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**Interviewee:** Reuven Freidman 285

Born in Lille, France. 23.6.1925

**Interviewer:** Iris Berlizzka

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Expulsion of part of Jews of Lille, 1944;

work in printing works, Lille, until 1945.

Relationship of the French. In the prison of Cherbourg.

- 17/11/43 - 17/12/43. Relationship of guards and Head of the Prison. Expulsion to island of Alderney. 17/12/1943. Officer of camp in the island work in fortifications on the island, under supervision of the "Todt" organisation; from Alderney to Dannes Camier, May 1944; to Calais on foot, afterwards by train to Dixmuoe, Belgium.

14.9.1944. Liberation by partisans, Belgium, without battle: official liberation by Canadian Soldiers, end September 1944. After liberation: meeting with parents in Lille. Allyan to Bretz-Israel on the ship. "Tes Mai" 1940

Names mentioned in the interview

Lille, France

Cherbourg Alderney "Todt" Dannes Camier

Calais Dixmuoe Jersey Guernsey.

My name is Reuvan Friedman. I was born on 23.6.1925 in France, in the city Lille. My parents came from Poland, until the age 14 I worked and then the German conquest began, which tore France in half. I then worked in printing until 1942. The Jews of France and especially of our town were not troubled at all.

The atmosphere in fact, with us, was not one of fear. We knew nothing, although in 1937, Jews came from Germany, who visited our synagogue, where my father prayed. My father told us what happened in Germany and it was clear that there were Jews who did not believe him. The stories that Jews were beaten, no one believed, and especially because the news was not forceful.

When the Germans entered our town, my father was in the army, and we were with family. Before that, all the announcements of the French were that they would win because they were stronger. We had always heard that the Germans had nothing to eat and when we saw the army marching, all of them strong, sturdy, of course, that made an impression. The Germans did not immediately begin with the Jews and the Jews went on working as usual, busy with commerce and only little by little did decrees begin to appear, such as, for example: in the shops, a placard had to be hung "This is a shop of Jews" in contrast to what happened in Germany. Of course, the Germans did not buy in the shops of Jews, because they were a conquering army. We secretly would slip in, because the SS did not rule the area.

A boy, aged 14 seeing a foreign army enter, did not feel very good, and did not yet understand what was happening. He continued working as usual in printing. The most difficult experience was working all day. Next to their headquarters, seeing those Germans marching goose-step, changing the guard and every day seeing notices that they were arresting people. A boy of 14 does not grasp what is happening, but he sees that they are murdering people, people who don't know where they are going. Gradually, rumours spread in France, that is, in the town.

I, as a boy, after a year or so, joined a group of boys in stealing benzine, to give it to the underground. Not every day, but from time to time, we would go to the central square, and steal empty cans, barrels of benzine, until one day three boys were caught.

Of course under torture, they gave the names of the whole group. For some reason they did not give my name. It seems for a Frenchman, it is hard to pronounce the name, Freidman, and I was not arrested. But fear was there. My friends were sentenced - most of them Goyim - to 15 months imprisonment in Germany, on forced labour. Then every day when I went to work there was fear that I would be arrested.

My parents, it seemed, also felt afraid, but it didn't occur to them that one could escape from it although at the printing works there was a man from the underground, and he was interested in transferring children to Portugal. I was an only child and my parents were afraid that their son would go who knew where. In spite of the fears that the day would come and they would take us separately my parents would not let me go. I, a boy of 15, could not go without separating from my parents.

In 1942, one day I went to work and saw that from every direction, French police came, accompanied by Germans, knocked on the houses of Jews - friends acquaintances. We, of course were at home. It did not occur to us to try to escape - to run where? Rumour had it that they were taking people to work. We prepared bundles and stayed indoors. With every knock on the door, fear mounted. Next morning, I went out into the street. The neighbour from opposite and also other friends were already not there.

*“Jews?”*

“Yes, Jews. On that same day, they took only Jews. All the Jews of the town of Lille were taken, without our knowing where they took them to. I it is true, remained, but I removed my patch (the Yellow Patch) for another day or two, I wore it, but I knew in my heart that if, before this they had taken the Jews it would look very strange if someone walked about with a patch. I took off the patch although every day in the street, notices were published that a Jew must wear the patch.

