

Transcript of the Shoah Interview with Filip Müller

Translation by Uta Allers - Volunteer – Visitor Services – Summer 2010

Germany – Müller

Cassette No. 7 – Side A

Bob. No. 75 (Mü 1)

La: Okay then, Filip, my first question is as follows: Why were you in ...

in the beginning in the political division in Block 11 in Auschwitz?

Mü: Well, I came into Block 11, which was not a political division; it was a Block 11, which had previously housed the penal division in 1942. This penal division was then moved to Birkenau, and I was sent with about 500 Jewish prisoners to this Block 11.

La: But that means...

Mü: In this Block 11, we ... a Kommando (*unit*) was set up, well, a Kommando was set up which went into the Buna Works every day...they had to work in the Buna Works.

La: One moment.

(Mü 2)

Mü: I came to Auschwitz on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, from Slovakia and got the number 29236.

La: You (*plural*) were the first resettlement from Slovakia?

Mü. That was part of the first resettlement, indeed, from Slovakia. In Block 11, I came from Birkenau in May, 1942. Before that, it was

Mü: Block 11, the so-called penal division lived there; that was a block of the political division. And we, about 400 Jewish or 400 to 500 Jewish prisoners, suddenly came from Birkenau into this block.

La: That means, when you arrived in Auschwitz, you were immediately sent to Birkenau?

Mü: No, first I came to Auschwitz. From Auschwitz I was sent to Birkenau the next day...

La: The next day.

Mü: Sent the next day, so off I marched, and then later after about 18 to 20, after about 3 weeks, I came back to Auschwitz.

La: to Auschwitz 1.

Mü: to Auschwitz 1 in the main camp into the so-called Block 11. In this block, there were mainly the bunker cells, the bunker cells, then the death wall; that's where the executions were carried out...

La: the black...

Mü: the black wall, yes. And, and across from there, across from this Block 11, later there was the dreaded Block 10, where the experiments with women were carried out.

La: Yes, medical, so-called...

Mü: Yes, where so-called pseudo-medical experiments were carried out.

La: But why were you chosen to stay in this block?

Mü: Very simple. I was...as I said before, I

Mü: worked in Birkenau. And suddenly, within a regular work Kommando, it was a street construction work Kommando...

La: Street construction

Mü: Street construction in Birkenau. In those days, Birkenau was not a finished site; it was merely Camp B 1, which was later the women's camp. And suddenly some SS men came and chose 500 men and sent us to Auschwitz.

La: Without, without, without any reason...

Mü: Without telling us why. And I came, I came, as I said before, around May, the first half of May, 1942, into Block 11. Before that, this block was the penal division.

La: Okay, so could you (*say*) something about your experiences in this Block 11 – what happened with...

Mü: Well, I think that Block 11 was the deciding factor about my fate later on. That was a Sunday in May. In May of 1942. And we were... the so-called exercises were being held that day: caps off, caps on, move, etc. Of course, if one didn't do it right, a prison guard by the name of Watzek, would get...

La: A Pole?

Mü: He was... I don't want to say a Pole, but maybe he was; well, I didn't get to know him well, but he spoke good German. He was probably an ethnic German.

La: Ah, yes.

Mü: From Upper Silesia. He was a big murderer. And if things weren't

Mü: done right, he always selected a few people and he beat these people to death.

Very suddenly...

La: Beat them to death.

Mü: Beat them to death with a..., well...

La: With a what, with a rubber...

Mü with a rubber truncheon

La: Yes.

Mü: And when this ritual had been carried out, it was time for the noon roll-call. And during this noon roll-call...

La: On this Sunday?

Mü: On this Sunday.

La: That's always the first day.

Mü: Always the first day. So we got to this...to this noon roll-call, and this Watzek now gave the order that this tea...that this tea had to be poured into the canal. So, he ordered the ...the tea to be poured into the canal. I was very thirsty, as were the other comrades. So we got only soup and had to, had to go into the block, were forced to do the so-called Sunday bed-rest, which was (*part of*) every Sunday in Auschwitz, which we had to do. And in the meantime, new tea had arrived, that is, new urns of tea had arrived, which were prepared for the evening. And since I was very thirsty, I spoke with a French comrade, I talked with him, I said....well, so, we agreed to...

La: A Jew from France?

Mü: A Jew named Maurice; we agreed that we would, probably we would, when there's some down-time, that we'd go into the yard, back to the yard, would drink the tea, which was there for the evening, because we were convinced, that this Watzek would pour out this tea in the evening again.

La: Meaning, that you were so thirsty...

Mü: I was; I was so thirsty that I couldn't stand it anymore. Besides, I was convinced that in the evening, this tea would be poured out again.

La: What kind of tea was it?

Mü: That was, one could say, not a real one; I would say it was water, not a real tea. It was just stinking swamp water. But it was a liquid. It was very important for a human being. Yes. That is, if you want to survive.

La: Yes.

Mü: Now, with this tea, when I wanted to drink it, I went to the yard, so I went to the yard with Maurice only when everyone in Block 11 was sleeping and I wanted to drink. And then I was caught. Suddenly, I felt from behind, that someone was pushing me into the water, into the urn.

La: into the, into the...

Mü: I wanted to sit down, but I couldn't. Suddenly I lost, I couldn't, couldn't breathe anymore. So,

Mü: suddenly I, I drank water, to the point of losing consciousness.

Bob. No. 76 (Mü 3)

Mü: When I came to, and with my friend... we were led down an unpaved road with a guard from 11, from Block 11 through a gate, turned right, and suddenly, about 100 meters, more than 100 meters in front of the gate, a building appeared in front of me, a flat building. Behind it, I saw a gate. Now I thought...I didn't know where we were being led. So, I thought they would shoot us.

La: And you...you had no idea what...

Mü: What, how, what, I had no idea, what would happen to the two of us. Suddenly, at the gate behind a small street light right by this building, there stood a young Sergeant, who said to us, "Get in, you swine," And we went into the hallway. We were driven in and in and in. We were in the hallway. Suddenly, I smelled such a stench. One was...it was smoke. Then we were driven further in and there I saw the silhouettes of the first two ovens. And in between the ovens, were running around, were running around there a few Jewish prisoners. We found ourselves then...

La: Running?

Mü: Running. We found ourselves then in the incinerator room of the crematorium of the main camp of Auschwitz.

La: How did you know that the people were Jewish prisoners?

Mü: Because I, when I got closer to them, I saw that they had here on the right side the Mogen David.

La: Yes, the Star of David.

Mü: The Star of David. And then we were driven from this incinerator room into a big room. There we were ordered to undress the corpses.

La: There were corpses?

Mü: I looked around the room. I saw perhaps several hundred, several hundred corpses: men, women, among them also Soviet prisoners of war, but also Jews, who had been forcibly chased in as each transport (*arrived*). Every transport, that is, those who were lying there. Among them lay suitcases. They were dressed. Strewn all over the place were bundels, the last possessions which they took with them, and all around I saw, all around I saw, strewn about, some blue-purple crystals. But I couldn't imagine what was going on. I just couldn't imagine, how one could kill so many people at one time.

La: But these people were all together in one room?

Mü: Yes, they, they, this room, as I found out later, was practically the gas chamber of the Auschwitz crematorium, which is standing there to this day.

La: Yes, I know.

Mü: And...I just couldn't imagine, how, by what means, one could kill that many people at one time.

La: And these people were not naked?

Mü: They weren't naked. We now had to undress these people.

La: These corpses?

Mü: These corpses. Obviously it was very hard work. Now, when we had undressed a few, we had to tend to the ovens. Suddenly a Sergeant came to me and said, “Get out, to the corpse ovens.” I didn’t know what “the corpse ovens” were; I got to the incinerator room and saw a Jewish prisoner there, who was later a foreman, named Fischer. He looked at me and I saw how he was stoking around in the oven with a long metal pole. So he said to me, “Grab this pole quickly, otherwise the SS man will beat you to death.” So, I grabbed this pole and stoked around with it...

La: What is a “Stange” (*English = pole*)

Mü: A steel pole. So I did as he did, what this Fischer ordered me to do. I was in shock at that moment, yes, as if hypnotized. I followed every order, whatever came at me. In that moment, I lost my sense of comprehension through what, what I, the terror, what I saw, that I did, I did everything that Fischer, the foreman, told me. Then the ovens were charged (*as in: fueled*), but we didn’t know the workings of these ovens that well. The ventilators were on longer than they should have been.

La: There were ventilators?

Mü: Indeed. There were ventilators, which were used to heat up the fire.

Mü: So, we let them run for a longer time and suddenly, the firebricks caved in. And with that, the pipes of the Auschwitz crematorium to the chimney were blocked. But in those days, the chimney wasn't the one it is today, in those days...the one that is visible today. Then it was red...the chimney...there was a red chimney. And through that, the incineration process was interrupted, and in the evening, first came the...we had to, we had to, we had to douse the ovens with water. And later in the evening, a few trucks came and we loaded the rest, maybe 300 corpses onto the trucks.

La: Because the ovens weren't working?

Mü: The ovens weren't working. They were inoperable. And we drove to some open area; to this day I don't know where I was, but probably I was out in the open, in a field in Birkenau.

La: Yes, that's...

Mü: And there I saw...

La: a detour (?)

Mü: Yes, and then suddenly I see...then we had to get out of the truck...

La: How many people were there?

Mü: There were six, six...of the Sonderkommando (*Special Unit*). So we had to get out and had to pull the corpses out of the truck and were ordered to (*throw*) these corpses into a pit...

Mü: It was a pit. And probably, it was a man-made pit, because...suddenly, the ground water came up, and the corpses fell into the pits. That's how the first day ended.

La: But, excuse me, there were SS people there with, with you?

Mü: Well, where, where we were, we were surrounded by SS guards, surrounded by SS weapons, that is, SS guards. Among them were also a few SS men. As I learned only later, this was about the then-Commandant Aumeyer, the then-head of the political division, Grauner, who (*plural*) gave the orders in those days and who were also on the field that night. When we had completed this horrible work, we were loaded back onto the truck and we drove back to Auschwitz.

La: But I read in your book, there were two young Jews, who...

Mü: That was later. Then we were locked into a bunker cell. It was one without a window. It was completely...we were completely cut off from the world.

La: Yes, in Block 11.

Mü: Yes, Block 11. And we lay there completely dirty, bleeding, (*cut off*) from everyone on this earth...

Bob. No. 77 (Mü 4)

La: Filip, on this Sunday in May '42, when did you come into the crematorium of Auschwitz 1 for the first time; how old were you?

Mü: I was 20 years old at the time.

La: 20

Mü: Just over 20, yes.

La: And you had no idea at the time that these people in Auschwitz had been gassed?

Mü: No, we had been in Birkenau before that. And there, no one (*spoke*) of these things then; things hadn't gone that far...

La: There was no crematorium in Birkenau at that time?

Mü: There was no crematorium in Birkenau then, yes.

La: yes, yes, yes

Mü: So, as I said, the first time I saw these piles of corpses, still clothed, I racked my brain, how this, how it was possible, how could one in one (*fell swoop*)...I knew they had been killed, but I didn't know how one could kill that many people at one time. Only later...

La: The corpses were cold or...

Mü: Well, the corpses could have been somewhat, I don't know, well, when I arrived, they might have been gassed maybe 2 or 3 hours before. Probably. Only later, when I saw the people alive, but that's...

La: Yes, but that is...?

Mü: But back to the subject...So, around midnight...we arrived at the block at night...

La: (*That was*) your first encounter with the corpses?

Mü: With corpses, clothed. With suitcases, with bundles. And the people had, the people had probably been forcibly driven in there.

La: And you, you didn't talk to the other Jews, who were already there?

Mü: These, these, these comrades, who were already there, they came about an hour before I did, they came an hour before me, before me. I asked them later, how did you get there, how did you get into the Sonderkommando? Then they told me that they were told that (*the SS*) were looking around for a few men for work which was well...that is, whoever could work, would be treated well, treated well. So they volunteered, so they could work. But not one of them knew where, how...

La: Yes, they were disappointed.

Mü: Of course, shocked, just as I was.

La: Could you describe that shock a bit more?

Mü: Yes, it was quite...how can I say it...in that moment, when I saw that, in the first instant, it's like a...as if you were hit in the head by lightning. I didn't even know where I was, what, what I ...where I even was. Then I looked at the people. And now another thing. When I

Mü: undressed (*them*), you know I had to undress some of the corpses, suddenly I took advantage of a moment, when the SS Sergeant went into the incineration room, to look around and there I saw a woman, that is, a corpse, it was a girl, who was lying there, and I said, and I looked at her, and I recognized a schoolmate from my school in Serrek.

La: A schoolmate.

Mü: And now...her name was Johanna Schwarz. Her father had a ritual Jewish bath, a mikveh in Serrek. I was... but I wasn't sure if it is she. But since I knew that one of her hands was crippled, it was very thin, so in school she had to write with her left hand; I went, I went to her and touched her hand. It was true. So, the shock...as I already said, was enormous. You just didn't know what, where you were, how you got there.

La: And in this instant, you were afraid for your own life.

Mü: No, in that instant, I, I wasn't, wasn't thinking about my own life. I didn't have time to, to... We were being driven, horribly, everything was driven. We were driven.

La: driven?

Mü: It was either undress or go to the ovens and back from the ovens to undressing again. I had never seen a corpse

Mü: before.

La: Never?

Mü: When I... when I was a high school student. The first time...

La: What were you...?

Mü: A high school student. And when I now saw so many hundreds of corpses, then I became afraid to touch them. So, I didn't know if the SS would have shot us on the spot. That's how it was. Now back to the subject. When we arrived back from the pits in the middle of the night, were locked into the cell, that was quite bright, quite...that is, a dark cell, I would say, without windows. About noon, we were taken out of there and again led to the exit at the gate. There we had to get into a Sanka, an ambulance, and again were taken to the site where we had thrown the corpses in the night before.

La: This pit?

Mü: Yes, but the water was much higher. Then a big, a big fire engine truck with SS came and they pumped the water out from the field.

La: Oh yes, pumped it out.

Mü: And then we had to get into the muck up to here and had to pull these corpses into a pile. Of course...

La: Why, why?

Mü: Yes, because they were...when we, when we threw them from above they were spread out. Now probably,

Mü: the SS wanted them in a pile, so they wouldn't be all strewn about, to be able to cover them.

La: They wanted order in the...

Mü: No, not because of order, I don't think so. I think, it was because the pile shouldn't be spread out. So, we had to (*retrieve*) the corpses, which were slippery by now if you...now I, shall we say, for example, touched a, a, a woman, whose hands, the hand was slippery, slimy and suddenly I wanted to pull, but I flew into the water, that muck. And the others came and they did the same. On the edge stood Aumeyer and Grabner, "You pigs, get going and work, etc. I'll show you how to work. You pigs." That's how we were harassed, with insults like that. And under these, what can I say, under these conditions, there were two comrades who couldn't keep up. There was also a French student. Yes.

:La: Were they all Jews?

Mü: All Jews. Suddenly he couldn't go on. And he just lay there in the muck. Then Aumeyer called to his Sergeant, "SS Sergeant, get going, finish off those pigs."

La: The one who couldn't go on?

Mü: Those who couldn't go on. And they were shot in the pit.

La: Why, why do you think they couldn't go on?

Mü: Well, physically they were exhausted, physically. It was very hard work. And they were, we were in the muck up to here and we still had to pull the corpses. And they also fell into the muck several times. They probably got the muck...well, either they had their mouths open, so they got some of it. They couldn't breathe. Everything was blocked up with mud, with them too. That was death itself, a terrible scene and that's how those two were shot to death.

La: Shot to death?

Mü: Dead, then and there.

La: Dead.

Mü: So I just expected..., how long can I, how long can we endure? And then suddenly we were told we were to... we went up and (*covered*) the corpses with a shovel, that is, shoveled dirt over the corpses.

La: With what?

Mü: We shoveled the dirt from up top.

La: Oh, I see.

Mü: And in between, there was a barrel, a big barrel with chlorine lime, and that we had to spread...chlorine lime over them. Suddenly it came to that, that we were able to cover these people, a bit with the, with the, with the earth, but then came the order "get out", and we moved out.

La: The order, that is...

Bob. No. 78 (Mü 5)

Mü: Then we were forced to board the Sanka truck, to get into the ambulance again and came back to Block 11. Dirty, bleeding, shocked along with my comrades and later we got a cell, No. 13, in which we were housed. So, the Sonderkommando lived in the bunker in Cell 13.

La: Were you locked into this cell?

Mü: This cell was underground, closed off, and from this moment on, we were on-call as the bearers of the secrets of the dead. We were not allowed to speak with anyone, to have any contact with any prisoner. Actually, not even with SS men. Only with those, who were authorized for this undertaking.

La: That was a hard cross to bear.

Mü: That was a hard cross to bear. And so it went on; we stayed in Cell 13 for a few days. There was a window, and it was possible to hear what was going on in the yard.

La: The executions?

Mü: The executions, how people screamed and the yelling, but we didn't see it.

La: Yes, but there was...

Mü: Yes, but there was one... they were blocked these, these, these windows.

La: They could, they could (*let in*) a bit of air...

Mü: Yes, because of the air.

La: But you couldn't see what was going on in the yard.

Mü: Yes, what's happening. Yes, and that's how it was for a few days. Suddenly an SS Sergeant from the political division came again and .....(?) It was around 4 a.m. or very early in the morning.

La: In the, in the night.

Mü: The block was still sleeping, everyone was sleeping. Everything was totally quiet, and we, I want to stress this, about the two Frenchmen who were shot, whom I mentioned, two new ones had joined us.

La: Meaning, how many people are...were in Cell 13?

Mü: There were six in the cell.

La: Six.

Mü: Six. And again, we were taken out of the bunker cell and we went to the crematorium. And I have to describe what I experienced there. It was my first encounter with people who were still alive. We had to stand along the wall and were told, "No one is allowed to speak with these people."

La: Who said that?

Mü: The SS. An SS (*man*). We just asked ourselves, so why are we here? What are we supposed to be doing? Why do they need us here?

La: You asked?

Mü: Yes, I mean, each of us asked ourselves.

La: Yes, and it was night?

Mü: No, early morning.

La: Early morning.

Mü: Suddenly there was a procession. The wooden door to the crematorium in the yard opened, for there was no room for undressing there. The wooden door opened and a procession of about 250 to 300 people, older people and women, came in. They carried bundles, had the Star of David...

La: All Jews?

Mü: All Jews. And from afar, I could see that they were Polish Jews.

La: How did you know that?

Mü: Because...I'll tell you in a moment...who probably came from Upper Silesia. They had...

