

Saul Sorrin: Oral History Transcript

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Name: Saul Sorrin (1919–1995)

Birth Place: New York City

Arrived in Wisconsin: 1962, Milwaukee

Project Name: Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust



Saul Sorrin

Biography: Saul Sorrin was an American witness to the Holocaust. He aided survivors at displaced persons camps in Germany as an administrator from 1945 to 1950. Saul was born on July 6, 1919, in New York City, where he attended the City College of New York.

In 1940, he applied for a position with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). At the end of 1945, Saul was sent to Neu Freimann Siedlung, a displaced persons camp near Munich, Germany, to help Holocaust survivors. In 1946, he hosted General Dwight D. Eisenhower on an inspection tour of Neu Freimann. At Eisenhower's recommendation, Saul was appointed permanent area director at the Wolf-Ratshausen camp in Bad Kissingen. He served there until March 1950.



Saul became deeply committed to the survivors he was helping. He ignored many illegal actions, violated countless rules and regulations, and helped refugees alter their documents to sidestep a variety of restrictions. Saul also aided those who wanted to immigrate illegally to countries with quotas. He even permitted refugees to hold secret military training for the newly formed state of Israel.

Saul helped set up cultural institutions in the displaced persons camps he supervised. He began schools and synagogues and organized sporting events and entertainment. He was also able to bring in famous performers.

After the war, Saul returned to the U.S. He married, settled in Milwaukee, and became executive director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council. Saul died in 1995.

Audio Summary: Below are the highlights of each tape. It is not a complete list of all topics discussed. Recordings that used only one tape side are marked: (no Side 2)

Tape 1, Side 1

- Saul's family background and education
- Saul's United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration appointment and transfer to Munich
- Conditions at Neu Freimann
- Relations among the survivors at Neu Freimann

Tape 1, Side 2

- Restrictions on immigration to Israel; Saul's attempts to circumvent them
- Secret military training for the new state of Israel
- Former ghetto police and concentration camp guards at Neu Freimann
- The birth of the state of Israel

Tape 2, Side 1

- Religious and cultural life, schools and synagogues in displaced persons camps
- Relations between refugee relief organizations
- Jewish war orphans
- General Dwight D. Eisenhower visit, 1946

Tape 2, Side 2

- Refugee-created culture, such as newspapers and nightclubs
- Previous uses of displaced persons camps
- Survivors' relationships with German civilians and Gentiles
- The transition into civil society in Europe and Israel

Tape 3, Side 1

- Saul's promotion to area director
- Refugees who stayed in Germany
- Black market in the displaced persons camps
- Hasidim and other special groups in the camps

Tape 3, Side 2

- American entertainers visit displaced persons camps
- Excitement surrounding the first flights available to Israel
- Comparing Jewish refugees with post-Vietnam Asian refugees in the U.S.

Tape 4, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- Mental health issues and suicides among Holocaust survivors
- Humor in displaced persons camps
- Saul's reflections on the production of *The Search*, a 1948 film about war orphans
- How working in displaced persons camps affected Saul's later life

Tape 5, Side 1

- Discussing the photographs Saul preserved
- Depression among survivors in displaced persons camps
- Male survivors' obsession with maintaining physical fitness
- The character of the Underground fighters and its supporters

Tape 5, Side 2

- More discussion while looking at photographs
- More on General Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1946 visit
- Falsifying papers to help survivors

Tape 6, Side 1 (no Side 2)

- Saul's promotion and the UNRAA bureaucracy
- Riots in displaced persons camps
- Paramilitary training in displaced persons camps
- Jewish defectors from the Soviet army join displaced persons camps

About the Interview Process:

The interview was conducted by archivist Jean Loeb Lettovsky on February 13 and 19, 1980, at Saul's office. The two sessions lasted three-and-a-half hours each.

Saul's discussion of his photographs offers a unique perspective within the *Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust* collection. He was not a survivor, but lived and worked intimately with them for several years. His unusually rich collection of postwar photographs prompted many memories shared on Tape 5.

Audio and Transcript Details:

Interview Dates

- Feb 13, 1980; Feb 19, 1980

Interview Location

- Sorrin's office, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Interviewer

- Archivist Jean Loeb Lettovsky

Original Sound Recording Format

- 6 qty. 60-minute audio cassette tapes

Length of Interviews

- 2 interviews, total approximately 7 hours

Transcript Length

- 96 pages

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Pictures:



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Transcript

The following transcript is from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives. It is an unedited, firsthand account of the Nazi persecution of the Jews before and during World War II. Portions of this interview may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive audiences. It is unlawful to republish this text without written permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society, except for nonprofit educational use.

Key

JL Jean Loeb Lettovsky, Wisconsin Historical Society archivist
SS Saul Sorrin, American witness

TAPE 1, SIDE 1

JL: OK, Saul, first I'm going to ask you a little about your family background.

SS: Mhm.

JL: Where your family came from.

SS: Eh, ready?

JL: Yeah.

SS: Shall I begin?

JL: Yeah.

SS: Well, let's see, my mother and father came to the United States in 1915 from Belorussia, White Russia, from the town of Gomel, sometimes written as Homel or Homler. Both lived in New York and were very active in landsmanshaft affairs. My father was something of a Socialist, a member of the Workman's Circle,¹ and very secular in his personal views that is of a traditional Socialist pattern. He was very much involved in the labor movement and was a tailor by profession and rose eventually to some sort of management entrepreneurial status in the men's clothing industry. My mother had no ideology at all, just a simple Jewish girl, very strong in personality, whose main concern was her family. She was interested in tradition. Whatever religious training I received, I received because it was at her insistence. [My religious training] included Talmud-Torah,² Bar Mitzvah, and the rest. But I

¹ An American Jewish fraternal order founded in 1900 that supports labor organization, socialist politics, and Yiddish culture and arts.

² Religious school.

think the most important impact on my personal views came from my father with his kind of Socialist views, and these were reinforced. I was raised during the depression by my experiences elsewhere including those at City College, which was a hotbed of left-wing radical thought.

JL: When were you at City College?

SS: I was at City College from 1936 to 1940. And in 1940 I left for Washington, DC, took a job there with the United States government.

JL: How old were you then?

SS: I was twenty years old.

JL: So you were born in 1920?

SS: I was born in 1919, end of 1919. I was a little over twenty, when I left for Washington. I graduated from the City [College] at the age of twenty. They had that business about skipping in those years, you know — they were trying to get kids out of school because we had to go to work, it was depression years. We didn't have, you know, the sort of delayed, extended adolescence, you know, that we have now — learning for years of going to school to school. You just had to get yourself a job or your family starved.

JL: Would you talk a bit about the first job that you had?

SS: Well, it was the depression. My first jobs came, you know, while I was still in high school and while I was at City and they were the sort of — they were really not jobs. They lasted for a few weeks during seasons. I worked for men's clothing companies. I worked for ladies' dress houses. I ran errands. I delivered furs. I did everything that was done in those years in order to make a living. None of them were real jobs. As a matter of fact, the first real job I had is I worked for a friend of my father who owned Jack Dempsey's restaurants. I went to work for him in 1939. It was a cashier in Dempsey's on Broadway and 50th Street in New York. And I had already applied for employment, taken civil service examinations for a job with the federal government, and when my appointment came through in 1940, toward the end of 1940, I left for Washington. I went to work for the Treasury Department.

JL: How long did you work there?

SS: I worked there through the whole war. We were in a sort of war-related function. I was the procurement division of the Treasury Department. I sort of had a half deferment from the service. I had some physical problems at the time. I had a status, which lay between 4F and between being deferred because of physical and being deferred because of some sort of an essential occupation.

JL: You told me a while ago that you fell into this UNRRA³ work because of your Treasury Department work.

SS: Well, yeah. Well, what really happened was that, you know, all of these great events were taking place in the world and I was affected by them, you know, and I hadn't served in the military so I wanted to do something. I asked to be sent overseas for UNRRA, which was then organized in – had been organized – by President Roosevelt and Churchill and the other leaders of the Allied powers. In 1943, I think, it was the first field agency, first agency ever put into the field by any international organization as a functioning field agency. It was designed to assist the Allied powers, or the occupied powers, with programs of food and medical care and other kinds of assistance. It also had a refugee function, as in the wake of World War II millions of people had been put on the move, and so there was the other aspect of UNRRA's programs, which was refugee relief. I had chosen to go to a country program. The country programs, by the way, included Poland, Belorussia [or] White Russia — which was a separate republic, they had a relief program, the Soviet Union itself did not — the Philippines, and China. And I had asked to go to China. But it was in the course of a — I was appointed to UNRRA in the light of my procurement responsibilities with the treasury, with the government. I could presumably arrange to have things shipped, knew about how to get things, and how to have them shipped, and all the — everything was in the bureaucracy of that kind of thing. And I'd been appointed and sent to the University of Maryland for training prior to departure. This was in the fall of 1945, I guess, or late summer of 1945. And there I met the Direction General of UNRRA who was the former governor of

³ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.

New York, had been appointed. Herman Lehman had been appointed to Director General by the United Nations. And we were in a small seminar with him and he asked me whether I spoke Yiddish and told him I was from New York, I had been a constituent of his in New York. He said, there's a great need for people like you in Germany because there are Jewish survivors and I think that's the place you ought to go. I accepted the advice and I ended up in Munich just about a month, several months later, toward the end of 1945, I guess. And I was assigned initially as the supply officer of an UNRRA team — UNRRA, United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation. Which was – I remember the team number, it was UNRRA team 560. And we were assigned to this camp outside Munich. Three thousand or so people in it, just recently arrived.

JL: What was it called?

SS: It was called Neu Freimann Siedlung.⁴ The camp was made up of about 250 or three hundred small two-story cottages which had been built by the Nazis in the early-, well, the mid-1930s as a worker's camp, Arbeitersiedlung.⁵ And each of these houses was individually owned by a German worker family. And it was General Lucian Truscott, who was then in some capacity with I don't remember what [group], who ordered the camp evacuated to accept Jewish survivors who were then beginning to arrive in goodly numbers, you know, from Eastern Europe. And as many Jews survived in Eastern Europe, some survived in Germany, but the vast majority in Eastern Europe, and they were beginning to flow out. And it was a desperate need for housing. And it was in December, I think, of 1945 that General Truscott ordered that camp set up, provided the food, and we staffed it. I was made the supply officer. It was quite a job because supply lines were not clearly established. We were receiving food and other supplies, medications and the rest, from the United States occupying authority. But basic rations was to come from the German economy. We had an international team, that's the way it was organized. That is all of the staff came from countries of the United Nations. We had British, we

⁴ German for New Freeman Settlement.

⁵ German for 'workers' settlement.'

had Dutch, we had French, we had Belgian, we had Americans — all Western Europe. By this time, [there] is an interesting controversy which had taken place which is the reason there were no eastern, no Soviet or Polish or others among our international personnel. The Russians withdrew from UNRRA because they had insisted on the forcible repatriation of eastern European nationalists, essentially Russian nationalists or countries in their orbit at that time — although it had not been clearly established that these countries were in their orbit. But they wanted Ukrainians and Latvians and Estonians and Poles and Russians returned forcibly. Many of these people did not want to go back on two grounds. They didn't want to go back because they were really anti-Communist or they didn't want to live in the Soviet Union anymore. But a goodly number, I'm not quite sure, didn't want to go back because they had themselves been involved heavily in collaboration with the Nazis during the time of the Nazi occupation of eastern Europe in the early years of the war. Many of them were engaged as SS guards and members of execution squads of Jews and so they knew that for them to go back, there might be death or execution. There was, for example, Vlasovs.⁶ Ukrainian armies had deserted en masse, hundreds of thousands, to the Nazis and wore the Nazi uniform during the war. So when they didn't want to go back, the United States supported their right — I think correctly, I know correctly — to remain where they were. That caused the Russians to pull out of the program. Incidentally, efforts were made to repatriate Jews too, those who came from the eastern territories, and they resisted fiercely. No Jews went back.

JL: What was the demographic makeup of these people? Single people mostly and then families later?

SS: Well, the initial survivors that we met — now Munich, our camps were all around Munich and south, were in the area which was dominated by the Dachau concentration camp. Dachau was a concentration camp just about twenty miles from Munich and it had many satellite camps, worker's

⁶ Apparently a term for the anti-Communist Soviet troops who followed Soviet Gen. Andrei Vlasov into the Nazi camp.

After he was captured by the Nazis in 1941, Vlasov propagandized for the Nazis, encouraging Soviet troops to switch sides.

camps. That is people were, prisoners were, assigned from the Dachau concentration camp to be working in the various towns either in factories or in some cases on farms. So you had, when the Americans liberated Dachau in April-May of 1945, those Jews remained with the Americans in the American areas of control. Now these people, by and large, and the earliest survivors that were there — who also came from other camps like Buchenwald from the north down to Munich, which became a center for Jewish rescue activity by the JDC⁷ and other Jewish agencies — were in the main single people. Their families had been totally uprooted, destroyed. Wives were killed, husbands, mothers, fathers. In rare occasions, people did survive and find each other, you know, the people who'd been in concentration camps. But in the main all of these people were the fragments of families. There was a lot of marriage, a lot of dating, a lot of people trying to get together to recreate their families. But as I say, it was all just shards, splinters of families. After January of '46, early '46, we had a new kind of *infiltrée*,⁸ that was the term, people who had survived in other ways. Either inside the Soviet Union or in areas of Hungary or Rumania to which the Nazis had not really gotten to in their program for the destruction of Jews. Or people who were in hiding. There you have the beginnings of families with children and the married units coming together. That camp there and the others which were subsequently organized were designed to accommodate both kinds of lifestyles. We had kitchens where we fed people individually [in] large messes, you know, and we had kitchens where people ate — I mean in their homes cooked — we distributed food which was designed for people to cook for themselves. The other elements in the demography were that the major population group was Polish. They were the largest surviving Jewish community. Then probably after that came Hungarians maybe, and Czechs, and then Balts, Latvians. That's about it. We had no western European Jews. Everybody from the east. We had also other groups which are less well-known. We had the Jews of Salonika,⁹

⁷ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

⁸ French for 'infiltrator.'

⁹ Salonika, Greece, an important center of Sephardic Judaism.

who survived Dachau, Auschwitz, Dachau — Greek Jews that is. Very roughneck crowd, by the way.

Salonika was known for its roughneck community, they were stevedores, you know.

JL: Generally speaking?

SS: Yeah, yeah. I don't know whether it's a stereo[type]. That's what I heard. I haven't really studied the community. But, believe me, the people I saw were really tough. There was a lot of problems between them, by the way, and the Polish Jews. Violence between these two groups. So much so that Rabbi [David] de Sola Pool, the famous Sephardic rabbi from New York, had to fly over to try to deal with it. We had to move hundreds of Greek Jews out of one of the camps which was a Polish Jewish DP¹⁰ camp for their own safety, you know. They objected, and the major reason is that there was a good deal of business in that camp — they had little shops, you know, black market — and there was competition between these two groups. Competition frequently took a violent form. We had a few Bulgarian Jewish families, interesting group of people that I didn't know too much about. They were also Sephardic, a group of people from Sophia. They came in. That's about it.

JL: I'd like to get back to the Jews from Salonika. Could you describe a bit perhaps a violent incident?

SS: Yeah. There was a camp in which they lived. It was called Feldafing. It was a large camp, three or four thousand people. And in that camp — now this goes back thirty, thirty-five years or more — in that camp was a gasele,¹¹ a little street, you know, and this street had gevelblekh,¹² little stores, shops, which had been just set up with booths, you know. You could get most anything you wanted in those booths, you know — liquor and bread and meat and cheese. There was a very heavy black market. The Jews traded on the black market, but the black market was fundamentally a German thing. The Germans were withholding their products to be sold on the black market because to sell them on the regular market for the worthless currency, the German postwar mark, not the present mark, would

¹⁰ Displaced person, a term used after World War II for refugee.

¹¹ Yiddish for 'little street.'

¹² Yiddish for 'shops.'

have been for them to give their products away. So everything went into the black market, both among the Jews and among the general German population. But it was a highly competitive business. And the Greek Jews, I was told, the Jews of Salonika, were very aggressive in the way they competed, you know, and with violence. If you come in here with your product — knives and sticks and, you know, everything else. We were repeatedly receiving in our office, I was located then in Wolfratshausen, sort of a regional and area office, getting reports of this violence. It was getting very alarming, and we knew that passions were rising among the Polish population because there was real culture clash there. These people were all Jews but they were culturally much different and all of them had suffered in the same kinds of concentration camps and died. And one day it rose to a fever pitch. There was like a mob lynching, an attempt to lynch these couple of hundred, I don't remember precisely the number. They fled the camp and we really considered that their lives were in danger. We tried to mediate, met with committees. Yeah, they said it would meet, but the next day the violence broke out all over again. By the way, there was a very interesting sort of thing what happened in one of the places, is that the Greek Jews went into Munich and found Greek Christians with whom they made common cause. And I remember truckloads. We had to stop truckloads of Greek Jews and Christians on their way up to this camp to fight the Polish Jews. The end was that we decided that we would resettle — that's a term, by the way, which is a non-kosher term. It was in Yiddish or in German called umsiedlung, resettle these Greek Jews. We couldn't resettle five thousand Poles. So we tried to do it as nicely as possible to say, "Look, we're going to take you to this other place. Do your business there." But apparently that was not as lucrative. So the next thing I knew I had a telegram, was either from the States or from the UNRRA headquarters, asking what was going on. They'd received this telegram from Rabbi Pool, de Sola Pool, who's a patriarch of the Sephardic congregations in New York, the grand old man of a congregation on Fifth Avenue, personal friend of Franklin Roosevelt and other greats, saying he was coming over. What is this he's hearing? He's receiving reports that the same things that Hitler did to them were now being done all over again. They were being umgesiedlungt,

resettled. We met. He came, he flew over, and we met and tried to explain that this was really something which was done because an alternative would have been violence. We finally managed to quiet the whole thing down. But the black marketeering, the economics, was given the vitality of the Jews, their need to reestablish when everything had been taken from them, it was an important part of their life, the economics. That is, living in this economic system which was separate from the above-board economic system in postwar Germany.

JL: Since you started talking a bit already about the black market, the last time I talked to you told me some very interesting stories about the black market, the oxen and other things.

SS: Yeah, there was a whole thing that grew up in the camps. The United States was trying to, quote, "preserve the Germany economy," end quote. The German currency — the Reich marks, which were, I think, changed in '47 [when] they had a currency reform — but up until that currency reform these marks sold for about four hundred to the dollar. The legal rate was four to the dollar; black market rate was four hundred to the dollar. So if you were a German, you sold a kilogram of meat or a camera or some socks or whatever you had, at the regular price, you were selling them at one-hundredth its real value. The result was that nobody sold. The shops were all empty, you see, of all of this goods which was being produced. The farms were still intact and many of the factories, and Germans had prewar merchandise — cameras, Leica cameras, which they all had stock, but they were not about to sell them for that worthless currency. And that therefore developed two kinds [of market]. You had a legal market, which had nothing on it. I don't know how the people ate off of that, the Germans. And you had this illegal or black market. And it was German essentially. The Jews participated in it because they wanted to live just like everybody else. So up until when the currency reform came, I think it was in 1947, I had to supervise the exchange of the old worthless money for the new d-marks,¹³ which are the currency in Germany today, that's when the economic miracle occurred in Germany. Because the day after these d-marks appeared, when the new currency worth something appeared, all of a sudden

¹³ Deutschmarks.