*“Your parents-?”*

“My parents stayed indoors. My father certainly left the market - he used to sell in the market and began to work as a painter. The owner of the house knew he was a Jew, because he knew him from before. At the printing works, they knew I was a Jew, because before

I wore a patch. It was very strange to them the first time I appeared with a patch and they asked

“ what? Are you a Jew?”

It seemed that the concept “Jew” to the French, not only to the young ones, was very dim.

They could not define it. They continued treating me as usual. I don’t say that anyone ever called me “dirty Jew”, but the intention was there, a kind of curse. Our teacher at school, who belonged to the socialist party, explained what a Jew was, but I don’t think anyone understood what he said.

*“What did he explain?”*

“What a Jew is?”

*“In what way?”*

“He began: this is a nation that once had a homeland in the Land of Israel....he was an educated man.

“I don’t know if they understood it”

*“Did you go to a Jewish school?”*

“No”

*“Wasn’t there a Jewish school? Was the teacher a Jew?”*

“No the teacher was not a Jew. I think that in the school I was the only Jew.”

*“You said the teacher was an educated Jew”*

“Excuse me, he was an educated man and he explained what it was,”

*“Was he an antisemite?”*

“No, he belonged to the socialist party of Leon Blum and wasn’t an antisemite. Until 1945, everything went on... True, every night we went to sleep not quiet”

*“Until 1942?”*

“No, in 1942, they took all the Jews. I’ll go on. For a whole year, let us say, they stopped bothering the Jews....that is, as if the Germans knew that there were no more Jews, because it was clear that they all went in 1942. It was hard to walk about the town and see that suddenly one’s friends were not there, not knowing where they had gone and especially the great illusion, that everyone believed, including me, that they really took them to work.”

“In 1943, I went to work at the printing, and as always told my parents that if anyone came to the house, not to say where I was. One day they did come - agents of the French secret police and then my mother said, “he is working”. They came to the printing. At the printing works, there were two exits. And the manager tried to tell me to leave by the second exit because they had come for me. But it seemed the detective was not a fool and he knew there was another exit, and there too they were waiting for me. They came home with me, I took a few things and they took me to the railway station under guard.”

*“How did your parents react?”*

“My parents started to cry and they had perhaps some illusion that it would be all right. “Many people have gone to work, you too will work.”

Somehow I knew I was not going to work. What awaited me I did not know. By 1943, the conquest had gone on for three years. Clearly the parting was terribly hard. Interestingly enough, at the station, those same French did not ask my parents anything. If I was taken as a Jew, or as a boy, at that moment I could not have known - but I did know that it was not good for me.”

*“At the printing house were there other Jews?”*

“One..a Jewish girl”

*“They didn’t take her?”*

“They didn’t take her. On that day, she wasn’t at home, that girl. Another family where they did not take anyone, there was only a widow. She had common sense, which we did not understand at the time. In the town council, they were serving tea and cake. This woman simply entered, sat down in a corner and although she couldn’t read, took a newspaper, and waited there till the end of the day. At the end of the day, she went home and stayed there till the end of the war. And they didn’t bother her. A matter of luck. A matter of intuition, who could have told?”

*“What did your parents do?”*

“My parents stayed at home until the end of the war and no one touched them.

The Germans to prevent sabotage in the train, took ten men each day for public service, put them on the train, and travelled to the destination. From there, they could go where they liked. After about an hour, they had to report for duty again. My father was one of them - a kind of surety that the train would travel in safety. On that same train, in a special carriage that no one was allowed to enter, we travelled to Cherbourg. There they handed us over to the Germans in a prison for Jews. There were criminals there too.”

*“You were in prison from November 1943?”*

“From November 1943 to December 17. In that prison our guards were all sorts of volunteers from all sorts of countries - Belgians, French. The Head of the prison was a Pole. One day we decided to escape from the place, because another two people I knew were brought from our town. Next day we didn’t work together, that is, I was taken to work in an isolated place. They escaped, but I didn’t have the strength to escape alone, because after all I was a boy of 17 and didn’t know where to go. They managed to escape and the guards decided to take revenge on us - those who remained. That night, they took us out of the cell and punished us with “exercises” - not the most pleasant.

