into the concentration camp.

MM: Yes.

FS: Okay, now, you were in Gelsenkirchen let's pick up it up there.

MM: We was in three days in Gelsenkirchen in a *SammelLager* [collection camp]. Every, from all the little villages, towns, they came all in that big, it was a mess hall. We was there for three days. And then we came in a train.

FS: The, the train, which you, can you describe the tra-, can you describe first of all that feeling, what it was like to see this train? What was it? What did it look like?

MM: It was a rail train. Third class...

FS: It was a real passenger train.

MM: Yeah. Passenger. From all the goods they, what we had we came in separate, you could not take it in the compartment.

FS: In a separate wagon.

MM: Wagon.

FS: All the goods you carried.

MM: Yeah. After we was in the boats. 500 miles there, that was gone already.

FS: They took that wagon, that railroad car off.

MM: Off, after 500 miles.

FS: So, all you had then...

MM: Was gone.

FS: Was what you had on your person.

MM: Was gone. We don't, never we saw it again.

FS: What kind of clothes did you have on your body? Did you have warm clothes?

MM: I put two suits on. It was bitter cold, this was very, very deep snow that time in Germany. Only, when we came on in Riga it was 38 below zero.

FS: What, what kind of clothes did your wife wear?

MM: She put on slacks, she had on boots, and double dresses.

FS: And how, when you left Gelsenkirchen, how old was Judith then?

MM: I don't know.

FS: Approximately.
MM: Four years. Four years. She was now in *Gibs* [a cast].
FS: She, so Judith had broken her hip previous, at home?
MM: No, it was, it was from the *Geburt*, the *Ursprung* [birth].
FS: Oh, from birth, it was...
MM: Yeah.
FS: Yeah. And she was in a cast...
MM: Cast.
FS: When you took her into the train. She could not walk.
MM: In Gelsenkirchen they told us we couldn't load her here. We get care we don't want her here we take care of her.
FS: Wherever you were gonna go they were gonna take care of her.
MM: Ah, the SS came in Gelsenkirchen. They said to us we can't let the child here. They get, they taking care of the child. And my wife and I would not agree with that. We took her with us. And we want, they want kill there already.
FS: So, and then, you, how long did it take from Gelsenkirchen to Riga, which is,..
MM: Five or six days. There are no heat in that train.
FS: Did you get any food? Any water?
MM: No food. No water. We scraped the ice from the windows and put it in our mouths.
FS: Were there any toilet facilities?
MM: Yeah, toilet. Was all frozen. Cannot, go not through. Then my father, both feet was frozen.
FS: Both feet were frozen.
MM: Both.
FS: On the train. Tell me something, the people, the Jews on the train, what was their behavior? Did they fight with each other, or did they...
MM: No...
FS: Stick to each other, or...
MM: Stick very good now. They don't fight. Only in Stettin, that strange stop that was on the border from Lithuania and Russia.
FS: Yeah.
MM: In Stettin there was now German Jews. They brang us food on the, on the train.
FS: Train.
MM: We stopped there from half a hour.
FS: Were you permitted to open the windows?
MM: Yes. Even we was allowed to walk.
FS: How many chil-...

MM: Two people was, disappeared already.
FS: Two people disappeared; ran away.
MM: Yeah.
FS: Were there many children on this train?
MM: Not too many.
FS: Were the children quiet? Were the children fearful, or what was their behavior?
MM: Well, very, very, f-, we took care of the children first. We got the food what we had on the train, that, first the children got it, and then we, the grown-up people. First was for the children.
FS: And the, did the SS come into the wagons?
MM: No.
FS: Not at all.
MM: No.
FS: Was it organized in any way that they appointed someone to take charge of the train? Some Jew to take charge of the train?
MM: No. No.
FS: No organization whatever.
MM: No.
FS: Okay. So then you came to Riga...
MM: Riga.
FS: This was the only stop. Stettin was the only stop.
MM: Stop, yeah. Then we came in the ghetto.
FS: Now, tell me, when the train arrived, what, who unloaded you?
MM: The SS. Then it started, hitting us, and my father could not walk. He got it over the head with a stick.
FS: Was this as soon as you got off the train?
MM: Yeah. Then it start. Then now we, what we, what we saw when we got...
FS: What was ahead...
MM: Yeah.
FS: You saw then.
MM: Yeah.
FS: And then you, where, how far did they march you from the train to...
MM: To the ghetto?
FS: To the ghetto.
MM: It was one hour. We could not walk anymore. They put us in, in, in...
FS: Lorries? In trucks?
MM: Trucks. Never, never we saw them again.
FS: Wait. You, what are you saying, what are you saying to me? You're saying the people who could not walk...