German shops became full of produce and food and everything else. But up until that time you had the black market. Now the military authorities used to tell us that black market hurt the German economy. They asked us to communicate to the Jews in the camps that if they black marketed they would be hurting the German economy. I can't think of anything, which was less persuasive to Jews, about stopping than the idea that they should be protecting the German economy. There was nothing they were interested in less. And so, you know, we had all this business. And I tell you very frankly, I say it now thirty years later, but I was very sympathetic with the black market because I saw it was the only way in which Jews could recover some of their equilibrium and that they could eat properly. And I wasn't about to cooperate with extensive — except where I saw something very bad going on — with the law enforcement efforts of the German police or the American police to stop it. And I recall sitting in my window and I would see an ox cart come in, a great big wagon taking garbage or something or bringing coal, coming in with four big oxen and leaving with two. I knew that somewhere inside that camp there was a shoykhet, a kosher slaughterer, he would be working shortly. Meat was kosher. Everything was done accordingly to strictly the [mashkiakh] and everything. And the meat was slaughtered. And in the next day it would appear on these little stores, you know, to be sold. Meat and milk. It was brought in a thousand ways. You had to be very careful about the police. Some cattle was even raised in little houses in the cellars of the DP camp, some of these houses I talk about, you know. They were being fed there and raised.

JL: There was enough room?

SS: Not really. You know one time we had a raid in the camp by the military and they found a fairly grown heifer or something, and the guy said, "How did you get these things?" He asked the people, "How did you get it done the steps of this little teeny basement?" Of course, they kept it fairly well immobilized, they were feeding it, you know, and it was slaughtered. They would slaughter it and cut it up in the basement and take it out. A very, very tough existence. A very, very tough life. None of the niceties were observed. You must remember these people were survivors and it took a good deal to survive.

Basic food rations were supplied by the United Nations on a carefully laid out calorie table, you know, for different categories of people. We had tried to get people working in the camps to take care of their own needs. So people who had worked in heavy occupations were fed 3200 calories a day. Non-workers got 2800 calories a day. Children got less. Women got a different ration and then when they were pregnant we had other kinds of foods. There was a classification called "lactating mothers," breast-feeding. So we had all of these categories. We had hospitals. In the Fernwald DP camp we had a two-hundred-bed hospital, which had been stolen by the Germans from the Romanians. After the war the Romanians asked us to give it back to them and we tried to give it all back. But we delayed it because the hospital was needed, it had surgical suites, it had OB-GYN. A lot of the stuff disappeared by the way and is somewhere in Israel. It was taken by the immigrants to Israel. Some of the EKGs and operating equipment was badly needed in Israel.

JL: While you were there it was taken?

SS: Yeah, yeah. As a matter of fact, there was a big trouble about this. We had a thing called restitution teams. At this camp, Fernwald, was one of the largest Jewish camps in Bavaria, in Germany. There was a railroad that ran into the camp, which carried the supplies and the Germans had stolen this. They had, you know, simply gone and taken the whole railroad, with the tracks and the locomotives and the cars and everything else, to Germany and it was built around this camp, Fernwald, which itself had been a munitions factory during the war. So they needed the railroad, the Germans. When the war was over, the Romanians, who are themselves allies, remember, ex-enemy national, a country allied with the Nazis, demanded the railroad back, and we prevented them. If that railroad were not there we would not be able to supply our people — there were six-thousand people in that camp — with the food. So I stalled them in the return of that railroad. And then there was, as I say, this Rumanian hospital which was there. It was about two-hundred beds, it had operating room and all of the rest.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SS: We prevented the move of the return of the railroad to the Romanians because we needed the railroad. It was still there the day I left and subsequently, I think it's now gone. I've returned since I don't see any when I actually went back.

JL: And when did you leave?

SS: I left in March of '50, 1950. Then the Romanians asked for their hospital back. They wanted it dismantled and taken back. At least the equipment in the hospital. But by this time, Jews departing for Palestine, or for Israel after '48, that's what I'm talking about, had shipped out most of the valuable equipment in cases in which there was supposed to be their personal belongings. The movement of Jews from the camps is an interesting chapter in itself. The United States and most of the western countries — Canada, England — were dreadfully, terribly, unenthusiastic about the potential of the Jews to come to their countries. There were, I estimate, in the American zones of Germany and Austria, about 250-300,000 Jews. That's off the top of my head. I don't know clearly what the — but when the war was over, immediately when the war was over, there were probably no more than 40-50,000 Jews in those areas, who were liberated in the concentration camps of Germany and Austria. And it was in the end of 1948 and especially after the early months, Passover of 1946, when a pogrom in Kielce,¹⁴ Passover time in a Polish town, that the masses of Jewish survivors in the east began to go westward. And by this time the British, at that time the British became very nervous about the potential threat to their control of Palestine and the United States occupying authorities were not too happy about the prospect of these people coming in and straining the almost destroyed the German economy. So what did they do? They said that two things: they ordered all DP camps in late December or early January closed to new arrivals in the hope that the message would filter back, you know, to Germany and Hungary and the rest of these countries that people would not be welcome.

JL: Again, what year was that?

¹⁴ In a pogrom in Kielce, Poland on July 4, 1946, forty-two Jews were killed.

SS: '46, early '46. And secondly, they imposed an immigration requirement that you would not be eligible for emigration to the United States if you arrived in the American zone of Germany or Austria after December 22, 1945. There were two problems with those two restrictions on the movement of Jews. One, that they moved into the camps anyway. There was no way to keep them out and for myself I opened the camps. Everybody was accepted. And by the way, it was a dangerous thing because we knew this was a good potential for typhus and typhoid or other kinds of epidemic diseases in these camps. But we took the people in as best we could. Couldn't let them stay out in the snow in the winter of 1946 and also the winter of 1947. The second thing that happened in the connection with the movement of Jews to the United States, the requirement that they come after December 22, 1945, that arbitrary a restriction, clearly designed to keep Jews out of the United States, was violated all over. We just printed new DP cards for them. Many of them changed their — this has never been said publicly but it's thirty years later and nobody knows who the people are — but there was change of both the time of arrival/day of arrival in the zone, and there was widespread change of these identity cards to provide a place of birth which would overcome the obstacles placed in their way by the national origins quotas. So then a Jew, let's say, from Latvia, where there was a quota of two hundred or something each year might have to wait ten years or something before he got in. So he changed his birthplace to West Germany or Germany where there was a very large quota unused because the Germans were not at that time eligible for immigration to the United States.

JL: Didn't the authorities try to keep tabs on what was going on?

SS: They did, but there was really no way of doing that because the Jews could properly claim and truthfully say that they had no documentation. If you came out of a concentration camp or somewhere where you were in hiding, one thing you did not have is a place indicating your place of birth, your religion, or whatever. It was probably destroyed or taken from you, whatever. So there was really no way of checking it and the eastern European countries, East Germany in particular, could not, would not, under Soviet occupation, provide the United States with any evidence of birth. So what happened

in effect was that you had this postwar effort after the Holocaust, it's unthinkable, but it happened, where these people who had survived the most terrible of all experiences were told "I'm sorry, we don't want you," you know? And Palestine was not open either. And so they made their own way out and that was another way of surviving — found your own way, changing documentation, changing place of birth. Now we had up until 1948, we had illegal movement of Jews to Palestine. You all remember the ship the Exodus.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, the Exodus, the people on the Exodus came from many of the camps in my area and I knew about it. We provided blankets, we provided food. And when the Exodus did not succeed in getting into Palestine, and its people were returned, I think to Hamburg and forcibly removed from the ship by the British, they were then returned to our DP camps where we unhappily welcomed them back. But up until '48 there was illegal immigration from these cities and from the camps, and after '48, when the state of Israel was established, we set up refugee processing centers. We had the first one of these refugee, among the very first of the refugee immigration points to Israel, which was a little town called Geretsried in the south of Bavaria near Fernwald. And we set up examinations, physicals and all of the rest, to move the people out. They changed the name of the place to Camp Negev it was called, I remember. And the United Nations paid all the expenses, moving the people, their airfare, many of them went by air, beginning in May of 1948 to Israel. I have no exact statistics but I think it broke down almost even. Half the Jews opted for Palestine and for Israel the other half for the United States, Canada, Australia or other western countries when they could get out. There was a lot of secret training before May of 1948 of Jews, have the units of the Hagana¹⁶ and Palmah¹⁷ were secretly training the Jews in and around Fernwald and the same Geretsried camp.

¹⁵ The 4,515 passengers of the [Exodus 1947](#), one of the ships involved in the clandestine immigration of Jewish refugees into British-ruled Palestine, were prevented by the British from disembarking in Palestine, and were returned to internment camps in Germany.

¹⁶ Underground Zionist military force founded in 1920 to facilitate the take-over of Palestine and protect Jewish settlers.

¹⁷ Commando units of the Hagana, first formed during World War II.

JL: Did they have weapons?

SS: No, they had brooms for guns or broomsticks; they had knives; they had all kinds of military training. We were warned by the authorities who monitored these areas, the American army by airplane. We'd see little Piper Cubs¹⁸ flying around, that they could see the formations moving over the ground in an area that was supposed to be agricultural training. It was not. And we were told that that had to stop, there would be crackdowns. They never came and we tried to tell the people to cool it, to train a little less loudly.

JL: How loudly did you tell them to train?

SS: Well, we wouldn't — my job, what happened is after the first year, the United Nations could no longer afford strictly international personnel. So we were then recruiting what we called indigenous personnel, that is DP people, survivors themselves, some of whom were given international status. They wore uniforms. But the major instrument for the conduct of the camp affairs, of all of these camps, were the people themselves, were camp committees in each of these major camps. And these committees would be responsible for the assignment of rooms, food, for the administration of these camps. It would be my function to — well, I sat as a supervisor, the place they could come. We kept the records, we moved the people, we maintained records on the supplies, the welfare, and other kinds of problems. And I would come approximately once a week. I'd make a round to each one of these camps and there would be a preset appointment with the lager komitet¹⁹ from [? 11:05]. And you'd see the camp chairman. All those people were elected democratically — and I was not aware they were elected — in Zionist elections, you know listes,²⁰ just in microcosm [of] what goes on in Israel today. They represented the various parties then called Mapam,²¹ the classic Revisionistic

¹⁸ Small American airplanes.

¹⁹ Yiddish for camp committee.

²⁰ Yiddish for lists, referring to elections in this context.

²¹ The United Workers' Party, an Israeli socialist party formed in 1948. Left of Mapai.

[Yudets? Yisroel] the Mizrakhi²² and the rest. They would hold elections every year, would be very hotly debated, and you'd have this shtetl,²³ of six or seven thousand people run by committee. I'd come once a week and meet with the committee. We would discuss grievances and problems, spend an hour or two. They would tell me their problems: this was needed or that was needed or this had happened or they were being harassed by Germans or by Ukrainians or whatever. Or people were in jail. By the way, that was a constant problem I had — getting our Jewish [Korsiche Zaylende?] Yidn out of jail, mostly on black market offenses. That is they would be swooped up in some raid in the city of Munich or caught with some cigarettes or chocolate or illegal currency and then they would end up in an American court. They could not be tried in German courts according to the occupation. Then I'd have to go down to the courts in Munich, you know, I'd send some assistant. But very frequently on that day I would ask the major — I don't remember his name, he was a neighbor of mine as a matter of fact, had a house nearby where I lived, and we drank a lot together so that made it a good relationship — I'd go down and I'd tell him, "Look, we have all of these cases. How about hearing them all? I want to hear them?" I'd come down and I'd speak up for them, try to get them out, very often successfully unless it was a very, very serious offense. But in most, where there was a black market offense or he was caught with some petty or minor thing —

JL: What did you do, just by persuasion?

SS: Yeah, you know, it's not unlike what lawyers do. I'm not a lawyer but I knew — I think the guy's name was Major Daly. He was a guy from the Middle West. He was a decent fellow, upright guy, not too complicated, you know. We'd drank together, we ate together, we developed a camaraderie. So if I came and said, so and so — I don't remember his name, Bob or Dick — I said, "Look, these cases are the ones I'd like to hear. I'd like to be in the courtroom. I'd like to say a word when they come

²² A religious Zionist organization and Israeli political party, formed in 1901.

²³ Yiddish for 'small town.'

before you." "Sure," you know. And usually we would get them off unless there was something serious. And occasionally there would be something serious.

JL: Like what?

SS: A killing, murder, hit and run. Jews did not drive cars too well in those years. There were very few cars around, you know, but somehow or another one would get his hands on an automobile. It was Nelly bar the door, you'd have to get off the streets. But I had some serious offenses. By the way, I want to tell you a very tragic aspect of this if you want to hear about it. In the earliest days I remember I had my office the first in the Neu Freimann camp. I visited with my wife this past summer and my offices were on this sort of what looked like a town square in this area. In this town square there would be hundreds, perhaps even thousands of Jews milling about on a sunny day talking to each other. And suddenly there would be a cry, shouts, and the sound of feet and screams and yelling. It was horrendous. I'd rush to the window and I'd see a knot of angry people, maybe a hundred or so people, standing around some man beating him, see. I mean beating him is an understatement. Literally lynching him or trying to beat him to death right there. We had our own police in the camp, you know. We had an unarmed police of Jews appointed to patrol because there was concern about security. And the police would rush in and I would rush down and we'd try to separate them and finally we'd get to the man in the middle, who by this time had been beaten into a pulp, his clothes are all ripped. I cannot tell you. I must have seen dozen of such cases in the five years I was there. Now what was this all about? I'd take him up to my office and we would be followed by a stream of angry and gesticulating people screaming and hollering. And it turns out that this man was, let's say, a ghetto politsiant²⁴ in Lodz or in [Poniewiez?], or this ghetto, Vilna, whatever, you name it, and that he had extracted money for certain favors — life itself by the way — assigning people, "You go to work and you go for deportation." And that he had beaten people, or that he had [opgemassakht? abgemassakht?], which means he had informed — there's no worse crime than that — to the

²⁴ Yiddish for ghetto policeman.

Germans. And the result had been that people had been taken away and killed, never seen again. And there I was a young fellow, a young kid, and I was faced with this problem of how you deal with this. Don't forget, I'm Jewish, too, you know, and it was traumatic for me. I'd never known about this. And in trying to decide these sorts of things, you say, "What do you do about this?" I mean, how do you deal with this whole business in the postwar period? Should we turn him over to the American authorities and say he was a war criminal? It was unthinkable from our perspective then. To let him go free? I mean what are the alternatives here? I soon began to learn, however, that virtually all of these cases were not clean-cut. That is, there were two sides to this question. When I asked for eydes, which means witnesses, to come forward so that we least in consultation — and by the way I was all alone on this. There was nobody to help me make these decisions usually. Maybe a committee in the camp. So, vos tut me?²⁵ Then the eydes would come forward, and by God, you would almost automatically produce witnesses on both sides of this. That is, almost one for one for those who said "Er geharget mayn tate,"²⁶ and he killed my mother or he caused my father and my brother to be killed etc., there would be people who say, no, no, er hot uns gratevet, he had saved us. I remember this. You learn there's nobody, really no matter how dastardly that person is, that is totally unredeemable. You know, totally on one side. I think if you went into the prisons here, Waupun, and talked with a murderer, there are people prepared in his own family to say he was a sweet guy on this and that occasion. You hear that all the time. And who knows what the truth is? But nevertheless, you could never excuse informing or deliberate beating or the selling of favors. As I say, favors meant life. There would be cases where people escaped, you know, and he went to the Germans to tell on them and when you asked him why did you do that — "Because I had to save some others." There was always some business. I'm trying to remember — one case occurred when the writer Hannah Yaffee, she's

²⁵ Yiddish for 'What does one do?'

²⁶ Yiddish for 'He killed my father.'

now dead, she came for the Forverts,²⁷ she was a writer for the Forverts, Hannah Yaffee. I have a picture of her here in this collection. And she wrote a series of articles about the camp — I should go back to the Forverts and the old files and find — and about me and what I've experienced with them. And one of them, my mother told me, was a description of that very day when she was sitting in my office and we could hear this screaming and the beatings and the hollering. Well, let me tell you, what really worked out in all of these cases was that we held a kind of an open court or hearing and the sentence, if there was a finding, was that we informed what we called ale instantsn, all levels of Jewish authority in Germany at that time. That is the Komitet fun di Bafraytet Yidn in Daytshland, the Committee of Liberated Jews of Germany, by the way who were in Munich and also under part of our camp system, you see. We informed the Jewish Agency,²⁸ the JDC, the emigration people, the local committees, you know, that such-and-so had been adjudged or had been accused and we feel that — that was the only weapon that was really what we could aim at him. So that if such a person among the Jews, let's say, would be living here in Milwaukee, and it's probably so anywhere that in other places, whether it's in Israel or whether it's in Canada, whatever, that this person in a sense would have a sort of an invisible mark of Cain upon him, that this was a man who had bad reputation, who had done these evil things.

JL: Was that the only sentence?

SS: That was the only thing we can do. Now I did hear, and I can't corroborate this, that some very bad people, I mean really bad, and believe me they were, were executed in Germany by Jews.

JL: After an official trial?

SS: After the war.

JL: Just haphazardly?

²⁷ The [Yiddish Daily Forward](#), a newspaper published in New York, New York.

²⁸ A non-governmental body that is the executive of the World Zionist Organization.

SS: No, there was some sort of secret hearing or something. He was known. I don't know how it was done. There were stories, and I'm sure they're true, that even during the concentration camp days there were executions in the camps by drowning in a sanitary ditch, a toilet ditch. Or by two people standing on opposite ends of a broomstick which had been put over the man's throat. In some cases I heard that people had been spirited upon the aliya bet,²⁹ in the illegal immigration had been moved out or sort of semi-drugged to Israel where they were also placed on trial secretly because it was a Shanannah?³⁰ for the world. I don't know, I can't substantiate it. Those are stories, which went about, that revenge or retribution, you know, for these acts had been meted out. But I know that at least two dozen cases of beatings and accusations and beatings together with accusations were made in the camps where I was the administrator and I was asked to be in a sense an adjudicator of these — I was only then, by the way, twenty-five, twenty-six years old — of these instances. And I did the very best that I could under those conditions. And the only sentence, the only way we could handle it was to identify this guy as someone who had done bad things. By the way, there were two cases, or three cases, where non-Jews, kapos³¹ and concentration camp guards were identified. It's interesting that these people were identified in the middle of Jewish camps, or in the camps.

JL: What were they doing there?

SS: They were in the camp, I don't know, or they were outside doing business of various sorts. There was one man I remember who spoke Yiddish, who claimed he was Yiddish, or claimed he was Jewish, who spoke Yiddish as clear, just like it was his mame loshn,³² you could not tell the difference. And it turned out he came from one of these little towns, which was predominantly Jewish, they had them, the stetlekh,³³ you know, and he had worked for a Jewish butcher, [kintflaysh] from childhood up.

²⁹ Illegal immigration of Jews into British-ruled Palestine.

³⁰ 22:05.

³¹ German for 'overseer.'

³² Yiddish for 'mother tongue.'

³³ Yiddish for 'small towns.'

And he was raised with Jewish people and with this family he spoke. And he'd tried to pass off as a Jew. And he was identified. He'd been one of the most horrendous of all, you know, of the recruits for the SS in that area. Now with this man, after we took him, there was at that time still a Russian military mission. We took him to this Russian military mission. By the way, this man was taken back some place. At that time it was still possible, in the early days. He was removed. He was sort of identified by a cooperative effort of the Americans and the Russians and removed somewhere, taken back to trial. He's probably not alive today. We had two, three, I recall, of those cases where non-Jews — I always thought it very interesting. It just seemed to me that would be the place you'd go last. But there was some sort of psychological factor impelling them to be hanging around. One man even had his SS tattoo. You know, some of the more hardened SS had the tattoos under the inside of their left arms.

JL: And they were actually in the camp?

SS: In the camp, yeah, with Jews. So, it was a strange world.

JL: Besides these criminal types, were there any other non-Jews in the camps?

SS: Oh, yeah, there's a whole story attached to that. There were quite a number of non-Jews, mostly women, Polish women. Mostly Polish, non-Jewish women; other non-Jewish women; occasionally men, who had rescued or who had sheltered Jews. They lived together for some months, you know, during the war years, maybe a year or two in secret, and this attachment had grown up. Most of them, by the way, are in Israel, where I'm sure that the rabbinate, if they were to identify, they would have the Orthodox — that without benefit of conversion they're simply Jewish and their children are Jewish.

JL: And they're intermarried?