*“The French and the Belgians?”*

“The French and the Belgians, under threat of a gun. This is called ‘subordination under cover’ as this sport is called today. But when it lasts for a long long time, it is so hard, that at one time I said to them all

“kill me! I can’t take more”

I had no more strength. A friend of mine fainted. Here, I must tell something that happened in that prison. That Pole whom we knew - we knew that the Poles were terrible antisemites - was the officer of the prison. Next day when he heard about this, called me - he also knew French - and said

“what happened yesterday?”

I was terribly afraid because I didn’t know how he would react. He said

“I know and I want names”.

I told him that they took me out of the cell in the middle of the night and forced us to do exercises, not the most pleasant. He asked,

“Why didn’t you come to me?”

I was struck dumb what did I have to do with the officer in charge of the prison. He shut the door and told me a very interesting story. When he was a boy of 14 in the forests of Poland, where he lived, he once went to visit his grandmother and got lost. He walked for hours until at last he saw a light in a house. He knocked on the door. It was a Jewish family. This family took him in, gave him food, looked after him and sent him back in a carriage to his parents. He then swore silently as a boy that he would always remember the debts he owed. He said he tried as much as he could to help at times, and does so quietly. As a boy of 17 hearing such a story, it seemed to be pure imagination. But it is a fact that he punished the guards”.

*“Were the rest of the prisoners also Jews?”*

“No, in the prison there were many people who were caught in the black market for all kinds of criminal acts. There were also foreigners who were arrested for not having identity papers.

On December 17, we were taken to the port, embarked on a ship and sailed to an island opposite Cherbourg. The island was called Alderney. We arrived in the middle of the night and didn’t know where we were. We were transferred to the officer of the camp. First of all the officer of the camp took out his sub machine gun, put it on the table - he had a clerk who registered us - and began to read out the camp regulations. In addition to wearing the yellow patch we had to have a white stripe the full length of our trousers on both sides.

*“From Cherbourg, were only the Jews among you transferred to this island”*

“Only the Jews. The officer said that here we would only be occupied with piecework. The island was under the supervision of the SS so we should not dare to try to escape.

We were placed in huts, which were very long. They were made of wood; on the inside, planks with straw. Three levels”

*“You slept on them?”*

“On them we slept. Yes. Next day at a quarter to five, morning parade in the presence of the officer and then we went to work.”

*“How many of you were there?”*

“In that camp, about 800 Jews. Part of the camp were Arabs, Christians from North Africa - Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans. Contact with them was forbidden. As it was for them with us, that is, separation”.

*“Were they prisoners of war?”*

“It seems that the German racial laws stated they were Arabs. I don't exactly as what they were there, but he would always compare us. They are sub-men, exactly like you. That was his theory”

*“The officer of the camp?”*

“Yes. The officer in charge”

*“You don't remember his name?”*

“It is hard for me to remember because they never called him by his name. They called him ‘Schniagerfehrer’ (camp master) because he always beat them. We heard from the veterans in the camp that he could go into a hut - he was responsible for all the huts- and shout ‘Achtung’. It wasn't important what was happening ‘Attention! Caps off!’ Of course, later that day he was in a bad mood, he would find a reason to beat someone. He ran the camp alone.

All the work on the island was for fortifications. That is, casting metal and everything relating to that. We walked six kilometres to work every morning and six kilometres back, after twelve hours work. On that island, Russians were working too, Russian prisoners of war.

The work was done under the supervision of the ‘Todt’ people, that is, when the work was hard we were given sufficient food to be able to carry on. One of the things that seems ridiculous was, we were also given money. We were paid a mark a day. Their system was very, very sophisticated. There was a black market on the island, in bread and this was known. Once a month, there was a parade and they took all the money of the prisoners away. It didn't matter where you hid the money. They found it”

*“So you never managed to use the money?”*

“No. If you were clever, you squandered it immediately. But there were still some people especially people from homes who didn't know what a Jew was and who had lived for generations in peace who believed that if you were given food to eat, more or less enough, and you were given money, they would say

“It's not so terrible. You work hard. Conditions are not of the best”

There was a shower. And here, there is a contrast hard to grasp. The officer forced us to shower every day in hot water. And then he could make us stand for hours on parade, for sport. He did not have anything to do. On the island, the wermacht hated the ‘Todt’ because they were soldiers. They beat him. This was because they had heard of his cruelty”.