La: near Auschwitz

Mü: Yes, near Auschwitz. I could tell from their talk, from their way of speaking, how they said, "fachowitz", which means "a skilled tradesman". And then I could make out, "Malekenowis", that's Yiddish for "the angel of death", then "harginnen", "that's how they will kill us", and from that, from those words, which I heard, it was clear to me what was going on the minds of these people. Once they spoke about work; they were probably hoping that they would be able to work. Once

Mü: they spoke of “Malekenovis”, that is “the angel of death”.

La: Both concepts together?

Mü: Those two concepts were in opposition. The words pushed against each other.  
Suddenly there was silence among the people in the yard of the crematorium

La: There was a yard by the ...

Mü: A yard. A forecourt. It’s still there. In those days it was, it was surrounded by  
fencing, fenced in...

La: Can you describe how these people...were they, were they tired?

Mü: Yes, I can, I would, I...suddenly as I said, these people seemed to be in shock.  
One could see, that they were, that they were terrified. They, they, probably  
from...probably they had an inkling that something wasn’t right here, but not one  
of them could, not even by the farthest stretch, could imagine that, maybe in 3 or  
4 hours, he could be turned into ashes. Such a thing couldn’t...

La: How did these, these, these people... these people came by train; you don’t  
know?

Mü: These people, well, I saw them only when they arrived at the crematorium. But I  
think, they came by train at the then-Auschwitz ramp.

La: The first ramp...

Mü: The first ramp. I think, everything was decided there.

La: And you think that these people were Jews from Upper Silesia?

Mü: For sure they were. I can say that because, later, we had to sort through their things. Those were Jews. They came from the ghetto, Sosnowiec-Bedzin.

La: Yes, that's...

Mü: ....? about 35 kilometers. And it became clear, that within earshot of these people, that they had already heard a lot.

La: About Auschwitz?

Mü: About Auschwitz. But who would, who would...realize, I mean, who would...go so far as to...that he could imagine, that he would be turned, as I already said, into ashes in the next 3 hours?

La: There were women?

Mü: Women, men, children too.

La: Children too. Old men.

Mü: Older ones, it was mixed. Now suddenly quiet. There was suddenly a silence in that moment. And all those eyes looked at the flat roof of the crematorium. And who was standing there? Aumeyer, that SS man, the head of the political division, Grabner, and the Sergeant, and, back then, I don't think he had that title, but he was already a higher-up, that is, a junior officer, Höslar. Then Aumeyer began speaking to the people. I just want to mention it, how, how, how it looked, for you couldn't tell one from the other.

La: Yes, and you yourself were in the yard with the Sonderkommando?

Mü: In the yard. Maybe 4 or 5 meters from them. We just stood there. We still didn't know why we were supposed to stand there. What was the meaning of this? And then Aumeyer said to the crowd, "You came here to work for our soldiers on the battle front. And whoever can work, will be treated well." Suddenly you could see that the people, that in people a bit of hope was awakened. You could really feel it... Or you could see it happening. They started to... Grabner spoke to the people, "We need masons, we need electricians, we need all the tradespeople." Then Hösler spoke again. And he looked into the crowd, the crowd and saw a little man. To this day, I see him before me. "What is your occupation?" The man said, "Sir Officer, I am a tailor." "You're a tailor? What kind of tailor are you?" "I am a men's, no, I am a men's and a women's tailor." "Wonderful, we need people like you in our workshops." He continued to look, turned to a woman and asked,

Bob. No. 79 (Mü 6)

Mü: "Wonderful, we need people like you. Come and see us when you come back from the bath." And suddenly he continued to look into the crowd. There was a woman. He said to her, "What is your occupation?" "Nurse", said the woman. "Nurse, good, that's what we need, nurses, for our hospitals for our wounded soldiers. Come to us in a moment. We need everyone,

Mü: skilled workmen, nurses, we need everyone. Only, you have to undress now because you have to be disinfected. We have to do this for your health,” Aumeyer said again on the...

La: To the crowd from the roof...

Mü: and (*he was*) on the roof. And the crowd, from my perspective, as I saw them, seemed to be quieted down. They believed that they were needed for work. They were happy that they had been assured and they started to undress. And when they were undressed, they went through the hallway...

La: Yes, but where were, where did they (*put*) their clothes...

Mü: In the yard. Their clothes stayed in the yard. In the yard.

La: Everywhere?

Mü: Everywhere. Spread out all over. And then they stayed (*there*)...

La: And they had no idea...so the men and women together?

Mü: As I said earlier, you have to see it like this, that the people came from a ghetto. They had already been through a lot of hardships. And probably they had heard a lot. It was only 25 kilometers from Auschwitz. But when they were told all that, yes, then they were probably convinced of that, so that even if they had their doubts, that...if you want to live, you have to have hope. Then they went, got undressed. And in this way, that I already, that I just told you, that was the first, well, that's how the first strategy (*was carried out*)

Mü: so, the first was...in this way, by which the people got...the people had to get undressed, then another strategy was developed, how shall I say, another step...now the clothing could be used.

La: Yes, so what did Aumeyer say?

Mü: Oh, Aumeyer was, he seemed to be very satisfied with what he had done. And he turned to some of the SS leaders and said to them, "See that. That's how you have to do it." Because before...

La: That was the strategy?

Mü: Yes, this strategy. That's how you have to do it. Because before, the people had been forcibly driven in...

La: ??

Mü: I didn't describe that to you...the people were driven while being beaten.

La: You saw that too?

Mü: I saw that too, of course.

La: In the crematorium?

Mü: In the Auschwitz crematorium. The SS men beat them.

La: But that is, that is, that is a big question, and if you like, we can talk about that right now. People are always saying, that in Auschwitz, the killing business was quite well organized and that people were so disappointed that they (*Jews*) went to their deaths very quietly without the use of violence. I want to ask you, is that true, because I don't think so, I think, there was, there

La: was always violence.

Mü: I want to answer that, as I saw it. I think, you can't talk about it in the sense, that the people, the people, who came, went in like sheep, they way we often hear about it. They were supposed to go in like sheep. Now look, that just isn't the case. You have to see like this – before every gassing action, the SS had already taken severe preparatory measures.

La: very severe...?

Mü: precautions

La: What is that “measures”? Oh, yes, yes.

Mü: The entire area was fenced in with SS weapons. Dogs were barking. Machine guns were in place. People coming in (*saw*) all that, this entire scene, how can I say, saw it all.

La: They saw all that...

Mü: Yes, they saw that SS men were standing in the street, that dogs were barking, that there were machine guns, so, as I said, they were...each of them doubted, mainly the Polish Jews, mainly, they doubted, that what they had been promised, if that was true. But against such a show of force, hardly anyone could do anything. On the contrary. People said to themselves, if I want to live, I have to hope, that such things, that

Mü: despite that, they would go to work, even if they, if they....if maybe they had heard about this whole thing..

La: That means, there was always violence.

Mü: Yes, yes.

La: Can you .... (*incomprehensible conversation between Lanzmann and Müller*)

Mü: I'll give you some examples. In the year 1943, in the year 1943, when there was already a crematorium in Birkenau...

La: Crematorium 5.

Mü: 5... in Birkenau, a transport arrived from, I think from Bialystok. And there a prisoner of the Sonderkommando came upon a woman, the woman of, that is, a, a, a woman entered his (*gas*) chamber, who was (*the wife of*) a comrade...the wife of his friend. At that point, he said to her right then and there, "You will be killed. In three hours you will be ashes."

La: He said that.

Mü: Right out in the open. Then this woman ran around. She believed him because she knew him, she knew this man.

La: And why suddenly this...

Mü: And this woman ran around and told other women. "They are going to kill us...they will kill us...they will gas us to death."

La: You saw that.

Mü: And the people, the mothers, who were carrying their children on their shoulders, they didn't want to hear it. They thought that this woman is crazy. They refused to believe her. They didn't want to hear it. They wouldn't even believe what someone was telling them. Then she turned to the men. No use. On the contrary, how can I say it, it made ...the torturous dying, that already torturous dying was made even worse. That didn't help. And there was never, not just with Jews, you see, there were also, there were political prisoners, partisans, Soviet POWs, etc., and they didn't fight against this either. So, I ...yes, the moment when she was standing in front of the wall...Possibly they could also hear what was happening to her. So, it's not true when people say they (*the Jews*) went like sheep, it's that they were overwhelmed...faced with unbelievable force directed against them.

La: Yes, but I would like to...

Mü: ...if they were Polish...?

La: ...an example...

Mü: Yes, an example, as I told you, an example is where a woman was told, you are going into the gas chamber, you will, you will be incinerated. Yes, yes, turned into ashes. And this woman ran to the others and told them. They didn't want to hear it. It's not that they didn't believe it. They

Mü: had heard a lot in Bialystok, in the ghetto of Grodno and such. But who would want to hear something like that?

La: Yes, yes, I understand.

Mü: And now you have to imagine too, that...when...until they came to the crematorium, they hadn't seen this terrible violence, which was directed at them: dogs, I'll make a point of it again, machine guns, and all that taken together ...that the only way out was hope...

Bob. 79 (Mü 7)

Mü: I want to come back to this woman, as one could say, to what became of her, this woman, when she told it to others, and as she saw that no one believed her, she scratched up her whole face and went into despair, into shock.

La: You saw that?

Mü: I saw that. And she screamed. And then she went to the people again. And they thought she was crazy. And suddenly Höslér came. When he saw what was going on, he sent for this woman and said, "What, what, what are you doing?" He spoke to her. And the woman said, "Yes, Mr. Commandant, you want to kill us? You want to beat us to death. You want to destroy us." Yes, that's how she said it. And Höslér said, "Woman, you must be crazy. You are not sane." That's how he responded to the woman.

La: Was he a good actor?

Mü: He was the greatest actor; we called him the treacherous liar.

La: The treacherous liar?

Mü: Liar, that's what we called this Hösler, Sergeant Hösler. And when, despite that (*his act*), people here and there refused to undress, suddenly a horde of guards with dogs came into, in front of, in front of, in front of the undressing room. And the dogs barked at the people again and again, and probably showed the people again what would happen to them if they didn't get undressed. And then Hösler spoke to them again. "People, get undressed; you have to get disinfected. There's a war going on. And if, if, if you don't get disinfected, you can't get assigned into a work group. And whoever doesn't work, can't live during a war. So, what do you people want? Don't you want to live?" That's how he talked to them again.

La: Did these people have lice?

Mü: No, no, but it was said that everyone who came into the camp, there was that saying, had to be disinfected to prevent disease. They always said, it's for your own good. That's how, how it was always pushed by the SS. And suddenly when the people saw this, they undressed and how did it end? They went into the gas chamber. But the woman was left outside, the one who had been running around.  
And now

Mü: she had to, we all had to line up. Before that, they tortured her, tortured her terribly because she wouldn't tell. And when she was being tortured...

La: Because they wanted to know...

Mü: ...who had said that to her. And then she (*pointed at*) one...

La: One of the Sonderkommando.

Mü: Yes, that...yes, that was a, a friend, the one from Grodno. And he had told her, so then she pointed to him. He was taken out and (*pushed*) alive into the oven.

La: Did you see that?

Mü: Yes. That is...I was standing there, we all had to line up for them and in front of the ovens we were told, whoever tells, will end up like this.

La: And how do you explain that this man from Grodno, this Sonderkommando man suddenly told the woman the truth, because he knew that...

Mü: Look here. I'll (*say*) this with a few...we had been wondering, we had wondered a lot in this Sonderkommando, how one, how one could tell this to people at all, how one could get this across to people. But this experience, it wasn't a one-time thing; I'd say, it happened several times, so we said to ourselves, this showed that it doesn't do any good, that there's no point to it...it just made life even harder. Maybe it had a minor purpose, we thought that with Jews, who came from Poland or Jews from Theresienstadt, from the family camp, who

Mü: had lived in Birkenau for half a year, yes, maybe it could have had, that's what we believed, a purpose to tell these people. But just imagine how it was in other instances. The Jews from Greece, Jews from Hungary, Jews from Corfu..., who had been traveling for 10 or 12 days. Starved and without water for several days, thirsty, they arrived in a state of being only half-alive. They treated those differently. They weren't told...they were told, get undressed and then you'll get a cup of tea. And these people were so desperate, because of, that is, that they had such a long, had been in the train cars for such a long time, that their whole...their entire focus was just to quench their thirst. And the henchmen, the SS, knew this very well, that was part of the plan, I would say, it was a premeditated...

La: ...process

Mü: It was a premeditated destruction process, which counted on the fact that when people were so weakened, if they were given nothing to drink, then they would just go into the gas chamber, but practically speaking – one could say – these people were almost half dead, half dead prior to the gas chamber. Just imagine, the children, pleading with their mothers, they were screaming, “Mother, please, water, water, water, water.” And the people who hadn't had anything to drink for several days, yes, they were fixated only on this need. So, to have told these people anything, would have made no sense whatsoever.

La: It made no sense...

Mü: It made no sense to tell them the truth. I think in this situation, if you will, to my way of thinking, it made no sense to tell the truth to anyone, who had already crossed the entrance of the crematorium.

Cassette No. 7 – Side B

Mü: Everyone who crossed the threshold of the crematorium...there was nothing to rescue. It was impossible, it was...

La: To rescue

Mü: To rescue. That would have had to happen sooner. To my way of thinking, somewhere else, at another place. See, there were several countries, let's say Slovakia, France, partly Holland, partly Belgium, which handed over their citizens. Handed over their own citizens. Many even paid for that, to get rid of them. And the proof, that rescue was possible, was shown us by Finland, Denmark, by these small, small countries, who (*whose citizens*) were here and which were occupied.

La: Yes, so you think in Auschwitz it was too late.

Mü: Well, in Auschwitz there was no space for it. Or, I'll give you another example, in the year 1944, I ...with my, with the two escapee comrades, Alfred...

La: No, later, later, later.

Mü: So, here I would say, whosoever crossed the threshold of the cre...the, the, the house of death, the site of destruction, as I see it, never had a chance.

La: And now a different question. How many crematoria were in Birkenau?

Mü: Yes, in the spring of 1943, there were four crematoria in Birkenau. For 1, 2 and 3, for each of these crematoria, there were 15 ovens. There was a large undressing room of about 250 or maybe more than 280 square meters and a large gas chamber, where up to 3000 were gassed at once.

La: Did you see Crematorium 2 yourself?

Mü: Yes.

La: Did you work in Crematorium 2?

Mü: Yes, I worked there several times as well, even though I had my steady, my, my, I would say, where I was assigned, that was Crematorium 5. But if one needed something, let's say, for the resistance movement, to organize something, yes, or to get one's hands on something, some photographs too, for many photographs had been buried, those must be in Auschwitz to this very day. We also made sure that the world might some day dig in this area, would dig.

Bob. No. 81 (Mü 8)

La: Filip, I was in Auschwitz a few months ago, and I saw the gas chamber, the crematoria, what's there today...

Mü: ...in ruins.

La: They are ruins, they were destroyed. But in Crematorium 2 and Crematorium 3, it is possible even today to see the stairs from the undressing rooms. There are the stairs and I was there at these stairs, and I thought, here it was too late. And I knew too that it was too late before that. But I would like you, if you can, to describe exactly, what was the impression, what were the people thinking, the Jews, when they (*went*) through in the undressing barracks, the undressing room. What did the undressing room look like? I mean, in Crematorium 2.

Mü: Yes, yes. So, Crematorium 2, as I said, was identical to Crematorium 3. The big undressing room was underground...

La: It was a...these Crematoria 2 and 3 were perfectly (*designed*)?

Mü: Yes, perfectly designed (*said sardonically*). The destruction was pretty much a perfect (*operation*), so that the deception strategy, deceiving the people was carried out to perfection.

La: Yes, and can you...

Mü: When one (*incomprehensible as both talk at the same time*) ...Crematorium 2. Crematorium 3 was similar. The lower part, when coming down the yard on the right, on the right were steps.

La: There was a yard?

Mü: A yard.

La: A big one?

Mü: A pretty big one, and in every yard was an iron gate.

La: And the people came from the ramp...

Mü: And the people came from the ramp. They came from the ramp and moved toward the women's camp and then down the street to Crematorium 2.

La: There was a street?

Mü: Yes, a street. Yes, that was the ramp to Crematorium 2 and 3; it was maybe 250, 300 meters away. Not more.

La: It's so surprising.

Mü: And now, it was...

La: Excuse me, a different question. How did these buildings...

Mü: ...how did they look?

La: Yes.

Mü: When you approached, let's say, Crematorium 2...when one approached Crematorium 2, you opened the big, iron, massive door. That was the yard and on the right, well, and before your very eyes, just imagine, there was a building with a single gigantic chimney. A chimney, that was jutting out a bit. On the right, on the right wing of this big red brick building were, were the stairs that led underground to the undressing room.

La: The undressing room and the gas chambers were...

Mü: Underground, yes indeed. How they got into the undressing room, you saw that, that the undressing room looked like an international information center. That's how it looked.

La: Oh yes, it was very big?

Mü: Big. It might be, I would say, several hundred square meters. And on the walls, there were hooks and every hook, on every hook was a number. And under the hooks were benches made of wood.

La: Benches?

Mü: So people could get undressed, more comfortably, as one would say. And then all those columns, which were holding up these, these, these underground, in this underground bunker. It was a bunker after all, this undressing room. There were lots of posters, for example "Cleanliness, clean is good." (*in German it rhymes: "rein ist fein"*)

La: Clean is good.

Mü: Is good. "A louse, your death." "Wash yourself". "To the disinfection room."

La: Lots of posters?

Mü: Lots, lots of signs and posters like that...for the sole purpose was to lure the people, once undressed, into these extermination, that is, into the gas chambers. Besides that, of course, there was light...

La: Electric light?

Mü: Electric light. And to the left, that is, to the right when you

Mü: enter, when you come into the undressing room, there in the right hand corner, across the room was the gas chamber, equipped with a huge door...

La: How was it (*situated*)?

Mü: It was in the right hand corner. That's how the undressing room was and how the gas chamber was. And there they saw lots of columns and above on the ceiling showers had been installed.

La: In the gas chambers?

Mü: In the gas chambers.

La: No, no, I'm not in the gas chamber; I'm in the undressing room.

Mü: In the undress...

La: I want to know, where the Jews entered the undressing room. Where were the other people? For example, how many SS were in...

Mü: It was like this. These people came in...the people were led in from the ramp with SS guards up to, up to the crematorium. The crematorium was surrounded by SS, by SS.

La: Always?

Mü: Always. There were electrified ditches and above them stood SS guards with machine guns.

La: In the yard?

Mü: In the yard. The yard was surrounded by the, by the SS guards. And besides them, moving about in the yard were lots of SS men with dogs...