SS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They were part of the — in some cases daytshkes³⁴ as they were called. There was a good deal of fooling around with the Germans nearby. Germany, all of Germany itself, you know, was to a significant degree a population on the move, you know. Where you had enormous numbers of Sudeten Germans and Silesian Germans and East German Germans under Soviet occupation. The

³⁴ Yiddish for 'German women.'

war had just totally destroyed the family, you know, the infrastructure of the country. Millions of people, all kinds of people — Ukrainians and Germans and Balts — and all on the move. And a country in which the economy had been destroyed — there's a lot of hunger. And many of the Jewish men did meet German girls, also refugees, sometimes Jewish girls were not available, and they romanced. Now the Jews were beneficiaries of special programs on the part of the American Jewish communities, so that a Jew would receive every month — you know, I think it was every month — in addition to the basic ration from the UN, which itself was very inadequate, he would receive a package from the JDC, which included very valuable things like cigarettes, chocolate, coffee, fat, sugar, margarine, fat and margarine, you know whatever. And this made life tolerable, you could live. And so if you had a daytshke, a pretty girl, you'd move in with her or you'd bring her into the camp as your wife or somebody and you'd live together, you know. And many of them went to Europe, or to Israel, many of them came to the United States. And it was a strange and interesting [? 27:45]. I was going to tell you something else about these kinds of relationships. We wanted the people to go to Palestine and to Israel, you know, so sort of repeat a little bit of what is going on today with Russian Jews, you know. There was a great imperative to send people to Palestine to demonstrate that Palestine was needed. See the United Nations Commission on Partition was taking testimony as to whether, you know, Palestine was needed for a Jewish homeland.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

JL: Okay, you were talking about UNSCOP?³⁵

SS: Right. I think it was in 1947, if I'm not mistaken, that the United Nations, then meeting at [Les Sources?], [came] under some pressure to make a decision with regard to the mandate. I think having already been notified by the British that the British were going to give up the mandate. My history may be faulty but I think that's how it happened. [UNSCOP] sent yet another commission out to investigate what should be the disposition of the mandate as regards to the question of a Jewish homeland and Arab homeland and the rest. And it had been the Anglo-American Commission, [there] had been a number of commissions before that. And this commission was a UN commission called UNSCOP, United Nations Commission on Partition, and a subcommittee of that commission from New York came to Germany to look into the question, to talk to Jews themselves on the spot and look into the question of where Jews really wish to go, what did they wish to do. Now, there was, of course, the Jewish community there was divided on where they wish to go. A large number of Jews who were dedicated to going to Palestine, Erets Yisroel.³⁶ We had continuing agitation and marches and protests — I have pictures — in the camps to demonstrate the wish, the commitment, to go home in Erets Yisroel. I remember a song called [Kimat mit Toysund Yar: A heym, a heym, briderlekh a heym, kimat mit toyznd yar, mir varten oyf dem.]³⁷ That's not exactly how I speak Yiddish but that comes out in the Galitsianisher³⁸ way. In any case, the Zionist feelings ran very high. It was unanimous even among those Jews who wish to go to their uncles or their brothers or for whatever reason to the United States or to Canada. And when the commission arrived in 1947, they came to Neu Freimann — one of the camps — where I received them in one of the rooms we had sort of a hearing there, you know. We were asked to provide them with the roll of the camp's inhabitants, which we did. Mostly the people

³⁵ United Nations Commission on Partition.

³⁶ Yiddish for the Land of Israel.

³⁷ Yiddish for 'Almost a Thousand Years: A home, a home, a brotherly home, for almost a thousand years, we have been waiting for it.'

³⁸ Yiddish for Galician, referring here to the pronunciation of Yiddish among the mostly Polish Galician Jews in the camps.

were sympathetic on this committee, but there was a Pakistani, who was then from India, this is before India itself was partitioned, and he was a Muslim. I recall that he was very hostile. He saw conspiracies all around and he saw the plots. And he accused me, or he asked accusingly, if I am Jewish. Am I pressuring these people to say they want to go to Palestine? And I assured him I was not, that I was not even a Zionist, but I knew that the people wanted to go nowhere but Palestine. And the first person who got called on this list was a man by the name of Weinschenker, who was a brother of a business colleague of my father's. He had his visa to the United States in his pocket. And he was asked where do you wish to go and he said, proudly and loudly, "Vo ale Yidn faren: in Ertz Yisroel."³⁹ "Where all Jews must go: to Palestine." Of course, he left a week later to the United States. But [? 4:20] great cheers and hosannas. There was a lot of pressure on the Jewish community to go to Palestine, to Israel. And as I say, there was a strong feeling among many of the Jews that that's where they wished to go and they went despite all of the hardships, you know. Sometimes we'd get them back, like off the Exodus. Many of them ended up in Cyprus. Some made it through. And then when the state was declared, legal immigration occurred. Now there's something to be said here which sort of gives you an insight into how refugee and refugee camps work. When Jews left illegally for Palestine, they turned in their DP cards and their ration cards not to us in the United Nations, but to the committee in the camp, you see. So what happened was, let's say if a third of the camp left illegally for Palestine, that camp's population was always recorded exactly as it was [before their departure]. People have commented on the fact that in the Arab refugee camps in the Middle East, nobody dies, nobody leaves. And we know that people are leaving and that people are dying. The ration cards are used to beef up inadequate, you know, rations. They're also used to supply food for people who are leaving in a variety of ways. It's classic that population statistics in refugee camps are the most iffy of, you know, statistics and I knew that to be true.

JL: And you did this with both eyes sort of closed?

³⁹ Yiddish for 'Where all the Jews are going: to Israel.'

SS: Well, I knew it was going on. There was no way that I could stop it.

JL: Did you want to?

SS: No, I would not want to stop it. We were told by the Americans. It was just like with the United States consulate people who knew that half the people they were getting through there had documents which were falsified, but which [ones were falsified], there was no way of knowing.

JL: Did they approach you about that?

SS: Yeah. They said that there was a false document factory in all of our camps, you know, and that they were trying to find out and would I cooperate? I said, "How can I do that? I don't know who's got the documents and you don't know either. Unless you're willing to penalize all of the people." So we had that kind of thing with the immigration of Jews. We also had the problems with the Canadians. The Canadians ran missions, they wanted certain specialized people. They were looking for holtshakers,⁴⁰ you know, wood choppers, foresters, you know. And they were looking for tailors and furriers, special occupations. There was a good deal of feeling that they were very anti-Semitic in how they chose their immigrants. And there's a lot of bigotry, a lot of prejudice about it. We were constantly protesting to this government to that — the Australians were the same way. The South Africans were very, very restrictive. A lot of Jews want to go to South Africa because so many of them had family there and friends who had gone before the war. Now we'll turn to your questions and perhaps you'll remind me of some other things. You asked about agencies.

JL: Well I did want to ask you something else first. You were talking about the authorities and what they knew and what they didn't know. On this I'd like to go back for a moment to the black market. You said that there were some things that you couldn't close your eyes to – some really terrible things. Do you remember what they were?

SS: Yeah. Well, for example, there was an illegal whiskey, alcohol. There was a shortage of alcoholic beverages and there was a market for it, of course. And some of the stuff was being made in such

⁴⁰ Yiddish for 'lumberjacks.'

ways that it would result in blindness and illness, you know. I don't know what the medical details are. But we had situations where American soldiers had bought this black market whiskey and had become very ill and I don't know, blindness, I don't recall the reports exactly but that was something which we had to stop. Which was being done by people not simply to make a few bucks or to, you know, provide for living. But people who really were dealing in very bad things. Or else put it right on the table — that is, we had our own criminal types, you know, who would do very destructive things. So that had to be stopped.

JL: Did you have hearings for them?

SS: Yeah, we had hearings and we made it clear — I don't remember whether it was military police in the military were brought in, that is the police authorities. We warned people that that would be dealt with harshly, you know, that we would call the cops down on them, and we did. We had something else which I think was a source of great embarrassment at that time. We had the involvement of some Americans who came over in relief operations who were exploiting the Jews in the camps for the shipment of black market materials into the German economy. That is an American relief organization. Pardon the expression, I mean, Jews I'm speaking of, some of them even rabbis who came over in the guise of a relief operation who received permission to ship certain kinds of foods and other amenity supplies into Germany on the names of each of the Jewish DPs. How they got these names, I don't know. And then the stuff would be shipped in ["toe-fly"? 10:05], that means without any customs, and never saw a DP camp. Immediately broken down, you know, the packages and sold into the black market. We felt that that had to be stopped, and it was. There were a lot of things. There was vice, there were a number of things that were going on which we tried to put down.

JL: "We" meaning you and your staff?

SS: Yeah, the Jewish community. I'm talking about the camp committees. It was done always with camp committees. And they would come to me and counsel — how do you put a stop to this, or we have this kind of thing going on and how should we deal with that? And we would counsel together and talk

about it and reach a decision and we would stop it. We had people stealing in the wind and dead of winter, precious coal from one another, you know, so we had to stop that. People freeze in the Bavarian winters. There was misbehavior. We had to deal with our own misbehavior. I must tell you I was the United Nations official, but I was very much a member of that Jewish community which lived there. I had a dual role. And I think that was not only true of me it was true of other Jews who were in that program. I think of Sam Haber from Milwaukee who was a JDC Director. JDC worked under our auspices. United Nations' UNRAA, [which] subsequently became IRO, International Refugee Organization, was what we called the umbrella group. Jewish agencies functioning in Germany worked with our commission under our auspices. We provided supervision, they provided the workers and the programs and the food and the materials. Those agencies included the Jewish ones, the Joint Distribution Committee. HIAS⁴¹ is an immigration agency, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which was then called JAFB. And they provided mostly counseling services, but their real function was immigration. First illegally and when the state was declared they became the first consulate of Israel. They also provided for the Jewish political parties, you know. The central committee provided, you know, counsel and cooperation to the Zionist organizations. But mostly they were pretty [kha]. They also processed the orphans who were found. We found lots of those. I maintained an orphan home near Fernwald. I have a picture of it here, where children who were found after the war - orphan children – were brought. And at any given time probably be a hundred kids [were] in the home. And we had a very interesting system, I have to tell you about it, how life is a chance, sort of like a big roulette wheel. We would have these children and a transport of children would arrive and we would hold those children until they were ready to move out to Israel. We sent virtually all to Palestine, see. They went aliya bet, they went illegally to Palestine. Some of them, I guess, did go to the United States under the auspices of the U.S. Committee for Orphan Children. But the political parties, the Zionist parties quarreled among themselves, the different factions, who would run this home. So we had a

⁴¹ Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

rotating system. I remember — it was what, a month or two months or three months we would have Mapai,⁴² three months Mapam,⁴³ three months the [Regengenisset?] the right-wingers, three months [Yagudets Israel], three months the Mizrakhi. Those were, I think, the five major groupings that each took. Now the children who would spend two months or three months — there were children six, seven, four, you know — under the influence of each group would come out totally formed — it was so funny to watch — by these groups. That is the [Linker] came out, [Mapam — perhaps a correction for Linke 14:00] came out with a sort of left-wing orientation. The Revisionists came out, they were very war-like. I remember a man came to visit [and asked them] "Vu farstu?"⁴⁴ Many of them spoke German and some of them began to speak Yiddish. "Ikh far in Erts Yisroel"⁴⁵ and one kid said, ["Far vos nisht [shaken a?] hargenen Araber?"⁴⁶ he said — Kill Arabs. Other children, the children of the Mizrakhi began already to grow the side curls, the peyes. Some of them had come in still wearing the — I have the picture and I'll show you — the peasant costumes or parts of peasant costumes the families or the convents wear, and in months they're completely changed around. And, by the way, speaking about non-Jews, shiksas⁴⁷ who were going out with Jewish men, a number of these children — I don't know how many, I am convinced, and many were convinced — were non-Jews who were also orphaned, sort of swept up in the zeal, or the convent or the families said, "Look, take them all," you know. And they took all of them. So it's sort of an interesting kind of thing that happened and a reflection of how malleable and how formable young children are, that within a matter of months they were —

JL: Yeah, that's what I wanted to ask you. It was just months?

⁴² The Israel Workers' Party, an Israeli labor party founded in 1930. Right of Mapam.

⁴³ The United Workers' Party, an Israeli socialist party formed in 1948. Left of Mapai.

⁴⁴ Yiddish for 'Where are you going?'

⁴⁵ Yiddish for 'I am going to Israel.'

⁴⁶ Yiddish for 'Why not kill Arabs?'

⁴⁷ Yiddish for 'non-Jewish women.'

SS: Yeah, just months. I think they stayed two or three months at one group at a time. I have the picture here, I'll show you. That was called — oy, I forgot the name of the home. There's a home we made. It was a Kinderheim⁴⁸ before it had been deserted. It had become some sort of government institution and we took it over again. My own office in Wolfratshausen, where I had my offices, was a Hauswirtschaftschule⁴⁹ for Jewish girls, had these home economics, you know. A live-in place where girls at boarding school learned how to be housewives, how to do whatever had — and as a matter of fact there's a guy here in town who's professor of Social Welfare, Max [Kurs Kirst Kirs Kers]. Do you know Max? His wife was a student in that school until she was thrown out — Kristallnacht 1938 by the Germans. We reclaimed that building and used it as our office building through the whole of the DP period.

JL: You were taking about the orphan children. What about things that were done for children of families and children who were born in the camp?

SS: Well, that's very important. Many of the Jews had been denied all of the things that in a normal course you have — homes and families and schools and all of the rest. [They] hungered for these things. So immediately camps, when they were created, we set up certain basic services. In the beginning, there weren't very many children, but I've indicated that kids began to come in, whole families, after January of 1946. We set up schools, which were taught in Yiddish and Hebrew. The kids were like sponges. We found teacher volunteers, people wished to teach. They're marvelously dedicated people. Just fantastic to watch. You would think after experience of that sort that nobody would care for anything. But there was so much spirit. As I think about it wells up in me. I remember these marvelous people who devoted themselves, for so little, you know, in compensation whatever they did, to creating classrooms. There's a man, I wish I could see him today, he's in Baltimore, Mr. Spector, who was a gifted schoolmaster from some town in Poland, I don't remember where. Mr. and Mrs.

⁴⁸ German for 'children's home.'

⁴⁹ German for 'school of home economics.'

Spector. She was a teacher. He was a teacher. I know he immigrated to Baltimore. And they were dedicated in their recruitment of teachers and their training of teachers. And, by the way, they didn't know how long they would be. It was all, you know, for a matter of a year, two, or three. It was not a career. And Mr. Spector ran the schools and the kids just were avid to learn. They loved it. And I have pictures of one of the schools and Eisenhower. We took Eisenhower into the schools. The children learned to sing the "Star Spangled Banner" phonetically, you know. And Eisenhower asked me, "What Yiddish song are they singing?" He couldn't understand it. Mr. Spector who was present, the head of the school, said to me, "Vos zogt er?, what is he saying? I was embarrassed to tell him. I didn't want to tell him, he would be so hurt. I said, "He says it's very beautiful." But their English was so twisted, so bad, it had been learned phonetically, that he didn't understand what they were saying.

JL: What did you tell him it was?

SS: I don't remember, I said it was some Yiddish — oh, no, I told him what it was. I said, "General, they're singing the 'Star Spangled Banner.'" I did tell him that. And he laughed. But Mr. Spector leaned over to me, "Vos hot er gezogt?,"⁵⁰ and I couldn't bring myself to say that he thought it was a Yiddish song. Yeah, he asked me, "Is that a Yiddish song?" So we had the schools. We had kindergartens for the kids. We had programs. We had theater programs for them. We built a stage in many of the camps. In one or two of the camps, which had been workers' settlements, you know,, you know, under the Germans, there were stages. We had concerts, we'd get touring artists who have come over, Jewish artists. [Hermann] Yablokoff⁵¹ came over. Levick, the famous poet, came over, Chaim Levick. And he wrote a play, after visiting Fernwald, which is still being performed as part of a Yiddish theater reparatory in various parts of the world. It's called [A Khasene in Fernwald](#).⁵² It's a famous story about a romance and it does deal with business of the recreation of life, you know, the affirmation of life, these

⁵⁰ Yiddish for 'What did he say?'

⁵¹ A leading actor of the Yiddish theater.

⁵² Yiddish for [A Wedding in Fernwald](#).

two people coming together to be married. We had musicians of various sorts and we had our own talented people. We had, tragically, remnants of the Stupel Orchestra, which was the Dachau orchestra, which had been put together by the Nazis to impress the Red Cross that Dachau was humane. We had Leonard Bernstein come to concertize. He was presented in a very tearful ceremony, it was unbelievable emotionally, with a concentration camp suit or jacket that he wore. So we tried as best we could, you know. And the Jewish agencies, they'd come in with their own religious supplies. And, by the way, he had in one camp you would have as many as eight or ten synagogues even though the population would only be 6,000. But these synagogues were, you know — they're Pelishe and Litvishe and a this and a Ungarishe and some of these Carpathian towns, [Munkach]. The various groups each had their own little shtibelekh,⁵³ you know, and they would worship in them.

JL: Where did they get the Torahs from?

SS: Well, Torahs were found, by the way. That's another interesting thing. Torahs were found after the war in hiding. There were Germans to whom they were given for concealment. And they were brought out to the JDC and to other Americans. Some of the American Jewish chaplains with the military received these things, found them. So there was, I think there were Torahs which suddenly appeared. Some people brought them from Eastern Europe, you know. The people who had not been in concentration camp but had survived outside them brought them with them. So we had all these synagogues. The JDC provided sdorim,⁵⁴ you know, and tefillin⁵⁵ and talisin⁵⁶ and all of the various things. I remember the first Yom Kippur I spent in Germany was in 1946 and I was not particularly a shul geer,⁵⁷ you know, but I was put up in front of this jammed congregation, which broke every fire rule ever made, and I just couldn't get out. I would have to clamor over — I had to stay there for eight hours or

⁵³ Yiddish for small Hasidic houses of prayer.

⁵⁴ Hebrew for 'seders.'

⁵⁵ Two small leather boxes connected by a band used by men in morning prayers.

⁵⁶ Prayer shawls.

⁵⁷ Yiddish for 'synagogue-goer.'

whatever in an Orthodox — it was something I was not accustomed to. And we had a rich life. One of the charming things I remember about our schools is that tablets – writing tablets — were provided to us by the YMCA which had really brought them to Europe for American soldiers as diaries. And on the front it said YMCA with the familiar triangle of the YMCA. And I remember that the children would speak to me and the teachers would speak to me about their little books, or they needed these books. And they called them "eem-ka." The pronunciation of Poles of America words was very funny. A package of cigarettes was called — a famous brand was called "Lootsky Streekeh" in the beginning, which is the way it would be said. We had streets in one of the camps which were named after American states. They tore down the old German names and we had all these gasn,⁵⁸ you know, these streets. They were very funny as they said, "I live on di Kentootsky Gas." Or I love the one, "Oheehoh" which is Ohio Street. And the best one that the Jews really loved, the state that the Jews really loved, the street to live on was called the Meshuggenah Gas.⁵⁹ By the way, there was great humor. There was a lot of fun. If it sounds all grim, and it was grim, at the same time Jews did find a lot to laugh about, you know, and a lot to have fun about. Bavaria was beautiful in the foothills of the mountains and down into the Alps itself.

JL: So could they travel outside?

SS: Yes, they could move about. They went to the lakes. They were then travelers as we are now and they went wherever they could. They went to the lakes in Garmisch and Chiemsee and Starnberger See and all around. Many of them, tragically, had to stay in hospitals in the mountains. Tuberculosis, we had a lot of TB. I remember somebody saying to me, ["Khaver Direktor, far vos zunen di Daytshn — far voset Got — far vos et nisht Moyshe Rabeynu — far vos iz ungarishe gekummen — di Daytshen zonen." 24:50] What he was saying that Moses should have led the children of Israel instead of into the desert where they would be heading, right here to Bavaria. There was a big mistake, he said, on

⁵⁸ Yiddish for 'streets.'

⁵⁹ This mispronunciation of [Michigan Gas](#) yields the Yiddish for Crazy Street,

the part of Moses. It's sort of a commentary. It is a beautiful part of the world, but it's flecked with the blood of Jews. It really is. So we had a strong cultural life and efforts were made — we recruited physicians, dentists, nurses from among the indigenous population. Rabbis. And, by the way, rabbis were very important for another reason. In addition to running the congregation, since there was no recourse virtually to the civil courts in the manner of, let's say, important financial disputes among Jews, let's say you're a Jew in one camp and you have ordered from another one a thousand cartons of cigarettes, a big black market deal, right? You pay for them. And now the guy sends them. They've got to be sent secretly, can't put them in a big truck, right, because it's illegal. But on the way it is grabbed by German police and confiscated, or stolen, you know. So now you're suing, you want your money back, right? And who's to settle this? You can't go to the German courts, right? It's also true of occupied Europe. So you had the dintoyre, a religious court. And the Rabbis were in charge of the dintoyres. And they received a fee for a dintoyre, for holding court. And the fee sometimes depended on the size of the issue.

JL: From the litigants?

SS: On the part of litigants, right. They would agree that they would come to this rabbi and that this rabbi would decide who was right and how much had to be paid — whatever the case was, whether it was small or large. Sometimes it was quite large. And so the rabbis performed that and there was a great deal of competition among them and anger. Now one of the rabbis, I remember — I was placed in positions I thought I'd never be in. In one of the camps in Munich and there was a rabbi about whom was claimed he really didn't have smikhe,⁶⁰ that he was simply a shames⁶¹ or something, a gabe⁶² from some place and they wanted to unseat him. They came to me and they said, "We want him out." And I had to decide. And there were people who wanted him in, those people said "Smikhe, mikhe!,"⁶³

⁶⁰ Ordination.

⁶¹ A sexton in a synagogue, or a rabbi's personal assistant.

⁶² A trustee or warden of a synagogue or the manager of the affairs of a Hasidic rabbi,

⁶³ Yiddish for 'ordination, shmordination!,' dismissing the question of ordination as irrelevant.

they didn't care. "He's a fayner Yid, a guter Yid."⁶⁴ They liked him very much. I don't remember how that thing was decided but I knew that behind all of the hollering in addition to the religious questions, there was also a, what we call a [panose 27:55] question, how much you can earn. So in the absence of a regularly constituted legal authorities, we were all playing all kinds of roles, you know.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1

⁶⁴ Yiddish for 'a fine Jew', 'a good Jew.'

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

SS: In regard, you know, to such matters as the courts and the failure to, or the unwillingness, or the inability to resort to civil authorities, in so many ways the life of Jews in those immediate postwar years in the camp reflected the instincts, the conditioned responses, that they had that had given them survival during the war years themselves.

JL: This reminds me of something. The last time we talked, you spoke about the type of person that survived. Could you talk about that again?

SS: Well, yeah, I don't have any hard, you know, data on this, just general impressions. The people who survived, in my own view, were tough people. I don't believe that there were many intellectuals among them, people who would, you know, think through all of the alternatives, who would hesitate, who would equivocate, you know, whatever, because they have all sorts of doubts. What you have are a group of people who I think were sort of action-oriented, who were not cerebral in that sense. I'm not reflecting on how smart they were. I think many of them were very bright, but they were not of an intellectual cast of mind. I think intellectuals perished. I think that's confirmed by some other materials I've seen on survivorship, including Terrence Des Pres's book⁶⁵ on survivors, which I think is very insightful about the period. People who, for example, out of the poorer areas of each of the countries occupied who were suspicious about government, suspicious about authority, were the ones who took the risks. Who when they were told report tomorrow for registration or for a job in such and such a place or you're going to be moved to this town where you'll be working in a munitions factory or in a canning factory or some construction projects, simply didn't believe, you know, and took off or whatever. They're the ones who survived. The ones who could not bring themselves to believe the bestiality that the Germans became capable of, or could not believe that people could sink to that, they're the ones who perished. So what you had in the camps were sort of a tough, strong group of people. Their suspicions, by the way — we saw them in the camps, suspicions about everybody,

⁶⁵ Terrence Des Pres, [The Survivor: an Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

everything. And that persisted as a characteristic. The JDC, the relief agencies were crooked, the United States was crooked. You don't believe anybody, or most anybody. And I used to be impatient with that quality and say, "How can you say that about these wonderful people?" "Ale ganovim," somebody would say — "All thieves."

JL: Was there any basis in fact?

SS: No. I think there was, by the way, some corruption among Americans and among even some of the relief. I've told you about people who'd come and sold their goods right into the black market. There was some of that but it was a minority. By and large, the relief operations or the JDC were carried on by people with the most noblest instincts, desires. The food reached them. They worked very hard. It was a marvelous program supported by the American Jewish community and it was effective. But, as I say, nothing among the survivors was holy, nothing was beyond suspicion. And it was that quality, by the way- — I think some healthy suspicions. We have healthy suspicion today. I don't know how healthy it is. We have a lot of suspicion, I'll put it that way, about the intentions of the world, whether, you know — it's all part of our survival instincts and it was strongest among those people who I saw in the camps after the war. By the way, rumor? Unbelievable in the camps, you know. We had our little newspapers. Yes, there were newspapers, I should add, I mentioned [by the cultural each elite, Religious [Shepartayim?, ????, Undzer Veg, Undzer This, Undzer That.] I should mention one man who was the Neu Freimann DP camp whom I got to know early on who left very quickly, was a genius, a talent, who since died. Relatively young man. He died I think in Paris in the '50s. His name was [Shmerke] Kaczerginski and he was the great ghetto song composer. His song is the one called, [? 5:50]. It's sung at Holocaust observances of, you know, survivors throughout the world ever since. Kaczerginski — I remember him very, very, very clearly. We had writers, redaktors, shraybers.⁶⁶ Some people who were trying to put down [in those areas? 6:15] — I have never seen their works — who tried to write what they had experienced or put down into a book.

⁶⁶ Yiddish for 'editors', or 'writers.'

JL: Where did they get all their equipment for printing? Or was it done by hand?

SS: Well, Yiddish or Hebrew presses, you know, Yiddish. I think some of it came through JDC. That's a good question. I think some of it did come through the JDC. Some was found, you know, on the black market economy. Germans had stuck everything away. In 1946, the Orthodox Rabbi into the camp, one of the camps came to me, they wanted a mikveh.⁶⁷ A mikveh has to be built to certain specifications. You have to have the boiler, you have to have the kakhI,⁶⁸ you know, the tiles — certain requirements. And we built it using black market cigarettes, whatever we could find. And, you know, I was back last year and it's in the house in Germany which we had taken. When this German came back, he came down into his basement and he found this enormous [tape is interrupted here]. I must tell you also, in connection with the mikveh, we tried to give jobs to as many people in all of these camps as we could, that they would have something to do. Collect garbage and move this or move that. ORT⁶⁹ schools. Even ORT schools. If you went to school, you had a job. Now the jobs received money or payment in marks, see. The marks were relatively worthless. But it wasn't the marks that the people wanted, because if you had a job you were entitled to some extra rations, you see. But the problem was that the jobs had to be certified by the military government. And there was a colonel, a Georgia colonel, I remember a fellow from Georgia that we used to deal with on [? 8:05]. So in this camp there are a thousand people working. We'd load it up, you know. And we'd have a list of who was working in these camps and we'd have the so-called, amt, an amtI. An amt is a bureau, an office, you know. And we'd have the meditsinishe amt, that's is the medical amt, and we'd have the velfarts⁷⁰ amt, welfare amt, and we had an educational amt and you name it. We had the religieze amt, religious office, which was headed by one of the rabbis. We had a dozen rabbis in the camp. Now under the religious amt you would have all of the various functions. [tape interrupted] We had to

⁶⁷ A ritual bath.

⁶⁸ Yiddish for 'tile.'

⁶⁹ Organization for Rehabilitation through Training.

⁷⁰ Not in Weinreich 8:25.

justify each of these positions so I had the staff write out descriptions of each of these requirements. Of course we had [meshprukhen], you know. We had moyels,⁷¹ we had the gabes, and rebes,⁷² and shamosim.⁷³ We had all kinds of, you know — oh yes, what were difficult to explain were the attendants at the mikveh, lady attendants and man attendants. I don't know what the hell they'd do — take out the lint from the pupik⁷⁴ and put it in the — I don't know what. We were trying to describe, I don't know too much about it. He just could not, this cracker, you know, from Georgia could not comprehend what it is we were talking about. There was one which particularly got him. That was the position, I don't remember what it is called, but it's the guy who stretches the wire around the stot,⁷⁵ you know, for Friday night.

JL: [yere! 9:45]

SS: Yeah, for shabat. I must have been [because] I came out of a secular [background]. We were Yiddish-speaking but I didn't know too much about it. And that tradition is still being done symbolically in Milwaukee and in New York and all over the place.

JL: In Jerusalem, too.

SS: In Jerusalem. But it was explained to him as somebody who goes around this camp, six thousand people, and puts a wire around it. And he was, "Why do you want to do that?" He couldn't figure it out. But we had all of these marvelous positions open and people were being paid for them. But the main thing was that they were able to receive extra rations, extra food, because they were employed. It was very, very important.

JL: You talk about this religious life, rich cultural life that you were able to support and protect. What happened in other DP camps where there were no Jewish directorial posts?

⁷¹ Circumcisers.

⁷² Yiddish for 'rabbis', often referring specifically to Hasidic rabbis.

⁷³ Sextons in a synagogue, or rabbi's personal assistants.

⁷⁴ Yiddish for 'navel.'

⁷⁵ Yiddish for 'town.'

SS: Where there were Jews? No, the Jews did that mostly for themselves. They didn't really need — there was JDC all over. It didn't depend on me that this existed, although I tried to encourage it and help.

JL: But the protection of it.

SS: Well, I think they made their way. They were all over. We had in the camp, among a few people you'd have twenty newspapers or something. It was just a fantastic burst. Which does not contradict, you know, what I said earlier about intellectuals and all this. A small number. And these papers were not terribly cerebral, you know. They were sort of newsy and newsletters and things of that sort — Undzer Veg, I don't remember. I saw a tafle,⁷⁶ I have a picture board showing all of the newspapers which were being printed. Many of the newspapers were written — since a goodly number of Jews did not read Yiddish in the Yiddishe bukhstavn, that is with the Yiddish letters — these were written in what we used to call Lateinishe_bukhstavn, and that is Yiddish written in the Roman alphabet. Very few actually in Polish. We had Hebrew newspapers read by a very small number of people. We had Yiddish papers, with Yiddish letters, Hebrew letters in the Yiddish. And we had an awful lot of material which was printed in as we called it Lateinishe bukhstavn, and that was widely read.

JL: Okay, before when you spoke about the [12:43?] you were telling me about this enormous bath that you saw when you went back last summer? You were reminiscing about...

SS: The mikveh, yeah. It's still there in the camp — I guess it's southwest of Munich — restored to its original beauty. I'll talk about that for a moment, too. And we stopped and I found the address and outside was a man going around there and I said to him, "How long have you been here?" Well, he came back so and so. He'd owned that house before the war. And I asked him, is there a bath in your basement? See, they dug out a piece of the basement. And he said yes. But he had filled it in, see. And I asked him, did he know — "Wissen sie_warum das Gebraucht [sic] war?" "I don't know. I don't know." But there it was. The camps took on different [forms]. Some of them were former military barracks. Some of them were former workers' or even forced labor barracks. Fernwald was in that

⁷⁶ Yiddish for 'panel.'

[category], they made munitions there. This particular camp in Munich was made up of 250 houses, small houses, two-story. No central heating, they had sort of those little stoves, you know, which heated the whole place. But they were built about 1934 by the Nazi labor ministry and they were very attractive to German workers and they paid them out, you know — down payment and they owned them. And as I say, I think it was in November or December 1945 General Truscott, Lucian Truscott ordered them evacuated and the Jews who were in the snow at that point, survivors, were placed inside. And I must say to you, in two or three years until that camp was closed, it was made into a shambles. Those places were just torn apart, you know. In some cases when the fire wood ran short they would simply tear the steps up or the banisters off and put them in the fire, you know. There was just a business of simply not caring. This was enemy territory. These places belonged to [yokes? 14:50], to Nazis, to Germans. Only in very rare cases would you see some Jewish family, who had some super impulse to keep things neat, you know who would really keep the thing intact. We had a heck of a time because we had some fiscal responsibility as the United States would be paying for this, paying repatriations to the German government or to the Germans for the damage which was done to their home. Every requisitioned house, including the ones that I lived in, which were very beautiful homes, you know, the United States was responsible for them and some reparations would have to be paid to the owners, you know, when they came back. Well, I tell you it was just an absolute shambles, that place. Now when we went back in August of '79 to look, my wife and I, they were just gorgeous. I mean they had been painted, you know, and in the German Bavarian window boxes with flowers, you know, and gay colors. And I asked some of the people, "Were you here?" Some of them were the old residents and they didn't know who I was. I said, "What happened here? Tell me about it?" And of course they recounted — these Ausländer, the foreigners had been here and they have done — they didn't say Jews but they may have meant that. But they said Ausländer, foreigners, had come and had lived in these places and they were just schecklich, what happened, terrible what happened here. And then, I tell you, without being sympathetic to anybody, it was bad. I've often said

this as you look about people who in the United States who are alienated from the society in which they live; blacks in some ghetto from which they really feel no ownership or no — they'll tear the places up too. You have to have some stake, you know, to keep places going. I'm sure that these same Jews who left there and bought houses in Madison or Milwaukee or Cleveland or New York were just as careful as the most careful suburbanite in the United States. Once you have a stake in the place. But we had a lot of problems. By the way, that extended to me. I had a house in Munich which was owned by a family by the name of [von Schrerien? 17:05], he was the finance minister of Bavaria. It was a requisitioned house and I was put into that house.

JL: Requisitioned means?

SS: [Verschlacknet] is the German word. American military and other officials related to the occupation, which would include me, the United Nations, were put up. I'm talking about officials, you know. [They] were put up in housing which was requisitioned from the Germans. And the Germans who were picked were usually [Nazi] Party members. They were considered to be the appropriate target of a requisitioning of their homes. So what happened is some captain, major, colonel you know would be assigned to a certain house. The military would show up with a slip of paper saying in German, your house is [verschlacknet], is taken. I think there was some sort of nominal rental paid. But you were ordered out overnight.

JL: Where would you go?

SS: Wherever. That's the war, you know. You moved in with family or you moved in with friends. Or if you couldn't find anybody I don't know where the heck you went. But you were allowed to take out just what you could carry. A suitcase and some personal bedding and that's it. And then we moved in. A lot of the stuff was already gone because the Germans, who themselves had looted all of Europe, understood that things might not go too well. So, I guess some of the stuff, but the house I lived in, this [Schrerien], was a beautiful villa by the English garden in Munich. I lived in that house and we had — those were tumultuous days — and we had wild parties. The Americans used to have many

friends over, and also Yidn,⁷⁷ that came up for parties from the camps and in those days it was not uncommon that [mir *unds a ha* bisl ongeshikret,] you know, we got a little drunk and then you'd begin to kick the walls. One night I gave a party. This was later on. I lived in a house — I moved up near Wolfratshausen and there was a house owned by a Nazi German professor at the university. He was a hunting enthusiast. And he had, all over one of these big rooms, he had the heads of deer, boar — I don't know what it was, all kinds of things. And we had people shooting at those things with rifles. The place was full of holes. We really tore it up. And, you know, I could have been held personally responsible, but you left and nobody bothered. I'm sure he put in a claim later on to the Americans for some damages. So you were living then, again, an extension of the wartime occupation, sort of a never-never world. A strange, peculiar time, you know, that all values were upside-down, you know. And what happened to the Jewish people was part of that whole system. And it's marvelous that they came out, most of them, and they recovered and they are now functioning. Even though, you know, there's something, as you know, which is there's something residual emotionally in all survivors.

JL: Let me ask you something else. So the people were disowned from these houses, what kind of relationship was there with others who lived around the DP camps?

SS: Very bitter. Very bitter. With the established community. There were also German refugees on the move. They tended to be in a better relationship with the Jews and they were despised, these Germans, sometimes by the resident people of Munich or in the towns, the various towns where the DP camps occurred. By and large there was very little sympathy for the Jews. We never saw any. We only felt hostility from the German police and all the rest. So far as other refugee groups were concerned, there was a good deal of tension between Jews and Ukrainians, and Jews and Balts, and Jews and the Poles. Some residual hostility, again from the olden days. We tried to provide security and we had a perimeter, you know, and we had tsam, a fence, around it, and we had the Jewish

⁷⁷ Yiddish for 'Jews.'

police dressed in, you know, caps and suits and arm bands saying Polizei,⁷⁸ DP Polizei. But unarmed. No, they would not permit in any weapons. Occasionally we'd have holdups and robberies and violence.

JL: From the outside?

SS: I'd be hailed out at night. Yeah, from the outside into the camps. I'd come down, rush down, in the middle of the night. We'd have occasionally killings. There was violence. It was a violent area. There was a lot of violence and a lot of weapons stashed around. In the early days, '45, '46, '47, I went armed and then I carried a sidearm occasionally. Or in my car, if I drove, I had a weapon in the car. We were initially warned about the possibility of so-called werewolves. That is a hard-lining Nazi youth group which, it was said, had been holed up in the Alps mountains which would never surrender, you know, they would continue to fight. So there was some feeling that these kinds of people around — that they might engage in sort of postwar guerrilla activities. We really never saw anything like that. The Germans turned out to be pretty, you know, quiescent and accepting of the occupation. But there was some fear. It was a scary place to be from time to time. I want to mention also, you know, that among the Jewish pursuits, very interesting, Jews were tremendous [sprekhler? shprekhlekh? 22:45]. They loved sports. And we had boxing matches, football games. I provided football fields where I totally set them up in cleared areas or we took areas. We had a Jewish boxing team fought and won a match with American army boxers. I acted as a referee for some of these. Now these were Jews who were not concentration camp survivors. One or two of them were. One man went to New York as a light heavyweight boxer. Did pretty well for a year until he ran into the guy who eventually became — Marciano,⁷⁹ he played Marciano as a light heavyweight and got knocked out in the first round. His name is Haft, H-a-f-t. But I thought he had some possibility — but they loved sports. And they also loved nightclubs. And it wasn't a matter of it just a month, two months, five months, three months or

⁷⁸ German for 'police.'

⁷⁹ Rocky Marciano.

something, the little nightclubs began to appear in Munich and around Munich called Bonboniere and things like that — bonboniere meaning little candy box. Jewish nightclubs in which illegal booze was served, you know. So the good life is always something that we longed for. And you could see the early evidences of that kind of an impulse among the DP camps.

JL: What other kinds of – you say the nightclubs were established outside -- were other businesses established outside, too? Or just within the camp?

SS: Not in the beginning. I don't think businesses outside were established until after the so-called currency reform, 1947, 1948. Some Jews remained behind, you know, after everything was all empty. The camps were emptying. By 1948-9 they were already on their way to being almost totally empty. But we had people who were described officially as hardcore. Either they were sick, amputated, mental hospitals, prisons in some cases, people serving jail terms. People who were in mental institutions, there was some of that, who could not be moved or for whom it was difficult to move. Then we had a group, very frankly, in the postwar years, who didn't want to be moved. That is you were living in a camp, you'd made yourself pretty comfortable, even in a camp when the people began to spread out you were left with maybe the best rooms. And you got free food, right? And you got some deference from Germans because you were Jewish. You got free medical care and you might have had this beautiful shikse, you know, there too that you were fooling around with and you were not too interested. And the Jewish agencies went about and the Jewish chaplains and I'd also go around asking questions, "Vos zitstu do?" — "What are you sitting here [for]?" — in an effort to convince them to leave. And it was difficult because some of the people, just a small number, had not worked and they had developed a kind of welfare dependency thing and we just had a hell of a time getting them out. And they were there after I left and they were being pushed and forced, you know, by the JDC and other agencies until I think most of them have left. But a group of people did stay, two thousand Jews in Munich, who made their way there. I see them. We go back and I see them. They've done, some of them, very well. The chief doctor of the Munich hospital is the president of the Jewish

community he was a DP, Fernwald, and he's a man of substance and a leader of the Jewish community and a civic leader of great importance in Munich today, thirty years later. And that's the way that problem generally became resolved. All the camps were closed, you know, and the people had to make choices. Either you live here and work on your own, or you go to Israel, or you try to get out someplace else. Israel, Palestine, accepted everybody. There were no restrictions. They just had to have their teeth fixed. They had a big dental program. Teeth were a terrible problem among the Jewish survivors, terrible teeth. So we had volunteer dentists. We had all kinds of things going on there to repair teeth. The Israelis, once the state was established, made a requirement that you had to have all your teeth fixed before they let you in. They didn't want the burden, you know, that medical burden, dental burden in Israel.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

TAPE 3, SIDE 1

JL: Last week we were talking about your being a supply officer. And listening to the tapes again, there was some indication that you had a higher position. Could you tell me how you got into that?

SS: Well, I came over as a supply officer on the basis that I had worked for the United States government doing procurement work — getting supplies and getting them ordered, getting them shipped, getting them approved, whatever — as a person who would do that kind of thing on this international team of about thirty-five or forty people. We were all organized into units called UNRRA teams. And our team was [number] 560 and it was in charge of all of the Jewish displaced persons, or Jewish survivors, infiltrées, whatever, in the Munich area and a large part of the area between Munich and Salzburg. I was the supply officer and I worked under a fellow whose name was [Wachtell?], he was the director. Within a very few months [of my appointment there] he resigned to become employed in some important job for the JDC, that is the Joint Distribution Committee, a Jewish relief organization. And I was sort of named as an interim or temporary – a director – in his place. And I understood it was the intention of UNRRA, based in Germany in Bad [Kissingen], to find or to recruit a director for the camp. But then suddenly, word came from the United States that General Eisenhower, who was then Chief of Staff in Washington, was going to come to inspect the Jewish DP camps. The military government, the United States army, was fundamentally responsible for the supplies to feed and house and to care for the displaced persons of all kind, Jews and non-Jews. UNRRA administered the programs. That was the division of responsibility. Complaints were reaching President Truman through Jewish organizations about the inadequacy of the programs, food programs, other programs — housing for Jewish displaced persons. And Eisenhower came over in response. He was sent by Truman in response to this outcry. And the camp he picked on was going to be near Munich and was Neu Freimann camp, which was one of the areas under my responsibility as a temporary director. Well, the visit worked out very well. Showed him around and we talked about the various programs, briefed him on the food levels and supplies, medical, physical, other kinds of problems we faced. And

it went that well that they said, "Let's leave this young fellow in as the director of UNRRA team 560." Subsequently we reorganized our programs in Germany. UNRRA was phased out to be replaced by the PCIRO, the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organization. And subsequently that was phased out for the International Refugee Organization itself. In Germany, instead of individual teams we had areas, which included a much larger area, and I was assigned to IRO Area 6 and I was assigned the responsibility for all Jewish centers within that area. So that's how it happened. It can only happen really in that kind of disorganized, topsy-turvy world which existed in the immediate postwar period in Germany. It would never happen in these days. The world is too well-organized for that, for a totally inexperienced young fellow, you know, with no background in the field of public welfare or public health and all the rest, to be charged with so important a responsibility.

JL: Well, they apparently thought that you did well.

SS: Apparently. We all survived it. I guess the people left and I'm here. They went to Canada, the United States, or to Israel, and they're all doing well, so I guess it worked.

JL: And then by what date, or year or month were they all [relocated from the DP camp]...?

SS: Well, I served as the director for Jewish programs in Area 6 until early in 1950. But by 1949, most Jews had left. And the ones who remained had become, in a sense, problems for us. The problem was how to get them out. When you shook it all down, we had a so-called hard core of people, who by virtue of illness, physical or mental, by virtue of other problems, were not able to move. In some cases were unwilling to move. It's a story of how people develop a dependence to the degree that they're even unwilling to leave Germany, you know, the country which had visited so much misery on them. And I recall that I would go around speaking to these groups of people from the JDC, some of the Jewish chaplains, and then we would say, "Vos zitst ir dort afn glutiken erd."⁸⁰ In some cases there were even liaisons which were with German girls. There were love affairs going on with women they had met who were German. There was great criticism of that from our religious leaders saying "Mit di

⁸⁰ Yiddish for 'Why do you sit here on the bloody ground?'

Daytshkes! Mit di shiksles!"⁸¹ you know. And the favorite expression was one which in response I think I've heard in so many ways — "Khaver Direktor, mir zitstsn on di tshemodanes," they would say. Tshemodan is Polish for suitcase. "We're sitting on our suitcases," telling me they were just any moment preparing to leave. Just any minute, just had to get this or that done, you know. It was all an excuse. Many of them never left, you know, and some of them have survived in this present day and done quite well. I visited with some, you know, a year ago. But in the main, it was a major problem, major difficulty to get people out. Not out of Germany, but out of the DP camps onto the German economy. We did not see them, you know, desirable for them to subsistence in this sort of welfare situation. I understand after I left that there were some very ugly scenes, in 1951 or so, 1952, where people were forcibly expelled. This is seven years after the Holocaust, you know. Forcibly expelled by German police, I think, from DP camps. Whose time it had come, you know, to tear them down and to cart them away. So that's how it ended. There were these great days from 1945 until 1949, [days] of drama, of people leaving, you know, for the creation of a new state and a new country. People dedicated, committed to any kind of an experience to achieve, you know, that new state, to travel on these boats. It was a real doubt as to whether these boats would make it through. They would suffer, they would be interned in Cyprus, and there were people who struggled with...there were moments of the reclamation of the Jewish neshamah,⁸² you know, out of the ashes of Europe. Here was this group of people asserting themselves as Jews, that they had survived, you know, the intention to destroy them all in the Endlösung, in the Final Solution. There were dramatic moments for me, you know, and there was a lot of horror and tension, what you would see in them when you learned what the people experienced. But you felt that they were in a moment of great meaning, you know, for the Jews. Now and in the millennia ahead, you know, that here were the people who — it was that spark of light, you know, that rekindled. We have the pictures showing, you know, the people speaking out that we want

⁸¹ 'With the German women! With the Gentile women!'

⁸² Hebrew for 'soul.'

to go to Ertz Yisroel, we want to declare ourselves. Having babies, recreating families. So that was great. At the very end we had this sort of downer note of people, simply the sickest, you know, the people who [were] in many ways the least idealistic having to be in a sense expelled from those camps.

JL: As you say there were idealistic ones, they had to live also. What kind of things did they do?

SS: Well, we supplied rations from the United Nations and they were inadequate. Not only were they inadequate in terms of calorie count, but they were inadequate in terms of being satisfactory kinds of foods. Nobody likes to live off of dried milk or dried eggs and [hafa, hafa floken?]. I don't even know what that is in English. It's a cereal of some sort which is very high calorie. Potatoes — we had all of these things which would come in. You couldn't live on that and you couldn't die on it. That's what was said: Mit dos, me ken nisht lebn, me ken nisht starbn oykh. So the people had to go out on the black market. The Germans were very willing. They were the sponsors of the black market, you know, and they had all the food which they wouldn't sell for the worthless currency. And so people all over were buying it. The Jews were buying it as well. Some schmalts-hering,⁸³ a little meat, you know, a little food that you could really eat and feel that you had eaten something. And we managed to find traditional foods, you know, fish and chicken. A fellow came to me one day. In front of one of the offices we had a great sort of a wading pool, and he said to me, could he use the pool to raise carp? "Could I have carp in there?" So I said okay. The next day I showed up and I looked in the pool and I see all these big fish swimming around that he had gotten somewhere. And the carp, of course, was for shabbat, the shabbes⁸⁴ fish. We had community kitchens and people cooked wherever we had the facilities. They cooked in their own kinds of kitchens as well. We had a particular problem with the certain special groups of people getting certain special kinds of foods. For example, we had lactating mothers. We had already women who were nursing newborn babies and they needed fresh whole milk

⁸³ Yiddish for herring in chicken fat.

⁸⁴ Yiddish for 'shabbat.'

and we had to find that. And we did from, you know, among German farmers somewhere. We sent people out. So the military requisitioned this fresh milk. We also had a group of Hasidim, very Orthodox Jews, and we had to provide food for them. And they were not only kosher they were glatt!⁸⁵ And speaking of milk, for the lactating mothers in the Hasidic group, we had to — this is something I learned since I didn't come myself from an Orthodox [family], I came from a secular Jewish family. My father was a bundist, a Socialist under the Workmen's Circle. But we had to assign Hasidim, a [meshkiakh], to sit in the barn as milk was being taken from the cow, you know as the cow was being milked, to make sure that nothing treyf, nothing non-kosher was getting in there. One of my people went out to these farmers and assigned Hasidim to each one of the farms in the area where the people lived. The spectacle of this Khosid,⁸⁶ you know, with the side curls, sitting in the barn, you know, watching the farmer, this Bavarian Nazi, you know, milk his cows — it was just too much. It was a very complex problem feeding people, meeting various kinds of needs — children, older people. We had working rations for heavy work, certain calorie levels for people. But we had dieticians and people who try to plan these things out. With the undesirable foods they would lie there untaken. Nobody would ever take them. For example, skim milk. And one day about two tons of skim milk disappeared from one of the warehouses and it showed up just a few weeks later, in the summer of '46 I guess, and the guys wearing around their necks these metal boxes which, you know, had dry ice. They made ice cream out of it. By the way, we had a big saccharin traffic. Sugar was a problem, and saccharin is a substance [of] which the manufacture is very closely licensed in Europe. We had real problems with that, with illegal saccharin factories in these camps in the basements, in various nooks and crannies of the camp. Camps were enormous, you know, so a lot could go on there that nobody ever knew about.

⁸⁵ Particularly meticulous in the observance of Jewish dietary laws.

⁸⁶ Yiddish for 'Hasid.'

- JL: You were talking about food now, what about things for the – what we talked about – cultural things. Were there other skills that people acquired? You were talking earlier about the ORT classes.
- SS: Right, ORT was very active. They had schools for watchmaking, for shoemaking, for dressmaking, tailoring, carpentry, electricians, and cement work, moverers, you know, cement workers or bricklayers. And the people came to these classes. The teachers were drawn by ORT from those people who had those skills in the DP population. And they attended these classes and would receive for attendance supplementary rations from the JDC. That was one of the ways of getting them in. But the schools were quite serious. Occasionally we had these funny situations where people would be enrolling in these courses in order to get two extra rations or three extra rations. And we knew some of this was going on. We tried to control it but it was very, very difficult to control. But I recall the delegation of Jewish leaders came, we showed them through the Jewish workshops, you know, the ORT workshops, and one guy, an American who sort of had a good eye, looked at this fellow and said, "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?," he said. And I knew he had seen him in the other workshop. This was in a shoemaker workshop; he'd seen him in the watchmaker workshop just a few minutes ago. This guy had enrolled in all of these courses in order to get, you know, the various rations. But by and large, the people did learn to become equipped to deal with their — you must remember they came from countries which were in turmoil for Jews not only during the war, but for some years before that, you know, maybe beginning in '37 or '38. This was '45. So if a young man was twenty-two or twenty-four years old, life started to come apart for him when he was about fourteen, sixteen, and he desperately needed to be equipped.
- JL: How about agricultural training?
- SS: Well, we had agricultural training programs, but they were really, I think, cover for military or paramilitary training. We had areas where people were supposed to be learning to raise crops and tomatoes and radishes and cucumbers, and indeed they were. But they were early sort of portent of the [Meshav], you know, because they were both — military people trained there with broomsticks

and they charged around the fields and fired imaginary weapons and engaged in imaginary military formations, and they did raise these crops and live in part off of them. But we had a problem. The military did know this was going on. The American army observed these maneuvers from airplanes, Piper Cubs flying around. We received complaints that there was military maneuvers going on. The training was very tough and it was very frequently in the hands of [shilikhim], who came from Israel, who'd been part of the Palmah, or part of the Hagana, but also on the part of the training at the hands of people who served during the war as leaders of partisan groups, and as soldiers in the Soviet Army, the Russian army, during World War II. Trained and battle-hardened. Battle-hardened beyond the capacity of most Americans, even [those] who went through World War II, to understand how much they had seen. I mean it was horrendous. So we had that going on. And there was food, agricultural training, but I think the main purpose of the training was to train people for the battle which would eventually come two years later — I'd say this was '46 — after May of '48 when the first Arab-Israeli war broke out, the War of Independence.

JL: You told me about the simulated live targets.

SS: Yeah, it was a horrendous thing. I walked in there one day and they had a burlap bag [containing cats] — I think it was cats, it could have been dogs too. And there were people walking up and stabbing these. You know, they were charging with bayonets. They had knives affixed to a stick of some sort to stab, for these younger people, fourteen, thirteen, fifteen years old, to simulate for them what it meant to stab a living thing. It's a difficult thing to do. I saw it and I said, "You've got to take that down. I'm not going to permit that." The people doing it were people who came out of an environment we don't know anything at all about, and an experience that was totally out of the range of anything we in the United States understood.

JL: I'm going to change the subject now. I understand that there were conferences held for all DP camps periodically.

SS: Conferences? When we changed from UNRRA to IRO, we changed from international personnel to indigenous personnel, and the camps were run by committees.

JL: Did they ever meet with other camp personnel?

SS: Yeah. Well, first of all, you had, so far as Jewish committees, you had an overall organization called Tsentral Komitet fun di Befrayte Yidn in Daytshland. That is the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Germany. They were the overall umbrella. And they would run regional conferences for Jews on how to best achieve the state [of Israel], how to bring pressure on the international community, how to deal with the relations with the United States army, and with us in UNRRA. But they [the camp committees] also administered the affairs of the camps, the police forces, whatever needed to be done. And these committees, were democratically elected on Zionist tickets and Zionist party platforms. I would come, as the UNRRA administrator, to each of these camps once a week and meet with a camp [committee]. We'd have an appointed time. I'd meet sometimes with two camps a day. I'd start out early in the morning. I'd have a early morning camp meeting and then another meeting and other business going into the late evening. They would meet and they would have prepared for me when I came a list of complaints, or they called them Bittes. You know what a Bitte is? A request. They needed this or this was inadequate or this building had to be repaired or they were having problems with this German Burgermeister, mayor, in the town, or the police, whatever. And I would note these things and those things which I could deal with myself, ultimately I would deal with, and those things which could not be dealt with myself I would take up with the appropriate instantsn, with the appropriate authorities. Sometimes they were unreasonable, the requests we had. We had a big problem. As people moved and left we had a problem of consolidating our operations. This was one of the major problems we had. As a small camp, let's say a subcamp of three or four hundred people began to empty out, and you had thirty or forty or fifty people left, you'd want to move them into another [camp]. But by this time these people had made all their connections: they felt comfortable, they knew their local shvarts hendler, their local black marketers, you know. So they would resist it,

you know, and I'd have to deal with that. And rumors flooded. "Khaver Direktor! Gezogt az mir [varle] ibergesiedlungt,⁸⁷ you know, we're going to be settled over." If it was not so I'd try to reassure them that it's not happening now. There were many, many problems and there were many, many rumors. Rumors, these people lived with rumors. Many of them had just come out of five or six years where there was no newspapers, or no authentic information. A lot of fear-mongering, and you can understand that. "Gezogt:" "it is being said," they would say to me. "Ver zogt? Ver zogt?"⁸⁸ "They're saying over there." "Who is saying?" "It's over there by — " These were constant problems. Keeping up the morale, dealing with the human needs of people wherever I could. And, of course, the people had problems with their getting out. Some who want to go to the United States would come back. There would always be fifteen, twenty people in each camp would show up and say that they were denied emigration rights to the United States because it was discovered in the picture there was a lesion, you know, or there was some scarring which indicated to the physician reading the x-ray that the five years had not transpired since this man had an open tubercular [lesion]. There was some requirement there could be a five year interval between that the physical diagnose the lesion or the scarring as being more than five years old since there was active tuberculosis.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 1

⁸⁷ Yiddish for 'Mr. Director! It is being said we will be resettled.'

⁸⁸ Yiddish for 'Who says? Who says?'

TAPE 3, SIDE 2

JL: We were talking about the TB [?] on the x-rays.

SS: People were showing up who for a variety reasons were being denied immigration rights. Some of them were being denied because of illness and most frequently on account of tuberculosis which was very widespread. When I would come, there would be a lineup of these people with their statements of rejection from the American consulates in Munich. Frequently on account of the fact that the x-ray showed a lesion or some scarring that indicated that — I think it was five years had to go by since the last active tuberculosis. It was incredible. By the way, in some cases the consulates acted unreasonable and demanded...If a scar showed up they said, "You must bring us a five-year-old x-ray to show that five years ago what your condition was." That was so ridiculous. These people were in ghettos and concentration camps or on the fly or on the move. How could you possibly have that with you? That request might we made here in Milwaukee, you know, where my doctor keeps my records or my hospital keeps whatever medical records I have. It was ridiculous. Finally we went down there and raised all sorts of Cain with the consulates, and got them to change that so that the requirement was that you could read just the existing x-ray and try to make head or tail out of that in terms of what this person's health was in terms of lung disease. By the way, we had a big sanatorium in Gauting. We had several [sanitoria] — Bad Reichenhall, Gauting — for tubercular people. Tuberculosis was a major, major problem. And another major medical problem I want to mention to you. Oh yes, so then I just want to mention to you people would come with all these Bittes — "I can't get out, I'm being denied." And I would listen to each one of these wherever I could and try to do something. In cases where it was impossible — for example, some people got in trouble with the law, like marketeering, carrying green dollars, selling cigarettes, whatever. People were trying to recreate their lives. Now, [if they had a] police record, they were finished. Their uncle or their cousins or their brothers or their sisters in the United States, they'd never get to see them. So we'd start them all over again. Take the whole identity card out and give them a whole new identity. In some cases they would go from our

consulate up to Stuttgart, to another consulate. I'm here to confess, by the way, thirty-five years after the fact, that I was widely engaged in violation of the immigration laws of the United States in order to get our people out over the obstacles which were very frequently put arbitrarily in their paths. I was going to mention something else which occurred to me as we talked. In any case, the health problem was a serious one in terms of dealing with the problem of immigration. Widespread falsification of documentation of the birth places under the national origins quota.

JL: I'd like to jump a bit and ask you about some of your famous visitors besides Eisenhower.

SS: We had people from the Jewish theater who came to those sort of USO's to entertain and also to train theater groups. Two people stick in my head, in my mind. One was Stella Adler, the actress, who subsequently ran a very prominent school for the theater arts in New York, and who came and put plays on and worked with our theater groups. Our people loved theater. They just loved theater. I loved theater. And no DP camp, if it had fifty people in it, did not have some teater⁸⁹ in which they dredged up the plays. And very prominent. They loved the super dramatic plays. I must have seen a hundred versions of the Dybuk,⁹⁰ you know. And also theater from Poland, Yiddish theater from Poland, various plays. They just loved theater. Herman Yablokoff came over and spent a lot of time over there. He may not be known to you. You never heard of him? Herman Yablokoff was an actor in New York who went under the name of der payats, the clown, and he was a very funny man. It was all sort of the low grade theater, you know. It was popular theater. It had no class, but it was very funny, and the people just adored, you know, theater. We danced, we laughed. I remember, you know, it was very funny, in those years there were — this was before your time I think — there was some popular songs from the United States coming over which grabbed the survivors and they loved to sing them and dance. This was one song which was popular song was called "Open the Door Richard." Did you ever hear it?
"Open the door Richard, open the door and let me in." Some reason or other it fit the mood. It was a

⁸⁹ Yiddish for 'theater'.

⁹⁰ A famous Yiddish play by Shloyme Rappaport written under the name of S. Ansky.

very funny song. It had clapping in it. A very popular song also then was "Nature Boy." A very weepy song, 1946, 1948 or thereabout. Do you remember the song called "Nature Boy?" They liked American music and they liked theater a lot. Leonard Bernstein came over and concertized. He concertized, interestingly, in response to a very loud outcry. Bernstein came to Germany in '47 I think, '48, and conducted the Berlin Philharmonic. Our understanding was that Jewish survivors in Berlin had created almost a riot over the fact that Bernstein had performed for German audiences. And he conducted the Munich Philharmonic, the Munich symphony orchestra. And we had a similar response. In any case, he came to one of the camps, I think it was Feldafing, and he played or he conducted and played piano. He played Gershwin. And it was a very emotional moment. He was presented with a concentration camp uniform. Everybody wept. It's one of the things that sticks in my head. You made a face when I said Feldafing.

JL: Mr. [Israel] Wolnerman⁹¹ was in Feldafing, wasn't he?

SS: Was in Feldafing, yeah. Did you talk to Mr. Wolnerman? Anyway, then we had a variety of political figures. Former [New York] mayor [Fiorello] LaGuardia I remember came over. United States senators came over.

JL: What about [David] Ben-Gurion?

SS: Ben-Gurion came, right. Yes, I remember that clearly. Ben-Gurion came and it created enormous reaction. Ten of thousands of Jews mobbed this man. He came to Feldafing. He was in Landsberg, in our area. Landsberg was not one of my camps. He was in Neu Freimann and I can just see the seen — I was in the building, this little man with his white, flowing hair you know with the bald spot on top. I looked down and he was embraced by the Jews. He came to speak to them about the creation of the Yidish medine, the Jewish state. Very warm, powerful moment. Rabbi [Isaac] Herzog came, the chief Rabbi.⁹² Created a very great impression. Sainly man, gentle man. He stayed at my house, by the

⁹¹ Another participant interviewed for the Oral Histories: Wisconsin Survivors of the Holocaust project.

⁹² Herzog was elected Ashkenazi chief rabbi in Palestine in 1936.

way. I was his host, I remember we cooked, you know. He came with his son who eventually became the director of a foreign ministry. I think under Ben-Gurion or under Golda Meir, an important official in the foreign service, in the foreign ministry of Israel.⁹³ Rabbi Hertzog ate a lot of hard boiled eggs, I remember, in those two days, three days. And so we had a constant stream of Jewish dignitaries who came over to view the camps. One who sticks in my mind is a lady by the name of Levi. She was from Philadelphia and she was a member of the Rosenwald family. And she said to me, we walked about, she said, "How old are you?" And I told her I was twenty-five, twenty-six. And she said, "Are you in charge of all of this area, all these people?" And she could not understand how someone so young, you know, could deal with that. I don't understand it either. Mrs. Levi was, as I say, an heiress of the Rosenwald — Sears, Roebuck — family.⁹⁴

JL: You talked about Ben-Gurion and Herzog. Could you tell me a little about how things were in the camps when Israeli independence was declared?

SS: Yeah, on May 14, I guess - I don't have the precise date – 1948, I was in one of the largest camps. I had been asked to come to Fernwald camp where there was going to be a ceremony. There was one in every camp. Of course the Central Committee had their own. It was a great moment, the declaration of the Jewish state. I was preoccupied, you know, with the day-to-day business of camps and running among people, but there were people who in the camps were very much in tune with news of the world and what was going on. News was vital. And we knew the day was coming and they knew the day was coming. They asked me to come and I spoke in the Fernwald Camp, and there must have been two thousand people, half the camp, had come around in this enormous circle. We had the flag, Mogen Dovid⁹⁵ and we had various people who spoke. And finally I spoke briefly and I was asked to pull up [a flag]. There were flags going up in various camps all over West Germany and Austria and

⁹³ Herzog had two sons, Chaim and Yaacov, both of whom held important positions in Israel's diplomatic service.

⁹⁴ The Rosenwalds owned a significant portion of Sears, Roebuck, and Co.

⁹⁵ Yiddish for 'Star of David,' referring to the symbol on the flag of Israel.

Berlin. I remember using the phrase that was frequently used, "Af dem glutiken erd," you know — On this bloody soil we raise the Yidishn fon, you know, the Jewish flag. It was a very emotional moment. A great moment. From that moment, of course, all the illegal emigration stopped and legal immigration to Israel began. And Chaim Yahil, then [known as] Chaim Hoffmann, who was the head of the Jewish Agency in Munich, became the first consul of Israel in Germany even before any — there was no diplomatic representation, no exchange of ambassadors until quite a number of years later. And they began issuing visas. And our agency, the United Nations, began to move these people. We paid for their transportation officially. United Nations paid for the movement of all Jews anywhere where they were going. My sister was visiting me at the time in May of '48 and Yahil, the Consul General, asked me if she'd like to go to Israel. I asked her and she said fantastic, you know, she'd love to go. I don't know whether she said fantastic, but she said that would be unbelievable, she would love to go. Anyway, she was put on an ODC 3 airplane which flew from Munich to Zurich to Greece and then to Tel Aviv. I think that's the route. My sister was on board that airplane. It was stuffed with people and they took off from the airport outside of Munich. And I was standing there watching this airplane lumbering down the runway, you know, and the Air Force guy standing next to me — he didn't know my sister was on that airplane — he said, "I wouldn't be on that airplane if you gave me \$5 million dollars." It had so much fuel, you know. Well she made it, and she made it even back. So she was on that very first group of people, airplane, that went officially.

JL: What was that date?

SS: It must have been somewhere in June of 1948. She stayed in Israel for a month before she came back, and she had an interesting time. She spent a whole month touring the country with I.F. Stone, Izzy Stone,⁹⁶ who later on became very much a critic of the state of Israel, but who was then so emotionally involved with the new state and with the arrival of refugees.

⁹⁶ Journalist Isidore Feinstein Stone, former editor of The Nation and future editor and publisher of I.F. Stone's Weekly.

JL: Since our time seems to be running out, I'm going to skip a little bit and ask you how felt living among all these people who had gone through so much? You were a young man. How did you deal with all of this psychologically and emotionally?

SS: Well, I think that one of the ways I dealt with it was to become very passionately involved with them. In one of the pictures I have out here it says, one of the DP signed it to me in his concentration camp uniform and he called me a heysukhtet / heyssukhtet / heyssugtet heiliker, a passionate defender of the she'erit ha-peletah, of the "saving remnant." My response was in part a profound emotional involvement with them, and to the point where I was prepared to do almost anything that needed to be done. If it meant violation of the law — the immigration laws I'm speaking about, if it meant falsification of documents, if it meant providing extra food, even by falsifying figures about the number of displaced persons in the camp, if it meant admitting people to our camps and infiltrées when we were specifically forbidden to do that — all of these things I did. It meant immersing myself on a sort of day and night basis in the lives of the people in the camps. That sounds, you know, noble. I'm not meaning to sound that way. It merely meant it was my response of guilt that I had survived that I was here and so many of my people, my brothers and sisters, Jews, were not. As I heard the stories, I'd spend days, hours, listening to people telling me. And they wanted to talk about it. They wanted somebody to know about it, you know, what had happened. So I think that was the way I dealt with it emotionally. A lot of people simply could not take it. I remember JDC had a lot of problems keeping people at work who would come from the United States or from other countries, welfare people, other kinds of workers. We had a very large turnover. So that's the way I dealt with that problem.

JL: You had a very warm and deep relationship with these people.

SS: I think so, very much so, yeah. It's not only true of me, it's true of people like Sam [Haber?], it's true of people like my friend [Hy Wachtell]. Ted Feder, also from Milwaukee. It was the only way you could deal with it. You could not remain distant from it and function.

JL: Have you seen many DPs since?

SS: I see many of them, yeah. I have many good friends in New York. I have some people here who were in the camps here, whom I have known. I do see people from time to time. I attended a reunion of Fernwald where everybody got very drunk, you know.

JL: At Fernwald itself?

SS: No, here in New York, with people who had lived in Fernwald. I also see them in Israel. I've been to Israel on two or three occasions when I've spoken on the Yiddish radio or I've been interviewed in the Yiddish press and I take the time to announce that der gevezener direktor fun di lagern in Daytshland iz do — ⁹⁷ It's in Yiddish. And "Direktor Saul" is the way I was known among the people and inevitably when I do that, I get phone calls. People come see me, and we talk. And we reminisce about the way it was.

JL: You went to Germany already knowing Yiddish, but how did you learn German?

SS: Well, I had some German courses at City College. But I also have pretty good language facility, a pretty good ear. I speak French, Polish and a little Russian. I was rather surprised. I could move among Germans as a German-born, as someone who was German-born. I haven't spoken a lot in the last years, but I was in Germany just a few months ago and Arnold Goodman was with us, the Goodmans, and they were surprised. The people would come up and when they would learn that I was not German, they'd be surprised at it. I speak very good Yiddish. I speak very good German, too. English just fair.

JL: This is perhaps an unfair question. But would you venture to make a comparison between DP camps in Germany and what you saw in Cambodia?

SS: Yeah, I think I can compare them. First, [it's dependent on? 22:00] two entirely different cultures. The physical conditions of the camp at Sikkeyo in Southern Thailand cannot be compared with what [we had in Germany]. It's much more primitive. We took over buildings, you know, from Germans, former

⁹⁷ Yiddish for 'The former director of the camps in Germany is here.'

Kasernes⁹⁸ or military halls, whatever, and the Jews who had been Muselmänner,⁹⁹ very skinny and very sick, fared very well in the months after. They made fairly good recoveries, except for certain chronic illness like tuberculosis or other diseases resulting from that. I wanted to mention a disease, by the way, I didn't mention earlier. I just want to mention we had a stutterers' school, that sticks in my mind. I have to tell you about the stutterers. Can I say a work about the stutterers now? I don't know what the origin of stuttering is but I'm told that, aside from having stuttering from very early childhood, that stuttering can be induced by trauma of various sorts people experience. We had people in the camps that were just so creative and so eager. Here was a man who had worked somewhere in Poland, Warsaw or something, had been a specialist in speech therapy, you know. And he came to me and he said, "There are dozens of people who are stutterers in this particular camp. Now, I have this program to help them." And I said to him, "Well, okay." He said he wanted a room; I gave him a room. We had no equipment like tape recorders or anything of this sort, you know, and he had a shtamler shule,¹⁰⁰ a shule for shamlers. And I went to this place one day to see how it was being done. I've since talked to people who are specialists in this field and they tell me that the technique which was then used is no longer being used. What it is, is that you talk in very measured tones. And so he would have these people talking and he had a metronome that we got for him in front of the room and this thing clicked back and forth and back and forth and the people spoke in Yiddish in time to this. "Mayn nomen is Chaim Shmuel. Ikh kum fun [Poniabyiche 25:05]." Speak slowly and very measured. It's just a scene that sticks in my memory very sharply, watching these people trying to overcome this stammer and the emotional difficulties they experienced in getting the words out in this measured kind of way. I don't think this technique is applied anymore but I saw it. In any case, the people had illnesses, but essentially they were products of the civilization in which they lived, they

⁹⁸ German for 'barracks'.

⁹⁹ German for 'Moslems,' a term used by concentration camp prisoners for those near death from starvation and exhaustion.

¹⁰⁰ Yiddish for school for stutterers.

had the same kinds of aspirations. The relief work was leveled at them and they had some hope about getting out, that they were. But they lived under the shadow of an experience which said that people would be deliberately assassinated, shot and killed and gassed solely because they were Jewish. And, by the way, I knew, as I met with them, that if the Germans succeeded in winning the war and coming to the United States, that I would be a target. Or that if I had been visiting in Poland during those years, that I would — simply for the act of being Jewish — that was the basis for my destruction. The Cambodians, on the other hand, are people who are not the targets of a deliberate attempt to destroy the whole people, but they are people who are in the way of the ideology or the military goals of, let's say, the Vietnamese in Cambodia. So they're dispensable people. There's no direct effort to destroy them. I looked at the two groups somewhat differently. Aside from the physical conditions, which were much materially different. Four million Cambodians have died. But they've died at the hands of other Cambodians frequently. The Jews were victims, you know, of an attempt by a hostile group to destroy them all.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE 2

TAPE 4, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

JL: Did you want to continue about the comparisons between the Cambodian refugees and the DPs?

SS: Well, as I say, in Thailand where I saw Cambodian refugees they were living in the most unbelievably primitive conditions. They were living on the hard ground. Their housing consisted really of four sticks dug into the ground with pieces of cloth. The food was very primitive and the conditions were quite primitive. Much worse in many ways. So aside from the emotional business, the difference in the experience of Jews under Naziism as targets of the Final Solution, the conditions among the Cambodian refugees were much more primitive. But you have to take into account also the settings, the difference between western Europe and Cambodia, Thailand. But there were also similarities. The similarities, were I think, that you could see among both peoples, is reaching out, this wish to be human, to overcome the inhumanity of the conditions in which each of them lived. The smile, the reach out, the sense of family in which you saw in Cambodia and the wish on the part of Jews to create families. So the pictures of the baby carriages, you know, a year later. There was a need to reestablish, to recreate. So all these things stuck in my head. There was a difference. The essential difference being of course that the Jews were deliberate targets of an effort to destroy them all, whereas the Cambodians died of starvation in the midst of war. In some cases deliberate execution, but execution on a sort of political grounds, as certain people were undesirable and had to be done away with. Cambodians were in the way of achieving political goals on the part of the Vietnamese and the Soviets in Southeast Asia.

JL: A vastly different thing. Last week you started talking about a stamp factory.

SS: Stamp factory. Oh, yes. That's all part of the business of getting out, when people don't want you to get out. Stamps. Anyone that's going to Europe, you know that the Europeans live by stamps. I don't mean postage stamps, I mean stamps which are on documents. You come before some public official, you've got like nine stamps he will put on your document. Stamps make documents look very

official. So all kinds of stamp factories were around. You could get a stamp duplicating an official seal of the United States or the official seal of France or England.

JL: In the DP camp?

SS: Yeah. Well, in town. There was a tremendous forging of documents. Not only Jews — everybody was forging all sorts of things. There's food stamps and this stamps and that stamps and certifications to your health and are you qualified to do a certain function. "Hiermit wird bescheinigt, da\$ Chaim Shmuel"¹⁰¹ — "It is certified that Chaim Shmuel is incapable of doing this and this kind of job." Stamp! That could mean the difference — it's so stupid — the difference between life and, not life and death but whether you were going to have a future here or there. To many people, the ability to get out to the United States appeared to be almost a matter of life and death. Had to get out. We had some suicides, people who were denied emigration to the United States to be reunited with their families. So depressing did it become. We had a lot of mental illness in the camps too, people's delayed reactions to what they experienced and what they had seen. So stamps, when you mention stamps, you mean the things that you strike down on a document. Europeans love bureaucracy. If you go to Israel, by the way, you see a lot of stamps, too. The stamps become very, very meaningful. So in order to supply that need there were guys making up all kinds of stamps. You get a stamp from the king of Bulgaria, anybody. I tell you there's a lot of tragedy here but it was mixed in with a good deal of humor. You heard a lot of humor in the camps. It was a way of making it. Camps physically, I haven't spoken too much about them. Well, dependent on the places — in one case there was sort of a small village of workers' houses, in some cases would be former factories, or even some places which had housed non-Jewish slave labor, Polish slave labor, which converted after the war to DP camps. People were jammed in, you see. We had no space. And a room of, twelve feet square, might house as many as eight or ten people. You had no privacy. People conducted their lives, their personal lives, their sex lives, whatever, in the company of other people. Slender partitions made out of pieces of cloth hung

¹⁰¹ German for 'It is hereby certified that Chaim Shmuel—.'

on strings, it kept people apart. I remember now a movie with Montgomery Clift called The Search which was popular. It made a big hit in 1948. It was made with Jewish orphan children. It was about Jewish children. It had Montgomery Clift and Aline MacMahon, those were the two people who stick in my mind as the actors in it. It was done in one of my DP camps. Fred Zinnemann was the director of that film and they made it. It was a story about a family who had been broken up and the woman came to search for her child and found the child in the ruins of the city of Munich. There were many, many such stories. We were very, very crowded. There was a great danger of typhus, typhoid or other kinds of diseases. But we have to risk it otherwise people would be out there in the streets. We provided DP cards and ration cards and food and clothing and blankets and supplementary amenity food supplies.

JL: Was there any resentment towards you because your living conditions were better?

SS: No. No. We had a big, beautiful house, which was requisitioned by the military for me. I lived in the house of a man in Munich who's name was [von Schwerien? 8:00], which is a very famous noble name in Germany. He himself, he's now dead. Ironically he was struck by an UNRRA truck, run over by an UNRRA truck after the war. But he was the Finance Minister of Bavaria and I lived in his house. Beautiful villa. Now, there was no resentment of that. I think the Jewish community understood. There's great understanding of "authority," quote, unquote, that there was a place for the Direktor. I always felt very self-conscious about being called Her Direktor,¹⁰² but then you get used to — that was the Her Direktor. People called you Her Direktor or they would call you Khaver Direktor¹⁰³ if they were Zionists. Or some of the people who had served in the Russian Army had a longtime Russian experience would even call me [Dvarish] Direktor. Dvarish Direktor, [? 9:00]. We drank a lot. That was another way of compensating. There was some wild behavior, you know, in that kind of setting. A lot of vodka, you know, and dancing, jumping around, just to sort of deal with it.

¹⁰² German for Mr. Director.

¹⁰³ Yiddish for Mr. Director.

JL: In a typical Jewish way did they ever try to match make you?

SS: Yeah, I don't know whether they, but — yes, I think there were a couple of pretty girls, beautiful Jewish girls I met while I was — that I liked a lot. There was a thought about maybe we'd get — but I wasn't ready. Could have happened. You had to see the beauty, by the way, because there was not too many fancy clothes, you know, and there was not too much lipstick. One of the things I do remember a lot of the girls wore, something which is now — I've thought about it, when boots have become so popular — they wore shtivl, they called it. That's boots. Came up to just below the knee. They were like military boots. They were very practical, you know, because there was a lot of mud, you know, the streets were torn up and areas were — and they looked sort of nice on the girls I thought. But the prettiest girls — my wife's Hungarian — were the Hungarians. It just seemed to me the Hungarian women knew how to do so much with so little, and they were so pretty. They really were. You're not of a Hungarian family, are you?

JL: I am.

SS: Are you? Yes. I've told that to my wife. Hungarians were, I think, the most sophisticated. Well, first, the Hungarian Jewish communities fared somewhat better than most. Even today in Budapest, you know, there are about 80,000 Jews. But they had not quite completed. They were a very sophisticated community, the Hungarian Jews, especially of the great cities. This is also true of the Jews who came from Romania, from Bucharest. So that, yes, I did date some of the girls. But you tried not to. You tried not to. I had no social relations with Germans at all. Es hot nisht gepast¹⁰⁴ first of all. There was no mood for that kind of thing. So we had some Americans there who were working with the JDC and some of us, and occasionally — but there was — one of the ways in which you did deal with that disorganized setting was your own life took on a sort of a wildness. It's a period which I've never quite duplicated.

JL: Do you think your life was enriched by it?

¹⁰⁴ Yiddish for 'It was not fitting, becoming, proper.'

SS: Yes, beyond belief, it changed. Yes, family changed. It directed me into this work in the Jewish community and to whatever. It sort of shifted my own direction.

JL: I'm sure you have a lot more to say.

SS: I got like several weeks of reminiscence.

JL: Is there something else you'd like to add?

SS: No, but I think it's very important that you're gathering this information. I think the immediate postwar period that I'm talking about is clearly an extension of the period up until the liberation. I find, by the way, that [in] my own contacts with survivors, they talk about that period much more so than they talk about the period of the concentration camp time itself. It seems to have some sort of — and there's just a few of us in the American Jewish community who had so intense of an experience with Jewish DPs. I can only think of just a very few people that I know. One is [Chaim? Wachtel? 13:40] I mentioned. I saw him last. He was the director some years ago of [Mal Ben? 13:45] in Israel. This Sam Haber who's now just retired is the director of the JDC. Feder and Haber come from Milwaukee. Ted Fader's sister is Sarah Feder, very famous woman who founded the Pioneer Women.¹⁰⁵ Her name is Sarah Fader [Keyfitz? 14:10]. He was the assistant director of the JDC. There's Celia Weinberg who's now passed away. She lived in Detroit. She was one of the chief welfare people in the JDC. And that's about it, just a few of us. There's a fellow in Detroit, Dr. Walter Korn who worked with us. There's a small cadre of Americans who lived through that period and I'm proud to have been one of them.