*“But he was the Head of ‘Todt’ wasn’t he?”*

“He belonged to Todt and would boast  
“I am no 33 in the Nazi Party”.

*“Did he speak to you?”*

“He didn’t speak, he shouted - barked, in German. He had an interpreter and many people understood German he used to explain to us, not to make us understand, but to show off.

“I am in charge here”

The Jews on the island were mostly assimilated. There were a few who knew they were Jews. With me, there was one from Palestine, born there, left the country it seems when there was a crisis there, landed in France by chance and was captured together with us here.”

*“When you came to this camp, they took away your clothes, your property, money - Did you have any treatment, like disinfectant?”*

“Disinfectant, yes”

*“Did they shave your head?”*

“Here I must point out something. They did not shave the head but disinfected it. That is regular disinfection. We had to take off our clothes. But they did not take them away. That was what was interesting we worked in the same clothes. We had no shoes because they wore out after some time. You could get wooden shoes. We did 12 hours work, getting up at quarter to five every morning. On Sunday we got no meal because we did no work. Here something was not right. At any rate, I didn’t understand it. You’re in a camp of the Germans, you work, and on the day when you can’t work you get no food. This is without sense or logic. On top of that, we are Jews and they know we are Jews I don’t know how to express it - we work twelve hours a day in fact at work itself, the position was better, because it was under the Todt people, working people. They behaved towards us as to workers. I don’t say that here and there someone got slapped or hit with a stick, even. But on the whole, it was a work camp where you work for twelve hours with a break for lunch. Things changed when there was casting. If it was casting of concrete, it could last for as long as forty hours. What was important, was that it was work without a stop, a break for food, yes, but not for sleeping or resting. In this casting, these Germans were like mad people, because they knew they were building fortifications. They felt there could be an invasion or something. The same German who could be humane and a ‘mensch’ in his attitudes, the moment there was casting, all the officers and all the top officials of the island were present and if there was any stoppage, any hitch, immediately the word ‘sabotage’ was heard and nothing else mattered.”

*“Were there incidents where they killed people?”*

“No. On that island, they did not kill. Sometimes they beat people and that officer could beat cruelly, but still – absolutely not.”

*“Were there cases of illness, of people who died?”*

“Sickness, yes. I myself was laid up for about a week. This was called ‘flea fever’. They didn’t change the straw, although there were all sorts of pests in it. There was a barrack called the hospital for people who ran a temperature. Without a temperature you couldn’t stay there. There was a Jewish doctor called Rosenfeld, working there. Once I was present at one of the wonderful things. A man fell off the scaffolding and broke something in his head. This doctor operated on him with very primitive means and saved him. I was running a high fever and

apparently they decided that the prospects of my recovering were negligible because I had lost consciousness several times and the medicines were not so good. It seems that fate wanted me to live”.

*“The Germans had medicines, maybe they did not give them to you.”*

“The Germans had medicines but they gave the minimum to that hospital. that Doctor, Doctor Rosenfeld, would try and get some pills for headache, say. This fever was unknown until then because people did not live in such conditions.

The area of the island was 25 square kilometres, fortifications everywhere. In the evening when we returned to the hut, we couldn't move, after twelve hours of work. There was a dining room where we got food; we were given bread for three days. Now I am going to tell something, which seems very strange. They gave us twenty grams of margarine a day, quite a lot, 600 grams a month. I never understood it; there were such contrasts. I saw some with that camp officer, in chance meetings, my number was 623. We had a piece of cardboard with our number. Once, when I came for food, the camp officer asked me how old I was. Although I understood German, I always asked for the interpreter. He warned me

“Be careful. Don't smile. Always be quiet when you speak to him. Say only one word – yes or no.”

