

## From the Testimony of Ludwig Weiler Describing the Daily Hardship in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Buchenwald.

Interviewer: What about your mother?

Ludwig Weiler: My mother actually survived also the selection and through the next few days we were able to pass through the electrified wires which were not only on the perimeter of the camp, but between each camp. We were taken to what was known as "Zigeunerlager", where the gypsies were, they were the biggest gangsters. They were a ruthless lot, those gypsies. And in fact we passed messages through, so I knew this aunt who I mentioned to you, knew, and we had a niece of my mother's late sister who stayed with us at home still, who was also together and then in the next month or so she was sent in a transport and I do not know where to. My aunt thought it could have been Stutthof. I was just last Sunday in Yad Vashem, trying to look through the Stutthof register - there is nothing. But very few people survived from Stutthof. That was up near Danzig on the Baltic Sea. I know that we got message from her and she got message from us that we are both around, you know, all the four of us.

And then from then on started the game, you know. I mean, for instance, I was telling Micki the other day, to the toilet, for instance, you had to be fifty people to go to the toilet. This was "stam" "tzoresmacher", you know, just to make life unpleasant. I mean, there was no reason why five couldn't go. I mean, that was within the camp. I mean, you didn't walk two hundred meters. I mean, it was within fifty meters to the latrine. You couldn't go. So, alright. One knew already within a day what happened because the other people told us. And then came a few things which we learned. One was - they used to give people who they wanted to get caught or they did something or didn't do anything, they gave them a sort of a "Fratz" on the face, but with the hand sort of bent here which practically flattened anybody. You can give a hit like that, and some of these kapos and people - there were no Germans actually inside the camp. It was all run by these good-for-nothing Jews and gypsies and whatnot.

Interviewer: Who was your kapo?

Ludwig Weiler: There in Birkenau I don't even remember because there were so many people, it was so new, you know, I mean, one had to get used to the surroundings and what happened was, it came to mealtime, okay? What is mealtime? "Doerrgemuese." That was the name of a bowl of soup in which some vegetable was floating around or something which resembled something in it. And the toothbrush business - how does one eat it? You're lined up sort of like ten by ten, say a hundred people, and then they gave ten bowls of this soup. So the first person got it to drink, and then he had to give it to the next one and so on. So I mean, no spoon, no nothing again. I mean, that stuff had absolutely no taste. Then eventually they gave rations, either the next day or the same day, I can't remember. A small piece of bread and "noch was dazu", "Leberpaste", you know, liver paste. Well, when it started kosher,....but the way how one was used to have an aversion to which is not kosher that was the first time - and my father said: "You must eat it." - there were people who could learn and said: "This is a question of life and death. You can't mess about." And they made me that I should eat it and I vomitted it up. You know, it was a reaction. Afterwards I would have already taken it if it was there. So anyway we were there, as I said ...on the documents of Buchenwald it says: "EINGELIEFERT VOM KZ AUSCHWITZ 18.JULI," so by the 18th of July we were in Buchenwald. That was six and a half thousand people. We were put on a transport.

Interviewer: In Auschwitz you had "Appell" everyday? You were taken to "Appell"?

Ludwig Weiler: Yes. There was an "Appell". It was in the "Zigeunerlager". That was more or less the transit camp because one uncle of mine, who survived actually, he stayed in Auschwitz and he was working what was know "Buna", "Gleiwitz", that area. And he was in fact the last one to come back because he was liberated by the Russians there and then they took him to near Minsk and he came only back in September, '45. At the time when we left, people said: "If you're out of here, you're ninety-nine percent saved." It was not ninety-nine, it was the other way around. Anyway, it was safer. I mean, that was definitely not a place to stay. And what happened was that when we were put

into...literally we were there not working, we were not doing anything. We had an uncomfortable existence and got used to it what it was all about there, you know. One grew up very quickly there. Within days we already knew what was happening, if not, a day was enough. So about the second or the third day, they made one...sure there were "Appells", of course there were. And there was this one "Appell" - they said that anybody under the age of sixteen should step out and they could go on easy work in a jam factory. I didn't step. I had my father there and my brother there in any case. Those who stepped out, they were never seen again. And basically, besides a lot of luck which you need at any time, one or two things you learned how to get by. One - never to volunteer for anything. Don't volunteer for anything, never to stand at the front or the back or on the side - always in the middle. It's warmer, if there's an "Appell" and it's cold. If they hit you, they hit the guy on the side, not the one in the middle. These were sort of little practical ideas which really meant sometimes an existence or not, you know. So there was no great events there. I mean, we saw a few people being killed in Auschwitz because these "Blockaeltestes" were absolutely cruel. Even so, some of them were Jews, but quite a lot of them were gypsies.

Even so, some of them were Jews, but quite a lot of them were gypsies. In actual fact, what happened was when we got back here - I'm talking towards the end, in February, '45 - Buchenwald was a very big lager. There was a "Zeltlager" on the bottom, there was a "Mittellager" and the "Grosslager". It was, I would say, by great majority, non-Jews there. That was the first "KZ" in Germany in 1933 - Buchenwald. That's eight kilometers from Weimar. And the "Zeltlager", where we were were mainly the Jews. And when we came back in from Zeiss in February, '45, we knew already the setup because we were already three months there before, and the internal management was in the hands of the German political "Haeflinge", the communists/socialists over there since '33, '34. And they were very decent people, very correct people. They were the idealist communists, not the gangsters afterwards and when Auschwitz was liberated by the Russians, well before it, they liquidated Auschwitz, but the Germans sent out the kapos and the Blockaelteste - they did not kill them in Auschwitz. They sent them to Buchenwald, interestingly

enough. Why I don't know. And when these guys arrived in January or even before to Buchenwald it was a known fact - there was a guy whose name was Gustaf - he was in East Germany a big "Macher". He was the head of the whole internal camp control.

Interviewer: In Buchenwald?

Ludwig Weiler: In Buchenwald, that's right, and he was some sort of big chap after the war in the DDR. And they used to run nightly "Kangaroo Court". In other words, any of these kapos or Blockaelteste who were sent back from Auschwitz to Buchenwald - if anybody knew that they maimed people, that they got killed so to speak, that guy didn't leave that block that night anymore alive. He was on the heap of dead people the next morning. Nobody cared, nobody knew whether there were thirty dead people out there or two hundred twenty - it was a number which they took the numbers down and that was that. And there was a very organized order inside the camp because these...Look, first of all they were German, secondly they were goyim. However they were political enemies of the Germans, they had a better understanding with them than any other nationality. There were French, there were Dutch, there were Norwegian, there were Russian prisoners-of-war there, Jews as well - everybody had a different triangle and that was that.

Taking it back when we left Birkenau, we got a ration.

Interviewer: So your whole block was taken, those thousand people?

Ludwig Weiler: Six and a half thousand people - one transport was made up. In the majority it was people from that area, but there other people were joined on.

Interviewer: Without selection, just everybody taken?

Ludwig Weiler: Yes. Those who were already, there was no further selection because it was within a week or so of arrival, two weeks or ten days. And they must have put together a number of blocks and they made up six and a half thousand people and we got rations. Very nice. We got on the similar wagons, already a little bit more comfortable, not such cramped conditions, and water we got. So we set off. We went to Chemnitz, to Leipzig, you know, up Germany. First through Katowice, you know, coming out from there. So we started eating our ration. We were two and a half days on the train and I

remember that was one of my worst fasting days of the whole camp area because literally the first day we ate up what we got, we thought we're going to get more "A NECHTIGEN TOG". Nothing we got more, till we arrived in Buchenwald. So when we arrived there we went through a registration. You can get a copy from the Yad Vashem - where I've got my signature, the only signature I've got from the age of fourteen. Fourteen years and three months old. And in the registration which I found here ten years ago, I found that I've got the same day of birth and month except I made myself two years older, as born in 1928, means I was over sixteen by that time. My brother who was only twenty-four made himself born in '26, so we were within two years by that time. So my father made himself five years younger than he was. By that time we were wise to what was going on. Everybody used the same date and month except the year. And as I told you before, that was divided into two transports - three thousand two hundred went to Magdeburg within a few days and three thousand two hundred to Zeiss. We were over the quota and we stayed when we were eventually....

Interviewer: But first you were in Buchenwald for awhile?

Ludwig Weiler: I'm talking of arrival within a week now. I'm talking of July, '44 in Buchenwald when we were in the "Zeltlager". So we were there for a little while. When this transport left we were kept in the "Zeltlager" with many other people and we were over the quota. For some reason or other there was only one Jewish block because they were two, three story concrete buildings in the "Grosslager", and there was only one Jewish block - Block 22. For some reason - I don't know why - they made a Block 23, also a Jewish block. And there life was much better than in the "Zeltlager". Better rations, better accommodation - you know, it wasn't just "Zelt" with straw mattress, with straw bag, but they were proper blocks, you know, so it was somewhat better, but it was still...in the summer it was hot, in the winter it was cold under a tent. And eventually we got into that Block 23, which was a very good move, it was very good.

Interviewer: Just your family?

Ludwig Weiler: My brother, my father and me, all the three of us. I don't know, maybe others as well, but, you know, we kept sort of together. And a few

cousins of mine went out to the Zeiss transport - that lawyer's son, that cousin of mine was in that he was not over the quota. And our numbers were - that was very strange - was my father, I was in the middle and I think...no, my brother, me and then my father. Somehow I was sandwiched between them and all the three of us stayed together which is very difficult because usually they try to keep brothers or fathers and sons separated and somehow....

Interviewer: But they knew you were father and sons?

Ludwig Weiler: Nobody asked any questions. Maybe the....again, these German "Haeflinge" who organized the transport, they might have known. Don't forget, we had one tremendous advantage - we spoke German, real Hoch deutsch. Nicht Yiddish. And so one could communicate with these political "Haeflinge" in their own language which, I suppose, even that can help. You know, something like that. Anyway, so I didn't go much to that at all. Somehow I managed to stay in the camp. My father and my brother went out in the "Steinbruch", you know, that's a stone quarry, in the morning after "Appell" and they came back in the afternoon. There was once an air raid which quite a lot of people got killed. I remember standing there at the gate waiting whether they came back, they were alright because they bombed around there, some other factory and some bombs fell in the "Steinbruch". And I got, which is an individual story, friendly with a Russian prisoner-of-war and the guy was deaf and dumb. And I was sitting on the ground and sort of we played, like put a "Hakenkreuz" (sickle) and he put a big...crossed it over. And then we put a hammer and Ohh!....I couldn't speak Russian, he couldn't speak at all. And suddenly he gave me a siddur. Siddur to have was a death sentence if they caught you, so I took it and I had it. And I don't know where he got it, I don't know how he had it - that was in Buchenwald. And I must have been one of the few, if anybody, who had a siddur. So I kept it. I don't know eventually, I think later on...anyway, so we were there. Life was quite reasonable. Food was not too bad. It was one of the best times in camps which we had.

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