La: Was it always like that?

Mü: Always. Always like that. It was a big show of force, how they did that

Mü: and this force wasn't used only if the people behaved peacefully - as they always said – peacefully. Do you understand? Of course, people went down the stairs.

That's how they got into that room.

La: Into a gigantic room.

Mü: Into this large, gigantic room. I always say, it always looked like a big international information center, because the signs said “baths”, “to the showers”, installed in many languages.

La: In many languages.

Mü: And the people, people's reaction was varied. Of course, it was different for Jews coming from Sosnowitz, who had heard a lot already or from Benjin...or from Warsaw, from Warsaw or from other Polish ghettos. They had heard a lot already. And the other thing was, as I said before, with Hungarian and Greek Jews, French, Polish, who had no idea what was coming at them, but who were in such bad shape from the whole trip...

La: Excuse me...was there a stink, a...

Mü: I would put it like this, people always said, that it was a sickly sweet smell...But since I was there all the time, I already, I didn't perceive it. I can't tell you. So, I can't tell you...

La: But you heard...

Mü: I was there all the time. I didn't perceive whether the room was sickly sweet or not.

La: But for instance, this enormous chimney was...was functioning. There was smoke?

Mü: No, not always. Even when the chimney, that is, when the crematorium was in use, the smoke was not always so strong, that people would guess what was going on. And they were convinced, after all, that they would go into a disinfection room, and they had been told... (*the SS*) was prepared even to tell them, if maybe they had asked, that this chimney belonged to the disinfection room.

La: Yes, and another question. In the undressing room, were there people from the Sonderkommando?

Bob. No. 82 (Mü 9)

La: Were there people from the Sonderkommando in the undressing room?

Mü: Yes, in the beginning that was not the case. Then, only later, a few prisoners of the Sonderkommando were present in the undressing room, but they were, they were not allowed, that is, they were separated, they were not allowed, they were not supposed to, that is, have contact with the others. But it was always possible to speak with the people. The job of the Sonderkommando...

La: But what...the job...

Mü: Now, the Sonderkommando was there ready, right when people got undressed. No, no, they didn't help. When people were undressed, the SS drove them into the gas chamber, or, or when they went into the gas chamber, the clothes were left behind.

Mü: Yes, there were the, the...

La: Ah, the clothing.

Mü: The clothing, that is, the people's belongings. And the job of the Sonderkommando was, as quickly as possible, to load up the people's belongings, that is, what was left behind, up the stairs onto the truck. That was the task, and to clean up the undressing room, so others could come. Because it was like this, that the undressing room, when, let's say, 2,000 people had been gassed, as I said before, in total one could, if it was packed full, which was seldom, the gas chamber in Crematorium 2, in 3, one could (*pack in*) 3,000, so one could...they, they, the SS could pack in up to 3,000. But in the undressing room, no more than about 1,000 people can move about, so the 1,000 had to wait outside. And so the Sonderkommando had to be ready to go. Besides, I think it was also somewhat an intentional assignment of the SS to show the Sonderkommando, that even they, the prisoners too, who themselves wore the Jewish Star, perhaps to make it easier for the victims. So then (*they thought*) nothing could happen to them. Psychologically, to keep things calm, when they saw, when they saw us maybe. Well, I was only there on occasion. Yes, but I was in the undressing room several times. Even if I really had nothing to do there, for I was a fireman (*could also be "stoker"*) in the crematoria. But I, I think, that the job was also this

Mü: among others...that is, when the people saw the prisoners...

La: ...between, between the undressing room and the gas chamber what was there, a tunnel, a ...

Mü: between the undressing room...

La: ...in Crematorium 2

Mü: Above that was only a small, very small, long small room, which, which could be, if one were at the end of the dressing room, then there was a 10 or 15 meter long room, an anteroom , and there on the left the victims would bend down into the gas chamber.

La: And how wide was this...

Mü: That could have been, oh, maybe 4 1/2, 5 meters wide.

La: 4 1/2, 5 meters

Mü: I don't know, but I imagine it was that.

La: Yes, and the victims, who were in the undressing barracks, the undressing room, did they try to talk with people in the Sonderkommando?

Mü: Yes, that is, the possibility was... that is, that was forbidden, as I already said, yes, because the Sonderkommando, the Sonderkommando had to stand apart from the people.

La: Yes, but how, how, how, was it possible, because everything was very mixed, wasn't it?

Mü: Yes, it wasn't, wasn't like that, it wasn't like that (*not mixed*). On the

Mü: one side were women and children, on the other side were men and in between them, the SS.

La: The SS in the middle?

Mü: Yes, yes. And only at the stairs, if one is outside, where they came in, several of the Sonderkommando prisoners had to stand there. And they were under guard. And even with this, it was possible, in some cases, to communicate with the people; it was possible, sometimes, that is, the ones who were in front, to have a word or two with them. That was possible.

La: And...

Mü: Not with all of them, mind you, just the ones standing in front.

La: Yes. And what happened to the man from Grodno?

Mü: Yes, I think his name was Terensky? What was his name? The one who told from Grodno. The woman. What (*happened to*) her? What, what kind of a fate awaited them, those people, was to be thrown alive into the oven. We had to stand there and watch with a warning...

La: He cried, screamed, he...

Mü: Oh, I think, he was, he was quiet still. He was tied up...

La: Tied up?

Mü: Tied up from behind. And a second case that I remember, was a, was a friend, Leo Stein, from Dabo in Czechoslovakia, who also told in one case and the same fate awaited him. He was burned alive too.

La: So now, did the people of the Sonderkommando accompany the people into, into the gas chamber?

Mü: No, never, no.

La: That never happened?

Mü: No, I heard...

La: That happened in Treblinka, for instance.

Mü: Well, it didn't happen in Auschwitz, although I've read about that several times. You know, there is a lot of fiction out there. I also read, in the last book of Anus Mungi... which (*is written*) by, I would say, a very old, experienced prisoner about Auschwitz. And he wrote that before the gassing, people were given towels and, and, and soap, etc. That is more or less fiction. And one has to understand, that, that the prisoners had no access to these extermination sites. In their imagination, a lot of things...well, they saw how thousands, tens of thousands went into the gas chambers and no one came out. The people know that, that is, the other prisoners of the camp. So it's no wonder that a few fantasies, which are not quite accurate, got stored in their mind's eye. So, that the Sonderkommando (*accompanied*) someone, that the prisoners of the Sonderkommando went into the gas chamber or such, that's not true. That's more or less a piece of fiction.

La: Yes, and you were mostly in Crematorium 5?

Mü: Yes.

La: Crematorium 5 was in the woods?

Mü: Yes, Crematorium 5 was the last crematorium in the row, behind, not far from the sauna.

La: The so-called...

Mü: So-called sauna by the little woods. Crematorium 5 and Crematorium 4 were identical. It was different from Crematorium 2, about which I spoke earlier, in that there were not 15 ovens, only 8. So, everything was on one level. It was small; there were no underground rooms. The big... there was an undressing room...

La: Only one?

Mü: One undressing room.

La: A big one?

Mü: A big one, a big dressing room, about 280 square meters. And there was no ceiling. It was as if they were, they were almost under the roof (*as an A-frame*). That is, so close. Other than that, it was similar to Crematorium 2. There you could also (*see*) a lot of slogans about "Cleanliness is good" and "A louse is your death" and in the disinfection room... but they were attached to the wall, not on the columns, as the, as the, as the ones in Crematorium 2, as I said before. Besides, there were, there were three gas chambers in Crematorium 2.

La: Crematorium 5.

Mü: Excuse me. In Crematorium 5, there were three gas chambers.

La: Small ones?

Mü: Small gas...well, there were smaller gas chambers with a capacity of, at most one could gas 1,800 to 2,000 at one time.

La: At one time, in the three gas chambers?

Mü: At one time, yes.

Bob. No. 83 (Mü 10)

Mü: The difference between Crematorium 2, 3 and then 4, 5 was, as I said earlier, that Crematoria 2 and 3 each had 15 ovens. Crematorium 3, that is, 4 and 5, each had 8 ovens. In addition, in Crematorium 2, there were the three, the underground, the underground undressing rooms.

La: Cut, cut, cut

Müller 11

Mü: The difference between Crematorium 2, 3 and then 4, 5 was that Crematoria 2 and 3 each had 15 ovens and Crematorium 4 and 5, each had 8 ovens. And in Crematorium 2, the undressing room and the gas chambers were underground, and in 4 and 5 everything was on one level. Also, it was so, that the gas being dropped in...

La: Zyklon?

Mü: The zyklon was dropped in by the so-called SS disinfectors through, from the ceiling on...

La: In Crematorium 2 and 3 and in Crematorium 5 it was dropped through several small windows from the outside on the wall, in the wall, in the wall, and ending up in the gas chamber.

La: Yes, and you have to help me here, because that is that famous and awful photo of Jews waiting in the woods near Crematorium 5.

Mü: Yes, that's right. Those are the woods of Crematorium 5.

La: Yes, that's Crematorium 5 in the drawing. I'd like to know, since I was there, but I couldn't... Where are the woods, this place?

Mü: Yes, you have to see, when you see Crematorium 5, then you have to see...

La: Yes

Mü: Here was the yard.

La: There was a yard.

Mü: Yes, that's the yard, the whole thing. The people came from the street here, went into the yard here, and here they went into an anteroom...

La: Yes, but this photo...

Mü: That is a drawing. I have it here... that is a sheet of paper. And from this photo...

La: Excuse me, where was...

Mü: The woods were here to the left.

La: Here to the left?

Mü: Yes, here to the left. Those are the woods.

La: Yes, that means, the Jews were waiting here.

Mü: No, you have to see it like this. The, the Jews, that is, the victims only waited here at that time, when the gas chambers were full.

Mü: But when...that, that happened in the year 1944 with the Hungarian Jews, that over 20,000 people were daily turned into ashes. At that time, it was like this – for three or four days, no transport arrived and then suddenly on the fifth or fourth day, five transports arrived one after another. Each transport had up to 5,000, 5,000 people on it. And they were, they were gassed at the extermination sites. And in this case, in the year 1944, it happened frequently, that the people had to wait in the woods and that's because...until the gas chambers were free again.

La: Excuse me, where are the ovens here?

Mü: The ovens are situated here.

La: Here?

Mü: Yes, as you can see. And the Crema...the Crematorium 4 and 5.

La: That means, the people, the people are...the ramp...

Mü: Yes, that's it; they came from the ramp. Like that.

La: Yes, I see.

Mü: Yes, from the, from the street.

La: That means, the woods...

Mü: ...the woods are here and here.

La: Yes, yes, I know.

Mü: But what you saw in the photo here, those are the woods, that's the one here.

La: That means, they...

Mü: No, no, no, no, no. Normally, they came in. Like this, through the street. Here was Crematorium 5 and here was 4. And here were the

Mü: the woods and here the small sauna.

La: Where is the little...how do you call it...pond. No, le fameux lac blanc la...the white...

Interpreter: The white lake.

La: Yes, that one. I think Bunker 5. Bunker 5...

Mü: The white house?

Int.: Lake

La: The little lake.

Mü: Yes, the little lake was situated...

La: ...between 5 and 4.

Mü: Between 5 and 4 there is in these woods...

La: Yes, yes, exactly.

Mü: That has to be there to this very day, but...??

La: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Good, that's the yard.

Mü: The yard. Yes, that's the yard. Here is the, here is the entrance. Here is where the victims went in. There is the undressing room. That's where they, that's where they undressed, and then they went back, came first to this gas chamber...

La: That's a gas chamber?

Mü: A gas chamber, yes indeed. That was, it was locked...they locked it, this gas chamber. Then it was filled...then the SS filled the second and then the third.

La: Ah, yes. And the, the zyklon was...

Mü: The zyklon, as you can see here, the zyklon, here you can see

Mü: the little windows. Everything that's marked with Number 5, are the insertion openings, where the zyklon was (*added*) through little windows...

La: And they (*the SS*) waited for the, till the three gas chambers were filled...

Mü: All at once, all at once,

La: All at once.

Mü: All at once.

La: Yes. The people in the gas chambers, they weren't dead before?

Mü: No, no, no, no.

La: All together.

Mü: Yes, all together.

La: Yes, and what else?

Mü: Well, here were two rooms, where there were later, more or less, the accommodations for, for the Sonderkommando. Later in 1944, at the very end of the year 1944, a thirty-man Sonderkommando was housed, was housed here, I among them.

La: Thirty men?

Mü: Thirty men.

La: Including you.

Mü: I was right in this room...

La: You lived there?

Mü: Yes.

La: Between the undressing room and the gas chamber.

Mü: Yes, yes. But at that time, there already wasn't...that's at a time in October, already after the revolt, after October, 1944.

La: Yes, you were a fireman.

Mü: Yes, in Crematorium 5.

La: Yes, and what exactly was your job?

Mü: Well, the job of this fireman consisted of...he had to (*remove*) the corpses...that is to keep the ovens clean, to remove the ashes of the corpses...

La: With what?

Mü: With a...it was a big scraper. It was always like this, that the ovens were...there were three corpses per oven.

La: Three corpses?

Mü: Yes.

La: Together.

Mü: Together. And now let's say if there were eight ovens in Crematorium 5, you can easily imagine, there are three new ...every 20 minutes, that is, you have...

La: The burning time was 20 minutes...

Mü: The incineration time was about 20 minutes.

La: That's quite long, isn't it?

Mü: Yes, and so that, if you add it up, with eight ovens, there were 24 in 20 minutes, so that in one hour, you could incinerate 72 people.

La: Incinerate.

Mü: Incinerate, yes.

La: But it wasn't enough, was it?

Mü: Even in the year 1944 when the Hungarian Jews came in the beginning, that is, the middle of 1944...the SS completely shut down Crematorium 5, completely shut it down

Mü: and it was the case that the gas chambers were in use. And in the backyard, which you see here, five big pits had been dug. Each pit had eight, they were about 40 meters long, 8 meters wide, 2 ½ meters, over 2 ½ meters, that is...

La: The backyard, that is, how many meters from the crematorium?

Mü: Oh, that was about 10, 20 meters. Here in the backyard, yes. And there were those five pits. In each pit, you could incinerate 1,200 to 1,400 people in 24 hours. Just imagine, if there are only five...

La: Those are these...

Mü: ...five pits.

La: That's this photo.

Mü: That's the photo we're looking at. That's the backyard of Crematorium 5.

La: Where is the pit?

Mü: The pit is here, where the smoke is coming out. And these corpses were thrown out of, out of...

La: ...the gas chambers.

Mü: The gas chambers. And before that, the women had their hair shorn.

Bob. No. 84 (Mü 12)

Mü: You're seeing on this photo the backyard of the Crematorium 5. Then, the Hungarian Jews came in May, 1944. And within a month and a half, they were...about 400,000 Hungarian Jews, and within two months...

La: Yes, nothing, nothing.

Mü: Not, not quite two months, (*they were*) exterminated. For, the

Mü: capacity of the crema...of all four crematoria at once was 9 to 10,000...one could turn 9 to 10,000 into ashes, that is, in 24 hours.

La: ...in 24 hours.

Mü: But when the Hungarian Jews came...

La: ...there wasn't enough...

Mü: ...the SS needed even more. And for that, they made the pits, five pits in the backyard of Crematorium 5. Bunker 2, the former Bunker 2, the so-called farm, later called Bunker 5, was...

La: ...a little farm house.

Mü: ...with the farm house, with the straw...it has a straw roof. There were lovely fruit trees there. And that was changed, that was put into operation, and four other pits were dug. Now, you have to visualize this, there were nine pits. In each pit, you could incinerate 1,400 people within 24 hours.

La: That's...

Mü: If you (*add*) to that, excuse me, if you add to that, that in Crema..., the Crematorium 2, as well as Crematorium 3 were in operation, well, then you could easily arrive at figures, by which one could daily, even if it was only rarely, incinerate over 20,000 people.

La: That means, that people were killed in the gas chambers with zyklon before...

Mü: ...before...

La: ...but they were incinerated in the pits.

Mü: Yes, in the pits

La: Yes, and you, for instance, you were a fireman, but the ovens were no longer in operation, where were you...

Mü: So then I was a fireman at the pits.

La: But fireman is...fireman at the pits is...

Mü: ...fireman at the pits, so, the corpses were sorted by the corpse porters in the pits, that is, one on top of another and we had to add rags with methanol and gasoline, which were there, add those and then light, light them.

La: Methanol and gasoline...

Mü: The methanol, methanol heated it up and then the big fire was lit, and the corpses burned, burned. But even this, by itself, was not enough, because when everything settled and there was no air circulation and there were no fans as in the Auschwitz crematorium, yes, then, in addition, these corpses had to *(be covered)* with their own fat, which was in the reservoir *(gestures to signify an outer rim)*....yes, which had flowed out from the pits...

La: They *(the SS)*...

Mü: They used it, poured the fat over them.

La: That was a, a very good circulation system...

Mü: Here, to the contrary, you see the woods of Crematorium 5. Those are, look at this...

La: Those are Hungarian Jews.

Mü: There they are; those are Hungarian Jews. 1944. And you see here the little children, how they're crying. And you can see that older women how she holds her breasts. And all of them were half-dead with thirst. They hadn't had a drop of water in 6 or 5 or 6 days. And behind them, there was a, was a, was a, a wall, which was high and artificial, about eight or nine meters, but you can see here too, how the fire...

La: ...from the pits...

Mü: ...coming out of the pits, but you have to look at it like this, maybe someone could ask themselves, when you were there, didn't it affect the people when they saw that (*the wall*)? No, these people were so, I would say, half-dead from thirst and hunger, and every ten minutes a few SS men came, let's say the Sergeant, Eckert, who spoke Hungarian, and spoke their native tongue with them and assured them, that they had to wait only ten more minutes, that there will be, that they'll get as much tea as they want, etc., that their entire focus was on this, on this, on this drink, without which they can't survive. And that's the answer that they had already, they'd already lost their bearings. They were so distressed, and that – as I said before – this entire torment was part of the SS's plan, to get the people into the gas chamber so easily.

La: That's, that's unbelievable. That's impossible.

Mü: Unfortunately.

La: There are men here.

Mü: And look at the men here in this little woods.

La: Religious ones?

Mü: Very religious. Many licked the grass.

La: Licked the grass?

Mü: Just to get a bit of something wet. And now, just imagine, you approach these people and you say to these people...but we couldn't approach them and it wasn't possible here to have contact with them. Yes, but if there had been a possibility, if we said, "You are going to be incinerated or something like that", they wouldn't have reacted. The whole thing was completely – as I said before – their whole being, their whole, their whole focus was concentrated on, on, on the liquid, on water and on tea or...that's how you have to see it from, from, from the situation at that time

La: But the Germans had people for the Sonderkommando from the Hungarian transport, didn't they?