He (the officer) said to the cook

“From today on, give this boy a double portion.”

Why? Only God has solutions to these things.

Another thing that was interesting then: we could write two letters a month, at the beginning of the month and at the end. I at that camp, wanted to talk about Bretz Israel to the people. As a young boy I had not much knowledge about Bretz Israel, but I knew more than all the others and I prepared a short lecture, in the middle when I was writing, the officer came in.

“Achtung! Achtung!”

Everyone stood at attention. He asked

“What are you doing?”

I answered

“I am writing a letter.”

He said

“But this isn't a day for sending letters.”

I said speaking through the interpreter,

“Yes but I am an only son.”

“Is this the first time you've left your parents?” I answered,

“yes.”

He laughed and was suddenly in a good mood. When the interpreter said

“You. Don't smile when he talks to you. You don't know how unreliable he is.”

In the middle of the talk, he suddenly flings at me “

Why don't you smoke?”

I said

“Because I have no tobacco.”

He said

“Come with me.”

On the way, the interpreter told me always to say yes to him. We went into his room, he looked for tobacco and gave me four packets explaining.

“One because you don't smoke. One because you have no tobacco. One for you and the fourth: every time I see you in the camp I want to see you with a cigarette.”

Crazy.....I didn't smoke then, but I took care for fear of being hit. They warned me that he was mad and I always had a cigarette over my ear. Every time I saw him in the distance I

would take the cigarette and light it. He would laugh and say that was how he wanted to see me”.

*“What happened to the letter?”*

“The letter was really preparation of a lecture on Bretz Israel. I remember that once a few of us gathered in one hut, and I spoke about it after the war, and said that the place of every Jew should be in Bretz Israel, of course, all those who kept near me were mainly assimilated Jews, and they regarded me as someone who had gone off the tracks, was not sane because to be in a work camp and to think first of all of being liberated from the place – from the nightmare, and then to think of going up to what was called Palestine, had not occurred to a single one – to me, yes, I used to say, if I get out of this camp alive one of the things I will do immediately, is to go to Bretz Israel”.

*“How long were you in the camp: till what date?”*

“We left the island before the invasion. It is difficult for me to remember the exact date, but if the invasion began on June 6<sup>th</sup>, we left the camp in April or May, more or less”.

*“Were you there about six months?”*

“Six months on that island, then, once again to the ships, and from the ship to Cherbourg. In Cherbourg we were put on trains and travelled. Here, something interesting, once again, trains with carriages of animals, then we transfer from Cherbourg, from city to city and all we ask for from all kinds of people is to open that hook on the door so that we can at least move the door and escape”.

*“From the German guards?”*

“The guards were German on route, we reached Lille as well. And my parents heard that I was on the train”.

*“Did your parents receive the letters you sent?”*

“I heard after the war that they received part of the letters, and so did I.

I am going to tell something, that seems very strange to me even today, and that I still don't understand. We could have received parcels, but of course, most of them never arrived, that is, some came and some never did.

In Lille, the parents came to the train, and I saw them, my father even said to me ‘try to escape’, and I said, ‘how can I the coach is closed, maybe someone will open it, on the way’.

*“Was it possible to go inside the train?”*

“No. Of course, the meeting was very emotional, we didn't know where we were going, the final station was a small town between Cherbourg and Calais, Dixmude, Belgium, there was a camp there, and again, the same work. But something quite different. It seems that once again our luck was in, the camp officer was a German engineer, as we learned later, and not a Nazi. He told someone from the camp that his family had suffered, because they were not Nazi. They had left him alive because he was a building engineer. Once again, work on fortifications, near the sea front. But in the camp, the tone was already completely different. True, there were parades, but no one was struck. Quite a different thing, and one very strange to us, was that we no longer believed we heard no rumours about what was happening outside, but here

we could listen to the radio, for we were not in the camp, but were amongst French citizens, rumours seeped in that the invasion was drawing near. It seemed that the Germans had decided to move us from there before the invasion. We walked on foot for three days, while on the way, if anyone tried to escape, shooting began. The new guards of the new camp were young Germans, no more volunteers, who were afraid of failing in their task and announced, "whoever moves, whoever does not go with the others, will be shot, and we don't shoot in the air".