MM: Walk.
FS: They were put into trucks.
MM: Trucks.
FS: And then they, that, you never saw them...
MM: Never saw them again.
FS: Did any of your relatives go into these trucks?
MM: No. No.
FS: Your father managed to walk.
MM: To walk.
FS: Had you suspected foul play when you saw the trucks?
MM: Oh yes. First my child won't, my wife won't put my child on there if they could not walk. I took it again, again, or be carried there.
FS: And when you came to the ghetto, can you describe what the place looked like? Had anyone lived there before?
MM: Yeah, Jews. They were killed. Some people found babies in the bathtub, drowned. Down the synagogue was burned, with how many hundred people. Unless...
FS: This was...
MM: Unless...
FS: In the ghetto.
MM: In the ghetto.
FS: Do you remember the town where this was in?
MM: Riga.
FS: This was in Riga.
MM: Riga.
FS: And how big, approximately, was this ghetto, would you say?
MM: It was pretty big.
FS: Can you give us an idea in an area in Philadelphia, about how many square blocks?
MM: Like, like, eh, like Olney.
FS: The size of Olney.
MM: Olney. Yes.
FS: What else did you find there? You found...
MM: The, we found food on the stove...
FS: Cooked food on the stove.
MM: Stove. [Unclear] burned on the stove. We found everything.
FS: Clothes.
MM: Clothes and furniture.
FS: Did you find letters, books?
MM: Yeah, religious books, some. We found money, too.
FS: Did you find any living person?

MM: Yeah. There was no in, I was with. We wasn't separate. They let the Jewish, the men, they can work, working men they were strong people, they wasn't sent in in another ghetto next to us. There was no contact with German Jews, only Lettish Jewish people.

FS: And what kind of people were your guards? Were they Germans or what were they?

MM: German, and the *Kommandant* was German.

FS: Do you remember his name?

MM: Yeah, Klauss.

FS: You remember his...

MM: Unclear.

FS: You remember his, eh, his rank?

MM: I don't remember that. No.

FS: Have you ever heard in any of the trials that this man was, eh...

MM: Oh, he shot many, many people and hang them. When we came in the first, first year it was terrible in the ghetto. Every day we have to march when we came from work, and they string somebody up. We had to walk where they hang them up, these people.

FS: And, eh...

MM: And I saw him where I shot in, on the ceme-, on a Jewish cemetery I saw it for maybe across the street. I saw where he shot three Lettish.

FS: This was the *Kommandant* himself.

MM: Yeah.

FS: You don't know what reason there were to shoot these people.

MM: They brang something in the ghetto from the *kommando* from the, they was all working in the, daytime we had to work in, some, for the, for the military or civilian. And in the evening we came back in the ghetto.

FS: They came back with food or some such thing.

MM: With food, yeah. Food or cigarettes.

FS: Yeah. Now, how soon after your arrival did they assign some kind of work to you?

MM: Two, three days. We wasn't on, after, after three days we had the *Appell* in the morning, and everybody was selected for work. I was first selected on a, on the pier. It was bitter cold, 38 below zero.

FS: Thirty-eight Celsius.

MM: Yeah. It was terrible. We got one slice of bread in the morning. In the noon time we got soup, water soup. It was all what we got. That slice of bread was frozen. We had to break it up and put it in the mouth, and that was thawed.

FS: Tell me, what kind of work did they assign to the older people? Your mother and father, what did they do?

MM: My mother stayed home. That time...

FS: By staying home, do you mean you had an apartment or a room or what?

MM: We had two rooms. We sleep with one. . .

FS: Who slept there? Name the names of the people, Max.

MM: My father, my mother, my wife, my child, my brother, two brothers. And we had one kitchen and one room.

FS: For these...

MM: All, all...

FS: For all these people.

MM: Yeah.

FS: Were there any way of heating your, eh...

MM: They had to bring it by themselves from the *Kommandos*.

FS: Can you explain the word *Kommando*?

MM: *Kommando* means...

FS: Stealing?

MM: No. Working, eh...

FS: Oh, oh, oh.

MM: You go to the *Kommando* to, to - [woman in background says "Like a soup kitchen."]

FS: This was the work assigned to you.

MM: Then, we had to steal that wood too.

FS: Yeah.

MM: However when he brought wood in, you get not punishment for that wood. Only when you brought food in.

FS: And the, the food you got was given to you in a mass kitchen?

MM: No, you got so many grams bread, so many grams flour. Once in a while we got butter.

FS: Were you able to steal anything?

MM: Yeah. Where I work for nine months in a *Schleiderhaus* I steal, I steal a lot there. [chuckles].

FS: Tell me, when you, what did you do at first? What kind of work?

MM: First, I unloaded ships.

FS: What was on the ships, Max?

MM: Everything.

FS: German, eh...

MM: Eh, from clothes...

FS: For the armed, for the army?

MM: For the army, army. Clothes and boots and hay, and, for the horses, and everything. Only we were not allowed on the ammunition.

FS: Ammunition.