JL: Do you have just a few minutes to describe some of these pictures?

SS: Are those the pictures you're taking?

END OF TAPE 4, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

¹⁰⁵ The Women's Labor Zionist Organization.

TAPE 5, SIDE 1

JL: Let's begin with picture number three.

SS: This is a photograph of a group of people leaving for the United States. The gentleman in the middle is Max Newman, who came from Syracuse or Rochester, New York, and he was the director of HIAS¹⁰⁶ in Germany. The little boy to his left and the man with his coat under his arm are the Weinschenkers, a family of four who came from [Chernovitz? 1:00]. I found them in the DP camps. His brother was my father's business associate. These people are just praying they're going to Bremerhaven for movement to the United States. This is a United Nations transport here. What was interesting is that just a few days before, or perhaps a few weeks before, he had been called by the United Nations Commission on Partition, or subcommittee of that UN commission, to testify before them in the Neu Freimann DP Camp where he had been asked as part of their inquiry where he would like to go. And as an expression of Jewish unity over the establishment of the state, this is in the prestate days, probably early '47 when he was asked where he was going, he said, "In Erets Yisroel, vo ale Yidn faren," which means "To the land of Israel where all Jews will go." Of course, when he said that he knew he had his visa to the United States in his pocket. But it was part of the expression of unity in support of the establishment of the state.

JL: The young boy there, do you know the story of the family, what they went through in the camps?

SS: He, Mr. Weinschenker was lucky. He was in a work battalion in Romania. They came from [Chernovitz]. And he survived. The woman directly in the center is his wife and to her left is their daughter. A very cultivated family. They went to Chester, Pennsylvania, where he bought a luncheonette or a luncheonette was bought for him to operate. I do recall that the little boy somehow or other, and the girl also, had become musicians. The boy played the violin and the girl played the piano. I heard later on that they became quite gifted musicians and the girl married very successfully in Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁶ Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

JL: What year was this?

SS: I think it was '47.

JL: The boy in one of them was clowning for the camera, the one with dark glasses and doesn't really [?].

SS: Oh yeah, that's the little boy. Somebody gave him — he stood next to our jeep and he took a picture in his dark glasses. I don't recall that. That's the same little boy, yeah. I don't recall his name.

JL: He just seemed very playful for someone who's just come through so much.

SS: Well, it's been about a year since he came. They came to Munich in the winter of '46. I think I told you I found them. They had found a place to stay in a bombed-out apartment building which only some of the walls stood. When I visited and first found them they were all under an enormous pile of old clothes and rags, you know, just to keep warm. They were not able to find a place to live. But it was a year and they had recovered, they were all kind of okay people, very resilient. No, many of them may have their gotten illnesses later on, I don't know, as a result of these experiences.

Yes, United States engineers. Bremerhaven, this train goes to Bremerhaven, yeah.

JL: Okay, this is number four.

SS: This is again children. This slips me. I imagine this is outside of some warehouse in one of the DP camps in Munich and the children may have been going on an outing or they may have been going on some sort of a youth group function.

JL: There's a man in a white suit, he seems to be inspecting them?

SS: I don't know, he may have been a physician. I can't see him. The thing is so small I can't see his face.

JL: I somehow associated it with these other photograph of people.

SS: No, no relationship to the immigration thing.

JL: Just the same format.

SS: Right. What is the same format?

JL: The same picture format.

SS: Oh, well, all my pictures — I don't know what kind of a camera I used for this at the time. It's not a Leica. I think I had a Plaubel Makina. You ever hear of that camera?

JL: Yes, they still make them.

SS: Yeah, I think that's what I took these pictures of.

JL: This is number eight.

SS: Number eight. That's the same little boy. That's at the train, yeah. And this is the room I think in which — no, I don't know. He's just in bed, he was sick. I think he's got something wrong with him. I don't think this was the room in which I found them because I found them in bed. Maybe it was, I don't know. Maybe the other side of the house was sort of torn down, one of the walls. They lived in a blanket all wrapped up. I'm not sure what this picture, but that's the same little boy. That's the Weinschenker child.

JL: I thought it was a young girl.

SS: No, it's a boy.

JL: There's a lady here in town who lived in Shanghai¹⁰⁷ who told a story about lying in bed all day fantasizing about water and going swimming. This photo seemed to seemed to draw up that same sort of image.

SS: No, by the way, I know lying in bed was a big way in which people in France and various places in refugee situations — they were afraid to go out into the street. They didn't like to go out. There was just a question of waiting, and food was not too plentiful so you conserved your energy. I think people were driven by depression into sort of a bed situation.

JL: Okay, this is number nine.

SS: Yeah, I know what this is. These are Jewish children who are orphans and who were in an orphan home. Some of the children whom we have found who are now in Israel someplace. Now they were

¹⁰⁷ Shortly before to World War II, a large number of Jewish refugees found refuge in Shanghai, home of a prosperous Jewish community.

taken by a movie company. I think I mentioned this to you. Fred Zinnemann was the director of a motion picture called The Search. It dealt with the story of a woman, she was not Jewish, who during the war was separated from her child and after the war began the business of searching for him. The child is in the meantime found in the wreckage of the immediate postwar period by Montgomery Clift, acting as an American soldier. He takes the child, there's a period where the child is not trustful of anybody and portrays that, and then he wins the trust. Then the woman somehow or other finds the child. I remember she was a Czech opera star who played this role. And there was an American actress who played the role of a UNRRA worker. I remember she wore the patch, UNRRA. Aline MacMahon. I don't know whether you remember that actress but she was a fine actress. Despite her name, by the way, she was Jewish. She was married to Horace MacMahon, a famous actor. And they used the children to play the role. These children are dressed in the costumes as they saw them, see, as refugee waifs, childless waifs, and they are in between takes. They were sitting on the ground in this Kaserne, in this building, and they're in between movie takes. Zinnemann who was absolutely – do you know who he is? He directed High Noon. He's still directing. He's an Austrian. And we supplied them with the children. They gave each child candy and cookies and each child got a watch as a gift which was a tremendous thing for those children. They were very good, you know. They were supposed to run someplace and shout with glee and then he took another take. He wasn't quite sure of that. They did it over and over again. This picture shows the children sitting on the ground between the takes. I lent them a lot of gasoline out of our stores, you know, for their trucks and their cars. I lent them some other things that they could use and I did it unofficially but we never got it back. I pursued them. I said, "Where's my gas? Where's my this, that?" And they left. But we were proud about our role in the making of this movie, which I think was shown here about 1948. Montgomery Clift.

JL: Do you show up in the movie?

SS: No, no, just the children.

JL: I thought it was unusual because he is wearing a striped uniform.

SS: Let me see. I don't see that there, but in any case these children were portraying orphans and they were orphans.

JL: This is interesting, number 11.

SS: Horsing around.

JL: We didn't know if it would be that or, you mentioned some of the —

SS: No, no, that's simply horsing around. Two young fellows. There was a great macho thing, you know, among the Jews. I found one day, you know, a guy came into the camp, I saw him. He was absolutely the duplicate of an SS man in his suit, boots, hat. He just ripped all the buttons and the insignia off. They stole or took from wherever they could get, from fleeing German military. They took their boots. And they wore those boots, shtivl, you know. They wore German, and many of them wore Russian equipment because they had served in the Russian army, you see, and the Russian military in the beginning, see. And the girls wore boots. I think I told you. They looked very attractive as boots do today. I've thought about it because boots were unknown to me — in the United States in the '30s when I was growing up a girl didn't wear boots. Then I saw these women come in with their boots and they looked — there's something about boots on a woman, you know, which is so sensual, isn't it?

JL: I know what you mean.

SS: Do you agree?

JL: Yes.

SS: Well I saw for the first time these girls these girls who really had nothing but themselves, they had no... I mean if they made it through the war some of them — I think I mentioned to you I think the Hungarians were always just terrific.

JL: We've been finding, or I've been finding, listening to your tapes that I enjoy listening to the Hungarian accent much more than the Polish.

SS: [? 12:30] Much more.

JL: This is number 12.

SS: This I think - it's a Zionist youth group and they led in demonstrations. They marched around the camp. And if I'm not mistaken, it's paramilitary look, you know, it was probably a Betar, sort of a revisionist youth group. We had every political party in the Zionist spectrum then. It's a little more complex now of course, but we had on the far left, the Mapam, and then the Mapai and the Algemeyne Tzionistn [known in English as the] General Zionists,¹⁰⁸ and then the Revisionists,¹⁰⁹ and then the two religious parties, Mizrakhim and [Yegudets Yisroel]. I think these young kids were Betar,¹¹⁰ marching up and down.

JL: I sort of grew up to react to uniforms in a certain way, but they seem very happy to put on uniforms.

SS: I'm telling you there was a very strong macho. It's a response to being helpless I guess, you know. They wanted to fight. When I say fight, boxing was a very big thing. They wanted to play football. I had to accommodate that boxing. I had a ring built. We got the Army to provide boxing gloves, you know, and all of the equipment, protectors and everything else that goes into it. And as I say they fought military boxing teams. Had black troops there and they were formidable boxers but our boys did very, very well — Jewish boys. And they just loved it. And wearing of uniforms, many people went right into the Hagana after the war. Illegally a person to [? 14:30] in Hagana and all of these services over there. The reaction of the Jews was contrary to what one might think — that that war, milkhome,¹¹¹ they don't want any part of it. No, we want to demonstrate, you know, our own prowess in many ways — football, sport, boxing, marching, and of course the revisionists had a very strong military outlook. And I told you soldiers were being trained all around the camps. The Germans, by the way, in the postwar had an opposite reaction. Because they said "ohne mich" when efforts were made to reconstruct or reconstitute the German military. Even police. The slogan of Germany's younger people was "ohne mich," without me.

¹⁰⁸ A Zionist political party.

¹⁰⁹ A Zionist political party.

¹¹⁰ A Revisionist youth movement.

¹¹¹ Yiddish for 'war.'

JL: Okay, 13.

SS: I can even see the date on this: 18 of August 1946. It's a schoolroom in Hebrew, a classroom in Hebrew. The children there — we had a strong urge to education and we had schools set up. We had a hard put to find teachers but we found them and teaching materials. And I'm not sure which camp this is in. I have a little problem reading the Hebrew here, do you read any? What does it say?

JL: [Sim hamayim. Water plants. Something hamayim, might be fat Kanada. Something about the water with a plague of Canada, or some Canada. 16:30]

SS: Maybe they were learning to be agricultural people in Israel. That's possible. 18th of August, 1946. That's a long time ago, isn't it?

JL: Number 14.

SS: I think these fellows were our ambulance drivers, posing as a group. We had a very big population. People got sick. They drove ambulances but they also drove other vehicles. And I remember this young man in his leather coat up front, and I wonder where this guy is. He was a young guy who'd seen it all. I remember him very clearly. He'd been a partisan. You can just tell by the tilt of that hat, you know, and the way he's standing there. He had a real sense of bravado. He used to say, "Khaver Direktor, I could do anything." He went out and got that leather coat some place in Germany. And you can just tell, looking at him compared to the others that he — I don't remember his name, but these are a group of drivers in the motor pool of one of the DP camps.

JL: Did dandyism go along with being macho?

SS: I think so, yeah. Leather coats, big watches, you know. Shtupers,¹¹² they called them. Have you heard that expression somewhere else?

JL: Yeah, from you.

SS: Oh, just from me. You haven't heard it from any of the other people? [Zeks shtupers? Zets Shupers? Zekh shtupers?]¹¹³ Yeah, there was some dandyism and after the initial — when it all wore off. We

¹¹² Yiddish for 'gigolo.' Vulgar.

had tailors in the camp. I remember occasionally we'd have Americans who would come and visit and we'd take them through some of these gevelblekh, these little stores where the guy would have textiles, you know. These came from the German economy. Beautiful wools which had been hoarded by some German. And you could take your pick of the cloth and have a suit or a coat made up. That was later on, there got to be an emphasis on clothing and what you call dandyism — new shoes. It was not easy in that part of the world but many people did. But mostly the clothes were very functional. These jackets, by the way — the man with the short storm coat, which looks like a fur jacket — were UNRRA distribution, winter distribution. You see a number of them around in various pictures. You know, it looks like a fur collar on a jacket. See it?

JL: This is number 15.

SS: Theater. That was a big diversion. Every camp had a theater group. They weren't very good in the main, but they were there and the costumes were — I don't know where they dredged it all up. But there were theater groups and the people loved it. They enjoyed the expression, you know, they enjoyed just the articulation, being entertained. We had a lot of theater and we had a lot of cultural activity of sorts — newspapers, you know, dances, and the rest. And occasionally we'd get the American artists who would come over, help coach theater groups. I think I told you Stella Adler came over and ran a clinic, or ran a school under joint JDC auspices for the Jewish actors. The big play was Dybuk.

JL: Did anyone ever say, "We shouldn't be doing this. We should be honoring the dead."?

SS: No. As a matter of fact, I tell you, you know I'm a little bit overtaken by this whole Holocaust preoccupation these days. And I think on the part of the survivors themselves it's a second or third thought. I don't think any of them in the first ten years thought about that one day this whole thing would become so hallowed, you know. I guess, you never think what you just lived through is going to be history, you know. They knew it was history but they had a different response to it. We would talk

¹¹³ 'Six gigolos', 'Slam gigolos'.

about it, of course. I could be wrong, but I don't recall, for example, the observance of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Everybody knew when it occurred. It's only, I think, in later years that the full realization of what this event meant, you know, began to sink in. No, the camps were not tragic places at all.

JL: So everyone just wanted to get back to life?

SS: Right. We had dances, we had theater, there was a lot of good humor about it and about life generally. There were weddings. No, the places were not draped in mourning. That's not a good place to be, of course. The conditions were very bad, people wanted to get the hell out of there. But, no, there was no pall hanging over the place.

JL: I guess that's just my perception of those years. This is number 16.

SS: These are some of our clerks in one of the camps. I remember this man's name on the right. He was a welfare worker and his name is Sternberg. And these are two people who in this particular place were registering - keeping documentation on newcomers into the camp.

JL: Number 17.

SS: This is ORT school. Can't see what it says in the back. These ladies are learning dressmaking. We had the ORT schools and they taught a variety of trades — dressmaking, clothing cutting, watchmaking, shoemaking, shleser, that was mechanics. A shleser is a machinist. [An explanation that it's not a locksmith?] We had [maror], we had teslekhs,¹¹⁴ we had carpenters, you know, and all of the rest of these trades. The people wanted to learn and they did learn. And they were paid to learn. Not in dollars, not in money or marks, but in extra rations. So we had quite a [? 24:40]. And you could get into two or three courses, you could get two, three rations.

JL: 18.

SS: This is the food. They portioned in the food warehouse in one of the camps, food distribution. Now food was cooked in, wherever possible, in the individual family units if there was a family. For those

¹¹⁴ Yiddish for 'carpenters.'

who did not have a family we had communal kitchens and these [biksn] or cans, [büksn]¹¹⁵ of food were distributed as part of a regular worked-out ration. We had dieticians who planned the food distribution according to the UN calorie counts. Each person came with a different colored card which described the number of calories he was entitled to based on whether he was a hard worker or a not so hard worker or a child or whatever. The food came from the German economy mostly and it was supplemented by the United Nations with foods purchased elsewhere. Canned fish for example would come from Sweden, Norway.

JL: 19.

SS: Boxing matches. I told you before that we loved boxing. I was asked in this occasion to referee a — I think they were the opening matches. Asked me if I'd get up there and referee. I refereed four or five boxing matches. We erected the ring around the middle of one of the camps. They were not very skillful but they had a lot of enthusiasm. As I told you, we boxed a team match against the 3rd Army boxing team and we beat one or two or three of those fellows. One at least I remember was ETO boxing, European Theater boxing champion.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 1

¹¹⁵ Not in Weinreich.

TAPE 5, SIDE 2

JL: Number 20.

SS: Since I'd become such a first-rate trencherman, I decided to pose this picture at the head of the table in our staff mess in my house. This is on the Klementinenstrasse by the Englische Garten in Munich. This is a house which had been taken from a high-ranking Nazi by the name of [von Schrerien]. He had been the finance minister of Bavaria. And we had about a dozen people, or eight people, who came to our mess every day, whenever it was possible. It was probably a dinner hour. I see we got the plates out here. We had a staff, including a Jewish cook, the cousin of a friend of mine, a survivor from Vilna and she made us all kosher-style [foods]. There was kosher food available for the Jewish survivors who were kosher. And she made chicken and fish and whatever and cholnt and all those good dishes. I think from the time she came — really, I'm serious — in about six months I must have picked up about twenty pounds. In this picture I'm still fairly slender. By the way, I look very much like my son, Leonard, on this picture. You haven't ever seen my son. Just unbelievable. He's now twenty-six, exactly my age then, about twenty-six.

JL: Here's number 21.

SS: This is the construction of a mikveh in the Freimann camp, yeah. And these are two members of a religious community who were building — [tsukhsidim]. The man on the left, I remember he was so persistent, because we have to get things, you know, we have to get the furnace, you know, the boiler to heat the water and we had to get kakh, tiles, and we had to get piping, all of which was impossible to come by, you know, in those days. They got the JDC to put up about three hundred cartons of cigarettes and with three hundred cartons of cigarettes you could get anything (laughs) in Germany at that time. And that's the way the [tsukhke organizirt ?]. They called it organizing, sort of just made it available to themselves. And I understand that this mikveh which was built was a short swimming pool and is still there in this house in Munich. We visited there last August. I should have found that picture and brought it back, taking it over there. It's funny. Building a mikveh.

JL: Okay, this is number 23.

SS: This is a children's pageant probably from Purim or something like that. And there's part of the school. That's all I can remember about this children's play.

JL: I didn't know if you'd remember much more, it's just a very nice photograph of the theater because of the people standing in the doorway.

SS: Right, right.

JL: This is number 24.

SS: This is a bar, a beer bar in a camp. What I recall, either about this or other places, is that the so-called, the invalidn¹¹⁶ — the sale of beer was a profitable franchise. I mean, comparatively. There was a group called the invalidn. Invalidn are invalids but it means fun krig [farvatst], you know, wounded during the war — lost a leg or lost an arm or whatever. And they claimed a special right, and I think correctly, to have that concession for themselves, the beer bar. They took all the profit. The United Nations was not creating beer bars. But we are the sanctioned that there should be this beer hall. It's an outdoor place, you see, and had tables. You can't see them but there were tables out in the front and people came to have a glass of beer. In those days, by the way, they weren't allowed to make [it] fully strong. Beer was near-beer, like 2 percent, 3 percent beer because in order to make alcohol you have to get grain and they had other priorities for grain. So the beer was not as strong, but people enjoyed it. And we had a great big angry quarrel over who would get this concession, you see, and finally I said it goes to the invalidn.

JL: Why did they claim?

SS: They had lost limbs. They were disabled during the war.

JL: But they could've claimed anything else, couldn't they? I was wondering why beer and not some other business?

¹¹⁶ Yiddish for 'disabled people.'

SS: That was one of the few concessions we had. Everybody else were in business for themselves, but that was black market. This was a sanctioned area where people would buy beer. In each camp there was such a place. And they sold a lot of beer. The profits were split among the invalidn, from the Invalidn Farband, the Association of Disabled Veterans. Look at those faces in there. You see, they're rough guys, I tell you. These are not people who have been through easy times, you know. Let me see that. Yes, indeed. Look at him here. I guarantee, what his eyes saw you will never see in your life, and hopefully never. These are tough. I can just tell by looking at them. I think I remember this man. So many thousands of people went through, you know.. Some people stick out and others do not.

JL: 25.

SS: At the time that the United Nations was considering the partition, when the debates were going on, or at times when the United States was getting ready to make some statement, or whatever, at certain political moments, the Jews of the camps were politically quite active and would engage in demonstrations for Israel. That's what it really was all about. And this is one of these demonstrations. I can see here in Yiddish, "Mir fodern a Yidishe medine [blaykh?]¹¹⁷, "We demand a Jewish state now." And signs and placards were made. It's possible that there was a visitor, a commission of some sort may have visited one of the camps. The Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry or United Nations Commission of Inquiry, whatever. But demonstrations and political activity were very, very much a part of — when I say political, I mean in a Zionist sense — were a part of life in the Jewish camps.