At one of the places, along the way, they shot two, this was heard about only later, but when we heard shots, we knew something was going on".

*"Was this the same group that was with you in Alderney? The same people?"*

"The same number, 750-800, got on the train and travelled. After a journey of a day and a night, since they seemed to have a plan to reach a particular place on a particular date, at a particular hour, they began to hurry, in a state of nervousness, because the invasion had started. We arrived at the same train, and again, wherever we stopped, through the windows, and in different ways, we asked 'move the hook, lift it so we can get out'. Nobody tried because they were on the platform, and in order to move the hook, they had to come close to the coach. When you saw a guard with a gun, not everyone was prepared to take the risk. We crossed the border.

All the time we were in France, we had hopes that as long as we were within French borders, and since we were born in France, and spoke the language, something would happen here. The moment we crossed the boarder our mood began to change, and we understood that we were making for Germany. We came to a small place in Belgium called Dixmude on September 4.1944. Part of the German army had already retreated. In this town, in a train full of Germans, we saw citizens who asked us

"who are you?"

we answered,

"We are Jews"

They said they would do everything so that we should not go further. It was hard for us to believe this. But we saw many people there with a kind of cloak and we realised that under it, a weapon was hidden. We understood that there was an active underground movement here. They informed us that they would blow up the last bridge connecting this town with the next. They brought us food and it was unbelievable to see how many people of the Red Cross came over to us. Really, an hour later, we heard a mighty blast and saw on the faces round us joy that they had succeeded. We knew that whatever, we would not go on to Germany from here".

*"What did the guards do?"*

"Before the blast, negotiations took place between the guards and the underground, the negotiations were carried on through our interpreter, our guards were soldiers, young fellows, their officer the oldest there perhaps, and he, I suppose was 35, a family. The negotiators concluded that they would let us go, and the underground promised not to touch them. The guards had a problem about how to do this. So they agreed to open the carriages and let the people out, not all of them at once, but in small groups and let them disperse throughout the city. Apparently, something moved the guards, they wanted to live, I believe that because the train could not move, the underground would have waited for night, and would have finished the guards off . This in fact was their plan that if the negotiations failed, they would do everything to liberate us. The feeling was, first open the carriage, get out and begin to walk slowly. At the station, the Red Cross was present with many women who were giving out sandwiches, the woman who gave me a sandwich was weeping. I asked her,

"why are you crying"

she replied,

“I have a son, a prisoner of war, I hope someone is giving him a sandwich today”

This woman was thinking of her son at that moment. It seemed that all the women had sons who had been prisoners for a long time.

By the time we left the railway station, amid great excitement, the town knew who we were and directed us to places where there were no Germans about. A friend called Binyamin, I don't remember his surname, who was from Paris, and we walked together until we saw a farm. There, a farmer, who spoke French, greeted us. We told him who we were and we said “Look, I have not beds but I'll let you sleep in the granary”.

We thanked him and said,

“Wherever you put us will be good. The main thing is that we are free and can't wait to get home.”

We were given afternoon tea, a cup of coffee, and later, supper. It was like a dream to listen to someone suggesting something. He asked us not to smoke, because the granary was a storeroom, and of course we understood. When we came down for tea, it emerged that he had had ten people who came before we did. He did not want to mention this because he wanted to be sure that we belonged to the same group”.

*“What happened to the German guards”*

“They left, they waited next to the train until the carriages were empty. Where they went, was not business of ours. It no longer interested us. We, of course, simply got away. The underground told us later that the guards would not go far, It is true, we gave our word, and it did not interest us what they would do. Let someone else catch them. The Red Cross began to organise. They went from place to place, registered the names and numbers of the people. At 6 O'clock in the evening, a car stopped near us. They spoke Belgian, which we did not understand. The representative of the Red Cross said,

“You are in a small town of 3000 inhabitants, who do not agree that if you are free, you should not sleep in decent conditions”

The inhabitants decided that we should sleep in private homes. It was wonderful to see us walking in the streets with the Red Cross representatives, and to witness how the inhabitants actually quarrelled to have more people with them”.