Mü: Yes, in the Special... at that time, from Hungary in the year 1944, the Sonderkommando was large, maybe just short of 1,000 people.

La: 1,000 people.

Mü: Yes, and of these 1,000 people, there were mostly Hungarian Jews, then Greek and Polish Jews. 19 Soviet POWs...

La: Jews?

Mü: No, no, no. An ethnic German. Head Kapo (*prisoner*), a criminal.

Mü: who came from Lublin.

La: His name?

Mü: ...Kovojent. And that was the composition of the Sonderkommando at that time. And it was horrible, when you (*saw*) the Sonderkommando, when one (*worked with?*) these people, when the people...they were just as shocked as we were, even more then. You have to understand, those were all intellectual people. There was Dr. Peter Zoltan. I can, I can only mention a few. The head of the Internal Clinic, a very kind man from Muncacero. Or Dr. Hawash, a practicing physician. Many were, many were professors, university professors, there were many scientists, who were put into the machinery (*of the camp*) without a second thought, and then forced, that is, with brute force...

La: How did these people rea...react?

Mü: They were in shock and for the first few days, they just stumbled about, for they didn't know what they were doing. And then, after they had over...overcome the initial shock, they tried to live, to survive with the thought that...when the planned revolt, which gave us a lot of hope, that if that were to happen perhaps, there would be a possibility, maybe one in a hundred could save his life. It was that which gave us the strength to survive. And maybe to survive in order to inform the world about the biggest crime that ever

Mü: happened in the history of the world. And once we reported it...

La: But the victims of the gas chambers were only Jews, or were there others?

Mü: According to my take on it, 99% of them were Jews. Maybe there were a few (*others*), but the, the...mostly they were Jews. And Gypsies.

La: And how were relations with the Russian prisoners in the Sonderkommando...

Bob. No. 84 (transcript says "85" but video shows "84") (Mü 13)

La: Were there cases of suicide among the Sonderkommando?

Mü: Well, there were very few...cases of suicide. Just as in the camp. It's very interesting that the number of suicides, in the camp as in the Sonderkommando, was very low. Most of them, that is, after they got over the initial shock, fought – especially later, when it was clear, that the resistance was built up – to go through with the revolt, come what may. Everyone of us had that as his goal.

La.: I spoke with Tofal Zikowitsch and I had the same question, but Zikowitsch has already died in Israel and he told me that only the weak people committed suicide.

Mü: Yes.

La: Yes, you agree with that...

Mü: I wouldn't, I wouldn't put it that way, that the person who commits suicide, is a weak person. Yes, at any rate, suicide didn't, didn't accomplish anything in this case. In the enormous killing machine of Auschwitz, where so many millions of

Mü: people died, lost their lives, it was a small matter for the SS if someone committed suicide and to replace him with a new person. But it's really about the person, mainly those, who've seen a lot, that they persevere. And therefore, it's hard for me to say if suicide is a, a weakness or a...that's in no way...that would...but in no way did that help matters, a suicide.

La: Yes, but where did the desire to live come from in this situation?

Mü: Hope.

La: Was there hope?

Mü: Yes, if we hadn't had this hope, life would have had no meaning.

La: But, what, what is the most...

Mü: You have to see it like this...

La: ...in this death...

Mü: ...in this death machine...

La: Death machine. How in this death machine...

Mü Yes. The hope existed for us, mainly that the purpose, that is, the purpose, if you will, and the hope, but the purpose, that's what it was. The essential motivator for our continued existence was mainly that, when we decided in the fall of 1943, that we would carry out an armed revolt with the other prisoners. And that we would (*burn*) the ovens, all of the crematoria, that is, set them on fire,

Mü: would set them on fire.

La: Already in 1943, that was the decision?

Mü: A decision.

La: Meaning, you had a discussion.

Mü: No, not a discussion, one of the Sonderkommandos was, the first initiators were, were the resistance group within the Sonderkommando. I will only name Jankel Handelsmann, among them...

La: From Paris?

Mü: Yes. Grabowsky...Jochen Waschowsky...Kaminsky...

La: Löwenthal?

Mü: Zamal Löwenthal, the chronicler, as well as the Polish political prisoner, a wonderful man, Vladek. These people had already decided then to work out a plan, a precise plan, by which one could, in conjunction with the other camps, carry out an armed revolt. And the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement fully, fully supported us and told us that they would carry out this revolt with us. But it happened many times that, when a definite date had already been set, that the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement would not go along with such a high-risk venture and would tell us each time that this is not the right time, that it's still a high risk, that we should wait till we could carry out the revolt.

Mü: And so days, I would say, weeks, months, would go by until the revolt took place in our area on October 7<sup>th</sup>. The other prisoners in the camp, unfortunately, couldn't help us, because the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement had taken the position that they should avoid everything to do with this risky revolt and thus, left the Sonderkommando, that is, the Sonderkommando in the lurch. When 300 prisoners were selected on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1944, they (*the prisoners*) said to themselves, and they were mainly Hungarian and Greek Jews, these people said, "Enough. If the Resistance Movement won't join us, we won't be driven to the slaughterhouse. We will fight to the last man." Then the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement was informed about the matter and again, they gave us the word, that that's not the way (*to deal*) with the situation...

La: ...that's not the way, that's not the way.

Bob. No. 86 (Mü 14)

La: Filip, in my opinion and probably in your opinion, there is a misconception, a fiction, a myth, that the Jews went into the gas chambers without force. And I think, that in many cases, that's not true, that the deceit was not successful and that people frequently knew of the gas chambers, what would happen to them. And I think the story of the extermination of Jews of the Czech family camp in Birkenau is a very good example of what I'm saying.

Mü: Yes, that's a fact; one can't say that

Mü: the victims went like sheep into the gas chambers. You always have to keep in mind that the SS always had plans in place which depended on which (*group of*) people were arriving. So, when people came who were either Polish Jews or others, who already knew, what fate was awaiting them, then an extraordinary... they were treated with an extraordinary harshness; there was no pretense, rather they were told directly they were to get undressed and get into the gas chamber, and, if someone didn't obey, the SS used the ultimate harshness, but in other cases, it was different again. Let's say, Jews from Saloniki arrived or from France or Holland or Belgium, that is, who didn't know anything, then they (*the SS*) used their deceptions, and these deceptions were aimed at the gas chambers.

La: Yes, and just when deception wasn't enough, the SS was always ready for...

Mü: Of course, even with these deceptions, the entire area of the crematoria was surrounded by, by SS men, hundreds of SS men and dogs were at the ready, which made it clear to everyone, that the smallest resistance would be suppressed with brute force. Even in these cases, yes, we have to be very clear here. Now, to the family camp, as you've said, those in the family camp knew, they lived in Birkenau after all, in Division B2B for

Mü: half a year. So, they heard a lot about what was going on. They knew that the gas chambers are here. They often saw the flames from the chimney of the crematoria, that is, the extermination sites, etc. So, in a word, they knew a lot. About their fate, I can only say the following: in February, 194...around the end of February, 1944, I was...I was sent out with a night shift to Crematorium 5, and I had been given the assignment of being with the Technical Sergeant, Voss, for that night as a lackey (*in German: "Kalifaktor"*). He was the head of all four crematoria at that time, the Technical Sergeant, Voss.

La: What is a "Kalifaktor"?

Mü: "Kalifaktor", the job of the "Kalifaktor" was...he had to brush the boots, yes, a kind of servant. That was a...should I say, a servant for the SS.

La: Ah, the boots...

Mü: Yes, the boots had to...among other things, to brush the boots, etc. So, around midnight, as I recall, the Technical Sergeant, Husteck, came from the political division in Crematorium 5 and gave to Technical Sergeant, Voss, a sheet of paper. I didn't know then what was written on that paper. I only saw that Voss (*opened*) the paper...that he opened the, the, the paper and said to himself: "Yes, yes, it's all on Voss and if there were no Voss, then everything would go to pieces. How can we possibly do this?" That's how he talked about himself. Suddenly, he said to me, "Go and call the Kapos." And I went and called the Kapo Schleume

Mü: and Kapo Hatzek. They came in and then he asked them, “How many pieces are still lying there?” I think by “pieces” he meant corpses. Then they said, “Could be 500 pieces.” Then he said, “So, those 500 pieces, by morning, have to be...

La: ...be done.

Mü: Yes, yes, be incinerated.

La: ...burned.

Mü: “Are there 500?” he asked again. Then they said, “Maybe”. Then he said, “You assholes, what do you mean, “maybe”? I...” Then he went out and in the, in the, in the undressing room, and in this undressing room, there were...

La: ...where the corpses were...

Mü: ...where the corpses were stacked, for the undressing room in Crematorium 5 served simultaneously as a corpse storage room, when the gassing...

La: After the gassing.

Mü: After the gassing. Then they were carried back into the undressing room. And that’s where he went to check on it. But in that instance, he forgot, that he left that piece of paper on the table. In...I used that moment to look at it and was shocked about what I read. For it was written, I can’t remember it verbatim, but something...

#### Cassette No. 8 – Side A

##### Bob. Nr. 86 (Mü 14)

Mü: ...but something like, that the crematorium due to, due to the special treatment of the, the, the Czech family camp, should be ready as of 8 o’clock the next morning. I put the paper down and, in that instant, my whole body shook. Then

Voss came back and then I heard that, yes, about what was to be done with the Czechs. And when Voss then lay down, that is, went to sleep, I went out into the incineration room and...spoke with several comrades about this matter and shared with them, what I had read. Yes, it seemed to us that we had to alert the Resistance Movement in the camp with this, this news. And when in the morning, that I, when the dayshift arrived and we went into the camp, then I met at noon with Kapo Kaminsky, who was one of the important resistance fighters in Wi...in the Sonder..., in the Sonderkommando, and shared this information with him. Then I heard, he told me too, that preparations had already been made in Crematorium 2 as well, that the ovens were ready...

La: To which crematorium did Kaminsky belong?

Mü: Crematorium 2.

La: Crematorium 2.

Mü: Yes, that in Crematorium 2 some preparations had been made as well, is what he told me. And he urged me as follows: "You, you have a few comrades, people from your area, Erik Schön, later called Kulka, Larzo Langfelder, and the other one, Otto Kraus. Go to them, they are metalworkers (*could also be "locksmiths"*), they are in a position to go into, into, into, into camp

Mü: B2B. They have to tell these people, what it going to happen to them. They should tell them, if they come and if they were to defend themselves, we will turn the crematorium into, into, into ashes. And they could also set fire to B2B. So...”

La: Kaminsky was a Pole, wasn't he?

Mü: Kaminsky was a...yes, yes, he came from...

La: ...a Jewish...political...

Mü: Yes, yes, he came somewhere from the area around Bialystok, or somewhere there. And the fact was, I did go to them, my friends, and asked them to go into the family camp and to spread this news. Around noon, after...later afternoon, when they came back to the metal works shop, where my friends, my friends Kulka and Langfelder and Kraus worked, I could see from their faces that they were unhappy. They were sad. The people wouldn't believe them. They told them, “That can't be true. How could they kill, that is, how could they exterminate us; they could have done that in Theresienstadt. They could have already done that...”

La: ...privileged...

Mü: We lived under very good, well, relatively good, privileged conditions...yes, “if they exterminate us here, they could have done that in Theresienstadt.” In other words,

Mü: they didn't want to hear it.

Bob. Nr. 87 (Mü 15)

Mü: We were firmly convinced, that these people would be killed during the night. But when the night shift didn't go to work, we were happy. The date had been changed and for several days, nothing happened, but many of the prisoners, as well as the Czech families in the camp, accused us of spreading panic, that we...that is, that we said something to them that wasn't true. But at the beginning of March – I don't recall the exact day – suddenly, we heard a rumor from the former writer for the head of the reporting division from a former prisoner. That was Kata Zingerowar. She, she was able to find out from a telephone conversation that the extermina..., the extermination of the family camp was imminent. And she spread this news immediately, and later, this is what happened, that the head of the camp, Aumeyer suddenly appeared in Camp B2B and told them that they would be going on a transport to Heidenbeck...

La: Heidenbeck?

Mü: Heidenbeck, into their camp and that they would live there under good conditions. So, later, these people were taken to a sauna, just as was customary when people were taken to a camp.

La: To a different camp?

Mü: To a different camp. Everything took its normal course and besides that, a list of block elders, of designated (*prisoner*) officials, who were in

Mü: Camp B2B, was posted to reassure them (*the people*) that they (*the elders*) would have the same function in Heidenbeck.

La: That was deception.

Mü: That was an elaborate, I would say, ruse on the part of the SS to fool people, but which, unfortunately, wasn't recognized by the Czech Jews. So, when the time came, I think it was March 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944, suddenly trucks appeared on the B2B buildings and these people were loaded onto the trucks and taken to the yard of Crematoria 2 and 3. Since I worked in Crematorium 2 at the time...and was there, I was a witness to that whole horrible night of the extermination of the family camp.

La: Yes, but...you were in Crematorium 2?

Mü: 2, on this night.

La: 2

Mü: On this night, I was in Crematorium 2. What was, why? Well, I didn't, I didn't have to work, but because we were convinced, that, that it was the Czech Jews, it pulled at me like a magnet.

La: Like a magnet?

Mü: Pulled me like a magnet, pulled me there, to go there...

La: Why...

Mü: ...those were my people (*from my country*). Yes, I wanted to, I wanted to, maybe I thought, that maybe there would be a revolt after all, that they would do something after all, even if they

Mü: ...if they, that is, if they didn't ...if they refused to do so before. So, then I, I asked the Kapo Kaminsky, and I worked with the kommando then. And so I became the witness. And then a transport came after the second one onto the yard of Crematorium 2. The people had hardly stepped off the truck when they were illuminated with reflectors and had to go through a hallway to the stairs, where those, those go into the undressing room...

La: Stairs?

Mü: Through the...to the stairs. There...through...they had to run, they were beaten. Whoever couldn't keep up with the pace, was beaten to death.

La: Beaten?

Mü: Beaten by the SS. These people were treated with an unusually heavy show of force. Now, suddenly...

La: Without a word, without an explanation?

Mü: Without any...for they suddenly got off, off, the truck and the SS was beating these people. When they were in the undressing room, I was at the back door of the undressing room and was able to see this terrible scene. The people were bleeding. Now they knew where they were. They looked at the columns of the so-called, as I mentioned earlier, International Information Center, they were in such a state of terror, and this sight didn't calm them. On the contrary. It put them

Mü: into such a state of terror, because they already knew and had heard, these people in Camp B2B, what happened there. They were desperate. Child...clung to each other, daught...that is, mothers, parents, older people were crying. They were distraught. Suddenly, you could see that several SS officers were coming down the stairs. Among others, the head of the camp, Schwarzhuber, who had promised them earlier that they, that they, that they would be taken to Heidenbeck. Then I saw how they started, they started to scream, plead, "Heidenbeck was a lie. We were lied to. We want to live. We want to work" and were looking into the face of the SS executioner. But they (*the SS*), they didn't care, they just watched, when suddenly, a group revolted. Probably they wanted to confront the henchmen...the SS henchmen and tell them how they had been lied to. But on that morning, a few guards came and beat them with clubs. Some were injured.

La: In the undr...

Mü: In the undressing room, in the undressing room. There was an extraordinary level of violence in this situation, which, well...these people were then forced to undress. Some got undressed, but only a small, a very small number. The majority didn't, didn't obey, obey this order. And suddenly I heard, like a choir...it started like a choir, started

Mü: to sing, singing spread through the undressing room...and then it (*became clear*) they were singing the Czech national anthem and ...the Hatikvah. I was very moved by this, this act of my people, and I was overcome, my life had no value...my life for what? And then I went into the gas chamber with them and decided to die.

La: You with them.

Mü: Then suddenly several people, who recognized me, because I had been in that camp several times with my friends, who were metalworkers, came. And suddenly, a little group of friends came to me, looked at me and said...

La: In the, in the...

Mü: In the, already in the gas chamber.

La: You were already...

Mü: ...in the gas chamber...and said to me, "That makes no...you want to die; that makes no sense. Your dying will not keep us alive. That is no feat. You have to get out of here. You have to tell about our suffering, the injustice done to, done to us."

Bob. No. 88 (Mü 16)

Mü: It was a terrible scene with these people. They were beaten up. Their heads were bleeding. Wherever you looked, blood was streaming. And they were in a desperate situation. When they were told to undress, some of them undressed,

Mü: but most did not.

La: They wouldn't.

Mü: They wouldn't. Suddenly, they saw that Aumeyer with his entourage of SS men was coming down the stairs to the undressing room. They screamed at him that they had been lied to, "You told us, we wanted to work. We were supposed to be taken to Heidenbeck. We wanted to work." Over and over you could hear these words repeated. But the SS men remained silent. Then a small group (*of people*) set upon them, but they were beaten up by the SS. They (*the people*) probably wanted to tell Aumeyer straight to his face, and remind him that he had promised them something as an SS officer and given them his word of honor. But, as I said before, this little group was violently beaten down by the SS. And again people were ordered by the SS to undress, to undress. They did not obey. Suddenly, the Technical Sergeant, Voss, appeared before the mass of people and ordered them, "In your own interest, I order you...surely, you don't want to make the whole thing harder for your children. I order you, on behalf of your children, to undress." And then they, you could see, how the mass reacted when he said, I order you because of your children; they believed that there was yet some hope for staying alive. They interpreted it differently. But later, this terrible tragedy came upon them again. Suddenly

Mü: you could hear singing, which grew stronger and stronger, and the masses were singing the national anthem of Czechoslovakia and the Hatikvah.

La: The Hatikvah?

Mü: Yes, and when I saw that, I said to myself, what sense does my life have anymore? I wanted, I wanted to end my life. Just a few days ago I had learned that the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement had denied our (*plans for a*) revolt again, that nothing would happen again. Then I said to myself, what sense does my life have, after all, if I were to become a free man but would never see any of these people again? So I decided to go into the gas chamber with them, and I went in without notice, for many of them were not undressed either, and...

La: Yes, but, hold on...

Mü: ...and went into the gas chamber.

La: Schwarzhuber...made the matter very clear. He said, you could die, more or less peacefully...

Mü: No, that (*was not*) Schwarzhuber; Voss said that.

La: Yes, Voss.

Mü: Voss (*told*) them clearly...but they interpreted that a different way. They took that as a sign of hope. He didn't say...

La: ...he also said something

Mü: He only said, Voss that is, you don't want to make it harder for your children.  
They (*the people*) thought that there might be hope to stay alive.

La: But later the situation became very clear.

Mü: No, no, no, no, no, no. There was nothing else said, just that. And they interpreted it as a, a, a hopeful sign. And when I, as I said already, how they (*the SS*) drove them in the gas chamber, beat them, lots of SS men were there with machine guns, dogs...

La: Dogs were...

Mü: Dogs were used...

La: ...in the gas chambers?

Mü: No, in the undressing rooms. Dogs came, and they pushed them (*the people*) into the big space in the gas chamber. So, I decided to end my life. I went into the gas chamber and I was, I may have been there for half an hour, since the gassing hadn't started, because only a part (*of the group*) was there. The gas chamber wasn't full. They needed the undressing room free for the others.

La: Ah, yes.

Mü: And I used this moment to pull myself back against a wall and didn't want to be conspicuous. But I was recognized by some friends, whom I

Mü: had met in the family camp, whom I, whom I, whom I, whom I knew and...they saw that I was here. And within a few minutes, some girls came to me.

La: Girls?

Mü: Girls. They were naked, they were undressed. One came and asked me, a black girl, she introduced herself as Jana.

La: Jana.

Mü: “I’m Jana and I ask you”, she said to me, “what is the sense of a suicide, which you are about to commit? That doesn’t make any sense. You can’t help us. On the contrary, you have to live and tell of the agonizing death we went (*will go*) through here.” It seemed like Nirvana in that moment, what they told me. And suddenly these people converged upon me, took me and pulled me to the, to the, to the door of the gas chamber, which was open and threw me out, for at the door were several guards. And as they were throwing me out, there stood a guard of the crematorium by the name of Goschuss, and he recognized me. I immediately got a kick in the butt from him. Then he said to me, “You pig, we decide when it’s time for you to croak, not you.” Then I got another kick. “Get upstairs!” Then I went upstairs in the elevator into the incinerator room. Suddenly I fainted. Now, I

Mü: didn't know what was going on. Later, I was brought into the coke (*fuel*) room, the coke room with several friends. They opened the big door, which...and there I could see the women's camp at night. There was absolute silence. Right across was the clothing room of the women's camp. Standing there, as I was taking in the air, suddenly Kapo Kaminsky came to me and said, "But Filip, why did you do something like that? You're not going to do them (*the SS*) a favor by taking your own life. We still need you. You are young, you can still do a lot of things and maybe even survive." In that instance, I felt a surge of strength rise in me. I had a lust for life again. I don't understand how that, how that was possible. Earlier I wanted to take my own life, and now this sharp longing. Kapo Kaminsky spoke to me with such conviction, that it, that it had a big effect on me. And so, I was able to survive that terrible night. But now I want to go back to the gas chamber. When I, before the people threw me out, this black girl, Jana, said to me, "You will find me here under this column. I will lie down under this column. I have a golden necklace. I have a good friend, Sascha, who is a Soviet POW; he works in the bread room. Give him this little locket; give it to him and a last greeting." And later it happened, when the gassing was completed,

Mü: in the early morning, when the kommandos went out, when the Florentine March by the band could be heard from the camp again, we went into, that is, when the night shift went back into the camp. The first thing I did was to go into the bread room to Sascha. He was a tough Soviet, a former junior officer, I think from Sebastopol.

Bob. No. 89 (Mü 17)

Mü: Right when I arrived in the morning, I went to the bread room and visited Sascha. He was a tough boy, former Soviet POW, a junior officer, I think, if I'm not mistaken, he came from Sebastopol. And he looked at me, we'd known each other for a long time, looked at me and knew. From his facial expression I saw that he knew what message I was bringing him. Then I dug into my pocket, took out this necklace, the golden one, and gave it to him, saying, "That's from Jana, her last greeting." And there stood Sascha, that hardened man, about to fall apart. He was completely, I would say, shocked. I saw tears in his eyes, in his eyes. And he told me that a few weeks ago, he had spoken with Jana. They were still hopeful, if they were to survive Auschwitz, about what they would do. He proposed to her that she should come to him. He has a mother. They would marry. And then he broke into a big, that is, he started to cry. I couldn't stand to hear any more. It was enough. I was full of terrible experiences,

Mü: which I had survived. My heart was deeply shaken. I ran out into the street and returned to my Block 13. So, the story of the family camp ended abruptly.

La: Yes. Now, please, I think that in the manuscript of Zamal Löwenthal, there is another terrible story of violence with, with young children, with, with boys.

Mü: Ah, yes. You're thinking of those 600 young children, who, who were... Yes, I could (*tell*) you...

La: Do you want to tell, what, where, when it was...

Mü: Zamal Löwenthal was one of the outstanding men, one of the outstanding men of the Resistance Movement. He was a very, I would say, sensitive (*man*), who dedicated himself to being a chronicler. And always, I can always remember him when he said once, "We've been abandoned by the world. No one in the world...humanity has abandoned us." He said that. "And we have to, it is our duty, to write (*this*) down, to leave a document for those who will come here one day, so that the world will know some day what atrocities were committed here." So, as I've already said, he was very, very conscientious. I've read his notes myself. They are true to the facts. But they were very concise. It had to be that way because he always had to watch out that the SS didn't find out what he was writing, even if he wrote it in Jewish (*Yiddish?*). Yes, he really had to be on the lookout. I would (*tell*) you, if you...

Mü: I thought, they thought at the time, the 600...

La: Yes, but what did he...

Mü: ...these, these, yes, I wanted to say, these, well, all these descriptions were saved and buried in Crematorium 2, on the grounds of Crematorium 2 and...

La: In the ground?

Mü: In the ground. Later they were discovered. There were also...

La: And...ruined too.

Mü: And, of course, some, some of them were ruined through, through, through the dampness of the ground. But many of the documents were preserved. I will try to read aloud the story of the 600 children...

La: Yes...of course...

Mü: ...if you would like to hear it, perhaps.

La: And that took place in 1944.

Mü: That took place in 1944.

La: And that is the story about the 600 Jewish...

Mü: It's about 600 Jewish children. They were still children. *Reads:* "In broad daylight, 600 Jewish boys aged 12 to 18 were brought (*to the camp*). They were dressed in very thin zebra suits. On their feet, they had torn shoes or wooden clogs. The boys looked so beautiful and were so well-built, that not even the rags could distort that image. This was in the second half of October." I think this took place in October of 1944.

Mü: “Leading them were twenty-five SS men equipped with grenades.” Here is one piece of evidence. 600 children were, well...were led by twenty-five heavily armed SS men. “When they reached the site, the Kommando leader ordered them to undress right there. The boys got a whiff of the smoke coming out of the chimney and thought right way that, that they would, that this would be their death. They started to run around the site in sheer horror and to pull out their hair.” You see, it was similar to the woman (*I mentioned*) back then, the one from Bialystok.

La: Yes, exactly.

Mü: Something like that. “Many of them started to cry in an awful way. You could hear an inconsolable wailing. The Kommando leader and his helpers...” That is, yes, it was a lamentation, and it ended with that. That’s a short story...

La: Continue...continue.

Mü: “The Kommando leader and his helpers beat these defenseless boys mercilessly, so that they would get undressed, until his (*the leader’s*) club broke from the beatings. So he brought out a second one and continued to beat them on their heads, until the violence won out. The boys got undressed with an instinctive fear of death. Naked and barefooted, they crouched together in a pile to protect themselves from the beatings and they didn’t move an inch. One brave boy went to the Kommando leader standing there and pleaded with him to save his life, promising

Mü: to do even the hardest work. As a reply, he (*the leader*) hit him several times with the heavy, the heavy club on the head. Many of the boys ran wildly to the Jews of the Sonderkommando, threw their arms around their necks and begged to be saved. Others ran naked away from each other around the grounds to escape death. The Kommando leader called to a Sergeant with a rubber club to help. The young, clear voices of the boys grew stronger minute by minute till they turned, turned into bitter crying, crying. This terrible wailing continued to ring out. We stood there completely paralyzed and numb from this crying. With a smile of satisfaction, without the slightest sign of compassion, with the proud bearing of a victor, the SS men stood there and drove them, (*still*) beating them terribly, into the bunker. On the steps stood a Sergeant with a rubber club, and if one (*of the boys*) was too slow...”

Cassette No. 8 – Side B

Bob. No. 89 (Mü 17)

Mü: “...and when one went to his death too slowly, he got a murderous blow with the rubber club. Despite this, some of the boys still ran wildly about on the grounds.”

Bob. No. 90 (Mü 18)

Mü: “Despite this, a few of the boys ran around on the grounds in an attempt to save them selves. The SS men chased them, beating and clubbing, until they had the situation in hand

Mü: and had finally driven them into the bunker. Their joy was indescribable. Did they never have children?" So, that is Zamal Löwenthal's story of the 600 children.

La: And this, this episode, you didn't see it yourself...

Mü: No.

La: ...see it?

Mü: I don't remember this episode.

La: It took place in Crematorium 2.

Mü: He writes "in the bunker", but he probably, he meant the gas chamber under the bunker, because Bunker 5 was, that is...October, it wasn't used anymore in October, 1944; it was already out of operation. But in all probability, it was Crematorium 2.

La: Crematorium 2, yes. But that's very hard to imagine, since there were four crematoria in Birkenau and you, for example, were in Crematorium 5, Zamal Löwenthal in Crematorium 2. I'd like to understand, how were the connections? Was it possible to go from one crematorium to another? Where did you sleep and...understand?

Mü: Yes, yes. I understand your question. First I have to say, that, until the end of June, 1944, the Sonderkommando lived in, that is, all of us from the four crematoria (*lived*) in Block 13 of the buildings site B2D.

La: Ah, that's in the main camp, Birkenau?

Mü: Yes...(*Müller and Lanzmann in conversation*)...the main men's camp, Birkenau

Mü: (*was the residence of*) the Sonderkommando of all four crematoria until around June, 1944.

La: I always thought, that the people of the Sonderkommando were..

Mü: ...in the crematoria.

La: ...locked in and lived there in the crematorium.

Mü: No, no. Of course, this block was isolated, but not guarded by SS, rather by, I would say, prisoners of the Sonderkommando, that is, who had barracks duty. And there was a, it was possible to move about the camp, to be in touch with other prisoners.

La: How many people were in this Block 13?

Mü: About 400. 400 people lived there. Only...

La: But you said there were 1,000 people.

Mü: Only – let me tell you this – only when the Sonderkommando went from 400 to 1,000, then did the biggest, I would say, murderer of World War II come and take over the extermination: Master Sergeant Moll is...he organized it in such a way, that the...that all prisoners moved into the crematorium, lived in the upper story of Crematorium 2, prisoners lived in Crematorium 3 and in Crematorium 4 the majority of all the prisoners, about, I would say, 70% of the 1000, 60 or 70 %. They lived in Crematorium 4 in the undressing room, because Crematorium 4 had been put out of operation, that is, it wasn't functioning.

La: It wasn't functioning?

Mü: Yes, not functioning.

La: Why?

Mü: I think because there were a few places, the ovens were, were, that is, the firebricks were broken and...

La: How did the people sleep?

Mü: They slept on three levels of plank beds...upper...

La: Yes, as, as...in other barracks.

Mü: Similar to other barracks. Just that, just that in the big undressing rooms, about, I don't know, but certainly 600 all together, 600 people slept on the plank beds.

La: And you, where did you sleep?

Mü: I, I slept there too.

La: Also in Crematorium 4.

Mü: 4. Up until the last period, till November, 1944, when the three, when we 30 men were selected to go back into Crematorium 5 as firemen. And from that time on, I slept in one of the rooms, which I showed already you.

La: That means, there were three periods. The first period, the...

Mü: The first period was when the Sonderkommando lived in Block 13.

La: As in...

Mü: in ....., that is, in the main camp, in B2D. The second period was when the Sonderkommando lived scattered in various crematoria. The third period was when the Sonderkommando,

Mü: when 30 men of the Sonderkommando lived in Crematorium 5 and the rest, 70, who were still alive, lived in a regular block, which was incomprehensible.

La: Yes...yes...and...

Mü: And now the encounters, the ones among the crematoria, well, those weren't, that wasn't difficult, to be in touch. Let's say, it was well known, there was, there was a depot for tiles, cement, etc. in Crematorium 2.

La: 2, a depot.

Mü: Depot. There was a storage area. And if one needed anything from this area, one just made up, one simply said, we need, whatever, tiles or we need some materials or cleaning cloths or rags...or other things. And then two or three from the crematorium with a guard... and it was possible to be in contact, that is...

La: It was possible to talk.

Mü: To talk at various times, they came to us. Let's say, something was needed for the water pits, for the pits there, often groundwater came up, you needed a pump, a water pump, and this water pump was shuttled from one crematorium to another, always, often, even if you didn't need it, that was, it gave us the excuse, we needed it, so it was used for being in contact with others...Other contacts which one could establish

- Mü: were during lunch and dinner, when the ones from Crematorium 2, 3, 4 and 5 always went into the camp kitchen for lunch.
- La: Is it, is it true that the food situation was better for people in the Sonderkommando than for...
- Mü: ...than for others. Well, officially, I would say not. Officially, we got what they all got in the camp: the same piece of bread, the same piece of salami or whatever there was...just like the others. Also the bowl of soup like the others. But it's a fact that in the undressing room, among the possessions of the people, when we, when we, when we loaded them onto the carts, we found some food, but not just food, also valuables, which helped us to live quite a bit better than the other prisoners.
- La: It was possible to buy things?
- Mü: Yes, and we needed these valuables not only to buy things, but we needed them to buy weapons. That's the most essential reason for, for, for, which we (*used*) these valuables.
- La: Yes, that is another chapter. But why were the people of the Sonderkommando, as one says, considered today as a special group of people?
- Mü: You have to, you have to, you have to, I think it's only understandable, you have to see it like this, that the Sonderkommando were cemetery diggers. That is, if you (*think*) of...., well, cemetery employees. Who wants to (*work*), even in our...

Mü: society, let's say, people who work in a cemetery or such. That's how you have to look at it, even in the concept of the camp. These people were isolated from others. Even if it was possible to have some contacts (*with others*). But I think there was no real difference between the prisoners of the Sonderkommando or the prisoners, the other prisoners, no real difference. I would state it very simply. Auschwitz was, after all, was an extermination camp. And extermination was the priority in Auschwitz.

La: Surely that was its goal.

Mü: Yes.

La: Yes, the main...

Bob. No. 91 (Mü 19)

Mü: Auschwitz was an extermination camp. Extermination, extermination was pretty much the priority in Auschwitz, and all the activities of the those in charge (*literally: "the rulers*), as well as those of their victims, were directed toward that end.

La: Yes, extermination was the goal.

Mü: Yes, yes, extermination was the goal. And under almost inconceivable, I would say, under the most brutal conditions of the SS, the prisoners were forced, I would say, to participate in these activities.

La: Yes, to participate.

Mü: So, as for instance, even the prisoners had to fence themselves in, in that they built the fence themselves. They built, they had to

Mü: install the guard station on which the SS guards stood.

La: And they had to build the crematoria.

Mü: They had to, if you will, in the years 1942-43...skilled and unskilled workers, I would say, had to work here and build the four crematoria. They had to, say, maintain the trucks. Those were the trucks that came up the ramp and transported the people to the crematorium again and again.

La: The people from Kanada too.

Mü: Let's say, the people from Kanada, if they took... they took...with the new arrivals, they had to, had to take their possessions, had to take their possessions. The prisoners had to tattoo one another. They were also forced to, say, in the hospital to participate with the Vernol inoculations. (*They had to*) hold the people down, then undress them when they were corpses. They also had to, say, give false diagnoses in order to, I would say, to falsify deaths, that is, to falsify the cause of death. But it wasn't just, it wasn't just the physical work, there was some mental work, let's say, some prisoners, who were secretaries for the senior SS officers. There were secretaries (*female*) in Gestapo offices of the political division, etc. All these people were forced to participate under the most awful, I would say, the most awful conditions

Mü: in these activities. At, at the end of this cycle of extermination...

La: ...the cycle of extermination, yes.

Mü: I would say, stood the Sonderkommando. And what in turn did the Sonderkommando have to do? They had to incinerate the corpses, and thereby wipe out the trail of the crime. They had to maintain the ovens, they had to tend to (*the system*), be in the undressing room and load up the people's possessions, load them onto trucks. And in addition, they had to, let's say, had to participate even in the executions, which were carried out in the crematorium, like those, say, of the prisoners in the hospital...executions (*Müller and Lanzmann together*)...including executions in the crematoria.

La: Why, why, in which...

Mü: Let's say, for instance, if some "bunkered" Jews came, who had been discovered. That is, hidden Jews, a small group who had hidden themselves. And suddenly, they (*the SS*) found them. For the most part, they were brought to the crematorium and were shot, shot, shot there. Also, some political, political prisoners were shot in the crematorium.

La: How, how is it that the gas chambers weren't used under these circumstances.

Was there no...

Mü: The shootings took place within the crematorium in the undressing room. A wall had been built there, built up, and, a wooden wall and at this wooden wall, the shootings took place.

La: Why weren't these people gassed?

Mü: Yes, because, because gassing was only done then if the number was at least around 2, over 200.

La: Ah, yes.

Mü: Yes, and this (*group*) was too small. But to get back to the subject. So, as you, as I've already said, the Sonderkommando had their place at (*the end*) of the whole cycle of extermination. And if you take, if you take all these activities as a whole, then you can see that all of these activities served only one purpose: extermination. So, I would say, the whole camp Auschwitz/Birkenau was one big Sonderkommando.

La: Yes, it's very good that you say that. That is very good. But why, for example, in Treblinka, in Sobibor, in Belzec, when people talk about those extermination camps nowadays, they always say, that there were transit camps for worker Jews, so-called work camps for Jews and the death camps. These...these death camps were hundreds of kilometers away, a different world. Isn't that so?

Mü: Yes, that's right. (*But*) it's not true; that doesn't add up.

La: Is that just fabrication?

Mü: Yes, I think so. They all more or less think, those who were here – as well as those who... the survivors, yes – those who many times...those are misconceptions, I think; such myths went around more or less in Auschwitz, in Birkenau too... a lot was passed on about that. It is

Mü: certainly understandable. You see, the, a regular prisoner had no access to the, to the extermination sites. At the time that exterminations took place, there were no actual witnesses who could have seen it up close. And when everything is so secretive, then there is something, where you, which you, it allows for imagination, misconception. These fantasy-misconceptions also grew into lots, lots...turned into these rumors, which didn't add up; there were lots from other prisoners, that is, well-intentioned, yes.

La: Yes, I see. What impressed me so deeply in Auschwitz, for example, is that I saw that between Crematorium 2 and the last barracks of the women's camp were 50 meters.

Mü: Yes, the distance was maybe 50-60 meters, 50-60 meters.

La: It means that the women, who lived in these barracks, saw everything, knew everything.

Mü: Yes, I think so, that they (*knew*) about these things; they were so obvious. When the transports arrived, that is, in Birkenau, when the transports arrived, and then when they, then when they, then when they were taken to the extermination sites. The prisoners, who saw that, every one of the prisoners knew where the people were going. It's just that no one could help them. Yes, it was no, no secret. Every one of the prisoners knew. I think that thousands of still-surviving prisoners saw how the people,

Mü: I would say, crossed the threshold of the extermination sites. That's how I would say it, from afar, from afar, they saw it. And they didn't see one instance in which a person came out alive. That's what the people saw. Only, the actual inferno, what really happened in those four walls, that, I believe, was only seen by those who...

La: ...the people of the Sonderkommando. In your opinion, who are the people, who in Auschwitz...and mainly, basically in the extermination camps, who are the people that survived? What were the, what were the conditions, the character, personally (*their personality, which enabled them*) to survive?

Mü: You don't mean just the Sonderkommando? In general?

La: In general.

Mü: Yes, as for survival...it was somewhat...first of all, you have to make the decision not to commit suicide. So there's that, and then it's a matter of (*facing*) a hard, very hard struggle.

La: A very hard ...?

Mü: Struggle (*could also be: "fight"*).

La: Struggle, yes.

Mü: ...that is connected to a person's will to live.

#### Bob. No. 92 (Mü 20)

La: Yes, how was it possible to survive in this...

Mü: You mean, in the Sonderkommando?

La: In the Sonderkommando, under these conditions, circumstances, in this world of death. What was the attitude, the purpose...

Mü: ...of life

La: ...of life

Mü: Well, it's true that the Sonderkommando especially...I mean, we found ourselves in a very extreme situation. Daily, with our own eyes, we saw thousands, thousands upon thousands being killed. With our very eyes, we could see...

La: ...your own people.

Mü: Yes, and we could see that no one protested, no one said a word, when ten, even twenty thousand went up through the chimney every day.

Bob. No. 92 (Mü 21)

Mü: Yes, it's true that the Sonderkommando lived under very extreme conditions. With our very eyes, every day we saw how thousands and thousands upon thousands of innocent people disappeared up the chimney. We saw, we saw, we could see with our very eyes, what was the meaning of an individual, that no one (*stood up*) against the...that people arrived there, innocent people: children, women, men, well, that no one, that ...they suddenly disappeared, and the world was mute. We felt abandoned by the world, by humanity. And under these conditions, we were able to have a keen sense for the chance at survival. Since we saw all that and what the meaning of a person's life was. And we were convinced that there's always hope in a person, so long as he is alive. You can't give up hope, as long as you're alive. And so we struggled within our hard lot from day to day

Mü: week after week, month after month, year after year...in the hope that maybe we would succeed, after all, in escaping from this hell. And that this, that this was no illusion, and that the, this struggle...had a meaning of its own. It's a fact, after all, that a hundred prisoners of the Sonderkommando survived this inferno. We asked ourselves many times, what's more important in this moment, these thousands of people, whom we can't help, or the lives of a hundred witnesses, who are still alive today, will live tomorrow perhaps? And one day, they could inform the world what happened there. And we asked ourselves this question many times.

La: But I'd like to...

Mü: Well, that was the, that was...

La: ...I'd like to know exactly...that it wasn't reconstructed later. That's how it was in that moment, at that time, (*how you*) survived, to give a report to...

Mü: ...to continue, to survive. And I'd like to say, a second, a second very important component was, the ones about whom we would perhaps be speaking, was the resistance activity. The resistance activity, in which we were planning a revolt, that gave us, gave our lives meaning. Do you understand? And in this way, we had, our lives began to have meaning.

La: Yes, but that's something different. You yourself wrote, continue to live another second, another minute, another...

Mü: Yes, that's what I was just pointing out, the fact that we lived, we lived from one, from one day to the next, from a day to a month, from a month to a year. And many didn't make it, many...

La: Did you have a fear of death, for instance, when you thought of your own death. Was that a, a feeling? Did you...

Mü: No, no, I had no fear of death. I have more, more fear of death here on the outside than I had there in the Sonderkommando. Especially since I saw, that death, that is, is imminent; it was, the person just disappeared...into nothing. And this fact made us say to ourselves, more or less, in the Sonderkommando...

La: Yes, do you think, that this will to live under such...

Mü: ...extreme conditions...

La: Extreme conditions is a specifically Jewish characteristic?

Mü: I wouldn't say that it's a spe...Jewish...I think it's more or less a human one. It's just that Jews find themselves, they were forced to, more so, for their, for their, I would say, survival...to...to pay a higher price, I would say, for their chance at survival. They had no, they had no state of their own, they were, as I've said before, they were expelled by force. They had no land, no country to fall back on. They (*relied*) on themselves...(they were) by God, I would say, and humanity abandoned. They had nothing. And I think, this, this situation too, essentially

Mü: played a role.

La: Yes, and there are people who say that the members of the Sonderkommando were robots.

Mü: Robots. Yes, I don't think that was the case. It came to this, that those who came to the Sonderkommando in the first days and were confronted with these, with these atrocities, who saw this whole inferno suddenly, and until the shock of the situation was mastered, until then, people was robots. That fits because they had been driven there by the SS with clubs, to carry out this work by force. So, until that time, I would say, they were like robots. All of them. But when they had lived there for some time, and if they were able to give their lives some meaning, as I explained before, they thought like normal people, about which there is plenty of evidence. Look at the proof in the notes of Zamel Löwenthal, if you take that, what he...let's say, the revolt, about which we have yet to talk, which was carried out by the Sonderkommando, after all...about other activities, in which the Sonderkommando was involved, so that the world would know at some point, what kind of atrocities took place here. All those are proof, that these were normal, thinking people, even then,

Mü: people who had already overcome the shock, who were focused on the fact of somehow surviving day to day in any way possible, yes, and how this, and then to be able, to be able to inform the world what happened there.

La: But, the big question for me – not only for you – is this: how was it possible to do such work...

Mü: ...to do

La: Not just to do it, but to get used to it, to...

Mü: No, that's not right, that people got used to it, overall. See here, that...it was...we shouldn't...if you take the Sonderkommando as one Kommando, that was a group, let's say, who, who, who, who didn't care what they did. That was one small group, well, they didn't much think about it. That was a group...

La: But what is the meaning of brut...primitive...

Mü: Well, primitive people weren't stupid, they were just so terrified; the shock kept them there.

La: Ah, yes.

Mü: That's how I would say it. And they lived, and without any purpose. Even in the Sonderkommando were members, who were, let's say, who were never involved in the resistance. Yes. But the majority of the Sonderkommando were normal, thinking people. They were human beings, fathers...

Bob. No. 93 (Mü 22)

Mü: They were very simple people, who had been pulled out of their civilian life and ended up on the ramp of Birkenau, where they had been selected, where no one asked them, where they arrived, and suddenly they ended up in the buildings of death in the extermination camps. They were confronted with the most terrible conditions, which human beings had conjured up. In any case, as to the question you posed about to what extent people got used to this, I have to say, or, well, you can't talk about this in terms of getting used to (*the work*), getting used to it. The first shock that was overcome, as I've already stated, led to the will to survive, how to survive, how to survive. And if you wanted to live, you had to, had to, I would say, adapt to the conditions, even if you were deeply repelled by them. There was no other way. Yes. So, you can't talk about, that maybe people got used to that, to these terrible daily scenes, which took place before their very eyes, that they got used to them. But there was no alternative, if one wanted to go on living. And it also happened, that when we were unhappy, we laughed a lot at that time. Even when we were unhappy, we played soccer a lot. Yes, in Auschwitz, not just within the Sonderkommando. Yes.

La: The Sonderkommando even played soccer?

Mü: There were even times, when we, when we

Mü: when the prisoners, when there was a bit of free time, when the prisoners played some soccer, or the prisoners even laughed. It also happened that there was singing.

La: Even singing?

Mü: Ah yes, let's say, I could tell you, the Greek Jews, those poor, good people, among whom many, many were involved in the Resistance Movement, whose great leader was Alexis Aerera. He was a significant person in the resistance group. A former captain of the Greek Army, with a lot of resistance experiences. But to get back to these people. Many of them worked with, with, with processing the ashes. The ashes were pulverized. And a place had been built in 1944 by the murder engineer Head Battalion Leader, Moll, where the ashes were, well, pulverized. And you could see these people stamping the ashes. And all the while, for instance, they were singing, "Mama santanto felice", a song. Again and again, steadily, you could hear these monotonous songs from them. These monotonous songs, monotonous, always in rhythm. Which didn't mean, that it was sung as if they were in their element, as I said, as if they (*sang with*) a sense of freedom. They were terribly unhappy, but they had, as I already said, no alternative.

La: Mama Santa, Santa Felice?

Mü: Mama Santanto Felice.

La: Santanto...

Mü:: That's what they sang.

La: Completely mono-tonal?

Mü: It was mono-tonal, yes, and with misery and grieving, but what could they do?

La: Did you know Jews from Corfu?

Mü: Yes, in the Sonderkommando, there were a few from Corfu. Yes. There were some from Corfu, who...they told about their, about their, I would say, their exodus, until they got to Auschwitz...

La: No, no, that was a terrible...

Mü: Yes, they told me, that in the...that they were brought first with ships. Then, they told me, they were loaded, loaded onto wagons, cattle cars. They didn't get anything to drink, nothing. Many of the children, the women died or older men died even on the way to Corfu.

La: And this trip was very, very long.

Mü: Hard and long. And when these people arrived at the ramp, when they had been let out, they were almost...almost unconscious. They couldn't orient themselves as to where they were.

La: But, for instance, in which language were these Greek Jews addressed?

Mü: Yes, they (*the SS*) spoke with these Greek Jews...a few Greek Jews could speak a bit of Yiddish. There were a few, a few of them there. And besides, a few of

Mü: the Greeks could speak French. So, Josse Washafsky was a Frenchman. There were a lot of Polish Jews in the Sonderkommando, who had lived in France, Janke Handelsmann....

La: Who came back from France...*(both speaking at the same time)*

Mü: Yes, yes, deported. Yes, so people were able to communicate in the Sonderkommando.

La: Yes, but for me there was always the terrible thought, the fate of the Greek Jews. From a completely foreign land, another world, to come so far.

Mü: Now look, whether they came from a foreign country, were in a foreign country, I didn't mention it in my book, which I wrote, but I can remember that, let's say, once a Kommando of Greek Jews drove with a truck to unload the ashes into the Vistula (*German: "Weichsel"*) River.

La: The Vistula?

Mü: Wisla.

La: Wisla?

Mü: Wisla.

La: Vistula?

Mü: Yes, Vistula. And using this opportunity, they attacked the two SS men and hit them on the head, but they tried to... they fled. But unfortunately, they were found within a day and brought back to the crematorium and then shot. I just want to say, what power there was in these people, that even in, under these conditions,

Mü: they tried to flee, when they didn't even have the language and so on, yes. That again is proof, that people did everything they could to escape this hell. Only it wasn't, unfortunately, it wasn't just difficult, but almost impossible.

La: Almost impossible.

Mü: Almost...impossible, I would say.

La: Perri Brod (*Perry Broad*)...and that was a grand lie, he told us; I saw him. It was, it was easy to...

Mü: An escapee from Auschwitz.

La: Yes.

Mü: I wouldn't say, that Perri Brod (*Perry Broad*) was correct in that. Maybe it was easy, to cross the, the big border with the big guard posts.

La: Yes, that's what I meant.

Mü: Yes, maybe that's what he meant. He's right up to a point, but until you, when the, when the people that were, let's say, when the Jews there, who had come so far already. They had no country to fall back on, no people. People (*locals*) were afraid to hide them, because they knew, that that was, that was the death penalty... their death if they, if they...

La: But it was possible to flee through the big guard stations...

Mü: Very, very difficult, but possible. But I think the bigger problem was, the bigger problem, when one arrived behind the big

Mü: guard stations. What were you going to do? Mainly, for someone...

La: And you yourself, did you think about fleeing?

Mü: Yes, a few times I thought about fleeing. I wanted to flee with my friends, Erich Kulka and Otto Kraus. We made a plan in the year, 1944, and we wanted to figure out how far to flee, but then this, this, our initiative became more difficult by the fact that Erich Kulka had a son, who was quite young and...he was about twelve or thirteen and he (*might*) survive Auschwitz, and because of this possibility, among other things, it got more difficult.

La: Good. Now I'd like to talk about the liquidation of the Sonderkommando people and...

Bob. No. 94 (Plan muet, then Mü 23)

La: I've heard that you survived four or five liquidations...

Mü: Selections.

La: Selections of the Sonderkommando members. Can you explain what the goal of these selections was? Did the SS want to exterminate the members of the Sonderkommando because they knew too much? And, but I think, at the same time, it was in the interest of the SS, to ...these people...

Mü: ...keep them.

La: ...to keep them, yes, because these people could....

Mü: after all, they (*the Sonderkommando*) had more or less gotten used to...

La: ...the work.

La: ...can you explain it?

Mü: Yes, on that topic. In all, 4 or 5 selections of the Sonderkommando were made. It's not true, as is often said, that the selections took place periodically. No, it was...it depended on, if transports for extermination arrived or not. If several transports arrived and needed the Sonderkommando, then the Sonderkommando was left (*as it was*). And if for a long time, there weren't, weren't any transports, then...and...then the selections were carried out...

La: That means that...

Mü: ...which, for all practical purposes, led to, which actually led to a liquidation of, I would say, the people, that is, the extermination of the people. Those people were killed.

La: Yes. That means, the exterminations were the reason, the basic reasons for your survival...do you know what I mean?

Mü: No, I don't understand the question.

*(Interpreter advises.)*

La: The circumstances of your survival were (*dependent on*) the transports. The exterminations.

Mü: Yes, I would say so.

La: To put it precisely.

Mü: Yes. Of course. I've already said that everyone, well, many of the Sonderkommando, the people, did their utmost to stay alive, whenever possible...to...always to do their utmost within the limits, in order to survive. But that

Mü: wasn't always, I would say, within the resources of the prisoners of the Sonderkommando, that, that these, these chances of survival, was also more, I would say, dependent on that...if he...one or the other, didn't become the victim of the selection, that is, if he didn't get selected. And this matter, it was more or less a question of fate. Let's say, in my case, I would say, a case in, as you know, the first selection in Birkenau took place in February, 1944; 200 of the then 400 prisoners of the Sonderkommando were selected and they were sent to Lublin, and killed there in Lublin.

La: That's how late the...the first selection was that late?

Mü: No. In the Sonderkommando of which I was a part...Before that, selections had been carried out in the year 1942. But in the Sonderkommando of which I was a part, yes, was the...one of the first selections was in February, 1944. Yes, and...just on this very evening, when we were in Crematorium 5 and were about to go back, go back to the camp, 20 firemen were selected and told, you're staying here, we need...a few, a few shot prisoners have to be incinerated...shot prisoners, who had been executed previously, and I stayed. And when we, later...the twenty, when we got back to Block 13 in the evening, we suddenly discovered, that 200 prisoners were gone. So, they had been selected. If I had been in the camp, stayed...and I had been there, for sure I would have been one of the victims of the selection

Mü: So it was this time, too, a...

La: ...a happenstance.

Mü: ...a, I would say, a pure...that was pure chance.

La: Yes.

Mü: That's how you have to look at it. All told, I think...for the Sonderkommando, four to five selections were carried out.

La: But I think you didn't quite understand my, my question. And you've already stated the same thing, but I'd like you to delve further this point.

Mü: I don't know, which...

La: ...this point somewhat...

Mü: I don't know in what sense.

(Mü 24)

Mü: The size of the Sonderkommando always depended on whether, whether they were needed or not. So, in a word: when more transports arrived, yes, the Sonderkommando was enlarged. When the transports arrived periodically and they, they were needed, then the selections didn't take place.

La: And were you afraid, not you (*singular*), but the people of the Sonderkommando, when, when the number of transports was...short (*decreased*)?

Mü: If the...if the people of the Sonderkommando...of course, no, they were never afraid whether the transports came or not. Everyone in the Sonderkommando knew, that if no transports arrive, that that could mean a certain risk for him. But that wasn't just with the Sonderkommando. Let's take the Kanada Kommando...the Kanada

Mü: Kommando at times had, yes, until the end of 1944, 1,000 people. And at, at the time when the Hungarian Jews came. And in, in, I would say, when there were fewer transports...

La: Yes, but the people could do other work, but the people of the Sonderkommando couldn't do other work.

Mü: Yes, yes, that was the difference. And for the Sonderkommando it meant an immediate, an immediate extermination.

La: Yes, extermination.

Mü: Yes.

La: That's the reason...

Mü: But...

La: Maybe they were afraid...

Mü: ...for the Sonderkommando...

La: ...the number of transports decreased.

Mü: Yes, but that didn't, the Sonderkommando didn't want that, never, that the people...

La: Of course, but that is the horrible...

Mü: Yes...the contradiction exists in that...that the Sonderkommando, the lives of the Sonderkommando was dependent on whether the transports, if...on the arrival of transports. That's true up to this point.

La: That is a...that's a very important...

Mü: And so the Sonderkommando, because in the Sonderkommando they knew that if the transports didn't come, then that would pretty much lead to a liquidation. When, when...that was clear to everyone. For that reason, the Sonderkommando, among others, (*but*) not just

Mü: because of that, among others (*reasons*), ah yes, I think, they were the main activists in organizing and carrying out the, the revolt. That is one issue, among others.

La: Yes, of course, yes. Of course, those two matters are crucially connected.

Mü: Yes, in another Kommando, if, let's say, in another Kommando, let's say, in a regular prisoner Kommando, if the transport didn't come, there was...the prisoners could go into another Kommando.

La: Because it was always that way in every camp that I've studied. Whether it was Treblinka or Sobibor or Fen (?) or Kohnhof. In the beginning, they (*used*) new people for the Sonderkommando...

Mü: ...brought on.

La: ...took, and they killed the first ones. In the beginning. But later, not. They thought...the SS thought that these people of the Sonderkommando were already, one shouldn't say it, but I will say "skilled workers". And they (*the SS*) needed these people.

Mü: Yes, one para...one ques...one parallel...one parallel. I can confirm that there was something similar in Auschwitz. Let's say, in our case, similarly in my case. When I was first chosen to be in the Sonderkommando, and then when we, when we...the ovens there, as I said before, worked and ruined the Auschwitz Crematoria in the year 1942, later, only one Kommando "Fischl Kommando" was established there.

Mü: And the job of this Fischl Kommando was, that is, we six people in the Fischl preparatory (*Kommando*) was merely to carry off the possessions of the people after a gassing, and when everything was clear, a regular Firemen's Kommando came along and they started to...to incinerate these people, as if these people had fallen out of the sky. But I think...

Bob. No. 95 (Mü 25)

Mü: The reasons for this distribution of labor, if one can call it that, consisted of the fact that the SS just wanted to cover up the crimes.

La: Cover up, yes.

Mü: But later, they probably realized that that was impossible because, because in Birkenau, mainly, there were long processions winding through the streets of Birkenau, right before the eyes of the prisoners. And the prisoners knew exactly...

La: ...it couldn't be covered up.

Mü: ...where, where these people were going. The cover-up didn't serve its purpose, and that's why it was organized differently.

La: You, for example, you were a fireman?

Mü: Fireman.

La: How long was the training for such work?

Mü: Yes, well, there was, there was no training. To do this activity or any activity in the crematorium, especially in the extermination sites, you needed neither a specialization nor anything close to it.

Mü: The time of work was very short, perhaps a half hour or an hour. The, I would say, the hardest part of all, was to adjust to this terrible scen...to this, to this terrible scenario, which was, which was taking place in the extermination sites.

La: Meaning, that...

Mü: Well, touching the corpses...

La: ...technically, it wasn't hard to...

Mü: No, no, because these, because these extermination sites were, were the ovens, and to put it another way, it was, it was, in my opinion, a very primitive method...The heating, etc. wasn't, we're not dealing with advanced technology, as has often been written. The bulk of it (*the fuel*) came from the people. And the ovens, and later then, as I said bef...as I said, then the pits, etc.... with regard to specialization and...

La: It was very primitive?

Mü: Very primitive, one couldn't, well, one couldn't, one couldn't say.

La: But the psychological learning time, that is something else, yes?

Mü: Yes, you can't speak of psychology. But to adjust psychologically, let's say, for example, a...not a fireman, but even harder was, let's say to be a carrier of corpses, a puller of corpses, who had to pull out the corpses from the gas chamber, yes. For that you needed

La: Did you do that...

Mü: Yes, I did, well, I...

La: ...once or twice?

Mü: Yes, I did that too. Yes. Right from the beginning. At the Moll-time, that is, in 1944 Moll, well, he made us do it. And the most horrible part of all was...

La: That was the most horrible...

Mü: ...the absolute worst, the most horrible of all, when you opened the gas chamber, to see the dreadful scene, how the people were pressed onto each other like basalt, standing like stones, how they...when you opened the door to the gas chamber. How they fell out of the gas chamber.

La: Did you see that?

Mü: Yes, I saw that several times. And that was the hardest of all, for you could never get used to that. That was impossible. Even the physical work was very hard.

La: Physical?

Mü: Yes, not just the psychic, but also the physical work was very...

La: That means, that from a technical standpoint, not very hard work, but very hard psychologically..

Mü: Psychologically and psychic...psychic and physical.

La: Psychic and...

Mü: I would say more psychic than physic...

La: But the people of the Sonderkommando who went into the gas chambers, to (*pull*) the people out...

Mü: ...pull.

La: ...it wasn't dangerous? There was no gas?

Mü: Yes, in Crematorium 2 and 3 there were, there were fans which pulled the gas out. In Crematorium 3 and 4, the gas chambers were aired out before. Yes, but even so, but...there were several times when there was still gas, and there were many cases of prisoners fainting from the gas while doing the pulling.

La: And died?

Mü: ...well, no. No one died. I can't remember that (*anyone*) died...but I can remember many cases...there were times with me, when I, when I...had pressure in my head and almost fainted.

La: They had no gas masks?

Mü: Yes, at times there were gas...the gas masks, but the filters, which were used, weren't appropriate for this situation, so that breathing in the, in the gas masks was impossible.

La: Impossible?

Mü: Yes, very minimal. Yes, restricted to just a very short time.

La: Now, you said that the people in the gas chamber were dead like basalt.

Mü: Yes, you have to see like this, that the gas, when it was dropped in, it worked in such a way, that it rose from bottom to top. And now in this terrible fight (*could also be "struggle"*), which ensued,

La: A fight?

Mü: It was a fight which ensued there in, in, in, in... The lights were out, turned off in the gas chamber. It was dark in there. They couldn't see. And the stronger ones tried to get to the top, because they probably realized that the more they got to the top...the more air they got. And besides, most of them pushed themselves toward the door.

La: All toward the door?

Mü: Yes. Psychologically, they knew that the door was there, maybe (*it would be possible*) to break through the door. So, by instinct in the, in the, in the fight with death, which took place there...And that's how one could see that especially children and weak people, older people, they lay at the bottom, and the strongest ones lay on the top because they, because the living...in the fight with death, the father didn't know that his child was lying behind him, under him.

La: And when the door was opened...

Mü: ...the people fell out, fell out like a chunk of rock. Big rocks, let's say, like ballast from a truck. And then, there where the zyklon was dropped in, there, on the other hand, it was empty. There, where the zyklon crystals were dropped in, it was empty.

La: It was empty.

Mü: Yes. There was a big empty space. Probably the victims knew that the zyklon had the strongest effect there.

La: And the people were, how were they...the, the, the corpses, they were...

Mü: Yes, the people were very...well, they were injured.

La: Injured.

Mü: When they were (*trampled*) in the dark or rammed against each other. Filthy.

La: Filthy?

Mü: With feces.

La: With what?

Mü: Blood from the ears and nose. In some cases, you could see that the people lying on the floor, well, I would say, from being pressed by others, they weren't even...you couldn't, let's say, the children's skulls were broken.

La: And there was excrement?

Mü: Excuse me?

La: There was dirt, there was...

Mü: Yes, the people...vomited...bleeding...

La: How do we say that?

Mü: From the ears, from their noses, there was menstrual blood maybe...not maybe, for sure. All that was (*going on*) in the fight for life, in death.

La: It was terrible.

Mü: ...was a terrible sight, and that was the hardest...

La: Good. The resistance. Now the resistance.

Mü: Excuse me?

La: The resistance.

Mü: Yes, the resistance. Yes.

La: That is hard to...

Mü: About the resistance I would say the following:

In the fall on 1943, when it was clear to all of us that we would not get help from anyone, if we didn't help ourselves...

La: We, who is that?

Mü: There arose among the 400 people in the Sonderkommando a few, I would say...

(Error in the registration. Now to Side B)

Bob. No. 96 (Mü 26)

Mü: All during 1943, we thought a lot about how we in the Sonderkommando could put a stop to these exterminations, while at the same time, saving our lives. And we concluded, that there was only one possibility: if we could perhaps carry out an armed revolt.

La: But that was a dream, an armed revolt...

Mü: This idea...

La: To do that in Auschwitz.

Mü: ...took hold, I would say, in the minds of several leading personalities within the Sonderkommando, who had lots of experience with resistance. Just to name a few: Jankel Handelsmann, Grabowsky, the Polish political prisoner, Vladek...

La: In the Sonderkommando?

Mü: In the Sonderkommando.

La: How many Poles were in the Sonderkommando?

Mü: Five.

La: Five, five Poles. How many Russians?

Mü: Nineteen.

La: Nineteen. So, the others were Jews?

Mü: The others...one ethnic German, and the others were Jews.

La: One ethnic German?

Mü: Yes.

La: As what?

Mü: As Head Kapo.

La: As Head Kapo. His name?

Mü: Konvojent.

La: Konvojent.

Mü: Karl Konvojent was his name. I wouldn't say, that, that the revolt would have been an...impossible thing. We had decided, that if we could get a few weapons, that with the use of these weapons (*and*) in working together with all the prisoners in the whole camp, the revolt could succeed, and there could be a real chance, there was a real chance that several, perhaps several thousand prisoners could be saved.

La: It was unthinkable without weapons?

Mü I would say that from today's standpoint, it is unthinkable, if you see it that way. But you have to consider in which camp we were at that time. We had been abandoned by God and the world. No one, I would say, came to our aid. So that

Mü: was, I would say, the only chance (*to leave*) this inferno. Maybe from today's perspective, it was overblown, but from the standpoint of that time, yes, it was the only possibility by which we, by which we could perhaps escape that hell.

La: No, my question was "without weapons".

Mü: Without weapons it was impossible. It was impossible without weapons, and certainly it was imposs...it was impossible without the collaboration of the whole camp. Without these two, that is, the collaboration of the camp and with weapons, it would be...

La: Meaning that the collaboration of whole camp was necessary.

Mü: That was the basic requirement. And to that end, we, that is, our representatives: Grabowsky, Handelsmann, Vladek, Kaminsky and others, made connections, made connections with the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement Birkenau, and through them with Auschwitz, to coordinate the initiative, the whole revolt.

La: The planning?

Mü: Planning and coordination. We received the reply that the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement, that is, of the Resistance Movement in Auschwitz agreed with our view of the situation and were ready to work with us on it. The first weapons to reach us came from the Auschwitz Crematorium from back in 1942, a time when eight Ukrainian SS men were brought in, who were shot in a battle with the SS. To explain,

Mü: a few Ukrainian SS men lived in Auschwitz. They were afraid that they were going to be gassed.

La: Ukrainians?

Mü: Ukrainians. So they tried to flee and during this flight they were shot and were brought into the crematorium. And one of our friends, Schwarz, who...when those man were brought in, he searched through their pockets, maybe for cigarettes or tobacco, and there he found three hand grenades.

La: ...in '42?

Mü: Yes, in the year, 1942. And later in '43, these hand grenades were hidden in the crematorium in the ashes of an urn. Then we brought them over in the crema...that is, to Birkenau. And these hand grenades made up our first, I would say, our first baseline of weapons. Later...

La: They were from Auschwitz 1...

Mü: Found in Auschwitz 1, yes, and then brought to Birkenau. And it was very easy. When we came to Birkenau in January, 1943, we told Kapo Kaminsky. And Kapo Kaminsky figured out that there must be a few other pieces of equipment in Auschwitz...like iron rods, which could be of use and he convinced the Technical Sergeant, Voss, that we could bring those over. And Technical Sergeant, Voss, was, well, agreed to do so and so, Schwarz and a few other prisoners and another one, Eije Kanjak, went into the crematorium of Auschwitz and

Mü: loaded up these iron rods and besides those, they picked up the other items, the three hand grenades. And that's how the three hand grenades got into the Birkenau crematorium and were stored in Crematorium 2.

La: And those were the first weapons?

Mü: Those were the first weapons. But a big source of hope for us. You always have to look at it from the perspective of that time. We continued to organize; during the transports, we came upon many incredible valuables – diamonds, dollars and jewelry, which we used to obtain weapons, mainly revolvers. And now we...In the Special...were...in, in, in, in, in the Birkenau Kommandos, there was a so-called "Dismantling Works" Kommando. This Kommando worked on assembling the parts of airplanes, which had been shot down. And in these airplanes were often found, I would say, revolvers with ammunition. And with the help of the Soviet POWs, who worked there, we smuggled these revolvers into the Auschwitz Crematorium. That is, they got into our hands.

La: How many pistols?

Mü: There were six pistols, six or seven pistols, which we got a hold of. And with ammunition. Besides those, later, later, at a later time, we made contact with the, with the Women's Kommando in the Union (*Manufacturing*) Plant.

La: Chemical?

Mü: No, that was an Auschwitz plant. And this plant was a munitions

Mü: plant. And in this munitions plant worked Women's Kommando. And with this Women's Kommando, we were able to establish contact through our friend, Grabowsky, and through these women, powder in our resist... was smuggled, that is, powder got into our hands. Now, our plan, which we had worked out, looked like this: after the arrival of the Kommando in the camp, we were to overpower our guards and to take their weapons. That was to take place at the same time all over the crematoria.

La: In all the crematoria.

Mü: In all of them – 2, 3, 4 and 5. Now, our comrades were to dress in the SS uniforms and lead us, as was normal, into the camp. In each, let's say, from Crematorium 5 there were...

Bob. No. 97 (Mü 27)

Mü: Some of us experienced comrades, experienced comrades, who were (*familiar*) with weapons...

La: ...used to them...

Mü ...who, well, who could handle weapons, were supposed to change into SS uniforms and lead us in the usual way, how it always was done in the evening, to the camp. In so doing, when passing each Block leader's room, one of our comrades was supposed to go to the Block leader's room as a camouflaged SS man and with a silencer gun, which was in the crematorium, where the selec... where the executions were (*had taken place*), he was supposed to shoot the SS men present there. And just imagine,

Mü: ...if we had all (*arrived at*) these Block leader's rooms, if we had arrived at the camp, if we had (*reached*) these Block leader's rooms, if we had overpowered all these SS men, how many weapons we would have had in our possession. The same thing was supposed to happen in another, a second ring, in the Women's Kommando, the Women's Kommando in Crematorium 2. Besides that, we thought carefully about the big guard station. There, a small Kommando was supposed to, could have set up a so-called Repair Kommando, whose task it was, that another guard, a camouflaged guard was supposed to lead this one, and they were supposed to go to the...after work...

La: The idea was, the idea was to (*mount*) a big...like a, like a...

Mü: Yes, a, a big, I would say, revolt. In collaboration with those, those, in working with, that is, with active participation of the whole camp, with active participation of the whole, I would say, even the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement.

La: Did you yourself take part in these discussions?

Mü: Of course. Even though I hadn't been a soldier at that time, and didn't have much experience with, with, with, with, with, with...

La: Weapons.

Mü: Not just weapons, but I think with resistance activities. So I was an active member of the group and was involved in many of these matters. Thus, I can describe exactly, exactly how the plan was to unfold. In a word, we also wanted to overpower the big guard station, as

Mü: I've already said, so that we wanted to build up a Kommando of seven, eight men, which was ...with one prisoner and they were supposed to go to each guard. The camouflaged SS man had to say, he (*the real SS man*) should come down, that the Repair Kommando had to repair the guard station. Yes, because we had...this Kommando was the so-called Handyman Kommando. One would have a saw, so it would look real.

La: What was the, what was the plan?

Mü: Besides that, we thought that some of our comrades would stay, stay in the crematorium and would make sure that in the, in the meantime, that in the...these, I would say, extermination sites would, would all be blown up. With the dynamite, which we (*got*) from the Women's Camp...But also with the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement, the work was coordinated in such a way that even in other Kommandos, precisely at this time, the other Kommandos were to overpower their guards and take their weapons and change their clothes, so that, I would say, chaos would reign, so that there was no way to tell who was the real SS man and who wasn't. But we had covered that issue, in that the right one, that is, the camouflaged SS man would have a yellow armband, so that all the, so that all the comrades, who had dressed up as, as...had changed into SS men, so that they...

La: Yes, yes, of course.

Mü: And besides that, it was decided that in the camp all the barracks would

Mü: all the barracks would be set on fire. That the wire fence would...a few holes would be (*cut*) with insulation scissors, which we also had at hand, that we would cut a few holes through, that is, that we would break out, to make sure that the bulk of the camp (*prisoners*) could get through, and that they would have time until our friends, our comrades, who were armed after all, had secured their way by having finished off the real SS men, that is, fought the SS men.

La: Yes.

Mü: That was how, that's how our plan, the general plan looked. That was a grand plan that was to be carried out at a time when no one expected it – a big surprise, yes, and we hoped that maybe one out of a hundred would survive. That was a big accomplishment. If one out of a hundred could survive, then it was a big accomplishment. And among us in the Sonderkommando, everyone believed that he, of all people, would be the hundredth. And that was a big source of hope for us. And then we thought, that we, when we had broken through the big guard station, we would meet up in the nearby woods with partisans, and then, that we could hide in the woods and from there, we would carry out a few (*resistance*) activities, as for example, it would be possible to blow up the access to Auschwitz, I think, the train tracks, etc. That was the original plan, which we had at the time. And it was coordinated with the Headquarters of the Resistance Group of Auschwitz. But unfortunately, whenever the time

Mü: for this revolt was set, we were told, time and again, by the Headquarters of the Resistance Group that it wasn't possible to do it. Again and again, that it couldn't be carried out. And it was justified by not being the right time. We kept *(protesting)* against such circumstances...we protested against this reasoning many times. We said that this is the right time, but unfortunately, at the same time, we had to respect the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement, the Movement. They didn't want to...later we realized, to go for such a high-risk undertaking. Even for the Resistance Group, it was no simple matter. Look, the Resistance Group, the Headquarters of the Resistance Group, there were a lot of...not just Jews, many were political prisoners, who, whose lives weren't in danger. And every day they survived, every day was a major chance for survival. On the contrary, for us in the Sonderkommando it was reversed. Every day, if we heard that the Russians were getting closer, made us happy. On the other hand, we said if the Russians come, we already won't be alive anymore. And from this *(perspective, it's understandable)* that we were much more urgent than the other side.

La: Yes, exactly the opposite.

Mü: So, days, weeks, I would say, months went by. When we were told at the beginning of October, 1944, that the SS was culling out 300 new prisoner for selection again...

La: The SS said that?

Mü: No, they chose 300. It was almost...

La: 300 people of the Sonderkommando?

Mü: From the Sonderkommando for selection.

La: Were there many transports at this time?

Mü: No, there were, there weren't, there weren't many transports in October. That's why they reduced the Sonderkommando.

La: Yes, of course.

Mü: 300 prisoners were culled out, selected; so, there were 300 prisoners selected...

La: From which crematoria?

Mü: From Crematorium 4 and 5. And it was mostly Greek and Hungarian Jews who were involved. I would say, Hungarian and Greek Jews. And when these prisoners were selected, they said, "We won't be driven to the slaughter yards like cattle. That's it. Enough. If they, the camp, won't come with us, we'll do it ourselves."

La: That's what they said?

Mü: That's how they presented the situation to us. The resistance group of the Sonderkommando (*declared themselves to be*) ready; they got in touch, in touch with the Headquarters of the Resistance Movement right away, and we were told, that we shouldn't do this...

Bob. No. 98 (Mü 28)

Mü: These 300 selected prisoners of the Sonderkommando, these 300 Jews, who were chosen, from Hungary and Greece, were ready to fight. They said they wouldn't let themselves be, be driven like cattle to the slaughter yards, to the slaughter yard, made it clear that whether the camp joined them or not, they would carry out the revolt themselves and called upon the leaders of our resistance group, yes, to give them the weapons and a...to collaborate with the whole undertaking. The leaders, our leaders, then (*got in touch with*)...

La: Kaminsky?

Mü: It wasn't just Kaminsky. It was others too. They got in touch then with the resistance group in the camp, the Headquarters, and informed them about what happened at our site. Told them very clearly, that our people wouldn't just go along (*with the selection*), but would fight...that there is a high risk. And then they (*our leaders*) called on them to join us. The Headquarters of the Resistance Movement replied, that is, they declined.

La: They didn't want to.

Mü: In a word, they told us they couldn't join...that it's a high-risk undertaking, that, actually, this wasn't the right time and that the initiative couldn't succeed. And so, that's what they told us.

Mü: And they asked our leaders, that those who weren't selected, shouldn't join them (*the selected ones*). In any case, we should refuse to join them. Then our leaders went to the selected ones and explained to them, we're very sorry, but under these circumstances, if the whole camp won't join us, the whole revolt, the whole revolt wouldn't, wouldn't, wouldn't (*fulfill*) the right purpose, because it was planned to be, I would say, a united...it was to be a united action. And what happened, we explained it to them, (*but*)...unfortunately, not unfortunately, I would say, they didn't accept that and on the sixth...on the seventh of October, 1944, when the numbers of the selected ones (*were called*) up to the forecourt of Crematorium 4, one after the other was called up, it was noticed that some numbers didn't report in. And they were already in Crematorium 4, having set fire to Crematorium 4. Other comrades attacked the SS, injured some, other SS men fled on bicycles. But it lasted maybe three, four minutes, then the sirens started blaring and a few hundred armed SS men (*came*). They came with trucks, cars and made a... (*makes a circles with his arms*)

La: ...cordon.

Mü: A cordon around Crematorium 4. Whizzing, that is, the machine guns were crackling, the bullets were whizzing by, and I was looking around

Mü: and I saw, that my comrades were falling like rabbits, just as at a rabbit hunt. In that instant, I saw that everything was lost, and I lay down as if I had been shot...

La: You, you were in the yard of Crematorium 4 too...(*Lanzmann and Müller talk simultaneously*)

Mü: ...in the yard of Crematorium 4, indeed. I lay down there and in that moment, I realized, I slowly...that is, I was close to the door of the burning Crematorium 4, just a few meters. Then I, I crawled into Crematorium 4. Crematorium 4 was burning. Then I thought, what should I do now? Then I realized it was a good hiding place. Then I opened an, an, an iron plate, which connected the chimney, that is, the chimney with the oven. I closed it and I lay, I lay down there. Later, water came down the chimney, for the fire engine had arrived. Yes, then I noticed that water was coming down the chimney. But that was, that was bearable. Then it was still. Now I had to think about what I should do. Then I remembered that behind Crematorium 4 was always a Lithuanian guard. There was even a guard, a guard at night. And if I could perhaps overpower the guard in the night, knock him down and change into his uniform, and then go through the sauna, where there was also a guard and if I could...if I were to succeed in overpowering that one too

Mü: then I could easily disappear into freedom in the dark.

La: You were all alone?

Mü: Completely alone. This is the plan I figured out in this dire situation. In the night, I went, I went in the – the crematorium wasn't burning any more – in the main room...

La: With the corpses?

Mü: In the yard were 200 corpses. But at that moment, I really didn't notice that. I took an iron rod from the coke room and quiet...and with the iron rod I slowly crept to the, to the, to the door of the sauna, where, where the guard was standing. But I was maybe ten or twelve meters from him; I lay down. Suddenly I heard that there was a large number of guards present. Because of the revolt, the guards had been reinforced, had been reinforced, had been reinforced. Yes, so I saw no chance for an unarmed person to attack ten (*guards*). Then I became hopeless, without hope...I didn't give up hope. I said to myself, I'll crawl back down the chimney and continue to wait. Then I fell asleep.

La: And you went back into the chimney?

Mü: Back into the chimney. Lay down and fell asleep. After mid...it could have been after midnight. In the early morning, I heard a lot of noise outside. I recognized the voice of our very, a good person. It was a Kapo. And extraordinary human being: Fleume.

La: Fleume. A Jew?

Mü: A Jew. And I was saying to myself, what's the sense? Then I opened the plate, and suddenly he must have seen me. I must have looked a fright. But he didn't recognize me right away. He said, "Filip, is that you?" He said, "Wait a minute. Come with us, come out." Then I came out. And just then, the comrades in the yard, the ones still alive, loaded the dead ones on a cart and pushed it to Crematorium 5, which was in use. So, I pushed the cart with the comrades, ran into the crematorium, quickly washed myself, got new...different, different clothes, and that's how I ended up among the still-living comrades in the crematorium, and thus actually saved, actually saved my life through this coincidence.

La: Meaning, that the revolt took place only in Crematorium 4.

Mü: No, the incidents in Crematorium 2 and 3 took a different form. As I said earlier, the comrades in Crematorium 2 and 3 weren't selected. But they saw a lot of smoke in the distance and (*heard*) the shooting of the SS. Then they heard...they knew what was happening. And now suddenly they saw that the ghetto, that in the area of Crematorium 3, guards were approaching. Then it was clear to them, that maybe they would lose their lives too. Then they took action, in Crematorium 2 they (*threw*) the ethnic Ger..., one of the criminal Kapos, alive into

Mü: the oven. Besides that, they wanted to call the...

La: What was the name of this Kapo?

Mü: Karl Konvojent.

La: Ah, the ethnic German.

Mü: Very criminal.

Bob. No. 99 (Mü 29)

Mü: Crematorium 4 had been set afire and not, as is often said, blown up. When the comrades in Crematorium 2 and 3...

La: There were no weapons in the crematorium?

Mü: No, no, no. The weapons were in Crema...at that time, at that time, in Crematorium 2 and 3. And when the comrades, whose lives weren't in danger at the time because they hadn't been, they hadn't been selected yet, saw all that smoke, the shootings. And from, later they even saw, as the guards approached...they took up their weapons. The first thing they did, is to throw the criminal Kapo into the oven...

La: The ethnic German.

Mü: That was the criminal, that Konvojent, Karl Konvojent. They threw him into, into, into, into the oven, threw him alive into the oven. And in the women's camp, they broke through in one place of the electric fence and fled. But they were pursued by the reinforced group, an SS company. And during this chase, they (*the escapees*) used the first grenade and threw the first grenade at the SS. And when the SS saw that, realized that they (*the escapees*)

Mü: were also relatively heavily armed, they (*the SS*) became afraid and stopped in their tracks. And that's how our comrades succeeded in fleeing almost 15 kilometers from Auschwitz.

La: How many?

Mü: Several hundred got away. And, somewhere in the vicinity of Richsgow...they barricaded themselves in a barn, since they were chased in the evening by the SS, and that led to a big battle in that area between the heavily armed SS and our comrades, who fought against this big group with their few weapons. In this fight, several hundred of our comrades lost their lives, also three SS men. I was...

La: All, all of them died?

Mü: Our comrades almost all died, but some of them were brought alive to Crematorium 5. And I spoke with them in Crematorium 5, but they (*the SS*) later shot them in Crematorium 5. Then later, after a few...The next day, they arrested another twelve of us. Among others, Jankel Handelsmann, who led the bunker, and they were later executed too.

La: How did Zamal Löwenthal die?

Mü: Zamal Löwenthal, as far as I know, died through a selection.

La: Later?

Mü: Later. And that's how the revolt happened. They wanted

Mü 300 people. And the revolt resulted in 450 victims. And so it happened, that after a few weeks, after a few months, we heard some rumors that Himmler, Reich Leader of the SS, had forbidden, he gave an order to stop the extermination of Jews. We thought that to be an illusion; we didn't believe it. It couldn't be true.

La: ...you were afraid.

Mü: We had always asked ourselves, what would happen to us, if the SS asked the Head of the SS, what should be done with the hundreds of people who were the bearers of secrets. What kind of...after all, we knew that Himmler would then say, of course, you get rid of them. But given the obedience of the SS which was in effect in those days, they didn't, they didn't, I would say, they didn't...when they got the order, they didn't question what should happen to us. And so we stayed alive until the final selection, which took place around the end of November. In the yard of Crematorium 2. There, of the several hundreds still living, one hundred were chosen to continue to live. The 30 firemen in Crematorium and 70 returned to the camp, and were to work on taking apart the ovens with other prisoners from, from other parts of the camp.

La: And you were among the 30...

Mü: I was among the 30 and lived in Crematorium 5.

La: Yes.

Mü: The other were to be, were to be transferred to Camp Großrosen.

Mü: But, to this very day, their fate, their fate is unclear. It's certain that they were exterminated. And that's how...that's how winter started. My memory is fading, and suddenly it was January 18, 1945. The Soviets were only a few tens of kilometers from Auschwitz. The camp was evacuated on January 18. During this evacuation, we hundred prisoners slipped into the company of others and marched with them in the, in the marching columns through the streets, through the streets of Poland. During this time, during the march in Poland, some of the Sonderkommando managed to flee, like the brothers Tragon, my friend Jankowsky. I came to the concentration camp, Mauthausen, with others. In Mauthausen during roll-call, some of the SS men came to us, and we didn't know them. We were, we were ordered, ordered, we were to...the prisoners of the Sonderkommando were to step forward. And since we, and since we realized, that no one, that, that, that we, that that they, that we didn't know these SS men, that they didn't know us either, they didn't know us...no one stepped forward. And so I was transferred to the satellite camp, Kusingheiz, and worked in the Messerschmidt Works, came then with a transport to Wels-Gunzkirchen with a marching transport until the fourth, fourth, fourth of May, 1945, when I was freed in the camp, Gunzkirchen, near Wels. There I was liberated by the Americans, along with, as I've already said, my comrades.

Mü: of the Sonderkommando.

La: Yes, very good.

Bob. No. 100 (Mü 30)

La: How many Kapos were in the Sonderkommando?

Mü: In the Sonderkommando, there were four or five Jewish Kapos, three Polish Kapos and one ethnic German as Head Kapo.

La: For the five crematoria.

Mü: Yes, yes. In all, it could have been...I don't, I don't know exactly...maybe eight Kapos.

La: Yes, and how were they?

Mü: Well, I would say, that the Kapos behaved in a very, very humane manner. And that was...they, they, they were caught up in the same fate, after all. And many Kapos played a...which is proof that many Kapos played an important role...

La: ...in the...

Mü: in the, in the resistance. Let's say, we'll take Kapo Kaminsky or we'll take Schleune, or Kapo Leiser...those were extraordinary human beings. So, if the myth (*image*) of the Kapos in the past, in the concentration camp literature, that is, was described as very negative, that had nothing to do with the Kapos, I would say, of the Sonderkommando. Except for one Kapo, whom I want to single out, that was Miette Morava, who in my opinion, didn't act right.

La: He was a Pole?

Mü: He was a Pole. But the two others, his friends, that is, Watzeklipka and Joseph Etuk, were fine, they certainly were.

La: *(in French, presumably to interpreter): It's nothing. Enough. There's a thing that's completely different because it's. . .I just told you about what he said, but I must come back to the liquidation of the Czechs.*

La: We said, there was no fear of death, but, but...no fear of death, rather fear of the way...

Mü: In the many discussions, that we've already had, the question came up many times, why the people didn't defend themselves, if they already knew for sure, definitely knew what was coming upon them. In my opinion, in my opinion, what played a critical role was not the fear of death, but the way a person, how the person....played a critical role...

Bob. No. 100 (Mü 30) – Cassette No. 9 – Side A

Mü: ...the way a person would die. To give an example. If you came, let's say, to a, to a mother, who has a child in her arms, and said to her: defend yourself, you're going into the gas chamber or such, or if...she probably wouldn't do it, because she would reason, that she would rather die in the gas chamber than to witness, let's say, her child being shot, or, that is, in a word, if the person was facing imminent death, then he is continued to be somewhat of a

Mü: materialist in having a choice of the method of death. And if possible, that the method of death be, be the least agonizing.

La: Yes, but it was very hard to die with gas, wasn't it?

Mü: Yes, dying by gas was a, I would say, a very hard way of dying. And...

La: Very slow.

Mü: And it took about ten to fifteen minutes.

La: Yes, that is terribly long.

Mü: And it depended on the humidity of the room in which the gas was dropped, how, how high the humidity was. If the humidity, if the room was humid, I would say, then dying was...or the weather outside too,...that also was dependent on the humid weather, then dying was harder, let's say, than in a, in a, in a room that was drier, then it was, it happened, I think, quite a bit, quite a bit quicker. At any rate, that doesn't say it was an easy death. It was a horrible and very painful death. For one thing, if I were to, if I were to (*describe*) the sequence, that is, or if I were to, if I were to, if I were to describe it, the first thing was the pressure in the head, then to the sickly sweet, a sickly sweet taste...

La: That's almost a death cocktail.

Mü: ...a sickly sweet taste, I would say, a sickly sweet taste on the

Mü: tongue, then followed an irritating cough, yes, and after this irritating cough, the people very slowly lost consciousness. And the end was the paralysis of the lungs. And through the paralysis of the lungs came the fact...that is, the death from gassing. You can see from that, that it was quite a hard way to die.

La: Can you...

Mü: Perhaps it was, if you will, for the, for the, for the executioners, for them it was easier, because for them it was an anonymous death. And for that why it's often referred to, in the concentration camp literature it can be found, that this kind of death, is valued as, as more humane.

La: Yes, they say...

Mü: But actually, it was for them (*the victims*) a, a wretched death and it wasn't so hard on the executioners, that they only, that they only, it didn't weigh on their conscience so much, in that they were doing something good and besides, that they needed (*only*) a hammer for it...they needed the gas and they needed a gas mask for it. That was all. And of course, the acknowledgement, as I said before, that they had done something good for people and ...then they dropped in the gas.

La: Without the emotional burden.

Mü: Yes, precisely because the death was anonymous, it didn't weigh on their conscience like before with the Execution Kommandos. Yes. I could make the point again, that with the executions, if 50 or 60 people were shot, that for the executioner, that was

Mü: a, a harder thing than, let's say, for a so-called disinfector, who pours the gas in and with, whatever, five or six gas cans killed maybe 2,000 people.

La: What name? Disinfector?

Mü: Yes, they called themselves disinfectors. Came camouflaged with a red cross, which...they accompanied the columns with a red cross to give...give the impression that these people were to be accompanied into a bath. Very humane, etc., etc. But actually, the (*symbol of the*) red cross, in actuality, was the coming together of the zyklon gas and the hammers, and of course, the so-called disinfectors, who, who, who carried out the killings.

La: Yes. Can you talk here about your father?

Mü: I don't know what more I wanted to say about my father. I met him in 1942.

La: But he came to Auschwitz voluntarily.

Mü: But what does that mean, voluntarily? That's not true, voluntarily. He reported to the authorities...that is, back then in Slovakia it was said, he was bothered by (*the conditions*) at the time. His business was Aryanized. Jews couldn't be on the street before 7:30 a.m. and after 8:00 p.m. They were beaten. And then suddenly it was, it was, it was in the newspaper, in the newspaper of the party of Monsigneur Kisso, that the "Jewish question" would be solved, in that they,

Mü: the Jews were to be taken to the East. Then he believed that the East meant, it would be best, rather than have a life like that, to go East. But of course, no one knew (*how it would be*), just as my father (*didn't*). I would say to you, that was not the case with my father. When I was deported from Auschwitz, deported to Auschwitz from Seretonwart and sat in the train car, I recall that an extraordinary and very smart person in the Jewish Federation, Alexander Sonnenfeld, Alexander, said to us, as the train started to move: "Oh, my children, thanks be to God that you are leaving." For no one knew, then, of course,...sixteen hours later it became clear to everyone, what kind of, into what hell we had come. So I met him a few times through my friend, Rudolf Röpper, who had come with him then from Lublin to Auschwitz. I helped him at that time.

Cassette No. 10 – Side A

Bob. No. 101 (Mü 31)

Mü: Since I lived in the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz in January, 1942, I was able to acquire many items like medical supplies, food. I met my father. With that, I was able to help him a lot, to survive these harsh circumstances. Later he also worked in the Buna Works. Unfortunately, once he came and had a fever. He got typhoid fever. Under these difficult circumstances, since at that time I couldn't

Mü: help him, since, since I was locked up at the time in the bunker as a secret ... I could only meet with him, only...

La: ...not directly.

Mü: Yes, only in, that is, in...Block 11 in the cell 15 was I able to be...only through work could I meet him. I organized it so that he was working in the vicinity of the crematorium. And during this time, as I've already said, he got typhoid fever, and later, I found him among the corpses in the yard of the crematorium and when...he died there, and, and was cremated in the Auschwitz Crematorium.

La: Yes, was it, was it a shock?

Mü: Yes, of course it was a big shock, well, and...and when I lost my dear father, and one of my friends, Schwarz said the Kaddish, before, and then we pushed him into the, into the oven. Afterwards. There was no other way back then.

La: How was it for the religious Jews in Auschwitz?

Mü: In Birkenau, I think, maybe...

La: ...in?

Mü: In Birkenau.

La: In Birkenau.

Mü: Yes. In the Sonderkommando, there were...there was a group of religious Jews, whose job it was to...in the so-called Room for Hair, drying it for, for...where the hair of...the cut-off hair from the corpses was dried. And in the room lived

Mü: these religious Jews and one...and their, I would say, one of their leader, that was Daijan, a rabbi from Makow, an extraordinary expert of Jewish...who (*knew*) the Torah and the other...

La: Yes and these people...

Mü: And these people were...Kapo Kaminsky arranged it, so that they were somewhat, that they were removed from the, from the, from the immediate events, from the most horrible events and...they were very good, very, I would say, sensitive people, who believed in God and were believers. We honored them, but...how could I say it, it didn't help much, and it probably wouldn't have helped us much if we had prayed. God and praying in a, in such a, I would say, in such an inferno, in this hell in which we found ourselves, that was just not enough for Auschwitz.

La: Did you have discussions with the religious Jews?

Mü: Yes, there were some discussions, mainly, when, when, when, when...some about the question if there is a God or not, yes, and those from Daijan responded to that several times, very wisely put, that is, one shouldn't ask about God at a time when the person is stuck in a difficult situation. Yes, one should...God, one...yes. And maybe it explained, that the events, which took place here in Auschwitz, in, in Birkenau, that these have happened before

Mü: at the time of the pharaohs, when the people were oppressed. And maybe even appealed to God...*(the rabbi)* convincingly explained that our people will continue to live, that the destroyers won't succeed in destroying the people, and today we are witnesses to it, that that was so.

La: ...because Zikowitch told me that his father ate kosher.

*(Lanzmann and Müller speak simultaneously.)* He wanted to uphold the Kaschrutt laws in the Sonderkommando.

Mü: Yes, I would say, I think some of them wanted to abide by...went so far as to eat kosher. That is, eat kosher in the sense, that they didn't eat sausage and they traded, let's say, the sausage for onions and such, so, in a word, whenever possible, they restricted themselves to *(the confines of)* their religion. Within the limits of what was possible. That's true.

La: Yes, within the limits of what was possible.