MM: Ammunition. I was not allowed there.
FS: Was your brother with you?
MM: Yeah, no, he was on a different *kommando*.
FS: What did he do?
MM: He was on that, the *Bekleidungsamt*.
FS: What did they do there?
MM: The same thing for, he, oh, for, they are the same thing, unloaded trains.
FS: Unload...
MM: Trains.
FS: Clothing, and whatever.
MM: Trains, yeah.
FS: Whatever.
MM: Yeah.
FS: And how long did you work in this job?
MM: In, on the pier?
FS: Yeah.
MM: Only a month.
FS: And then what kind of work did you do?
MM: Then it was *Appell* again in the morning, and then they asked who was an butcher in Germany and I told them I was a butcher. And then they put me in, in a *Schlachthaus* [slaughter-house].
FS: Yeah.
MM: It was an better *Kommando* facility. It was. You got better food there. I could steal for my family something.
FS: What did they slaughter there? Cows?
MM: Cows.
FS: Pigs?
MM: Pigs. Horses. Everything.
FS: Do you have any idea where these animals came from?
MM: Yeah.
FS: Were they stolen from the property?
MM: Yeah. That's right; it was from the Riga's farm or some, came from the Lettland's farmer.
FS: Was there any refrigeration facilities where they stored this?
MM: Yes. Sometimes we got food, meat in the ghetto, too. That was meat from the front, from the horses. It was killed and...
FS: When the battle came.
MM: Yeah. That meat we kept.
FS: And your brother was, was your brother in this slaughterhouse too?
MM: No. No.

FS: Nor was your father.

MM: No. My father was, at that time he couldn't walk again. He was in Abdeckerei. I don't know how you say that in...

FS: So he was, your father worked to make use of the animals who had...

MM: Died.

FS: Died...

MM: In the trains or in...

FS: Yeah. And what did they do with that meat?

MM: We cook it for soup.

FS: They gave it to you?

MM: No, no, not that meat. That was dead animals. Only the animals was shot on the front.

FS: Oh. Oh. I see. And then, was there any kind of religious life in these first few months?

MM: Yes.

FS: Tell us about that, Max.

MM: Not, not the first month; after, maybe...

FS: First few months.

MM: After half year we start synagogues in the, secret. It was not allowed. I was, we go Friday evening to the *shul*.

FS: How many people would you say came to the s-

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

MM: ...then I came to Shparnitz [phonetic] hospital, the blue division from Spain. They had the wounded soldiers.

FS: Franco's soldiers.

MM: Yeah. I worked there in the hospital for about seven, eight months.

FS: How did, how did these soldiers behave toward the Jewish prisoners?

MM: The officer wasn't very good over there. The soldiers was mean.

FS: Would you say they were as bad as the Germans?

MM: They were the real SS. The officer he was not bad I would say. The [unclear], the soldiers was very bad.

FS: Could you speak to them in any way?

MM: You can...

FS: Did they speak German?

MM: Not much. Not much yet.

FS: You, you couldn't have any, you had no idea whether these people were enthusiastic about the Germans or they had it, they were fed up.

MM: I had a feeling that the officer wasn't, had enough from the war.

FS: Yeah. And what kind of work did you do in this hospital?

MM: Peeled potatoes, saw wood for the stoves, clean up, everything.

FS: And your wife, at this time, was where?

MM: Maybe *Kleidungsamt*, I don't know how you say it in, in...

FS: Eh, they were giving out clothes...

MM: Yeah.

FS: For the prisoners or for German soldiers?

MM: For German soldiers. They had a, they came in with the wa-, and with the, with the...

FS: With trucks.

MM: Trucks, and we had to, *sortier* [sort] is the way my...

FS: Eh, get the clothes ready for German soldiers.

MM: Yes.

FS: How many hours did she work a day?

MM: Eight. Eight to 10 hours, everybody had to.

FS: Everybody.

MM: You left the ghetto maybe six o'clock and four, five o'clock you get back.

FS: And they still had the kindergarten, or they still had the school for the children.

MM: Yeah.

FS: At this time.

MM: Till 1943. Then the ghetto was closed up there.

FS: Did the ghetto close when you lost your hospital job?
MM: Before I lost the hospital job. I worked again on the pier again.
FS: Yeah.
MM: Only for the, for the Wehrmacht. Not for the SS.
FS: Yes.
MM: It was not so bad then.
FS: Did these Germans, were they German officers or soldiers...
MM: That was, eh...
FS: You worked with?
MM: Oh, how you call it, you call it, eh...
FS: Sergeants? Corporals?
MM: Yeah, more with that. Yes.
FS: Yeah.
MM: They are not, eh...
FS: Were they decent?
MM: They wasn't very decent.
FS: Did they give the Jews any beatings that you know of?
MM: No. No.
FS: Were you able to steal any food for your family here?
MM: There was no food.
FS: What did you do there? What did you unload there in the...
MM: Shoes, and clothes, out what came back from the front. That time they, they moved already back.
FS: This was in 1943.
MM: Three ['43]. They moved already, came out, came back.
FS: Came back west.
MM: West. Yes. We had to unload the trains and then they put it in other trains and they...
FS: And send it home.
MM: Yeah.
FS: And did you, were you ever able to have a conversation with the German soldiers?
MM: Yeah, with the German soldiers, yes.
FS: What did they have to say about the war? Did they say anything about the war or about Hitler or about the Jews?
MM: Sometimes they say we lost the war already.
FS: This was in 1943.
MM: Three ['43]. Some think we have the *Wunderwaffe*, you know, the missile. We win the war now. That was the...
FS: They were referring to the B-2.

MM: Yeah.
FS: Which they were bombing London with.
MM: Yeah. Yeah.
FS: And most of these soldiers you worked with, how old would you say they were?
MM: That was...
FS: Young fellows?
MM: No, that was around 45.
FS: Older men.
MM: Older men.
FS: Older men.
MM: Yeah. The young, young soldiers they was all on the front.
FS: Did you see any SS at that time? When you worked for the Wehrmacht?
MM: Yeah, in the evening when we came back in the ghetto.
FS: Oh, that was still run by the SS.
MM: Yeah. Only that *Kommando* was run by the Wehrmacht.
FS: And while you were...
MM: They was not good friends, the Wehrmacht and the SS.
FS: Were not on friendly terms.
MM: No.
FS: And while you were working for the Wehrmacht, did many of your fellow prisoners disappear?
MM: No.
FS: Did not. The SS did not kill many then.
MM: No. No.
FS: Tell me, did you know at this time that they were gassing and poison-, gassing and poisoning Jews?
MM: We guessed it though we was not sure.
FS: Who told you? How did you find out?
MM: They sent all the old people back and never we saw them again.
FS: That included your parents?
MM: My parents too, 1943 they...
FS: Did you remember the day when they left?
MM: I think it was the 2nd of November, 1943.
FS: Do you remember the, how you said good-bye to them? Can you tell, can you tell us a little bit.
MM: They sent us, first we had to go early to the *Kommando*, in, eh, five o'clock already in the morning. Then we saw it goes something on. When we came back, old people and all children was in [unclear].
FS: Your child, too?

MM: No, my child and mine wife wasn't home, and we, wasn't in the cellar here, was in the hiding. And they don't find her.

FS: Did you have a chance to say good-bye to your mother and father?

MM: No. No. We don't know what's going on.

FS: And they were hiding in the cellar, your child and your wife.

MM: Yes. Yeah. Not in mine hou-, not in that house where we lived, another house.

FS: Were they hiding alone, or were there other people?

MM: No, there was ano-, two women with the children, too.

FS: And after this how many children did you have left?

MM: Five or six children.

FS: That's all.

MM: Yeah.

FS: By now your child, did your child know what was going on?

MM: No. No.

FS: She was too young to understand.

MM: Yeah.

FS: Were you, did you have enough food at this point?

MM: Yeah. Not enough, but we ate.

FS: Yeah, enough to stay alive.

MM: Alive, yeah.

FS: And this, this was approximately, when did they dissolve the ghetto?

MM: Then, a couple days later everybody had to go, I think they had another place. It was Urklausen they call it. It was an warehouse.

FS: Yeah.

MM: All that was left was in the warehouse, including the children.

FS: And all men, women, and children had to go and stay in this warehouse?

MM: Yeah.

FS: Did you still go to work at this point?

MM: Same work, till 1944.

FS: Did you have any sleeping facilities...

MM: Yeah, yeah.

FS: In this warehouse?

MM: Yeah. It was a couple stories house in that. Second floor was for the women and third floor was for the men.

FS: Tell me, eh...

MM: And the children were in a special room. And that was in, that was in November we came in there, in that warehouse. April, everybody was to work. When we came back all children was gone, taken. Was killed.

FS: This was in April, '44.

MM: Four ['44], yeah. And then, one week later, a doctor, I don't know his name, they came and they were, that's only stayed. They elected people that cannot work anymore. Came one o'clock...

FS: Who, who was this who selected these people?

MM: That was an doctor.

FS: A German doctor.

MM: Yes. He had a list. First we have taken shower and we stand all naked outside. And then he came and he says, "You go there. You go there."

FS: Were women and men separated at that time?

MM: Yeah.

FS: At that point?

MM: Yes.

FS: And the ones who were selected not to work, were they taken away in trucks, or...

MM: Right away on a truck and was gone.

FS: This was when?

MM: This was, I think May 1944.

FS: By then, did you know just what would happen, what would be happening to these people?

MM: True we know that. We never we see them again.

FS: While you were in the ghetto, and in the warehouse...

MM: In the warehouse we got uniforms.

FS: No, no, I want to ask you, I wanted to ask you this. Were husbands and wives living together?

MM: They don't sleep together, but we living together. We got the meal together. Yes.

FS: But in all these years, was this only in the warehouse, or also in the ghetto? Did men and women sleep together?

MM: In the ghetto? Yes.

FS: Yes.

MM: Yeah.

FS: But not in the warehouse.

MM: No.

FS: In other words they had no opportunity then to produce any more children.

MM: No. No.

FS: There was no way...

MM: No, no.

FS: ...to have intercourse between man and wife.

MM: They had no chance to get...

FS: No chance at all.

MM: No.

FS: And how long were you in the warehouse?

MM: From November 1943 till '44 in September.

FS: And what kind of work, November till September?

MM: Then we was separated, my wife, in September 1944 we was separated.

My wife came to Stutthof.

FS: What is Stutthof?

MM: Concentration camp. Stutthof.

FS: Yeah.

MM: It was in Ostpreussen [East Prussia].

FS: Yeah.

MM: And I came to Liebau.

FS: Which is in Estland [Estonia].

MM: In...

FS: Or...

MM: In Lettland [Latvia].

FS: In Lettland.

MM: Yeah.

FS: And what kind of conditions did you find, you were then in an actual concentration camp, in Liebau?

MM: No, it was not a concentration camp. That was, also a house what we live in there, women and men, the women separate and, and we had to work for the Wehrmacht, too.

FS: Yeah.

MM: And there we lose 11 men from a Russian. He bombed us. We losed 11 there. Was an doctor, Dr. Jacobi from Berlin. Eleven men. And the commander from, from, from, not from us, from the German commander.

FS: Oh, the German commander who commanded your group.

MM: Yeah.

FS: He was killed, too.

MM: Killed too.

FS: Was he an anti-Semite?

MM: Yeah, sure.

FS: But at, in, and at this point you were still under the Wehrmacht except at night...

MM: Yeah.

FS: When you were again under the SS.

MM: That's right.

FS: So, for all practical purposes the only, the only time you were away from the SS...

MM: When we were working.
FS: ...was during working hours.
MM: Yes. Yes.
FS: Did you ever see the Wehrmacht kill any Jews?
MM: No, never saw that.
FS: Never.
MM: I saw one, he killed a Russian prisoner. I saw that.
FS: For what reason?
MM: He stealed shoes.
FS: How did they kill him?
MM: Shot at.
FS: Was he a young man?
MM: Yeah, 20, 19, 20.
FS: Were there many Russian prisoners around you?
MM: Yeah, yeah. Lots of Russian prisoners in Riga.
FS: And then you worked for the Wehrmacht until when, Max?
MM: Till February 1944. Eh, '45.
FS: Forty-five. '45.
MM: Then we came from Liebau to Hamburg.
FS: How did you get from Liebau to Hamburg? That's a long stretch.
MM: By boat.
FS: They cleaned out the entire con-, the entire, eh...
MM: We wasn't a hundred...
FS: Camp?
MM: Hundred thirty-eight men and women. We came to, they brought us on the boat with *Kriegsmaterial* what it's...
FS: War materials.
MM: That came back to Germany.
FS: Yeah.
MM: We had to sleep upstairs in the cars and in the trucks.
FS: On the deck.
MM: On the deck, in bitter cold weather.
FS: Yeah.
MM: Then we came...
FS: Did you have any work while you were on the boat, or you were just laying around?
MM: Laying around.
FS: Did they give you anything to eat?
MM: Yeah, we got only bread and water.
FS: How much bread did they give you?

MM: I don't remember that anymore. I think two breads was for the whole trip. Two loaves bread everybody.

FS: For the entire trip. And that took how long?

MM: Four, five days.

FS: In all this time did you ever wonder how much longer you might be, might be living?

MM: No, you don't know.

FS: Did you ever, did you fear death?

MM: Eh?

FS: Did you fear death?

MM: Not any more. We, we were, that time we was glad when we was dead. We don't care anymore. And we came in Hamburg on the pier. The SS was there already. They took us in to the prison.

FS: Yeah.

MM: Tooked us.

FS: Yeah.

MM: Then we had take all of our clothes off. We had Mäntel from...

FS: Clo-, eh, overcoats?

MM: Overcoats from Belgish soldiers.

FS: From Belgian soldiers.

MM: And we, they got us that supplies.

FS: The German soldiers gave you that.

MM: That. Yes. When we came in, eh...

FS: Hamburg?

MM: Hamburg. They took everything from us. All, all the clothes. And they gave us the *Gefangenekleidung*.

FS: Prisoner garb.

MM: Prisoner garb.

FS: Was this light clothes?

MM: Yes.

FS: Was it winter time then?

MM: This was February, end of, beginning of March.

FS: While you were in Hamburg, did you see any live air attacks on Hamburg?

MM: Plenty. Every night. Every night there there was air attack.

FS: But they never hit the prison where you were.

MM: No. No.

FS: Did you have any work to do while you were in prison?

MM: Every day we had to clean up what they bombed. We had to clean up what they bombed in the night.

FS: Can you describe that work a little bit more in detail?

MM: We had to clean up the houses when something was under there and...
FS: Bricks?
MM: Bricks, and...
FS: Did you find many German dead in these houses?
MM: No. No. Sometimes we find food there was, was very handy for us.
FS: So this was in '45.
MM: Yes.
FS: Did you...
MM: Then, in '45 in April, they want to send to...
FS: *Wohin?* [Where?]
MM: To, Bergen-Belsen, from Hamburg. But they have not enough trucks so they elect a couple people and they put it on the trucks to Bergen-Belsen. We stayed there...
FS: And they collected people from your group?
MM: Yes.
FS: And put them on trucks.
MM: Trucks.
FS: Yeah.
MM: To Bergen-Belsen. And we got to march from Hamburg to Kiel.
FS: On foot.
MM: To foot. Yeah, there was 100 kilometers.
FS: One hundred kilometers.
MM: Yeah. With one bread.
FS: One loaf of bread.
MM: One loaf of bread.
FS: And this was in the winter.
MM: In April.
FS: In April.
MM: 11th of April.
FS: Was it...
MM: It was on mine wedding, wedding day. I'll never forget it.
FS: That you started out.
MM: Yeah.
FS: And how many people were there when you started out?
MM: About 100 and something.
FS: At this point did you think that Germany would lose the war?
MM: Oh yeah, we were, we saw every day when we marched there we saw they bombed Neumünster, a big town, it was completely destroyed. We saw it from. We was on a hill and we saw all the bombs falling down on the town. And then we came in Kiel in concentration camp. That was a real concentration camp.

FS: So, can you...

MM: When we came on in that concen-...

FS: Yeah, tell me when you arrived there what it was like. What did they do to you when you arrived at that camp.

MM: [unclear].

FS: Do you remember the name of the concentration camp?

MM: Hassel.

FS: Hassel.

MM: Yeah. Was not an big camp. It was most for Gentile people. Not Jewish people there. We was the first Jewish people came in that camp. My roommate was an Hollander, and then Danish people.

FS: Yeah.

MM: Underground. They worked for the underground there. He was in there, ah we saw so many deaths there. Then we came in that con-...

FS: Were they sh-, the people you saw, eh, dead, were they, would you say they were starved to death or shot to death?

MM: Shot to death and starved to death. When we came on the *Kommandant* look at us. "Where you came from?" And then the SS man, they brought us all the way in the camp and they says, they come from *Osten* [East]. Then the *Kommandant* said, [in German].

FS: "They probably forgot to kill you. We'll take care of that over here."

MM: Yeah. Yeah. Then we was two days, in that camp, or three days. Then we got separated from other people. We think there's going something on.

FS: You mean from the *goyim* who were in that?

MM: We were, yeah, we was separate from the *goyish* people.

FS: Yeah.

MM: And then we came to the commander on that, then, the *Wache*, *der uns begleited* [the soldier who accompanied us]...

FS: To the, eh...

MM: SS.

FS: The SS.

MM: The commander came. He said, "Don't, don't kill nobody from the *Juden* [Jews]."

FS: He told the SS, eh...

MM: Yeah, "Don't kill nobody from the people." Then we saw it goes something on. It was Greve Bernadotte⁴ from Sweden. He was in that camp, and he got in touch with Himmler. And then on 1st of May...

⁴Greve Folke Bernadotte, Count of Wisborg (1895 – 1948) was a Swedish nobleman and diplomat. In the spring of 1945 he was summoned by Heinrich Himmler, head of the gestapo to negotiate the release of about 31,000 concentration camp prisoners. They were taken to Sweden.

FS: 1945.
MM: Five ['45], we were, and he took us out of the concentration camp.
FS: Well what happened when he took you out? Where did he take you?
MM: To Sweden.
FS: How?
MM: First, firstly...
FS: Were you marched out or what?
MM: No, *mit* [Ger. with], the Red Cross came with trucks. We got different clothes with--*SträflingKleider* [prison garb] we had to put away.
FS: Yeah.
MM: We got different clothes from the Gentiles who they killed, we had to put on.
FS: Oh, you took the clothes from the dead prisoners.
MM: Yeah. And then they put us on the trucks. We got chocolates and everything already there. First we came to Denmark. Then we came in *Lausenanstalt* [were deloused]. And then we came and we came in a big hotel and they got us American food. All kinds of food. And then we came on the boat to Sweden.
FS: Can you tell me, can you tell us a little something about the march? Was it a forced march you took from Hamburg *nach* [to] Kiel?
MM: Yeah.
FS: How long did it take, Max?
MM: Four, four days.
FS: Did you rest?
MM: Yeah. The SS got tired.
FS: And you just laid down in the street?
MM: In the street.
FS: Did they shoot anybody?
MM: No. No.
FS: Not a single person.
MM: No. They were, I think they was afraid already. They didn't know if they lose the war.
FS: Did you want, did you have hopes at this time, I suppose you had hopes at this time that your wife might still be alive?
MM: Yeah. I was very much in hope.
FS: And where did you inquire then? Was there a station where you could inquire...
MM: Yeah, in...
FS: ...who survived?
MM: In Stockholm, in Sweden there was an Red Cross we can get all the information. It was the HIAS and the Red Cross we got all the information. And then I

got in touch with an woman who was with my wife, she was still alive. She came from Tschechoslowakai [Czechoslovakia] and told me that my wife died in her arms.

FS: Did, did she tell you how your wife died?

MM: On a march, too.

FS: On a march.

MM: Yeah. [unclear].

FS: And, eh, can, at this point can you tell us a little bit about your brother, the *Kommando* he was on?

MM: Yeah, that was the worst *Kommando* that ever were. That was *Grause Kommando* [horror commando].

FS: *Grause Kommando*.

MM: That was called after the *Kommandant* from the ghetto.

FS: What was their function?

MM: They had to dig the graves, eh, ditches for the people that got shot, with the hundreds of thousands.

FS: Where was this, actually? Where was this locale?

MM: Outside Riga.

FS: And these were all types of European Jews who were being shot there?

MM: Yeah. Dutch, German, all kinds of them. They shot it and then they had to close it up again.

FS: And for how long was he on this *Kommando*?

MM: A couple months. He came not back in the ghetto. He was, he had to work there and then they got in the prison in Riga. He came in the prison. Couple months he was in there in the camp, back in the ghetto. He had to swear by the *Kommando* nothing to tell what he did in that *Kommando*. Otherwise when he tell something he getting shot, too. Mine brother, at most, after that he came in the ghetto most of them died like nothing anymore.

FS: I'm sorry. I didn't understand you. After he came back in the ghetto most of them died?

MM: Died. Yeah. How...

FS: Would you say...

MM: *Verhungert* [starved].

FS: Oh they were, they starved to death.

MM: Yeah. Then in the ghetto they got a little bit food and then they got died. And I'm, I am-- Ernest, I think never he make it, and he make it. He was laying there for three weeks on the, on the bed and he not move.

FS: Did you have any experience, did you meet any rabbis in all these years?

MM: Yeah. I was...

FS: What...

MM: I worked with two rabbis on a *Kommando* in *Schleuderhaus*.

FS: Did, what did they, what did they have to say of what was happening to our people? Did they have an explanation?

MM: No.

FS: Nothing at all.

MM: I was working with two [unclear] the [unclear]. And one rabbi he eat everything, one rabbi he got on a, in a [unclear] with that soup. What little bit meat in it, he don't eat that meat and took that meat out...

FS: For fear it might be pork?

MM: Yeah.

FS: And another rabbi ate whatever there was.

MM: Whatever there.

FS: To keep alive. [tape off then on]

MM: ...and he was cleaning and the, by the SS comes in there. But the most important thing when you was dirty, you had no chance to live.

FS: Wasn't it difficult to keep clean? Did you have water...

MM: Very, I keep, I keep clean and we got an half cup of coffee, malt coffee. I saved it and shaved me with that.

FS: Did you have a razor?

MM: Yeah, one razor and I shaved me. I made a it sharp in a glass.

FS: And how long did that last you?

MM: A year. [unclear].

FS: And how often did you shave?

MM: As often as I can.

FS: About how often would you say?

MM: Oh every three days.

FS: And you feel that had something to do with survival?

MM: Very much so. Yeah.

FS: Did you have people, many people die of typhus in the ghetto?

MM: Not in the ghetto, in Sweden. They came back and got too much food.

FS: Were there many who passed away?

MM: Oh yeah, in the beginning, yeah. My brother had typhus in Sweden.

FS: He, your brother got to Sweden before the war ended?

MM: Me, too. We, together.

FS: Oh you were together there.

MM: Yeah.

FS: What happened to your younger brother?

MM: He came back. He was in Auschwitz.

FS: When was he, uh...

MM: With my parents.

FS: Oh at the same time.

MM: Yeah.

FS: He was sickly all the time?

MM: Yeah. He had asthma.

FS: Were there any other members of your family, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, with you?

MM: Yeah, my uncles, two of my nieces. My uncle there died there. My nieces came out there.

FS: Your nieces, eh, lived to see the end?

MM: Yeah.

FS: How old were your nieces? About your age?

MM: No, one was in America. One, no, one...

FS: No, must have been much younger.

MM: Oh, 14, 15, 16.

FS: And where are they now?

MM: San Francisco.

FS: They live in San Francisco. Their family is out there?

MM: [unclear]. Auschwitz.

FS: Oh, I see. Did you speak to them later? How did the Russians treat them?

MM: One raped my niece.

FS: The Russian soldier.

MM: Yes. And one raped my aunt too, and she said, "Go away I have typhus. Typhus. Typhus. Typhus."

[Tape one, side two ended.]

Tape two, side one:

FS: Tell us the entire story.

MM: It was in a [unclear] was finished with work. We came on the boat. Before we came on the boat the SS was there and touched everybody out. I was in the last row, then I saw something on the ground, a little small bag. I pick it up and put it in my pocket. And two rows before me the SS stopped and we couldn't go on the boat. We came in the warehouse and I told my wife, "I found something tonight. I don't know what it is." My wife opened it up, and she was shocked. It was \$93. American money. That helped me a lot.

FS: This was approximately when?

MM: That was in May, something.

FS: 1943?

MM: Forty-four.

FS: Forty-four. So your wife was still alive in 1944.

MM: Yeah. Oh yeah. They came in, in September 1944 to Stutthof.

FS: Go ahead, tell us about that. Tell us about the money.

MM: So I could buy me something for that money. Secretly. I got for one dollar two pounds butter.

FS: Tell us about the command, the German with whom you did business.

MM: That was the commander from the warehouse who I worked for. That was the Wehrmacht, had their business with that guy.

FS: Do you remember his name, Max?

MM: Yeah.

FS: What is it?

MM: Uh...

FS: It isn't important.

MM: I don't know where I [unclear].

FS: And tell us what you told us before, how he arranged for you to get the shoes.

MM: So, I had, I had, eh, I had to do business with another guy for him with shoes. He want tobacco and cigarettes. I, I, I shined shoes with another guy for him for tobacco and cigarettes. Another Wehrmacht officer. They, they don't trust their, each other. They don't trust there. I had to do their business.

FS: What did you do eventually with what, the money which was left over?

MM: When we came over in Hamburg I throw it in the water. It was an \$35 left. I throw it out in the water. When the SS was standing there on the pier I saw them and I throw everything in the water.

FS: Tell us about the diamond.

MM: And one fellow, concentration fellow, he had a big diamond from couple, how they call...

FS: Carat?

MM: Couple carats. He want give it to me. I'm saying, "I don't want it. I'll throw it in the water too."

FS: You were afraid to have it.

MM: Yeah. And I, then we was lucky. We had to take everything off, all clothes what we had. We had, in the pier we had to take everything off and we was naked there, stand there naked.

FS: Had they found the money or the diamonds they probably would have shot you.

MM: Yeah.

FS: Tell us what you told your brother the night before you were liberated.

MM: Oh, before we, that was the 31st of April. In the evening the commander from the, from the concentration came in in the barrack and say,

FS: "You damned sons of bitches, you have more luck than brains--tomorrow you'll be liberated."

MM: Yes. And then I goes to sleep with my brother and one bread. I said to my brother, "Tomorrow is, everything is over. Tomorrow we get shot." It was not that way.

FS: Max, tell us about the care packages you and your brother got.

MM: When we arrived on the 1st of May, first we came to Denmark. Then in Denmark we got a care package. There was everything in there. Graham, and whatever we call it, [woman says cream] lox...

FS: Bacon?

MM: Bacon and, and I told my brother, "Don't eat that bacon or that stuff. You'll get sick."

FS: Why did you say that? Because it was too fat or...

MM: Too fat. I eat only that dry *kneckenbrot* [crackers].

FS: Yeah.

MM: The crackers.

FS: Yes.

MM: Corn flakes. I don't eat that stuff. My brother said, "I'm so hungry I'll eat everything." When we came in Sweden he got the typhus.

FS: Were there many people who got typhus?

MM: Yeah, lots of them. All they eat they kvetched up.

FS: Their stomach couldn't take it.

MM: Take it.

FS: Did you say that the Swedes were very, very good to you?

MM: Very, very good. When we came out to Sweden, they take all of our clothes off, we put it in a pile, put gasoline on over there and we burned it, then we got, we had, take baths. The women got baths from men, and the men gettin' baths from the...

FS: From the women.

MM: Yeah. That was so good. Now we got new clothes, brand new clothes.

FS: Why was that? From, you mean the women got baths from Swedish men?

MM: Yeah. I don't know why they did it. [Woman in background says, "I guess to keep up their morale. That's, that's."] I, I don't know why.

FS: I don't know.

[Woman in background says, "And then they took you."]

MM: Was a couple months in Sweden, King from Sweden took us to the opera. They sent buses to the camp, then we are, took us to the opera and to in a restaurant for a very good supper.

[Tape two, side one ended. Interview ended.]