*“Did they know you were Jews?”*

“They knew we were Jews, possibly, even in the houses we visited, the people did not understand the meaning of the word ‘Jew’, but they received us so warmly that it was difficult to describe. I went to a man, who had a wife and two daughters, to this day, I have kept his visiting card, he was a wholesale merchant for pigs. He gave us a room with a mattress – so soft that we could not sleep on it. We weren't used to it, in the morning, he came to wake us, for breakfast, and saw us sleeping on the floor. He thought the mattress was no good and wanted to bring another. Next morning when we met, we knew who was missing out of the group. Here, I want to go back a little before we got on the train, we had walked, on foot one of the group managed to escape. He threw himself down into a ditch, which was full of thorny bushes, in spite of the shooting. It seems he was saved. I met him again only when I was already here. In Israel now we can go back to that wonderful little town. We were given some pocket money by the Red Cross. We were all wearing wooden shoes I saw a shop with shoes, in the show window, were slippers, I went in and asked to buy the slippers. The owner of the shop asked me to wait for a minute. He went down to the cellar and came back with shoes with fur. I told him that I could not pay their price now. He said, first try them on, and then we'll talk. I put them on, and asked how much they were. He said, “I was rescued, I will not take money for the shoes. I am only happy that I can help. All these years I could not help people for all kinds of reasons. I will not take money”.

In every place we went to, whether it was to coffee or to buy something, they did not want to take money from us.

In this small place, we spent two weeks, until the Canadians came, who were the first of the allies to come in to this town. Then we began to ask to go home. The difficulty was that the train service was not regular, and the armies of the allies had preference.

On the day we were to return home, the whole of the population of the town, without exception accompanied us to the station, and they parted from us as if their children were leaving, it was a sight we could never forget”.

*“Were you still 750 people?”*

“Yes, except for the 2 or 3 who were shot, of course. All the 750 , they paid for our train tickets. The Red Cross registered whatever was necessary. It was not far from Lille, about an hour away, but it was only many hours later that we reached Lille, because the train was held up everywhere.

I came back to my town. I got off the train – I live not far from the train, Like a Jew returning to Bretz Israel. I kissed the earth, because I knew I was at home. I could not inform my parents on what day I was coming. I worried about what would happen to them simply from so much happiness, that their only son was returning home. I was walking down the street when I saw my father. He was a war invalid of the first world war, and could not run, but with all his strength, he ran and we embraced. We both wept and made for home. I asked, “How is mother? How does she look?”

he answered

“you go in first and I’ll wait at the door, because if I go in suddenly, she might faint”.

Father was going to market, and when he opened the door, mother asked what he was doing at home. He said

“There are rumours that our son is coming”.

Mother was clever and asked

“Is he with you?”

then I opened the door

“Mother, I’ve come home”.

What luck an only son returns home”.

*“When was this?”*

“We were liberated on September ..... and 18 days later, I reached home. I arrived in September - the exact date I can’t remember, that was strange because no one else had yet arrived - prisoners of war – only me. There was a feeling of joy, and on the other side, of sadness. Of the Jews taken away in 1942 only two returned, no more.

Thereafter, I made up my mind to go on to Israel.

I must point out that I went to the police in order to clarify how it was that the French handed us over to the Germans. At the police station, the same agents who had taken me to the train were now of higher rank. The atmosphere was strained, they did not know how to deal with the subject called ‘collaboration with the Germans’. I was only 19, and knew little about laws. I was terribly upset when, as one who had returned, I saw the attitude of the police amongst themselves, as not understanding what I wanted. I dropped the subject, because I saw that in fact I was up against a stone wall and nothing would come of it.

Of course, my parents did not understand, in spite of what I had gone through, why all of a sudden I wanted to go to Bretz Israel. But I knew that the place of a Jew is not in France, in spite of the fact that many, like myself, had never felt that they were first Jews and afterwards, Frenchmen. There was a feeling that most of our youth, who had not been in the youth movement, belonged to France. When we celebrated the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, I think that all the Jewish youth then had the feeling of sharing the joy of the French, although we were not religious, we did not work on the festivals, and we fasted on Yom Kippur. If I have mentioned Yom Kippur, I must also mention the owner of the printing works, who all the time that I was in the camp, sent my parents, potatoes and coals once a week.

