Rudy Herz, Part 3

I do not -- I cannot tell you anything except the routine was unloading bricks without any nourishment whatsoever. It was, if anything, even less, I believe. Later on it was established that we got approximately the equivalent of 700 to 800 calories a day at a job requirement of, let’s say, 2,500 at minimum to 3,000 calories, unloading a railroad car. The details were marched out of the camp. At the entrance to the factory, we were split off. Three or four SS troopers took us and marched us, our detail, to the place where we were unloading bricks from a railroad car and stacking them up. Of course, none of us was geared to this kind of work. Our hands were bloodied. The first night, we had already blisters, and we still were forced to, to -- how do we call it -- to perform this work. The brutality there was quite simple. The SS, at that place, the guard troopers had rifles like our M-1 rifles here in the United States, and they would just take their rifles and beat on the back, on the head. Not the face; apparently they figured out that if they knocked our eyes out, we wouldn’t be able to work at all, so they concentrated on the back mostly.

The other job was concrete works, carrying iron reinforcement rods, carrying cement bags. At lunch, some food was brought out from the camp, and the only reason that occasionally I got some additional food was that some people -- the Germans had some mussels or -- not oysters, but mussels, some shrimp things, and there were quite a few observing, observant Jews here amongst us, really religious persons, and they perceived that this was really and truly against their religion. So they decided not to eat it, and I was able to get occasionally a few bowls of soup more, mainly because people didn’t -- couldn’t -- did not choose to eat it.

So life was like that until one day, I was working in an underground bunker. I found a German foreman’s lunch pail. Right or wrong, I took it and ate it. I was so hungry, I ate it. I stole this man’s lunch, and I ate it. And I was also so decimated at that time, I fell asleep down there on this job. I just could not -- I could no longer go on. I fell asleep down there. Unfortunately, this was the time that the SS had chosen, above ground, to assemble our group to take us to another work station, and I was missing. They could not have been very long there, and I ran to my place, but unfortunately, I was discovered by one of the SS men. He said, “Where are you coming from now?” And I said I was in the underground bunker. He says, “We called everyone together. You did not hear.” And he started to really lay it into me with his rifle butt. And I dragged myself that evening back to camp, and my name had been reported, and I had to undergo another beating from this particular man. The camp inmates called him *Peitsche,* which means “whip,” or “ra-ko-chi” [phonetic] something like that in Czechoslovakian. And he really beat me nearly senseless, so I started to bleed out of my mouth, so then he gave up. Nevertheless, I had to stand at that -- what’s called punishment standing. I did not get anything to eat that night, and since I was still continuing to bleed, they took me to what they called the hospital or *Krankenstation.* “Sick bay” would be the best translation of this in German. They took me to sick bay, which was staffed by the finest doctors in Europe because in order to get out of work, they had only university professors, medical university professors there as doctors. An ordinary doctor didn’t even get in, you know, a family practitioner.

So at any rate, I do not know what they diagnosed. They kept me there. Some internal organ must have ruptured. I don’t know what they gave me, but after a while, the bleeding stopped, but they still kept me on that station until about -- and I had a little bit better luck in there. I still saw my brother daily. He would come to visit me and talk to me on the window, and he told me what was going on with the camp. I could share no food with him, and he could share no food with me. We were all starving, and in this barracks that I shared with the others, our constant thought was nothing but food, food, food. We talked of nothing. We dreamt of nothing. We couldn’t. Food was constantly on our mind, and it was one of the greatest tortures that I have ever undergone because from then on, this talk about food did not cease until I finally got out of the concentration camp.

The camp itself was bombed severely on my birthday on the 23rd of August, a bombing attack that was actually destined for the camp. The camp was fog-shrouded by artificial fog, and the British bombed us instead. The barracks were destroyed, and some 87, 90 people were losing their life, and they were bringing them to the hospital, and the doctors were operating what they could, and the severed limbs were lying in front. It was carnage. But by that time, I probably was already somewhat inured, if that’s the right pronunciation, to these sights, and I do not recall having greatly been agitated by it. It was terrible, yes. It was Jewish people that were being killed, but we had seen so much already, we were lost so much already in our life that we did not put anymore import to this particular situation.

Would you like to ask me a question that I may have not answered?

Interviewer: When did you get out of the hospital?

Herz: I never did get out of the hospital because I was still weakened and still not -- I got around with difficulty. I will only tell you one more thing, and I beg you to understand it. The hospital orderly, a German who happened to have been also from Cologne, tried to practice sodomy on me. I knew, of course -- I was 19 years old -- I knew that these things were done. He asked me to take his penis in my mouth and, as we call it now, suck him off. I did it because I was totally concerned with my own survival, and I knew that I would be rewarded with additional food. I know it’s degrading, but tell me, what isn’t? What wasn’t degrading in that respect? He tried to -- I said he tried to practice sodomy on me, but he was unable because my body was perhaps not built that way because he was overly large. He was a little bit unhappy about that. He tried several times more. I was one of the younger prisoners. There were not very many people younger than I, and, well, he did not do this anymore than about three or four times that I recall.

And the end of August, the beginning of September, we were told that those of us in the hospital would be moved to another camp where we were to be evaluated for work -- how shall I say -- capability to work or other means, and a friend of mine whom I had known from Cologne and five or six other people were transported through Germany. The trip took something like about six or seven hours. The SS was sitting with us in the *Camion,* the German word or the Polish word was camion. Actually it was just what we call a 6 by 6, uh -- how do you call that? A -- well, a military, uh --

Interviewer: A cell?

Herz: A truck. No, it was a truck, an ordinary military truck, but it had a canopy over it, and the guards were sitting there. The canopy was closed, but the guards were there at the tailgate, and they were sitting there with machine pistols. And so we made it into Lieberose, and we were given over to the camp, where there were already -- the block eldest that took us into custodianship and assigned us to blocks -- my block was Block Number 2. I had a big, fat German by the name of Arno [phonetic]. He had been a political prisoner since -- he was a communist, apparently, but that did not prevent him from really putting it -- pulling rank on us or totally making our lives one hell there. The commission actually did come out, and there were doctors from -- military doctors from Sachsenhausen, and they did determine, and I did not know what to do, and I told them that I had actually been sent over there because they could not diagnose what my ailment was, that it seemed to have stabilized into a cold, more or less, that I seemed not to be able to shake. And I was told to stand aside. My friend had the presence of mind to tell these doctors that really, we were capable of working but they wanted to be sure that this was diagnosed properly because they did not have German doctors at this camp, and that is why we were sent to Lieberose -- the camp’s name was Lieberose -- and that we were there truly for evaluation. And they asked, “Can you two work?” And he said, “Yes, we can work. We are capable of working.” And he said, “Okay, we assign you to Barracks Number 1. Report there also for work detail.”

So this is what happened. He actually had saved my life because the rest of the people that were there were what we called *Muselmann.* Have you heard that term? A Muselmann is “Muslim.” I do not know how the term got started, but it were the people that you have probably seen, just wrecks of human beings, no cheeks, cheekbones, no arms, no buttocks, sticks for legs, barely able to move about. These were called, in the camps, Muselmann. And the transport was put together early in the time in Lieberose. Whether they made it back to Auschwitz -- because Auschwitz already was there on the verge of being evacuated. Whether they did or did not, I cannot tell. I, at least, worked some five, six months in Lieberose until finally, the Russians approached. And our work over there were digging tank ditches in the fields over there, and again, we were subjected, not so much by harsh or brutal treatment by the SS guards, but by those who should have had a fellow feeling, a sympathy, for us, namely the German Kapo*. H*ave you hear that term before? The Kapos treated us ill to the Nth degree. Everyone had the ever-present walking stick, and if we didn’t move fast enough -- he seemed to think that he was responsible that the work (penson?) was done, and if we didn’t work fast enough, well, then he started to beat us, generally, again, on the back. We were all -- our attitude was mostly this, trying to protect our heads and our faces.

Well, one day, he beat my friend so severely that he finally -- he was a guy from Saxony, a short fellow, a political prisoner. He beat both of us so terribly that we told our block eldest that we had to go to the sick bay because we needed some attention. Well, he apparently must have felt -- since we were German Jews, he must have felt some sort of, not compassion, or maybe a spark of compassion. We were, the next day, assigned to the potato kitchen. There, we could sit down and peel potatoes. And from there, we rested -- we stayed into the potato kitchen and did not have to work quite so hard anymore, and our jobs was just that. We were sitting, and we were talking, again, about old times and food and this and that and trying to eat raw potatoes, but as probably everybody knows by now, there is not very much value in raw potatoes because the starch has not been converted to an absorbable substance. The only thing that was forbidden is to take one single potato, or one single potato peel out, and we were, daily, searched, but in a manner that was unusual. We had our lunch pail, a cup and a fork, and the guy that serves us was a deaf-mute, also a political prisoner. He was a Polish prisoner, and I can remember vividly, we walked out there like that. Our lunch pail over there, our cup in that hand, and he would go under our jackets, feeling the pockets, feeling between our legs, lifting up our shoes to see whether we had secreted any, any potatoes. And if we did, well, that was the end of that person’s potato duty in the warm kitchen, and Germany’s gotten pretty cold there in the wintertime. Besides that, he got such a beating from the Kapo and was turned over to the *Strafekolonie* or “punishment detail.” They wore big, red patches, blood-red patches on their backs and had especially hard detail. I never did get on that detail, and I was very thankful for that. So that was the potato peel.

And there is also where I found -- this was now concentration camp in the German manner. It had nothing to do with death camp. And there, again, the brutality was carried to the extreme, to the flogging or the caning. Again, we had to stand out for hours in rain, in sunshine, in heat, standing in our place, not being able to move, just shifting around a little bit from one foot to the other and standing. It was such a punishment. We did not know what they wanted from us. Then they announced over the loudspeaker that such-and-such had transgressed. I don’t know what he’d done, maybe sabotaged something. He didn’t walk fast enough, or he dropped a bag of cement which spilled out and cost the German government damage beyond compare, and that he was to receive -- and this was in legal -- it was read by the camp commander that, Therefore, the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler has decreed that he is to receive 25 *Stockhiebe*, or “cane lashes,” on the naked behind, *auf der nackten Arsch,* “the naked buttocks,” at the next Appell*.* Appell was the name of standing out there. And they had a special -- that camp had a special device where they half laid the -- it was like a lectern, a crude, big, lectern with an ink line on it, and two prisoners held his hands over the lectern, and two other prisoners held his legs, and the camp, uh, *Kleiderkammer* -- what is that word again? Where the clothing was distributed. Another German Kapo, a *Schwerverbrecher,* a “professional criminal” who was well nourished, the best he could on there because he wanted to make sure that the camp commanders saw that he was taking his work seriously. And the ignominy of it was that the poor guy that was being flogged had to count the strokes, ostensibly by the camp commander’s order that he should be sure to receive only that which the Reichführer had decreed and not one more or not one less. And these poor people had to -- while they were screaming and begging for mercy and letting loose of their body fluids, had to count, “One, two, three.” By the time they were at 10 or 15, none of them could give any more sound except maybe a whimper, and for them, the camp eldest was then forced to count until the punishment was completed.

They had also -- one thing, and we were not allowed to close our eyes. They walked through the ranks. Our own Kapos walked through the ranks and laid the -- I mean, they had short sticks, and they beat us unmercifully if we closed our eyes during these, these -- how do you call them -- corporal punishment sessions. And that camp also had its own portable gallows. And some poor soul -- I don’t know what it was. It wasn’t a Jew. It may have been a Pole. Had tried to escape. And for that -- normally Saturdays and Sundays, we had some time off to clean up. Saturdays we worked till 10:00. Saturday evening was given to cleaning the barracks. But those Saturdays, or at least that one Saturday that I remember was a very simple affair. It was just two Poles with a crossbar and a bench on there. The guy’s hands were tied behind his back. As I said, he, again, had this decree of Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler read out, that now, Therefore, I decree that you shall be hanged by the neck.

The camp was something like 5,000 to 8,000 people or 10,000 people. We did not know where it occurred, what he had done. We only were confronted with the fact that our Saturday afternoon was, again -- when we needed to rest so badly, it was again taken. I’m not sure whether I felt a certain resentment. Maybe I did, that he was the cause of our loss of sleep or whatever it was. Anyhow, it was over, luckily, very quick for the man. He was simply, since they had tied his hands and feet, he simply had a rope tied around his neck. His hands and feet were tied. Two of the strong German Kapos just simple lifted him on the bench. The Kleiderkammer guy, this clothing chamber Kapo, simply tied with a rope, and the other two guys just kicked the bench away, and all I can say is, I hope that his end was quick. It was the first one that I witnessed, but it was not the last -- I wouldn’t say “execution” -- yeah, execution or willful killing of German guards of Jews or other prisoners. This was the way he ended, and for added measure, we were forced to march by the execution place slowly and were forced to look at it. We were forced like, later on in the American army, “Eyes, right.” And by golly, we had to see this sorry, sorry spectacle. I am not sure whether -- as I said before, I cannot tell you whether I feel pity. By that time, “pity” was a word that had been expunged from our dictionaries. We had no longer pity, except for ourselves.

That was Lieberose. At night -- we had a stove in the barracks, and at night, we had a bucket where we had to urinate. The urination was in the barracks because it was subzero temperature, and you could hear the prisoners utilize this bucket. It was loud and noisy, and we had to carry that outside and empty it outside. And believe me, the buckets were always overfull, and much as we tried to avoid getting splashed by urine, it never happened because we had no food. Therefore, we drank. The only thing that was available to us was water. We developed *Ödems* because the water settled in our knees. We had difficulty, all of us, except, of course, the well-fed German Kapos. We still were working on details, digging ditches, unloading cement bags, whatever it was. One of the -- it was bitterly cold, and one of our ways of trying to shield ourselves against the cold, we had exactly one small, thin jacket, our prison jacket, and one undershirt. And in the bitter cold, we had no socks. We had no gloves. We tried to steal the paper bags and place them between us, between our backs and our front, to have some insulation. That was strictly forbidden, and I was beaten severely for having this under my jacket. The only way they found it is, when we entered the camp after our work detail, they sometimes made body controls to feel whether we had secreted something, discovered that I had a cement bag, an empty bag, the paper bag on me. That earned me no food that day and a beating and standing at the gate with several others who had the same offense, had committed the same offense.

At night, instead of going to sleep, we, the Jews, were chosen to guard a woodpile because there was very little firewood. The other barracks tended to steal this. To avoid this, we were forced to stand outside in this bitter cold in the snow and guard our woodpile. I cannot tell you what thoughts I had. I had many, many thoughts to think of. Many of them were about what religion was doing to us; what religion was doing for us; why we were not being liberated; why the entire world, and this has occurred to us many times, why we seemed to have been forgotten or why we were, indeed, forgotten by the entire world; why we had no sign of anything. The German population kept very much away from us because we were described as the lowest of the low criminal element. We had no pity or sympathy from them at all.

What else is there to say? We stayed in that camp, and one of the highlights -- you must know now how desperate we were. One of the highlights was, German civilians fleeing from the Russians made it as far as the camp, and their horse died. And our cooks went out and got the horse and carved him up and put a soup together, some stew, and we had for the first time meat. One horse didn’t go very far for 8,000 prisoners, but they used everything. And I’m sure by that time, all the religious Jews decided to eat what came their way. Even if they did know there was horsemeat in there, it made no longer very much of a difference. You ate because you had to hope for the next day. You had to get through that one day.

So, again, we tried to make time go by. We tried to visualize what we would do when we got out. We had, actually, no reference point at all of when or whether we’d find -- we had hopes that we would find all of our family members again. That was how we lived from day to day.

Interviewer: Did you ever see your brother?

Herz: I did not see anyone of my family ever again until I met my brother in New York about two years after the war, or maybe one year and a half after the war. I had only one sign that he was alive because one of the people that I worked with in one of the camps said, “You look like this kid I knew from Cologne.” And I said, “What was his name?” “His name was Karl Herz.” And I said, “Well, that was -- that is my brother. Where did you see him?” This comes towards the last three months of my life in the concentration camp.

Interviewer: How long were you at this…?

Herz: At this camp, I was fairly long time, from August till January, February -- January, I believe, ’45. Then something happened that, again, some of it I only heard from a German official later. I do know what happened to me. At the time, we found out -- we were working under the SS guard, and the first time that I know that there was an invasion or had been an invasion, that I found a scrap of paper saying, “Allied Troops in the Hürtgen Forest,” and the SS deigned to talk to us, the SS guard, and he said, “You don’t have to get your hopes up, you Jewish pigs, because before anything happens, we will kill you all. But nothing will happen because our Führer has the V-weapons, the *Vergeltungswaffen.* The invasion force will be annihilated, they will be driven back into the sea, and you go on until you drop dead.” That was -- I mean, this is not hearsay. I was talking to him -- or, well, he actually talked to me. We did not say anything more than “Yes, sir,” or “No, sir.” But at that time, we knew that the invasion had taken place and that there was battle in the Hürtgen Forest, the Battle of the Bulge, as it turned out later. We were still at the other end of Germany, near Frankfurt an der Oder. The Russian front was our concern. We didn’t care anymore who liberated us. We just wanted to be liberated.

So after that time, then we were given, all of a sudden, two loaves of bread in the morning. Instead of going to work, we were given two loaves of bread, take your blankets from your bed and assembled by barracks. And then came one thing that you have heard of many, many times. I probably have no idea -- I cannot tell whether the other people, the survivors that you have interviewed, know about this. I know that Mr. Ben Stern related something similar. Then came something that we called -- that is then later on called the death march, and it was truly a death march because of the 8,000 people that left Lieberose, barely 1,500 arrived at the main camp. What I tell you now, the section, upon leaving the camp, I did not know until I called a German official for finding out whether one could visit Lieberose and see the ancient sites of the camps. As he said -- he says, “There is hardly anything left of Lieberose. Lieberose is still there.” I said, “Did you know about it?” “Yes,” he said, “we know about it because we have made them into memorial places for our East German population.” These were still the East German Communists that we are talking about, but he was an official in the German Embassy in Washington, D.C. I said, “What do you know about it?” “Well,” he said, “when you left, all the prisoners that were not able to move or looked sick were assembled in sick bay, and the building was set afire; was doused with gasoline and was set afire. After you had left, in the afternoon, the building was set afire, and the SS shot everyone that tried to come out of the building or to try and save himself out of the building.” None of the people that was in the building died, and there were some 700 people in the two barracks that were declared sick bays. That was the one group of people that had actually nothing to do with me, but because it was Lieberose, and because I was there, it may have been that some friends also perished there.

We marched. It was snowing. We were exhausted by the time we were reaching our first destination. People already started to break down after seven, eight hours of marching, and we were told, “If you cannot march any further, sit down by the side of the road. A wagon will come, and we’ll pick you up.” The wagon that came and picked them up? There was no such thing. I knew this because when we had marched about 10, 15 minutes later and the end of the column had passed by there -- the end of the column had the kitchen utensils and some favorite Kapos. It was drawn by human beings, this wagon. The camp records, whatever was on there, I don’t recall. We would hear a few shots, you know, and then of course, you know it could be partisans, it could be anything, the battle coming closer. But anyway, what it was, it was the end of those people that could no longer make it.

The second day was worse than the first. We had no place to rest. The German guards made themselves huge bonfires where they sat around and were at least warm. We had no such thing. We froze. And this, I mean all, including me. I was no better. We had no clothing, no protective clothing, no coats. Our shoes were nothing, wooden clogs. No socks. We froze, and our bread, I think we had eaten after the second day, or if we had some, I do not recall. We were getting weaker and weaker, and, again, I must related something that was told to me by the German official later, that a large group of people, mostly Russians and Poles, were assembled out of this march. This march was at least a mile to 2 mile along the road. It was 8,000 people. That they had simply gotten together because they could no longer figure what to do with these people. They grabbed together anyone that was weak and pulled them out of the rank and said, “There will be trucks coming to pick you up.” And they massacred -- again, we heard these volleys, but we did not know whether it was battle or something. The war was coming closer. That they had massacred, and they found the mass grave there of some 700 Russian and Polish prisoners, Jews, whatever it was, that could no longer make it.

We marched -- I cannot tell you what it was. We dragged. We marched. We finally -- it would be only a repetition of what I have said. Bread? We had nothing. Water? We dipped up some snow. The guards had these Schmeisser machine pistols and were walking alongside. They were not happy because they had to march on foot to guide us. They had also no beds to sleep in, and they were surly, and the slightest infraction was a beating with these hard Schmeisser guns. I did not receive any beatings. I kept to the German Kapos because I could talk with them in German. Perhaps that was my salvation. In one of the places, we had some Norwegian prisoners. In one of these places was a large barn. I found in the straw something that did save my life. A Norwegian prisoner had lost a bottle nearly full of cod liver oil. I still had some bread left. I had never had a great liking for cod liver oil. I relished this cod liver oil and shared it with my friend, the one who had saved my life. We ate cod liver oil on bread with salt. It tasted like the finest delicacy you had ever had because it sustained us. Our body was able to absorb it. I don’t know whether it means anything, but in retrospect, I know it saved my life. I finished that bottle. It gave me the strength to hold out till I got finally to the main camp in Sachsenhausen.

I may have left something unsaid in Lieberose. I don’t know what it was. Religious services? Yes. Some of the Jews did some prayer. Some Jews still kept the holidays, fasted on Yom Kippur, jealously guarding their piece of bread till the fast was over. The rabbis told them all rules are -- how shall I say -- are voided for this time in your life. No Jewish rules, no ritual applies. You are in danger of your life. But many of them did anyhow. They felt it was -- it sustained them. Me, the only thing that sustained me was my hope that I wanted to see the end. I may have had feeling of vengeance, but it didn’t even carry that far. I believe that I could not even conceive of slitting the throat of a German or putting him up against the wall and shooting him. Number one, this is not how German Jews or even Polish Jews or any kind of Jews -- this is not how we think. We couldn’t do that. Vengeance is mine. Well, it wasn’t mine. I only hoped that I would get out alive and see my family again.

So from day to day, I lived with the hope of getting out. It sustained us. We performed whatever was required of us. We suffered. Or should I say -- if you wish me to, I’ll say I suffered. But I cannot, I cannot divorce myself from the group of people in whose midst I was. We tried to steal each other’s bread. My friend and I, I’m sorry to say that we tried. We tried to steal another prisoner’s bread. Our plight was so desperate that we stole from each other. I am a law-abiding citizen now. I ran for the House of Representatives of the -- for the House of Representatives in South Carolina. Should I say I’m ashamed that I did it? Would you say that I should be ashamed that I did? We were reduced. Our humanity was gone.

Anyhow, we arrived in Berlin, and we were given a luxury that I never had: a ride first-class on the German subway. Beautiful. We saw the stations flash by: Friedrichstraße, Augustenhof, Tiergarten, all the German stations. The reason for that was because many of the roads were bombed out. There is only one more incident that I would like to mention. In this case, we were, one night -- “sheltered” is perhaps too much of a place. We were put into a huge building that was a boat dock, and there was a large boat in there, and one of the Jewish inmates, a prisoner of another Jewish concentration camp, inmate, was from that area, from Berlin. I said, “I haven’t got the slightest idea where I am.” I only knew that there were large tower, a radio tower, which I knew was the German *Sender,* Königs Wusterhausen. I said, “I saw a radio tower a while back, but this here area with lakes, I don’t know at all.” “Well,” he said, “if I’m not mistaken, I’ve been here before. This is Wannsee.” And Wannsee, I found out later on, was the infamous conference of all German officials, SS, *Reichssicherheitshauptamt,* the *vier B,* where the Final Solution was debated. So I got to that place, too, where the origin of my misery and the deaths of my family was planned and where the organizational talent was displayed to do this.

Anyhow, we got -- this was just on the outskirts of Berlin and, as I said, very shortly thereafter, we took this ride, and Oranienburg was a station where we were let off and marched to the main camp, Sachsenhausen. We marched by -- this was one of the suburbs of Berlin that you will probably have heard of, Potsdam, because Truman held -- there was a conference there at which Truman took place. And one of the ironies, again, of my life was that I was able to read the inscription, “Come, all ye who are laden.” And you may be more familiar with it. It was a Catholic church, or maybe a Protestant church. Would you know the entire, the entire verse? “Come, all ye who are laden. I shall give you sustenance,” or something like that. It may have been a Psalm. It was engraved in there. And I thought even that is not, is not for us.

We came into the camp, which was another march. I don’t know how long it was. We dragged one foot before the other. We finally did no longer watch the neighborhood. The one thing we did see, we saw the destruction that the Allied forces had wrought. When we came into the camp, the camp barracks were arranged in a semicircle, and they had this wonderful, wonderful inscription, and I will say it to you first in German. It said, *“Es gibt nur einen Weg in die Freiheit. Seine Meilensteine ​​sind Treue, Fleiß Gefühl” --* half a dozen more things like that -- *“und Liebe zum Vaterland.”* And then I’ll try to translate it. It said, “There is only one way to liberty” -- to freedom, yeah. That’s better. It’s freedom. “There is only one way to freedom, and its mileposts are duty, *Gehorsam”* -- obedience. They had a half a dozen. It was in cast iron -- not in cast iron. In ornamental ironworks. Duty, obeyance (obedience), whatever it is that the Germans called what we must do, and the last sentence was *“und Liebe zum Vaterland,”* “love of country.” So that is what greeted us there.

We were assigned some barracks. There was nothing for us to do. There were no details. Berlin was waiting for the Russians. We are talking about January, February 1945. We are now into nearly five years of war. So food, we had watery soup, bread, one slice. Calorie content, about 300. Nothing during -- we are talking about prisoners. I met first, for the first time in my life, in the barracks, someone who had a patch entirely different from mine. I had, meanwhile, no longer any Star of David. Mine was now all red because they had run out of yellow color in the printing system, and I had been promoted now to political prisoner. It meant nothing. We were all suffering. And for the first time, I saw a blue patch, and I defy you to determine what that was or even guess what it was: Spanish Communists who fought in the freedom brigade. You heard of the Lincoln brigade, Spanish Communists who got grabbed by the Fascists or by the Germans or whoever, however. They got caught in France. They got caught in France because they had escaped into France, and in the German sweep towards the Spanish border, they got trapped, concentration camp, and it was the first time I heard Spanish spoken and saw a blue patch.

So there was a mélange; that’s what the French say. There was a press of people of all nations, Norwegians, Swedes -- not Swedes -- Norwegian, Danish, Dutch, Belgian. You name it, it was there. And we spent 14 days in that in total ignorance of what the Germans would do. We knew only thing, and you have seen those signs, “The end is near.” We knew only that the end is near. We knew that the end was near for the Germans. We hoped that we would survive it and not die at the -- this was a very, very dire threat to us, a very near threat, that the Germans and the German guards, the SS, would, in a fit of, a fit of losing, of having lost the war, would take it out on us and just, just kill us. That is -- that is, well -- that is Sachsenhausen. There’s not very much more that I can tell you about it unless you have heard something about Sachsenhausen Oranienburg that I may have not mentioned to you.

Interviewer: You were only in that -- Sachsenhausen, the main camp, for two weeks?

Herz: Fourteen days, three weeks I’m sure. It was not very much. We were starving then. One thing that is an incongruity to you is that we were issued razor blades by the Germans occasionally. When we were not issued razor blades, the Germans had straight razors, and the German inmates were selected, former barbers were selected to shave us. So each week, we were shaved. The head was shaved. The beard was shaved off. They forgot about the body hair at that time. There was no sense. But they wanted us to be -- it is a degrading thing, you know. We had, as I said, the round, stupid cap, or hat, and whenever we saw an SS guard, we must smartly grab this thing and hit our legs with it instead of a salute. That was what they required of us, and I’ve done it many, many times. The thing was not to be taken off. It had to be grabbed and torn off the head and slapped against the leg while we were walking, looking neither right nor left. But when we encountered a German guard, that is what we had to do to show our sign of total and abject subjugation.

So then, one day -- I’m sorry I’m doing all the talking.