JL: Number 27.

SS: Oh, this is the same beer bar, but here they're selling ice cream outside. You see the ice cream cones? In Polish, ice cream was hawked as lody, which means ice, ice cream. "Lody! Lody!" on the streets. And I think I told you the story that one day several tons of powdered milk disappeared, because nobody wanted. It was just piling up in the warehouse. Nobody wanted it. It disappeared but

¹¹⁷ Yiddish for 'We demand a Jewish state.'

then it turned into ice cream. I heard later on that that's where our powdered milk went. I wasn't worried about it.

JL: 28.

SS: A victory toast. We had football players, we had a league among the DP camps, Jewish camps. Soccer was very, very popular. They played with great enthusiasm, you know. Hundreds, thousands of people came out to watch and then after the victory, the players would repair to the nearest invalidn bar, you know, and toast their victory. Great spirit. But look at these faces. Here's a man in the middle there with a toothache or something, he's got a thing around his — by the way, the Jews had awfully bad teeth, terrible. We set up clinics, you know for the JDC. We had our own clinics, then we set up JDC clinics.

JL: 29.

SS: Oh yeah. This has to be some time in late '47, maybe '48. There was a deluge of pregnancies and marriages, and again, you know, it's a response to that period of broken lives, you know. For six, seven years their lives had been interrupted, families had been destroyed, one of the partners killed. Children dead. And so there was a rush to recreate and of course it was across — usually in Europe you married somebody in your own town, in your own neighborhood, in your own shtetl. You made your choices pretty close to home. It was true in the United States, too. But being so fragmented, you had marriages now, you know, Hungarians and Poles, you know, and people from all different parts of Europe getting together. I had a very dear friend who now lives in Montreal and he was [from] Riga [Latvia], and he married this girl from Poland. I remember before he married her he would joke — you remember the old Galitsianer-Litvak thing¹¹⁸ — that he would never have anything to do with [a Latvian] — but they fell in love and they married and created a family. So these baby carriages are really symbolic, really one of the major elements in this whole thing, the rebirth. That's what I would

¹¹⁸ The traditional disaffection that existed between Litvak Jews from the areas of Lithuania, Belorussia, and Latvia and Galitsianer Jews from Galicia.

call that — rebirth. That's a fantastic picture, I didn't realize I had it. Now, where they got these fancy little baby carriages I don't know. We didn't issue them.

JL: Judging from other photographs I've seen from the period, those carriages were typical.

SS: Yes, I'm sure that there must have been a store or something which had them or a warehouse which had them stacked up and the people. These survival instincts were such – these people had such – you know, today words are failing me – such resourcefulness about finding things and getting things. Just incredible, you know.

JL: Number 30.

SS: A formal portrait of me. This is not taken in Munich. It's taken in the other house I occupied up in Ammerland, I think, on Lake Starnberg. I didn't mean it to be a formal portrait but apparently that's the way it came out.

JL: There's only one in the whole collection.

JL: There's no number on that one.

SS: Yeah. Now I've tried to place this picture of Eisenhower's visit to a camp in Munich. The best that I can come up with is the early fall of '46. Eisenhower came because they had a complaint from the United States. He was the Chief of Staff in Washington and the Truman administration was receiving complaints that food, housing, clothing was inadequate for the Jews. That there was an insensitivity on the part of the military government to the needs of Jews. The underlining responsibility for all displaced persons was with the United States army. And so Eisenhower came in response and the Jewish camp he picked was this big camp outside of Munich, which was one of my camps at that time. And I was asked to brief him, to show him around the installation, to brief him on conditions. He came in an early morning, around 9:00. It's so funny, this little man in Racine that I told you about remembered that on that day, he told me about it, that they had set up military on the street, on the road that led from town out to this area here. Every ten or fifteen paces, you know, they had two soldiers, you know, on either side of the road. Roads were closed, nobody could travel then. They had

checked all the housing. It was an incredible security exercise and Eisenhower drove up in this enormous thirty-foot-long Mercedes, one of those open Mercedes, you know. It had belonged to some Göring or Hitler. [Eisenhower] he came with a whole retinue of generals: McNary and Truscott and, oh the names — just three stars, two stars, four stars. All kinds of people. And I showed him around the camp. I remember, I was only twenty-six, you know, and I was a little bit flustered about how should I react. I was wearing a uniform. I was not in the military, you know. I didn't know whether to salute, you know, or to greet, you know. But he was very nice and, although austere, you know. You looked into that face, it was a face, you know, of command, you know. You looked into those blue eyes and you knew he was the sort of fellow who was accustomed to military command. You knew it. But he was pleasant and inquiring. He had a series of questions. We had a briefing all laid out for him. We took him to the various places. I was showing him at this point something which we had done in the camp. I'd make a joke [about what you see in this photograph.] I said, "What were you saying then?" "Well, I was showing him that the men's room was to your left down there." But that's not really what I was doing. I was just showing him something in the camp. I'm not sure what it was. The man on his left is his personal body guard, a very tough commando type. So that's what I remember here. By the way, following this visit, there was a appreciable improvement in the situation. I was then, by the way, the acting director. So you asked me, or somebody asked me, how did I get to be director? It was after this visit. In other words, I had responded well in this kind of situation, so they said okay, let him stay. We took him into one of the synagogues, [Beth an tvila? 18:25]. We took him in to show him around, to schools, hospitals, warehouses for food, kitchen facilities, whatever we had in this particular camp. When he walked into the synagogue he took his hat off and he put it under his elbow in the military fashion and I think it was General Truscott who said to him, "General, in a synagogue you don't take your hat off." And we also had him in a school. One of the schools was not very far from here and I think I told you this story. The children, when he walked in, had been trying to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" and they learned it in Yiddish. They didn't learn it in the Yiddish language, but

they learned it phonetically in Yiddish. And they were singing it, and they had botched it so badly that Eisenhower turned to me and asked me what is it they're singing. Because he walked in and they burst into this thing, see, in his honor. The Jews were unbelievably enamored, you know, of America, their liberators, and of course of this general. I think I had to tell him, "They're singing 'The Star Spangled Banner.'" "Oh," he said. So then, now I remember, Specter, the teacher or the principal or the head master of our school asked me, "What did he say?" I said, "He said it's [gebene] zeer sheyn."¹¹⁹ I didn't have the heart to tell him he didn't recognize it. The kids were so enthusiastic. It was a memorable visit for me. I'm glad this guy took these pictures. I had no idea. He came up to me the next day in a week or so. By the way, the camp he visited [was] Neu Freimann DP Camp in Munich. I thought I might one day try to go down to the library and look through the New York Times. His visit was covered. There was a reporter for the New York Times at that time. His name was Jack Raymond. It's not the same one. There is another Jack Raymond around now, I think. Jack Raymond was then about thirty-five, so he must be about seventy now, you know. He was covering Germany for the Times. He came to see me one day, Jack Raymond, and he brought this guy in tow, you know, a Jewish DP. He said, "This is my cousin," you know. I didn't know he was Jewish, Jack Raymond, see. I said, "You're kidding." [He said,] "It's my cousin. Can you help him get out?"

JL: Do you think he really was his cousin?

SS: Yeah, yeah, it was, it was. [Raymond] was a Jewish fellow from New York. We had a problem. A lot of people wanted to be helped to get out and you helped everybody you could. If a guy came into the zone after a certain date, he was ineligible. If his quota was wrong he would have to wait for years. So what we did was simply — I told you, I'd rip up the old documents and give him some new ones. Because when people came they were ignorant about these laws. If they asked them, "Where were you born? When did you come here?" they told the truth. Didn't have anything to back it up, you know. So then they found out that having told the truth they were now stuck. So they used to come. We were

¹¹⁹ Yiddish for 'It's so beautiful.'

also trying to encourage people to go to Israel, Palestine. There's a fellow who goes around the country. Have you heard him, his name is Neshet, Ariyeh Neshet. He's been here, I think, to speak.

JL: Yeah.

SS: Ariyeh Neshet and his wife live, they live in New York. They're Israeli citizens and they're fundraisers for Israel. They do a tremendous job of pumping up communities. He runs a seminar, I've seen him doing it in Milwaukee, on how to solicit somebody, you know. Now this young man, when I knew him, he was about my age, he's about my age now, he became a member of the Central Community of Liberated Jews and he's a very gifted guy because within weeks he was speaking English like I speak English. You know there are such people, you know. He was a DP in one of my camps. Have you see him here or met him here? What does neshet mean [in Hebrew]?

JL: Eagle.

SS: Eagle, yes. I think his name was Adler. That's German for eagle. Anyway, that's the way it got translated. He was in charge of [geeuse xxx? 23:45] they called it. You know what [geeuse] is?

JL: Recruitment.

SS: Right. And they were recruiting from the DPs people to be soldiers. It was a draft, not recruitment. It was not recruitment, they were drafting you. They came and said to you, "Du farst in Ertz Yisroel,"¹²⁰ you're in, you know. Now of course a lot of people didn't want to [farn] in Ertz Yisroel, they wanted to go [[??? 24:10] Amerike. So now that came to conflict. And I told you about the withholding of supplies, you know. Not the basic rations, that's the United Nations, but the Joint¹²¹ supplements and Neshet was responsible for that. He was going to make speeches, you know, and try to get people. He's very good at it. And we did have a lot of people who went and who were in the military in 1946 already, underground, in Israel before the establishment of the state. Arie Neshet and his wife, I don't remember her name.

END OF TAPE 5, SIDE 2

¹²⁰ Yiddish for 'You're going to Israel.'

¹²¹ The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Same as JDC above (first referenced in footnote number 7.)

TAPE 6, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

JL: Now we were talking the other day – I still have some further questions I wanted to ask you. One thing that arose out of what you said was not clear to me. You said when you went into the DP camps you were a supply officer.

SS: I had the classification of being a chief supply officer. This was based on the experience I had with the government in Washington where I was working with supply and the moving of supplies, requisitioning of supplies for the United States during the war.

JL: Okay, but then later you were talking about administration and supervising. Did you rise up then?

SS: Well, I was the chief supply officer for what was called UNRRA Team 560 was the number. A team of about, I don't know, thirty-five or forty international personnel from various countries. And the director was a man by the name of Wachtel, Mr. Wachtel.¹²² He turned out to be a very good friend of mine, you know. We've been friends for a long time. Subsequently he resigned and went to work for the JDC as some key person in their operations in Germany and Austria. And the team was without a director. Everybody else on that team, the welfare people, supply officers, dieticians, maintenance people, people who ran the motor pool and the rest. And I was working very closely with Hy at the time, with Wachtel, and what happened was that I was made sort of acting director. Just a quick decision by the headquarters in Bad Kissing, by UNRRA's headquarters in Germany and Bad Kissing. And then something interesting happened. General Eisenhower came and we were the largest camp in the Munich area. He wanted to view a camp in Munich. He had come because there was criticism by the American Jewish community about the level of assistance which the United States was giving to Jewish displaced persons. All displaced persons were the direct responsibility of the occupational authority. The army had the fundamental responsibility for providing supplies. UNRRA administered all of the programs. That is we were the administrators, but the army, the military, the government had responsibility for providing us with the wherewithal. And housing was inadequate for our people, food

¹²² Mr. [Wachtel? 1:45]. I was working very closely with [Hy] at the time with [Wachtel] a...

was inadequate, the Germans were slow. They were required to make some deliveries to us of food and other things and they were slow. So there were problems and Truman was getting a lot of heat in the United States and sent Eisenhower over, who was then Chief of Staff, to make a personal inspection of the Jewish camps and they picked the one in Munich. And I was therefore assigned the task of guiding him through the camp and briefing him on our problem. And the visit was quite successful and I think did result in material betterment, a significant betterment of the material problems we faced with Jewish DPs. It went so well, you know, that I shortly received notice that I had been appointed permanently as the director of team 560. Now later on, just to go on with that, later on I think it was the end of 1946, UNRRA was phased out. It was succeeded by something called PCIRO, which was called the Preparatory Commission for the International Refugee Organization. All of that was taking place with great success in New York at the United Nations so distant from me and I'm not sure of the politics. They were preparing for the International Refugee Organization to become a permanent arm of the United Nations. Then after PCIRO was put into place, about I think two years later, maybe about '48, the dates elude me at this moment, it became the IRO, the International Refugee Organization. But then we began to organize our work among the Jewish displaced persons and other displaced persons differently. First, a lot of the international personnel was sent home and instead of French physicians or Belgian physicians or American physicians working in the camps, we found survivors or infiltrées who were physicians and used them. It's true of nurses, true of dieticians, also welfare people. And we maximized the use of indigenous staff. We were left with a skeleton staff and acting in supervisory fashion. And I became director or field supervisor, director of the whole area which included the Munich south to Salzburg, to the Austrian border. IRO in Germany was divided up into areas. Area One, Two, Three, Four. I was a field supervisor for Area Six in Germany which was really based in [?? Goutine?6:20] and that was in charge of all displaced persons — Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, whatever. And I was responsible for the working of Jewish camps. The camps became self-administrative, camp committees, and we used indigenous personnel there.

JL: And this through to the end?

SS: Right. Until the end. In 1949 at the end it phased down, most of the people had left. We were left then, by and large, with a group we called the hard core. Illness, various kinds of problems which kept them in Germany.

JL: And they were still there after you left?

SS: Just very few. By then the program had been phased out. There was great problems I understand after I left in getting the people out of the camps because some parts of the camp — I saw the same sort of thing in Jordan or in Israel, you know, in Palestinian refugee camps outside of Jerusalem or the West Bank, you see people make comforts. TV antennas sticking out of the roofs, you know. And what became terrible, they combined two or three rooms and you're fairly comfortable. People were getting food for nothing. It was a problem. Jewish agencies worked very hard to get these people to leave but it wasn't simple. By the way, I'm going to mention, you know, a restitution program which was going on. There was a great episode involving Dr. Auerbach who was the first minister in Bavaria of the Wieder Gutmachen Programme.¹²³ The restitution program began I think about '47, '48. The Germans began the process of identifying people who would receive restitution. Auerbach was a German and rather so cloudy background. I don't know where the heck he came from. He was an enormous man about six foot eight, weighed about 350 pounds and he used to go about, serving on occasions. I was with him once when we both spoke at the dedication of a mass grave. Somewhere outside Wolfratshausen, bodies of Jews had been found, people who had been executed toward the end of the war. He and I stood there and he towered over me. He was a very big man, but he wore, in addition, a mourning frock coat, you know, and a Zylinder Hut, a top hat, you know, when he spoke. But the restitution program began then and we assisted the Jews in our camps to file the necessary forms, the pension programs for compensation for loss of limbs, health, freedom, and in some cases loss of life [? 9:10]. Also I was there during another great event. We supervised among all of the

¹²³ German for the "Program to Make Good Again."

Jewish DPs in the area the currency reform program in Germany. When Germany changed its money in 1947, from the old worthless Reich marks to the new d-marks. Everybody got ten marks to begin with. It was a terrible time for the Jews in the camps because nobody knew what would happen, how much money would be available. Black market food disappeared, you know, so nobody was eating very well. It was a difficult time. We had a riot, a number of riots in the camps. Somebody just told me the other day on the phone, we talked about Neu Freimann, somebody called me from New York and he was a DP in the camp and he told me about riots where two Jews, young boys, had eaten poisoned wurst¹²⁴ and died and there was a terrible outbreak of violence. We had a number of postwar incidents of mass violence, mobs, large crowds of Jews smashing shops and going into the nearby towns and engaging in violence against the local citizens.

JL: Now these shops, did they deal with these shops in general?

SS: Sure.

JL: What kinds of jobs did the DPs do in general?

SS: Well Jewish DPs in those years did not work on the general economy at all.

JL: What kinds of things did they do then?

SS: Well, they worked in the camp. We had lots of work to be done inside — working on the buildings, keeping them clean, distributing wood, distribution of food. ORT had a very important role of keeping people busy, training them in various occupations — shoemaking, tailoring, ladies dressmaking, watch making, teaching them to be bricklayers and cement workers and carpenters. We had all kinds of programs, and people received pay for enrolling in these schools. The pay was not so much in money but rather in necessary amenity supplies, you know, which were so valuable. Cigarettes, chocolate, [? 11:25]. But there was a lot of idleness. And then a lot of people spent a lot of time just tending to the needs: you know, finding food — organizing they called it — food, getting things together, doing business among themselves, getting their papers in order in the effort to move out, to

¹²⁴ German for 'sausage'.

get out. I think I mentioned this earlier on. One day, we were getting a lot of food in the calorie count, you know,- from the United Nations, which people would not eat or didn't eat easily — powdered eggs and powdered milk. One day about a man called me from one of the big camps and told me that about two tons of powdered milk disappeared. The next day, no not the next day. A few weeks later in the summer time, all of a sudden people appeared in the camps carrying these metal boxes with dry ice in them. They were selling ice cream. And I asked, "Where did you get this milk for this ice cream?" And somebody said to me, "Khaver Direktor, well you know that the milk disappeared from that warehouse." That's where it came from. So there was a lot of that business, people keeping busy.

JL: Let's go back again to the ORT classes. Who taught these and were they actually classes?

SS: Yeah, actually classes, and they were taught by people wherever we could find them who themselves were in the occupations they were teaching. That is we had the people who had been tailors in the factory, tailor shop, dressmaking shop, people who were watch makers. Everything was indigenous. ORTs program was run by international people, but they had to find people who were in the camps who had these kinds of skills and train them to teach.

JL: Some more about school. Last week we were talking about the children and the education. What kinds of classes were there? Just normal subjects?

SS: Yeah. The classes were taught I think in Yiddish and in Polish. There was a repartee. There was history. English was taught, and Hebrew was taught, these two languages. The curriculum, as best as I can recall, varied. But the curriculum was developed by people who were found who were school teachers. [? I mentioned a man who?14:05] went on to Baltimore. Spector was principal in one of the major camps in the school. The number of children were small, didn't have too many kids. But there were kids who did manage to survive either in the Soviet Union or in hiding and they were taught together in these classrooms. I don't know whether geography was taught or physical sciences were taught. I doubt it. Most of the children were quite young. When you were fifteen or sixteen there were

no high school classes. I think there were probably K through maximum of eight, K through eight we had available.

JL: Let me jump to agricultural activities, preparing people for kibbutzim. How was that done?

SS: Well, I have a feeling that – I know that much of the agricultural activities were really paramilitary training, sort of an approximation of what is it you see now in Israel is a [bushat? 15:20], you know, a combination. Those people did raise some foods in these places but the major emphasis was on preparing them for the eventual military conflict which would take place. By the way, this kind of thing happened before May of 1948. I do recall, you know, something that really sticks in my head, I was horrified by it. I don't know if we should include it, but I will. I went up to one of these places — it was kept secret from the military — and somebody had hung a bag of live cats on a tree branch. They were just stabbing these cats, di ketslekh.¹²⁵ We ordered that stopped right away, but apparently there was some feeling if you did this with some live tissue, a live thing to strike against, that it would steel you, you know. Many of the people engaged in the training were people themselves who had come out of the most terrible kinds of combat situations themselves and I don't know if these things were picked up behind the Russian or German lines in some way. The people we were dealing with, many of them, were veterans of the partisan combat of the most brutal sort. And of course the military conflict between Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Nazis and Germany was a horrendous thing and there was carnage, you know. So you had people who were really hard and they were trying to harden other young people to what they might see. In '47, '48, we began to get people who were defecting from the Russian Army in Potsdam. The Russians were occupying East Germany and some relatively high ranking Jewish officers decided they'd go to Israel [Yiddish for Israel?]. And they came out and they would search for asylum from the American Armed Forces in Berlin and they would send them from Berlin by air into the American zone of Germany and ultimately these people [?], all of them,

¹²⁵ Yiddish for 'the kitties'.

legally or illegally to Israel where they I understand became key people in the Israeli armed forces.

END OF TAPE 6, SIDE 1 (no Side 2)

END OF TRANSCRIPT