I also heard that he tried, through the Red Cross, to have me freed. Of course, he could not, because who succeeded in freeing a Jew? When I came to thank him for his help, he said “it was the least I could do from the human aspect, that same ‘Boss’, as a boy, also knew what Yom Kippur was, and ..... when I continued working at the printing, and there was no work, he took me on for work in small jobs. Every festival, he gave me a bottle of wine.

In 1940, I went on Machshara (preparation for agriculture in Israel) and left for Palestine on the first ship, the ‘Tei Mai’, that sailed from France.

On Machshara, there were many from the camps, and, in addition to the publicity in the newspapers, I met with the people who had also gone through the Holocaust, I had the fortune to have work, although it was hard, but I found home, I found father and mother.

I think the inhabitants of that little town deserve thanks, and there are no words that can do this. They saved 750 Jews”.

*“What did you do in the period from the end of 1944 to 1946?”*

“ I went back to work in printing and contacted the people who wanted to go on Allyan, and we organised going on Machshara. I spent four months in Marseilles-Barsna and was among the first people who were to go on Allyan, when I received a mobilisation order for the French army. I on no account wanted to serve in the French army. Adjoining Marseilles, there was a camp, where all the immigrants for Allyan were collected, and they left on Allyan. – The story of the ‘Exodus’ is also connected with Marseilles.

Yes, they came after us, here, I must point out that we embarked on a ship with the help of the French police. It was 1946. The matter of the Jews was still fresh, and the French tried, as it were, to atone for their sins in all kinds of things. They had never loved the English. The trust is that when the ship left Corsica, British ships pursued us. We were planning to disembark in Caesaria – at a kibbutz where I was later – and were caught opposite Kafiah. From there, they returned us to Haifa. We were at .....for four days, and in the framework of the 100,000 certificates for immigrants, each one of us went his way. I went with my Garin group for founding an agricultural unit to.....and the rest, dispersed. What was interesting was that the same immigrants that embarked with me on the ‘Tei Mai’ became a Garin or kibbutz Natzer Sironi where my daughter is a member today, and so, the circle was closed.

It seemed that my parents, like many of the Jews of France, did not understand in the years under the German conquest what was happening to the Jews. In one of the letters that I managed to receive from my parents, Mother asked me in all innocence to send her a photograph. This shows the position of the Jews of France, that even in 1942 when the Germans collected all the Jews of the town, the police informed some people of what was about to take place, but these people did what many did, they first took care of themselves and did not pass on the news.

Another thing that was interesting was, that when a German came to the house of a Jew, accompanied by a French policeman, who translated because the German soldier knew no French, the French policemen would say to the German 'We'll come back in another three hours' This was a clear hint: 'Take your packages and get away for a while and then come back'. Who understood this hint, save for a few who took their things and went somewhere else and then returned.

On the very day in 1942 that they took the Jews away, by train, an event happened that must be noted: The French brought another train to the station, opposite the train that the people had been placed in, they were to pass from one train to the other. But anyone who had the strength and the sense could jump and get out. They even took children out in a box with porters. A neighbour of ours, when her husband and three children had already crossed over, got down from the train and the guards turned around. He had no intention of arresting her. He simply turned round, she, in her fear, went back to the train and did not return. Perhaps the innocence of the people, the atmosphere, caused this. The very fact that we were with packages and prepared, explains our state of mind – of the Jews of France, who did not believe what could happen to us. Good that, today I am in Bretz Israel and can tell this”

*“Have you not met anyone of that group?”*

“The only one I met, not from the train out from that group, was a young fellow who needed evidence for compensation, and I gave evidence for him, but physically, I never saw him – to find him today – perhaps”.

*“And of the group with you on the Island?”*

“There was on the Island, and also in Dannescamler in the camp. It was from Dannescamler that we began to walk. He escaped and I never saw him again, but I know he is here in the land”.

*“Thank you very much”.*

Finnish

Signed:

Unit: