

He Who Dares Wins

Across the Pyrenees to Freedom

Diary of Chanan (Hans) Flörsheim 1923-1944



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PREFACE

(based on the preface by Heinrich Nuhn and Brigitte Meyer-Christ of the German version of the book)

During World War Two some 875 persons reached the British Mandate of Palestine as refugees from the Iberian peninsula¹. Following the disembarkation in Haifa of a few hundred passengers from the Portuguese ship “Nyassa” on February 1, 1944 it took until October 1944 before certain bureaucratic roadblocks on the part of Great Britain were overcome and another transport of Jewish refugees left Cadiz for Palestine. This time it was the “Guiné” which also sailed under the Portuguese flag. On board was Hans/Chanan Flörsheim born on April 2 1923 in Rotenburg on the Fulda, who had fled with his parents in 1933 from this town to Leipzig. His parents sent the boy in May 1937 to relatives in Amsterdam where they considered him safe from Nazi persecution. Beginning in March 1943 Chanan went into hiding² in Holland. He used the alias of Hendrik Westerman. He had a falsified identification paper³. Next Chanan lived in France under the guise of a German-impressed Dutch laborer and finally, during a fourth try, he succeeded in reaching life-saving freedom by crossing the Pyrenees to Spain.

After the surrender of France to Germany in June 1940 tens of thousands of refugees from Central Europe had tried to reach destinations outside Europe via the Iberian Peninsula. However, following Franco’s victory in the Spanish civil war in 1939, Spanish Consulates only issued a transit visa when a Portuguese entry visa could be furnished. Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann, Franz Werfel and their spouses used this opportunity to cross the Eastern Pyrenees on foot in August 1940 to reach the Spanish border town of Portbou. Walter Benjamin succeeded in the same manner to reach Portbou by the end of September of 1940. However, he committed suicide because he feared that he would be forcefully returned to France by the Spanish authorities. The circumstances of his suicide are still unclear even today.

In November 1942 Hitler’s army entered the unoccupied southern part of France which had been governed until then by the so-called “Vichy Regime”. The program of the “Final Solution” of the rounding up and forced transport of Jews to the concentration- and extermination camps of Poland had actually already begun in France in the summer of 1942. At that time the Vichy Regime had agreed to cooperate with Germany to carry out the arrest and surrender of all Jews of foreign nationality living in Vichy territory using its police forces in the framework of its own racial programs. Every person who was unable to demonstrate that he/she was a legal resident of a border zone with Spain of 30 km width was always arrested for additional close interrogation. Beginning in February 18, 1943 every town near the French-Spanish border was declared “off limits” for persons without valid identification and control posts were located at every town’s exit road.

¹ This number is from Patrik von zur Mühlen: *Fluchtweg Spanien-Portugal. Die Deutsche Emigration und der Exodus aus Europa 1933-1945* (Route of Escape Spain-Portugal. The German emigration and the Exodus from Europe 1933-1945), Dietz Verlag 1992.

² The German verb for this type of hiding “untertauchen” (in Dutch “onderduiken”) literally means “diving under”. It usually refers to the illegal hiding-out of Jews at the homes/farms/offices of non-Jewish helpers. When the Germans discovered this the Jews were sent to Auschwitz or other extermination camps and the helpers were usually sent for nine months to a concentration camp (D.H.).

³ The original text uses the word “Pass” i.e. passport but this almost certainly refers to the Dutch identification paper known as „Persoonsbewijs“ or personal identification paper (D.H.).

Nevertheless, these measures could not fully stop the illegal flights to Spain because the control posts were too sporadically manned and because of the difficulty of controlling the forbidding mountainous terrain. It has been reported that some 12,000 Jews escaped via secret pathways of the Pyrenees from November 1942 until August 1944, usually led by a competent alpinist (in French: passeur) even after the Germans had expanded their control to the Spanish border. They had also succeeded to evade the French gendarmerie with their dog teams as well as the German military patrols. This, however, was not the end of their perils owing to sudden changes of the weather, avalanches, serious injuries, or exhaustion.

Yielding to Allied pressure Spain declared in 1943 that it would not hand over foreign refugees to their respective governments provided that the Allies would accept responsibility for their continued voyages. Until then there were no foreign support organizations in Franco-Spain, such as for example private American organizations that had been tolerated earlier, not even the International Red Cross. The German defeat at Stalingrad at the beginning of 1943 had brought about a first political turnaround by Franco. This change benefited the refugees that had reached Spain because (private) support organizations were now allowed to serve them. Hans/Chanan Flörsheim belonged to the group cared for by the *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (abbreviated as "Joint" or JDC).

Whereas the illegal refugees that had entered Spain before 1943 were first arrested and then locked up in camps, this fate did not befall Hans/Chanan Flörsheim and his travel companions. Nevertheless half a year passed before they could leave the country on October 26, 1944. Until that date they were not kept in jails or behind fences of internment camps but were accommodated in hotels or similar quarters and were allowed to move about freely. Hence they discovered and used the opportunity to learn new languages and found leisure time to put on paper the trials and tribulations of their past months and years. That is what Hans/Chanan Flörsheim achieved by writing the diary for this book.

INTRODUCTION

I have written these diary notes shortly after my arrival in Spain in May 1944. That explains my accurate rendering of conversations and dates. The handwritten version was copied with a typewriter in the course of the 1950's by a frequent visitor to our Kibbutz, a Swiss national from Wallisellen named Albert Wetzel.

In 1978 I translated the work into Hebrew and had it printed as a book in 2000. A total of 200 copies were produced for family members and friends. In 2004 I entered the German text into a computer memory. The original story began in Holland in 1943 and ended with my arrival in the Spanish village of Leiza in the Province of Navarre.

When it was brought to my attention that it might be helpful for the reader to add a short description of my life before 1943 as well as the continuation of my destiny after my arrival in Spain I have added two specific chapters named Prologue and Epilogue.

Chanan (Hans) Flörsheim, Kibbutz Yakum.



*Chanan (Hans) Flörsheim first school year
in Rotenburg an der Fulda.*

Hans Walter Flörsheim was born on April 23, 1923 in the home at the Lindenstreet 9 (current address) in Rotenburg an der Fulda. His parents were Julius Flörsheim and Paula Flörsheim nee Katzenstein. In Palestine Hans adopted the name Chanan (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

PROLOGUE

Germany 1923-1937

Rotenburg 1923-1933

I was born in 1923 in the Hessian town of about 4000 inhabitants named Rotenburg an der Fulda some 50 km south of the city of Kassel⁴. My parents Paula and



⁴Germany at that time was a federal republic of “Länder” (States). Hessen (Hesse) was one of these (D.H.).

Julius Flörsheim⁵ came from solid middle class families deeply embedded in German life. According to some documents the families had lived in Rotenburg at least since the beginning of the 18th century⁶. My sister Edith was born barely two years later. My father had two brothers, Joseph and Willy. My father and Willy both served in the armed forces during the First World War. Willy was killed in Flanders in 1916. As a child I was mighty proud to read the name of my uncle alongside those of other fallen war heroes of the Jewish community on a commemorative plaque in the synagogue⁷.

After the war Joseph⁸ lived a few years in South Africa which turned out to have been very helpful for him many years later. Following his return to Rotenburg he led the firm “Brothers Flörsheim” together with my father. The firm had been established in 1906. It specialized in the shipping of textiles and manufactured goods although there was also a store in our house. Usually one employee was every day in the store and my mother, insofar as she had the time, always helped out.

My father traveled during most of the week, mostly in the “Land” of Thuringia, to visit customers and to accept their new orders. We, the children, were always joyful when he returned home for the weekend. We always asked him what the total value of the goods had been which he had sold that week. The orders were filled and the goods were packed during the course of the week and I was always pleased when I was able to help with the pushing of the loaded cart to the railroad station. As I have already mentioned, my mother often helped in the store. A maid, usually a young neighbor named Elisabeth, took care of us children.

My mother’s family was the Katzenstein’s. Her father owned a plant where shredded wood was produced. One day it was destroyed by fire. Grandfather Jakob⁹ was the only grandparent that was still alive in our time. He died in 1936 in Rotenburg when he was 76.

My mother had a sister Louise, nicknamed Lisl and a brother Karl. Lisl was married to Friedrich Bartmer, nicknamed Uncle Fidi, a non-Jewish representative for a wine dealership in Emden, Eastern Frisia. They lived in Emden. They had no children of their own. We children always loved to go to Emden during our vacations. Karl was a bachelor. At times he helped in our business but he was usually traveling somewhere in the wide world.

⁵ The photos of my parents shown above are displayed in the format 10x15 cm in the gallery of portraits of former Jews of the city in the Memorial Museum of Rotenburg (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

⁶ Additional documents about the history of the family can be found in the Appendix of the German version (Brigitte-Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

⁷ Willy Flörsheim married Hedwig Rosenthal from Hamburg in 1910. Their son Bruno was born on May 3, 1911. He succeeded in 1936 to emigrate from Leipzig to the USA. From there he moved to Johannesburg/South Africa where he died in 1985. (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

⁸ Joseph Flörsheim was politically active in Rotenburg. After his return as a soldier on 11.30.1918 he became a member of the SPD (the German Socialist Party; D.H.). He became secretary of the local organization. In May 1924 he was elected to the city council for the SPD. This made him especially vulnerable to danger after Hitler came to power in 1933. (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

⁹ Jacob Katzenstein ran a plant that produced wood shavings together with his cousin Salomon Katzenstein. The Katzensteins are Kahanes which means that they are considered progeny of the priests of the temple in Jerusalem.



Aus Hessen und Umgegend.
 Rotenburg, den 28. April 1916
 * Unsere Helden.
 Auf dem Felde der Ehre sind gefallen:
 Willi Flörsheim, Rotenburg.
 Feldm.-Leutn. Adam Kiemann, Gerterode.



Obituary in the local newspaper of Rotenburg.

Top left: Detail of the memorial plaque for the fallen soldiers of the First World War. It used to hang in the protestant Jacob's church (Jakobikirche).

Top right: News in the local newspaper of Rotenburg. (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn)



Geschäfts-Eröffnung.
 Am 1. Oktober eröffnen wir am hiesigen Orte in unserem
 herrlichen Hause
Lindenstrasse 157, I. Etage
 ein
Manufaktur- u. Modewaren-Geschäft
 verbunden mit
 fertiger Herren- u. Damen-Garderobe,
 sowie Anfertigung nach Maß.
 Eingetauscht werden Gewandstücke, aus ganz besten Stoffen zu trop-
 pen billigen Preisen in den Verleihen zu bringen, bitten wir
 gütigst unser Unternehmen gütigst unterstützen zu wollen. Das Bureau
 wird auch außerordentliche Bekleidung liefern, empfehlen wir uns
 Hochachtung
Gebrüder Flörsheim.

18. September Rotenburg 1901.

Gebrüder Flörsheim :: Rotenburg
Manufaktur- und Modewaren

Um unseren werten Kunden auch in diesem Jahre Gelegenheit zu besonders vortheilhaften Weihnachts-Einkäufen zu bieten,
 empfehlen wir als konkurrenzlos billig:

1 Posten doppeltbreite Hauskleiderstoffe	sonstiger Preis 85 Pfg., Weihnachtspreis 60 Pfg.
1 Posten reinwollene Cheviots,	sonstiger Preis 1.25 Mk., Weihnachtspreis 88 Pfg.
1 Posten reinwollene 110 cm breite Satintuche	sonstiger Preis 2.80 Mk., Weihnachtspreis 2.00 Mk.
1 Posten weisse Damenhemden	sonstiger Preis 1.75 Mk., Weihnachtspreis 1.25 Mk.
1 Posten weisse Damenhemden	sonstiger Preis 2.25 Mk., Weihnachtspreis 1.50 Mk.

1906 **25** Jahre 1931

Großer Jubiläums-Verkauf

vom 1. bis 15. Oktober.

Trotz billiger Preise geben wir noch einen
Jubiläums-Rabatt von 20% auf alle Waren.

Insbeson-
Damen- und Herren-Wintermänteln.

Des-
 Kleider- und Anzugstoffen — Bett- und Leibwäsche — Trico-
 tagen — Wollwaren — Teppiche — Gardinen.

Gebr. Flörsheim, Rotenburg a. F.

There existed a Jewish community of about 30 families in Rotenburg. We went occasionally to synagogue, usually on holidays. Most of the families were middle class and, as the saying goes, relationships with the Christian inhabitants were correct.

Like all of my cohorts I was raised as a typical middle class German which meant that we were implored to be diligent, friendly, helpful, and patient. As children we lacked nothing. We spent the summer vacations together with our parents. We were a small and harmonious family. Nevertheless, all signs portended the coming of a storm.

There were elections for the Reichstag¹⁰ in 1932 and the impact of the campaigns was clearly felt in Rotenburg. As everywhere in Germany there were violent clashes between communists and Nazis. My father who was a German patriot and a member of the Social Democratic Party proudly flew the black-red-golden national flag every day.

As everywhere in the “Land” of Hessen there was anti-Semitism but we children were seldom exposed to it; usually only during fights with the Christian children when we were playing with them. When they called us “Stinking Jews” we paid them back with equal coin as “Stinking Christians”.

Adults obviously treated one another quite differently because we frequently heard in conversations the expression “Rischeskopf” (bad head, i.e. anti-Semite).



Hans Flörsheim 1928 in his birthplace Rotenburg an der Fulda as actor in a play for Purim.

In January 1933 occurred the political victory for Hitler and soon thereafter the situation for the Jews began to change. My parents often listened to the rabble-rousing propaganda speeches of Hitler and his henchmen. If we children were too loud at the time we were reprimanded. However, during conversations at the dinner table or during bridge games these events were considered transient. There were even bets on how long Hitler would last.

¹⁰The German equivalent of the USA Congress (D.H.).



The family on vacation on the island of Wangerooge. Made from sand is the word ROTENBURG and the coat of arms of the city. On the right is Hans Flörsheim together with his parents and sister Edith while vacationing on Wangerooge in the summer of 1929.

Then came the first of April when the boycott of all Jewish businesses began. An SS man was posted in front of our house too. In that same month our parents and other Jewish families gathered in front of the “Seminary School” to register us as high school students for the coming school year.

However, nothing came of it because one day our mother surprised us with the news that we would begin a voyage that same evening. Where to? Why? To our questions we received only vague answers. Hurriedly we packed some belongings, interrupted by telephone calls. It was only much later that we understood what had happened. The situation of the Jews had become increasingly precarious since Adolf Hitler had become German Chancellor¹¹ My father, who was traveling as usual, had learned from his friend Herman Linz that the Nazis intended to arrest all the Jews of Rotenburg. My parents considered it prudent to leave Rotenburg as soon as possible. That very evening the three of us thus took the train to Bobra where we met our father at the train station. Together we then traveled to Leipzig¹².

¹¹ Essentially the German Prime Minister (D.H.)

¹² According to the municipal register of the town of Rotenburg, Julius Flörsheim left his hometown on May 20, 1933. The date of departure of the other members of the family is listed as June 12, 1933. The new address was listed as Weinligstrasse 11, Leipzig. (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn)

Leipzig 1933-1937

The next morning we woke up in a pension in the center of the metropolis. We excitedly watched from our window the hustle and bustle below us in the lively street. This was totally new for us. We stayed there for a few days until our parents were able to rent an ample apartment in the northern section of Leipzig named Gohlis. Our mail-order-firm was re-established smack in the center of the city, in what was then the Austrian Fair-Pavilion. The firm was located on the third floor but this time without a store.

We registered in the Jewish Carlebach School. I entered High School and my sister Ditha the Elementary School. I had to pass an entrance exam and I quickly adjusted to my freshman class. I usually made my daily way to school by tram but because I still had to walk a few minutes to school I often preferred to walk back all the way home, particularly because the route led me through the large and gorgeous "Rosenthal" park which lay close to our apartment.

It was a tradition in Germany that high school students wore a distinct cap which showed the class in which they were studying. The Carlebach School had a brown cap for every student regardless of the student's class. I did not want to wear that cap. The reason was that one could immediately recognize me as a Jewish student. I do not know whether it was my own or my parent's decision but I did not want to entirely forsake wearing some cap. Hence my mother and I went shopping and we found in one of the stores a green cap which did not point to any specific school. I probably had to endure all sorts of comments about the cap because I left it at home after a while and went to school without any headgear.

In the Fair-City of Leipzig with its 750,000 inhabitants one did not notice much anti-Semitism. The International Fair of Leipzig was held twice every year and during this time "The Stümer" that filthy, inciting anti-Jewish rag disappeared temporarily from the news-stands. Leipzig was, among others, also known for its world-famous fur industry which was overwhelmingly owned by Jews. In downtown there was a quarter where one found mainly fur stores or businesses that processed fur. There I met with great astonishment a kind of Jew which had been completely unknown to me. Bearded Jews that wore long overcoats and whose German-similar language was spoken with lively gesticulations of their hands. As I learned later, these were Jews that had emigrated from Poland and Russia who spoke Yiddish.

In our class too there were many children whose parents were "Eastern Jews" as they were called. It occurred often that our teacher had to produce a list of students for the authorities. Time and again one of the questions was about the nationality of the parents. Like many other classmates I was proud to answer this question with "German" in contradistinction to the others who usually answered "Stateless" or "Polish".

A classmate, with whom I often walked back home, “roped me” into becoming a member of a youth organization. In this way I became a member of the Alliance of German-Jewish Youth¹³. For me that was a glorious time as I met many boys and girls during our den-meetings. We organized performances and went occasionally “auf Fahrt”, or long excursions. It was usually my task to write the report of the trips and when I read these epistles aloud I always reaped huge bouts of laughter.



Hans/Chanan Flörsheim (front left) in Leipzig 1935 together with his sister Edith (front right). In the rear to the right is Julius Flörsheim, next to him Aunt Lisl Bartmer, nee Katzenstein. At center is Uncle Karl Katzenstein. In the rear left, partly covered, is Paula Flörsheim, nee Katzenstein.

In 1934 we spent two weeks together with other German local branches of the organization on a campground at the Baltic. In short, I greatly liked these get-togethers. It would eventually greatly influence the course of my future life.

At this time we still noticed little of the coming storm. Our business flourished, dad learned to drive a car which eased for him and our other representatives the arduous carrying of the heavy sample cases. Thus we also had a car available on Sundays which we used for trips in the surroundings of the city.

I was at ease in school and brought home excellent report cards. We had both Jewish and Christian teachers. Of the latter only one ever uttered anti-Semitic remarks. Later this resulted in violent clashes with him particularly involving students of Eastern European parents.

¹³ The Alliance of German-Jewish Youth was founded in December of 1933 as a reaction to the situation of Jewish Youth Movements after 1933 by the merger of the German-Jewish Youth Organization (DJJG), Liberal Ili, Jewish Youth- and Children Troops, and C.V-Groups.

In the summer of 1935 we traveled with the car for a vacation, this time in the so-called “Saxonian Switzerland”¹⁴. On this occasion we also made a day-trip to the nearby city of Bodenbach in Czechoslovakia. For me this was the first time that I was in another country. Today I am no longer sure about the real objective of this trip because in Bodenbach we met Uncle Karl. I guess that my father had smuggled money into Czechoslovakia and had handed it to Karl.

In Leipzig I had a good friend who lived very close to our apartment. His name was Ali Schub. He was slightly older than me and he usually spent his summer vacations in a boarding school. He always returned with enthusiastic stories. Precisely for that reason I ached to spend my vacation at such a place. However, my parents did not want to hear anything about my plans and insisted, correctly as it turned out later, that I spend the summer vacation with our family. They explained that the parents of Ali did not get along too well and that they therefore never spent vacations together.

It was now the year 1936. In Berlin, at 170 kilometers from Leipzig the grand preparations for the Olympic Games were underway. I spent my summer vacation in Hamburg with relatives. My sister was in Emden.

The infamous Nuremberg Laws had already been in effect for one year. We were therefore obliged to fire our young maid. We were only allowed to replace her with a person older than forty-five¹⁵. Towards the end of that year I now and then overheard my parent’s conversations dealing with my future. Above all there seemed to be plans to send me abroad. The first idea was to send me to relatives of my mother in England but nothing came of that. Next in line were Holland and a school of Quakers in Ommen¹⁶. In the end the destination was Amsterdam where a cousin of my mother and her husband lived. Both agreed to take me in.

And so it came about that I quit the Carlebach School at Easter 1937 after four years. In May of that year I rode towards a new chapter of my life in the express train Leipzig-Amsterdam, accompanied by my Uncle Karl.

¹⁴Saxony was another “Land” of Germany (D.H.).

¹⁵This regulation reflected the schizoid Nazi notion that Chanan’s father was likely to impregnate a young and innocent girl but never an experienced 45-year woman (D.H.).

¹⁶A town in Eastern Netherlands (D.H.).

Amsterdam and Werkdorp Wieringen 1937-1941

I was now aged 14 and was far away from home for the first time in my life. Moreover, I was in a strange country and with family which I had not met until then. Berni was the cousin of my mother. She was married to Fritz Polak who had finished his legal studies in Germany in 1933 but was prohibited to work as an attorney owing to new Dutch legislation. Therefore both immigrated to Holland in 1935 which was easy because the parents of Fritz were Dutch nationals. Fritz had refused to become a Dutch national because of his intent to become an attorney in Germany. Both were about 33, had no children, and lived in a modest apartment in the southern part of Amsterdam. Fritz sold neckties to relatives and occasionally taught Dutch, also in circles of émigrés. Berni occasionally helped out in other households and did laundry for acquaintances. Therefore I was very welcome as a renter as they were well paid for my upkeep. At this time it was still possible to transfer money from Germany to Holland. Consequently a significant amount of funds came into the family budget every month.



Hans and Edith Flörsheim in 1937

For me the change was anything but easy. I had left an environment where I had known no wants and in which I had become accustomed to good living. Hence it was difficult for me to adapt to a new and more parsimonious environment in which every penny was turned over before it was spent. My relatives believed that they had to raise and educate me in lieu of my parents but that was not so simple because I had entered a very problematic age. Materially I had no wants because my monthly allowance of five guilders was quite ample for those days.

I went again to a Jewish High School and was assigned to a class in which one half of the students had German parents. Because it was May I had to remain in this freshman class until the end of the semester in July (in Germany the school year started at Easter). However, since I had not completed that year according to Dutch rules I had to repeat the freshman year beginning in September.

In the meantime it had become July. With great pleasure I anticipated the announced visit of my parents and my sister which in 1937 was still allowed. Together we spent two marvelous weeks in Zandvoort a city on the North Sea and some additional days in Amsterdam where they stayed in hotel “Krasnapolsky”. Then there came the obviously hard goodbye from my parents who had another two weeks of holidays at the Rhine River.



Hans Flörsheim with his mother and sister on vacation in Zandvoort in July 1937.

Thus I began my school year in September. The school was located in an old mansion on the Herengracht¹⁷ (a gracht is a canal; D.H.). However, even then there were already talks about an impending transfer to a more roomy building. Again there were many German-speaking students in my class but I had by now overcome the linguistic difficulties and could speak the new language pretty well.

Nevertheless, my best friends were of German descent. I was at ease in the metropolis and savored my independence in contradistinction to my friends who had to live with their parents.

For Chanukah I got a permit from the German consulate in Berlin to travel to Germany for a holyday. Thus I spent again two beautiful weeks in the cozy family circle in Leipzig.

Meanwhile it was 1938. The international political situation had become increasingly tense. Hitler had marched into Austria and soon it was the turn of the Sudetenland¹⁸. During the lengthy summer vacation I traveled home again. At a railroad

¹⁷ In Amsterdam a gracht is a canal (D.H.).

¹⁸ A western border region of Czechoslovakia (D.H.).

stop between Halle and Leipzig my father suddenly appeared in the railroad car. He had traveled a bit into my direction to surprise me, which he indeed did. The four of us traveled during the course of my vacation to Königswinter on the Rhine for a stay of a few weeks. This was actually the last time that we were together. The signs “Jews Unwanted” were already ubiquitous in the parks and pools. However, we ignored these because none of us looked like an obvious Jew.

In the course of the vacation there were occasional phone calls from Leipzig which occasionally worried my parents but we children were not informed of their contents.

For the beginning of the school year I returned to Amsterdam. I was quite surprised when my father appeared unannounced in Amsterdam. I was not told the reason of his trip but he proudly showed me some gold coins which he had smuggled across the border. It was the last time that I saw him. I believe that he sensed this because the parting on the stairs that morning when I had to go to school was particularly painful.

November came and it brought the Pogrom Night in Germany. My father was arrested with many other Jews and was sent to the concentration camp Buchenwald. He returned after six weeks, shaved bald and emaciated as my sister told me later. Nevertheless, our business continued. Brother Joseph who was a partner of the firm had already left for South Africa in 1936 which he managed to achieve smoothly because of his activities there during the First World War¹⁹.

My parents did not allow me to visit them again. They were unable to leave Germany because most countries had closed their borders to Jews. They had registered with the American Consulate in Berlin and obtained a number on the German quota²⁰. However, the demand for emigration to the USA was so great and the quota so small that there was little prospect for success.

Meanwhile Uncle Karl appeared in Amsterdam and with much effort obtained a residence permit. He rented a small room in our apartment and took care of my upkeep when the transfer of funds from Germany was no longer possible. Holland was overrun by Jewish refugees in those days. Most of those who were allowed to stay had to settle transiently in the specially furnished camp of Westerbork in north eastern Holland.

Our small apartment was further enriched with an additional guest. This time it was Berni's father who arrived from Adelebsen near Hannover. The apartment was now packed full but I was allowed to keep my own room.

¹⁹In 1919 Joseph Flörsheim had married the widow Else of his brother Willy who was killed in World War 1. Joseph Flörsheim died in 1969 in Johannesburg/South Africa where he had run a retail business together with his partner Samson (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

²⁰At this time every country of the world had an “immigration quota” that is to say a maximum number of its nationals that were allowed into the USA every year (D.H.).

In the summer of 1939 my parents managed to send my sister with a transport of children to England. Originally her travel was intended to proceed via Holland so that I expected to meet her. However, she traveled instead by ship from Hamburg to England²¹. In the meantime my friend Günter Wolff and I had concocted a plan for the summer vacation, namely a bike trip to Belgium and Luxemburg. It did not remain a plan and so we really departed by bike one day. The first night we spent with the father of a friend from Leipzig who lived in Rotterdam. Then we proceeded to Belgium. We first called on family of Günter in Antwerp where we stayed a few days. Then we biked on to Brussels to relatives of mine where we were frostily received and were unable to stay overnight. Eventually we ended up with acquaintances of Günter. Although they lived in a poor milieu of émigrés, in contradistinction to my relatives, we were warmly welcomed. From there we proceeded to the Ardennes mountains where we stayed overnight in Youth Hostels.

One morning, when we were in the small town of Rochefort my bike broke into two parts for unexplained reasons just when I was about to mount it. Repair was out of the question so I tied the pieces together and mailed the whole by rail to Amsterdam. I urged my friend to continue biking with a different group to Luxemburg which he did. I myself “lifted”, as hitch-hiking was called, back in the direction of Holland. That is how I arrived in Liege where, by chance, an international Boat Show was in progress. On the last leg to the border I got a lift from a slightly inebriated Dutchman who suddenly insisted to show me how one could cross the border without being checked. Of course I was not interested in his proposal as I had a valid passport. However, as I have already remarked, he was not fully sober.

Before we arrived at the border post we left the car and crossed the border on foot. The border guard in charge only asked whether we were Dutchmen. My companion answered yes and we next sat down in a pub. A little later he went back to fetch the car. I mention this episode on purpose because it was the first of my illegal border crossings. Additional and much more dangerous ones were to follow.....

Once back on Dutch soil I could not find quarters for that night. I was already preparing to spend the night outdoors in small woods when one of the children that were playing nearby observed my efforts to make a bivouac. It probably occurred to him to go home and report to his parents. The child returned later with an invitation to spend the night in their home which I gladly accepted.

Thus I returned safely to Amsterdam. The political situation had now reached a boiling point because of the Danzig and the Polish Corridor issues. September 1 arrived on which day the German armed forces marched into Poland.

Even today I remember how we stuck to the radio until we finally heard Chamberlain’s speech on September 3 in which he announced the much desired declaration of war on the Third Reich.

²¹Edith Flörsheim married in England and became the mother of two children. In 1968, following a second marriage, she moved with her American husband Williams to Austin, Texas where she still lives today in 2007.

With even more tenseness we followed the events which we thought ought to happen. However, to the disappointment of all of us we learned in the ensuing months only of minor fights in no-mans-land between the Maginot- and Siegfried Lines and, best of all, of the bombing of German cities in the Ruhrgebiet with propaganda pamphlets!

Impatiently we waited for something more tangible. Alas we were not allowed to wait for very long. Holland had mobilized its forces in the meantime but clung to the illusion that the country could remain neutral as it had succeeded to do during World War 1.

In April 1940 Hitler struck again and occupied Denmark and Norway. Then, on May 10 it was the turn of Holland and Belgium. During the early morning of this fateful day we all woke up by the unusually loud roar of low-flying airplanes and occasional explosions. People stood jittery at their windows and on balconies from which they anxiously scanned the skies. They had realized already what was happening as the radio kept us loudly informed.

German troops had marched into Holland! Everyone was greatly upset because they had somehow believed the German assurances of honoring Holland's neutrality. That very day the Dutch decree was promulgated that all German nationals had to remain permanently inside their apartments and homes. That also applied to us so we had no choice but to listen to the radio or read the newspaper to keep abreast of further developments. Everybody understood that the Dutch army had no chance to stop the Germans permanently but there was some hope that the Dutch could temporarily halt the enemy by inundating huge tracts of land. In addition one hoped for help from England. However, the inundations were easily overcome by German paratroopers.

In these first days we were forced to idleness. On the fourth day, when the inevitable outcome was imminent, we already dared to go into the street. Rumors circulated that it might be possible to escape by ship to England from the port of IJmuiden²². My relatives learned of this and instructed me to get us a taxi with which we intended to ride to IJmuiden. The plan appeared so absurd to me that I did not make much of an effort to find a taxi which was difficult anyway. I returned home without having achieved anything. Later it turned out how prescient I had been as thousands had tried this route of escape and thereby had totally clogged all roads to IJmuiden. When they nevertheless succeeded to reach their goal it was far from certain that they were able to board one of the anchored ships. And those lucky enough to succeed were then exposed at sea to aerial attacks by German warplanes which sank many of these ships.

The commander-in-chief of the Dutch army, General Winkelman announced the Dutch capitulation after the city of Rotterdam had been severely bombed. On the afternoon of the next day German troops marched into Amsterdam.

²²About 30 kilometers due west of Amsterdam (D.H.).

I could not refrain from attending this spectacle so I stood among the silently watching Dutch people and observed how first the motorbikes and then the trucks drove into the Noorder Amstellaan²³. Only a few persons here and there lifted their arms to bring the Hitler-salute.

Following the scares of the preceding days it was almost a relief to discover that life had resumed its almost normal daily course. Nothing of the street scenes had changed except for the singing groups of German soldiers that marched through the streets.

Until the end of the semester in July I returned to school. However, now it was obviously the time to make decisions about the near future of my life. I had completed three years of High School. This I might accept because I also could get a diploma for these years. Alternatively I could continue for two more years and graduate. In the end I decided for the first option as I had no plans to study. I wanted to follow an inner voice to realize an old dream.



Hans/Chanan Flörsheim as 16-year old student in Amsterdam 1939

In addition I noticed how many of my close acquaintances spared no effort to “resaddle” as it was called then for changing one’s profession and to learn a trade that would be useful if one were to emigrate.

Meanwhile I had obtained some information from a friend about the existence of a so-called “Werkdorp”²⁴ in the north of Holland where several hundred boys and girls, all about my age, learned about farming, horticulture, and other trades with the objective to emigrate later. This, however, was exactly what I had dreamt to do when I was still in Germany.

²³Street in the southern part of Amsterdam (D.H.).

²⁴Werkdorp/Werkdorf Wieringen: an encampment in the Wieringermeerpolder which aimed to train young persons from Germany and Austria to become farmers in about two years or to learn a trade again with the goal to emigrate abroad (Chanan Flörsheim).



Werkdorp Wieringen

My relatives supported my idea surely in part to get rid of me as a renter because it had become quite crowded in the small apartment with the birth of their first child, a daughter Ilse. Moreover it had become impossible to transfer funds from Germany, whence Uncle Karl had to provide the rent for both of us which was not easy because he did not have permanent employment. However, the acceptance by the Werkdorp also required some payment which drew out the negotiations for admittance.

One day we received notice from our relatives because they were no longer able to feed us for free and thus it was that Karl had to search for another place to stay. He soon found one with acquaintances that ran a bridge club. This kind of entertainment and pastime was then very popular in the circles of émigrés. Because my Uncle was a good card player he functioned in the club as a fourth hand when he was needed at a specific bridge-or skat table. From this activity we could live and have meals with the family Marx.

Summer had arrived. It was not easy to take leave of the school which I had attended with pleasure. I had two good school friends, Walter Hes and Hans Bloemendaal, with whom I continued to remain in contact. In the meantime I looked for a job which I found as a salesperson of cosmetics which I bought directly from the owner of the plant, an acquaintance. These goods I resold mostly to German émigrés whose addresses I obtained from a Mrs. Rosenberg of Frankfort who had access to a large circle of her acquaintances. In addition I biked through Amsterdam's to purchase English and American cigarettes. Because these cigarettes had become rare I was able to sell them with a good profit to the pampered smokers of the bridge club. Then, one day, my Uncle suggested that I take a permanent job. An acquaintance of his had a small workshop in the rear part of his house where he produced all sorts of bags for ladies, especially shopping bags. My task was to stamp square pieces of leather together with an older helper. These pieces were then sown together by the lady of the house until a bag was finished. It was really a laborious and boring job but, for the first time in my life I earned money, albeit not very much. Thus passed the summer and at the beginning of September I had to stand by and watch my friends return to school.

However, one day my Uncle told me that nothing stood in the way of my acceptance by the Werkdorp any longer as he had convinced their leaders that he was unable to pay the required sum.

And thus, one day in September, three boys, among whom he from whom I had acquired the whole idea, traveled first by train and then by bus to Northern Holland and into the Wieringermeer Polder, one of those Dutch polders that had been recovered from

the sea only 10 years ago. The entire polder was therefore a new land covered with brand-new individual farms and villages which soon grew into small towns.

After we had registered we were brought to the main building on whose first floor were located the dining room and kitchen and which had a long row of living-and bedrooms on the second floor. In a semi-circle around this building were the barracks in which most of the members of the Werkdorp lived. I was given a bed in a room of the main building because that area was set aside for the younger occupants and members of a Zionist Organization.

I forgot to mention that I had become a member of the Maccabi-Hazair Movement²⁵ during my last school year. With Maccabi I had spent many pleasant Saturday afternoons. In those days one debated very turgid topics which I did not understand very well.

Because I was a Zionist I was assigned into the better living quarters too. On the whole, the population consisted of about 300 boys and girls, all from either Germany or Austria. During the years 1938-1939 they had always been admitted with the condition that they would leave and emigrate after two years. In those years they all learned a trade which they might take up later either in Palestine or elsewhere. Approximately one half of the inhabitants of the Werkdorp prepared themselves for immigration to Palestine. They were set apart by their memberships in specific parties or movements of which there existed many in Zionism. The three novices of us were somewhat of an exception. We had arrived after finishing school in Amsterdam, could travel home every now and then and had large allowances, all privileges which the others did not have. I had to get used again to speaking German which was the lingua franca of the Werkdorp. Only few learned Dutch because that was solely needed for dealings with the Dutch foremen.

I loved the work in the garden to which I had been assigned. Our foreman was a neat guy who lived in a neighboring village. Soon winter came; the ground was frozen and covered with snow. Our main job then was to sort beans. I usually spent the evenings in one of the social rooms. Every movement had its own. I preferred the club room where the immediate neighbors of my bedroom used to hang out. They were members of the "Workmen"²⁶ of the Schomer-Hazair Movement²⁷. It was here that I made the acquaintance of comrades like Zippi Fränkel, Ernst Kahn, and Walter Posnansky with whom I would later spend the greatest part of my life. They were slightly older than me hence I did not get close to them then. However, in their club room there was always a pleasant atmosphere with interesting debates and gramophone music.

²⁵Middle-class liberal youth movement (Chanan Florsheim). The European "liberal" does not mean "socialist" but "middle-of-the-road" (D.H.).

²⁶Originally the German-Jewish tour-group "Comrades". Following the split in 1932 they called themselves "Workmen" because of their aim to immigrate to Palestine. They founded the kibbutz Hasorea (Chanan Florsheim).

²⁷Leftist Zionist Youth Movement (Chanan Florsheim).



Ernst Hirsch (called Willy)

Spring came and we could finally work outside again. Of the German occupation we noticed little if anything. Nevertheless we were concerned because in the meantime, Hitler had conquered most of Europe, had divided Poland together with the USSR, and there always remained the danger of his invading England.

And now the day of March 20, 1941 had come. Towards 11 o' clock a.m. we suddenly heard the loud bell signal which was always used for announcing the beginning or end of our work periods. Suspecting that nothing good was going to happen we all went to the square in front of the main building where Germans in uniform and civvies awaited us. We were ordered to go into the dining hall where we were given the command: "Men to the left; women to the right!"

We all feared the worst, namely transport to a concentration camp. Instead we were told that the Werkdorp would be evacuated and that we were given five minutes time to pack our belongings. We ran to our bedrooms and after that we had to form rows outside. There was a dull silence until our director, Abel Herzberg, stepped out to introduce himself to the German Leader of the town. He was, however, harshly silenced. Meanwhile one of the Dutch foremen had become courageous enough to explain to the Germans that one could not simply abandon the animals and the entire farm like snap. That they also understood and after a short consultation among themselves they allowed 60 inhabitants to remain in the Werkdorp. Every foreman was allowed to select a number of workers from his specialty. Now it was the turn of our foreman named Slabbekoorn. As he walked by me he selected me too. I was more than happy that I could leave the rows and return to my room. I did not understand why I had been selected because I had worked with him in horticulture only a few months. However, I did not have much time to ponder this question. Later we stood at the windows to witness how our comrades had to board the buses which then drove away.

Once again we could heave a sigh of relief! After this setback we returned to our daily tasks. We had been reduced to an intimate circle and considered ourselves one big family.

Later rumors made the rounds that all of the evacuees might come back because it was assumed that the Germans were greatly interested not to disturb their supply of agrarian products. However, nothing came of it. Just the reverse happened! At that time there occurred in Amsterdam an explosion in a club for German officers and as a reprisal Jews were hunted. Since the German authorities had been given a list of former "Werkdorpers" for the objective of their return, they used this list of exact addresses to

arrest many of them too. A few hundred former “Werkdorpers” were picked up and sent to the concentration camp Mauthausen. A few weeks later we learned of the first deaths in that camp.

During my first visit to Amsterdam after this event my relatives told me that I had been searched at their address. However, the policemen were given the correct answer, namely that I was still in Werkdorp Wieringen. Evidently I had been lucky this time around! As it was realized that there was no future for the Werkdorp it was decided to disband and close the place before the Germans would do that anyway. I had two options: either to join a Dutch farm to continue my agrarian education or to join a community in the city of Gouda which occupied itself mainly with horticulture.

I decided for the second option and left the Werkdorp in August forever with two others, Erich Sander and Ernst Goldstein. With them I traveled to Gouda.

Gouda 1941-1943

The community we found there consisted of about 25 boys and girls in the age group 16-17 hence slightly younger than me but much younger than Ernst who was already 27. It was Ernst who adapted the quickest to the new conditions. Around the house, which was a kind of small villa there stretched a parcel of land on which the pupils of a Dutch foreman labored. They usually grew all sorts of vegetables which was common all around Gouda. The commune was led by the couple Manfred and Schuschana Litten. He, a German intellectual, cared for our spiritual and cultural education and Schuschana, a Dutch woman from Amsterdam, acted as housemother and she often pleased us with her beautiful voice, accompanied on piano by Ernst.



Schuschana Litten

The two of us soon decided to become independent as it was difficult to adjust to the significant age difference with the other persons. Gouda was a relatively small city which was world famous for its cheese. It had a small Jewish community with its synagogue which I visited every now and then, and an old folk's home which will play its role later on.

We soon got separate jobs with two breeders of flowers who also happened to be brothers. One, for whom I worked, cultivated flowers in fields or in hothouses whereas

the other brother had a flower shop in town and only bred flowers on the side. We were glad that we had a life of our own and to have our private incomes. I rented a room from a Jewish family. I soon got to know boys and girls of my own age.

Although the battlefields of the war were, in fact, far away it was Hitler's successes in Russia which turned all of us pessimistic. One always hoped for a counterstroke of the Allies in the form of a second front but that was a long time coming. Nevertheless I felt OK in Gouda. I was aged 18 and life seemed beautiful with its flirtations and disappointments as it should be. It was only the concern for my parents in Germany that cast its shadow on these idylls.

My father had been arrested again under some pretense. Once I received a postcard from him whose contents presaged what would actually happen soon thereafter: during the month of December I received the sad news from my mother that he had died of cardiac arrest. This cause of death was in those days the common ruse of the Nazis to disguise their crimes²⁸.



Tombstone of grandfather Jacob Katzenstein (on the right) and grandmother Nanny, nee Lange (on the left) on the Jewish cemetery of Rotenburg an der Fulda. Also a memorial plaque for the murdered parents Julius Flörsheim and Paula Flörsheim, nee Katzenstein.

²⁸Following the pogroms of November Julius Flörsheim was briefly incarcerated in the concentration camp Buchenwald. He was arrested again on February 13, 1939 and was locked up until 1940 in the penitentiary Waldheim. Lastly, on June 10, 1941 he was arrested in Leipzig on the alleged "crime against regulations of the war economy". On July 15, 1941 he was deported to the concentration camp Sachsenhausen where he was murdered on December 11, 1941 (Brigitte-Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

Our Mother in Leipzig had been forced to leave her large home and had moved to a smaller apartment, also in an upscale area where all Jews were concentrated. At the beginning of 1942 I received the news that she had been deported together with many other Jews from Leipzig to Riga²⁹.



*Dutch version of the „Jewish Star“
of September 1941.*

Holland had remained relatively quiet until the summer. For sure, we all had to wear the yellow “Jewish Star” (actually the Star of David of course, henceforth named “Star”) but that did not bother us. One had also become used to other restrictions such as the forbidden use of parks and swimming pools. The situation changed precipitously in July of 1942. Thousands of Jews in Amsterdam suddenly received the command that they had to appear at the Central Railroad Station of Amsterdam on July 15 for transportation to work in the “East”. Only a very restricted amount of luggage could be taken along. Huge penalties were threatened for non-compliance.

In the beginning people did not understand what this portended. Work? The young people especially thought that they could manage and they wanted to show them that Jews could also do heavy labor. Many obeyed the command for that reason. However, most of us did not trust this business hence did not obey the command. This, in turn, had the consequence that the “missing numbers” were replenished by big Razzias in the evenings when most Jews were at home³⁰. The deportation went first to camp Westerbork and from there to Eastern Europe.

²⁹Paula Flörsheim nee Katzenstein was deported from Leipzig to Riga on January 21, 1942 where she died on July 4, 1944 (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn).

³⁰During a typical Razzia, several apartment blocks were sealed off by soldiers of the German army. Military vehicles with loudspeakers then drove through the streets blaring that all people had to stay away from the windows of their apartments and that all Jews had to come into the streets with their restricted luggage. Subsequently, armed members of the Sicherheits Dienst (SD), Dutch policemen, and occasionally German army soldiers combed all apartments and houses for hidden Jews. The nature of camp Westerbork had changed from a place where Jewish refugees from abroad were transiently housed before entering Dutch society to a place where arrested Jews were temporarily housed before being sent to Eastern Europe in most cases to Auschwitz Birkenau. The German text uses the word “Sammellager”, literally “Collecting Camp”, for which there does not exist a good English equivalent (D.H.).

However, the actions did not remain restricted to a single call for deportation and labor. It was followed by many more especially in Amsterdam where most of the Dutch Jews lived. That resulted in a mood of panic. Everyone tried to evade deportation. This was often possible if one could obtain a special stamp in the ID declaring one was “exempted from deportation for work”. This stamp was routinely obtained by persons that worked for the various Jewish authorities. Consequently, the bureaucracy of the “Joodse Raad”- the Jewish Support Agency” swelled greatly. There were others who were not only very courageous but who had access to relations and funds to simply “disappear” from “the surface” and “dived under” as it was called (see also footnote 2) but they were a minority. Most lived from now on with full backpacks in their apartments and houses and with great fears especially in the evening and at night and nobody knew when the bell would toll for them to begin the road to camp Westerbork. Nobody in those days dared to fathom the criminal enormity of that “road”.

22. Juni 1942

Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei
und des SD

IV B 4 a - 3233/41g (1a05)

Berlin SD 11, den 22. Juni 1942.

140

1942.

Schnellbrief

Geheim

An das
Auswärtige Amt,
s.Hd. von Herrn Legationsrat Rademacher,
Berlin.

Betrifft: Arbeitseinsatz von Juden aus Frank-
reich, Belgien und den Niederlanden. *Hy 772g*
1 km

Besagt: Fernmündl. Besprechung am 20.6.42.

Es ist vorgesehen, ab Mitte Juli bzw.
Anfang August d.Jr. in täglich verkehrenden
Sonderzügen zu je 1.000 Personen zunächst etwa
40.000 Juden aus dem besetzten französischen
Gebiet, 40.000 Juden aus den Niederlanden und
10.000 Juden aus Belgien zum Arbeitseinsatz in
das Lager Auschwitz abzubefördern.

Der zu erfassende Personenkreis er-
streckt sich zunächst auf arbeitsfähige Juden,
soweit sie nicht in Mischehe leben und nicht
die Staatsangehörigkeit des Britischen Empire,
der USA, von Mexiko, der mittel- und südamerika-
nischen Feindstaaten sowie der neutralen und
verbündeten Staaten besitzen.

Ich darf um gefällige Kenntnisnahme
bitten und nehme an, daß auch seitens des Aus-

K210150

261423

Directive of June 22, 1942 from Adolf Eichmann to the Foreign Ministry about the planned deportation of Jews from France, The Netherlands and Belgium to Auschwitz (source: Homeland and Exile Emigration of German Jews after 1933. Publisher: the Foundation of the Jewish Museum Berlin; Frankfurt/M, page 65).

FEBRUARY 1943 IN GOUDA: *"I DO NOT WANT TO GO!"*

As usual there was a quiet before the storm. Those of us that had not yet been arrested by the police of Gouda and deported to Westerbork prepared ourselves inwardly for something to happen soon. In the meantime one had acquired a fifth sense for such things but this was not even necessary because it was certain that something bad would happen after about three months of quiet.

At this time I hovered between two decisions. The old folk's home had been protected against intrusions and it had been, at least in theory, hermetically sealed from the outside world because of an alleged epidemic of dysentery. Should I leave it or stay? Or should I move back to my room in the Sophiastraat and just wait and see until the whole situation had become clearer? Everyone knew that at the end of the terrible journey there was some kind of camp but the real conditions were then still unknown to us.

I must admit: every day I lived in fear that I would also have to take the road of the many thousands of Jews. However, I seemed to belong to a kind of persons who are filled with a remarkable and unexplainable spirit of determination when it came to making major decisions. It is debatable whether that was a good or bad characteristic. It was certainly a healthy brand of determination in any case. I did not want to go to Poland come hell or high water! I do not remember when this thought occurred to me for the first time; I only know that "Dear God make sure that I will not be deported" hammered my brain time and again. With my naïve trust I left the execution to my Protector who had safeguarded me until now. It then came to light that my name, owing to a strange coincidence, did not occur on the list for deportations of the Gouda police. What for much money or diamonds could not have been achieved had fallen by great luck into my lap! I never needed to fear that I would be suddenly arrested. Nevertheless it did not mean that I was totally safe. I might be present if the old folk's home would be suddenly and totally evacuated hence I preferred to stay in my home. Also one might be picked up in the street as all of us had to wear the "Star" even if one did not look very "Jewish" like me. Finally, it was always possible that all homes in which Jews lived would be searched and the inhabitants would be arrested and deported. Therefore, I really had absolutely no reason to feel safer than the others.

In the end I decided to stay with my current job because it was the best distraction. At night I slept at home again. During the winter months on account of the miserable weather I remained day and night in the old folk's home, about a good half hour walking from my room. Meanwhile the watchword was: wait, wait, and wait some more. However, in the end, the constant waiting made me nervous so that I thought: one must not so passively sit around and rely on the good Lord, but try to steer fate oneself, inasmuch as that is possible.

It was in those days of February during which I began to dream, when I did not have the evening shift, how beautiful (I do not know a different word that represents these feelings) it would be to live now in freedom, that is to say to be in some neutral country to be rid of these constant fears and to breathe again, really breath deeply and free. It seemed to me that that ought not to be totally impossible. For instance, the woman who ran the home had received word from close friends of hers that they had arrived well and safely in Switzerland. I stood near her when she read us from the card and had the

feeling as if some people from the Moon had sent us a message. That was my first and overpowering impression.

Next I pondered how these people had managed to get from Holland into Switzerland. Well, for that one needed above all much, much money and relations. To succeed it was not enough to be 19 and have the firm will not to fall into the hands of the Germans. For some leisurely hours I basked in the thought that I would be able to succeed too but where would I find the money and, above all, the relations? No, I said to myself, when the chips are down there would be only one thing left, namely to go to Poland despite my strong aversion. And thus I was not a little depressed during the next days particularly when I learned from Lilo Spiegel that several Chawerim, among whom also Adina had succeeded to reach Switzerland³¹. That was it!

What the devil! Everybody seems to get to Switzerland. Recently my friend Günter Wolf from Amsterdam and even more recently Rolf Schloss the leader of the Youth Organization in Gouda. Why would I not be able to succeed too? Luckily the permit to travel two days to Amsterdam which I had requested had been granted. How wonderful to be able to leave, albeit transiently, this narrow-minded provincial town which I had nevertheless taken into my heart. I planned to leave Saturday morning and return on Sunday evening.

Lilo gave me a letter which I was supposed to deliver to her friends somewhere in Amsterdam. I deliberately mention this letter, which was itself a triviality, because of the simple fact that it was to become the cornerstone of my future. How's that saying again? Small causes, huge consequences!

The Tolstraat where I had to deliver is located in a section of Amsterdam where many Jews live³². The quarter was quite ugly and had no outstanding features. It had been developed after World War One. When I finally got to my destination I rang the bell. It took quite some time before someone opened the door which was a common practice in Jewish homes because one first made sure, by hook or by crook, that it was not the dreaded Grüne Polizei or the black Dutch militia at the door³³. The situation in Amsterdam was then a veritable pandemonium. Every evening hundreds of Jews who were not protected by the notorious stamp which exempted them from deportation to German slave labor were hauled from their dwellings. One could expect sudden Razzias, or new decrees, in short everything possible and impossible. One was never sure to be able to sleep in peace, especially in Amsterdam. For example, those who held their heads high because they believed themselves safe might be in Westerbork two days later to beg relatives or friends to send them food packages.

³¹Chawer, plural Chawerim means Comrade, Friend. Lilo Spiegel, the housekeeper of the old folk's home was my source of such news (Chanan Florsheim).

³²At a stone's throw distance from the address where Chanan delivered the letter was the huge diamond factory of Asscher & Co where many Jews had worked. I do not know whether it was still in business at this time (D.H.).

³³Grüne Polizei or Green Police was the regular German police force but they were feared for their brutality. It is not clear to me what "Dutch militia" means. The uniform of the Dutch fascist party (NSB) was black but so was the uniform of the regular Dutch police and of some terrorist offshoots of the NSB such as the "Black Front". All of these participated in the rounding up of Jews (D.H.).



Kurt Hannemann

I never praised myself in vain that I had lived in Gouda, where one relied for everything on hearsay during these days of terror against the Jews. Another one of these “mazzels” which I truly wholly valued! And so I ascended the steep and seemingly endless stairs. Who would stand there at the top but Kurt Hannemann³⁴ whom I had not seen again following the closure of Werkdorp Wieringen.

Following our “hello” I told him briefly where I lived and what I did and gave him the letter for Lilo’s friend who obviously lived with him. He brought me to the room of the fellow who was in bed with jaundice. Thus I made the acquaintance of Harold Simon. His first name was Henk now and that was all I was told. Nevertheless I knew that he was an illegally hiding Chawer relying on falsified papers which, suddenly occurred to me, was precisely what I was looking for and so I began to quiz him more closely.

When he answered only evasively I began to understand that one should not ask too much in such situations. Hence I told him about Gouda and about Lilo Spiegel and asked him later if he could give me some advice of how I could start my own illegal hiding. He said that it would be better to ask Kurt Hannemann about that because he had no knowledge about this matter. Soon I said goodbye to him after he had given me his answer for Lilo. I found Kurt in another room along with lots of persons of my age none of whom I knew with the exceptions of Lore Sieskind and Ludi Goldwein from Maccabi Hazair in Amsterdam. I asked Kurt for a moment of a private meeting and asked him the same question that I had posed Harald.

³⁴Kurt Hannemann was one of the collaborators and friends of Schuschu (Joachim) Simon, the moving spirit of the resistance. He was murdered at Auschwitz in 1944 (Chanan Florsheim).

Even today I remember that he did not respond much and his attitude discouraged me. Surely I must not be the only pleader and if I had not known him I would have lost all courage. I had the impression that he listened to me with only half an ear. However, that was exactly like him with his bony and pale face. In any event, he promised me that I would hear from him after he had asked a few technical details about me. Thus I could have been satisfied but I did not really understand what he meant by “Hear from me”. The remainder of the day I spent with my relatives Bernie and Fritz and the only friend remaining from school times, Hans Bloemendal. This I repeated on Sunday. I returned home to Gouda with a sigh of relief when I had left the Amstel Railroad Station³⁵ behind me.

The daily task of helpmate claimed much of my time again. As the situation continued to remain calm I became more optimistic and, on occasion, lost the sense of imminent danger. Furthermore I learned of acquaintances who “had disappeared from the surface” (went into hiding) one day. One also learned about persons who had “reappeared on the surface” simply because they had been apprehended by the police. That was not rare given the extensive German surveillance network in Holland with its numerous controls. Whenever I learned about someone that had “disappeared” I reminisced about my visit to the Tolstraat in Amsterdam because I had not heard anything from Kurt Hannemann since then. On the other hand, whenever an acquaintance was caught I praised my luck that I lived a fully legal life. But hold your breath, they had not forgotten me. One day when I was busy cleaning the large cooking vessel at the old folk’s home; I noticed that Lilo, the housekeeper, was called outside. I had a hunch that a visitor had come for me. Lilo soon reappeared and asked me to come outside too. There I was confronted by a blond fellow, a really so-called Aryan type, whom I had once seen before during a visit at Lilo’s.

We began to talk and he told me that he needed my exact personal details. He inquired how an identification document might eventually be paid for. I told him that my Uncle would cover the costs. Norbert, that was his name, wrote everything conscientiously down. He was in a great hurry and left soon. Now my plan seemed to take concrete form. I rejoiced silently. Apparently it was enough when Kurt Hannemann listened with only one ear and an absent-minded face! I was so elated that I did not know what to do next! I had almost stopped believing in the possibility of “disappearing”. After all, it had been so quiet lately; almost too quiet.

³⁵The Amstel Railroad Station was the last station in Amsterdam where Jew-snatchers could have entered the train (D.H.).

JUMP INTO UNCERTAINTY.

I cannot describe the feeling when I walked in the street for the first time without the “Star”. Luckily it was early in the morning and I encountered only single workmen on the way to their jobs. The empty spot on my left breast seemed to possess magic power and attract everyone’s stares; at least that was what I imagined. I felt like a thief after his first heist. The most dangerous spot was always at the railroad station because one never knew whether it was guarded. However I ascended to the platform without hindrance. Even though I had begun to like Gouda after almost two years I breathed a sigh of relief when the train began to move. I cast a last melancholy glance at the well-known sights. Soon we raced past meadows and fields on which the young shoots were already appearing.

During the past weeks everything had actually proceeded very fast, almost programmatically so. One day Norbert arrived and delivered my false ID card. It was funny that I soon would be known as Hendrik Westerman. My profession was supposed to be that of a bricklayer and I was about one and one half year younger than my real age. The only thing that I still had to practice regularly was to write my new signature as if it had always done that. At the same time Norbert gave me a valid travel permit for four weeks which I could instantly use as a Jew to escape by train in case of some danger.

If something should happen, which could be anticipated any day, he said, I should come to Amsterdam to the Tolstraat from where I would be “expedited along”, as Hanemann expressed himself. This was not bad at all but the motto was still “watch out” so that one would not be arrested, especially if something would happen at the old folk’s home.

I thought that it might be better not to work there any longer, hence I quit. I felt that I was considered somewhat of a traitor there, to use a rough expression. However, I made no bones letting them know that I had absolutely no desire to end up in Westerbork. An agreement was reached that the old folk’s home would be warned by phone if any action against it was imminent such that everyone who wanted to flee could do so. In reality only three of the twelve employees opted for that action. Meanwhile I helped out at friends, the family Kahn, during all of March with spring house cleaning for Easter. However, towards the end of the month, when the job was finished, I started working part time at the old folk’s home again.

They were obviously short of personnel as several colleagues had “disappeared”. Beginning on the third of April I worked there again all day. However, I was constantly on guard. Whenever the doorbell rang one first checked who was at the door.

Something was bound to happen because not only were all of such homes in the surrounding cities of The Hague, Rotterdam and Utrecht evacuated, in all of Holland only the homes in Amsterdam and Gouda had been spared. Authoritative Jewish sources in Amsterdam had reported that our house in Gouda had actually been scheduled for evacuation quite some time ago.

As I have already stated, everything progressed well on schedule. It was April 9, 1943.



Norbert

That was a Friday evening and we had just sat down for dinner-it might have been six o'clock- when our director, Sara Texeira de Mattos, came to the kitchen and told us that an "action" was to start in about thirty minutes. I first did not react at all and continued to spoon down the good chicken soup. Only then did I begin to realize the seriousness of the situation. I jumped up with the well-known strange feeling in my stomach which always occurred to me in the case of sudden danger. Everybody was, of course, very anxious. I ran to the wardrobe, fetched my overcoat, not seeing or hearing anything around me, and did not calm down until I had distanced myself from the home by a few hundred meters. Later I regretted that I had failed to say goodbye to the others because of my precipitous departure.

I went home and waited while I tried to eat something. Just when I was about to go out and obtain some information on what had happened in the city I noticed that police rang the doorbell of my Jewish neighbors. I immediately knew what that portended. For a moment I was totally out of my wits. I was governed by only one thought: leave, get away from here!

I settled some technical details with my landlord who was protected because he was married to a gentile woman, and left the house via the backyard so that I did not have to go into the street. I instinctively covered the "Star" with my hand. I did not yet have the courage to remove it altogether. I do not remember where I walked during the next half hour. In any case I reproached myself that I had not made any provisions for such an eventuality by arranging for a provisory shelter in time. Now the situation had become critical. Eight o'clock was approaching which meant that we Jews had to be inside. In the meantime I aimlessly walked about not knowing where to turn. The worst was that it was not yet sufficiently dark to remain and hide somewhere outside. Finally the thought came to me to go to a former workmate from the nursery to stay for only one or one and one half hours. I did not know the people who were there but my acquaintance, as I had expected, was at home. These people talked only about trivial issues. However, when I mentioned the purpose of my visit they all fell into an embarrassing silence. Papa and the owner of the house did not want to help me but his wife and daughter attempted to change his mind and the son, my acquaintance, stood aside slightly embarrassed by it all. I stood next to him with a feeling of helplessness that I had not known during all of my life until now. Now what? It was a desperate situation. It was already a quarter past eight

and I did not have a hiding place yet. If I went back into the street I could be recognized by someone who wished to harm me, despite the covered “Star”. It was not hard to recognize the few Jews that had remained in Gouda at that time. Suddenly, after I had wandered around aimlessly for a while, I remembered the name of a black market provider of butter. His house was located very close by. After I had made sure that there were no customers in his house I entered and advanced my request to be allowed to spend about one hour in his barn. He understood very well what it was about and allowed me to stay. He lit a kerosene lamp in the dark front room of the barn and showed me the spot where I might sit most conveniently. I heaved a sigh of relief. Here I could safely sit and wait until it got dark outside. Then I could go home to ease my joint. Time passed slowly. From afar I heard a muted conversation.

When his customer finally left, he came and surprised me by scanning my room with a flashlight. Of course I was frightened as I could not explain why he did that. Then he left.

Finally it was sufficiently dark outside to dare going into the street. My black marketer offered me a place for the night on a bale of straw. I told him that I did not know yet whether I would accept. By way of thanks I handed him several cigarettes.

After I had cautiously explored the situation I swiftly went into the street. First I walked by the rear window of my room to appraise whether the police had been looking for me. My landlord and I had agreed before I left that he would leave the door of the balcony open as a clear sign of safety. When I did not notice this I heaved another sigh of relief. Only then did I go inside to learn that not a soul had come and asked for me. Hence I had escaped danger, at least for the time being. Of course I did not sleep very well because there was always the danger that one might be arrested in the middle of the night.

The next morning I went into town to learn what had actually happened. It exceeded all of my fearful suspicions. Every Jew who was not married to a gentile had been arrested and only very few families had been overlooked. I was congratulated that I had been so lucky.

The old folk’s home was guarded. Eyewitnesses reported how horrible the scenes had been during the evacuation. Only few of my colleagues had fled. I was unemployed. The next few days I lingered in bed in the mornings, spent the daytime with shopping and strolling, ate well, and helped out now and then at the understaffed city hall where I mainly operated the telephone service. Thus I also learned why I had been spared. City councilor Eli van der Hoeden had discovered during a visit to police headquarters that I had not been registered there as a Jew! What an unexpectedly lucky gift!

But what good was that for me? A few days later I fetched the evening newspaper from the mailbox. It reported the latest decree which gave me the same fright when, one year ago, the decree about the mandatory wearing of the “Star” had been promulgated.

This time it dealt with the evacuation of all Jews from all Dutch provinces before April 23rd. Every Jew had to report at the concentration camp of Vught³⁶. That was a blow for all who were still free even though one was by now prepared for such eventualities. However, nobody had expected the decree to come before the month of May. Now I had to “disappear”. The thought to obey this decree never entered my mind. It was a Saturday. The deadline would be on the following Friday. On Tuesday I decided to leave Gouda forever.....

All of this raced through my mind as I sped towards Utrecht in a fast diesel-train. I felt freer by not wearing the restrictive “Star” but I was not yet really relieved. I considered carefully what my answer should be in the case of a control. Frightening scenes about arrests passed regularly through my mind. At last I arrived in Amsterdam at 8:30 A.M.



Kurt Reilinger?

I immediately went to the apartment of Hannemann whose address I had obtained from Schoschanna Litten. Hannemann let me cool my heels for a while, then asked me to meet him later at the J.C.B. (Jewish Center for Employment) ³⁷. My relatives were astounded when I visited them so much an “Aryan”. Later I went to the J.C.B where there was a lively coming and going of the legal and illegal world. I met several acquaintances and time was passed with lots of chatting. There I also met again with my friend Marcel Leister who had escaped too from the old folk’s home. After a sheer endless wait-it must have been about 2 P.M.-I was able to talk with Hannemann. He had already given up on me because he had not had any news from me during all of this time.

³⁶The concentration camp of Vught, also known as camp Hertogenbosch, was located in the Netherlands province of Noord Brabant. Its inmates were Jews, resistance fighters, black marketers, prostitutes, Jehova’s witnesses, etc.

³⁷One of those agencies whose task was job retraining. The leadership of the illegal resistance held its meetings in its building. It was a meeting place for the legal as well as the illegal Chalutzim (Chanan Florsheim).

Someone had been in Gouda once and had left a message that I should come to Amsterdam, except that the message did not say where I should go. In any event, Hannemann did not know where he could house me, not even during the coming week because there was an enormous amount of work that needed to be done. Everyone wished to hide and there were not enough addresses for all. I should return at 7 o'clock that evening. Perhaps he would know more then. When I arrived he had no housing for me. I then decided to obtain a shelter by myself. I made an appointment with him for the next morning.

My relatives were too frightened to let me spend the night with them. Another friend might have a shelter for me but he was so angry about the whole scene that I decided to return to Gouda to spend the night there in my old place.

At exactly eleven P.M. I rang the bell of my landlord who clasped his hands in fear. He was quite angry at me but had to let me enter anyway. I promised to disappear very early the next morning. Thus I slept restlessly on an unmade bed and among untidy disorder.

The next morning brought a repetition of the preceding one, 24 hours ago. This time I even missed my train connection. I had to pass thirty agonizing minutes on the platform in full daylight. Towards noon I talked again with Hannemann. He gave me an address but warned me that he was not certain that I would be able to rent there. On the way over I constantly told myself: I must succeed! Evidently I could not return to Gouda again for the night. I was lucky! A pleasant woman³⁸ opened the door and within three minutes everything was settled. Now I knew at least where I could sleep at night. I had counted on a sojourn of only a few days because Hannemann had mentioned the prospect of a shelter in the countryside.

Thus I settled in the attic room which I was to share with a student³⁹. The days turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months. The illegal time in Amsterdam which had begun so seemingly empty and useless later became eventful and even productive. For full board I paid three guilders per day and I lived in a nice and friendly milieu.

³⁸The address was Argonautenstraat 19A. The pleasant woman was Mrs. Erika Heymann, a German socialist who had fled Nazi Germany in July of 1933 with her two children. Beginning in 1934 she ran a boardinghouse. Her Jewish husband had been arrested in April of 1933 and was at this time in the concentration camp Auschwitz-Monowitz (D.H.).

³⁹Abraham (Ab) Keijzer, a Dutch Jew whose false ID listed his occupation as „student“ (D.H.).



Mrs. Heymann, Sonja, and Dieter

The first fortnight was a severe test of my nervous system. I could hardly screw up my courage to stroll for a couple of hours during daylight time. It seemed that everyone stared at the spot where the “Star” had once been. In the evening after eight I really did not dare to go outside, let alone use the tram or go to a movie. I shed my inhibitions only bit by bit to venture into town during the day, to attend concerts, visited shops to my heart’s content, and soon I moved about like one who had never worn the “Star”.

During the following months I was more an observer than a participant. I experienced the preparations, failures, and successes of escapes of Chawerim, be it to France or Germany. Hannemann had to “disappear” also. By-and-by Kurt Reilinger⁴⁰ assumed the leadership of the illegal movement. Powerful decrees were promulgated against the Jews that still lived in Amsterdam and thousands were again on their way to camp Westerbork.

⁴⁰Kurt Reilinger (Nanno) was also active in the French resistance. He was arrested in 1944, survived, but was hit and killed by a truck in Holland in 1945 (Chanan Florsheim).

There were also Razzias like the huge one on June 20. On that morning I was awakened by the shrill loudspeakers of the trucks of the “Grüne Polizei”. Soon thereafter the real Razzia began. Police and others came into the homes to check ID’s and search for forbidden items or persons. My roommate and I paused anxiously while our landlady achieved wonders with her German passport⁴¹.

Only much later that morning did I observe what was happening outside: the barrier-cordons, the areas where he arrested people were forced to congregate, then the transportation away by streetcar.

As time went by I became more active in that I began to help the illegal organization in a modest way. My relatives also “disappeared”. Then there was the catastrophe of the arrest of the two activists Gideon and Norbert. Kurt had gone to France with Leo Schwarzschild the news of whose arrival in Switzerland was received three weeks later.



Gideon

Hence Lore Durlacher was the only person left behind to do all of the illegal work and I assisted her to the best of my ability. Then there arrived the sad day of the fifth of September, the day which terminated my cozy time and shelter with the Heymann’s.

⁴¹The full story is even more other-worldly. Until about 1938, Mrs. Heymann had actually rented the apartments on the third and fourth floors for her boarding house. Each apartment came with its own attic room. From 1938 until about mid-1942 the third floor had been rented by the Jewish couple Cohen who, unfortunately, obeyed the call for work “in Eastern Europe”. That apartment was then assigned by German authorities to the widow of an important but deceased member of the Dutch Nazi party. Mrs. Heymann had indeed succeeded to make the first group of soldiers who had ascended to her apartment’s entry door to go away by showing them her German passport and by answering with “only my two children who are asleep” to the question “who else lives here”. Apparently the fascist lady dropped a hint to check Mrs. Heymann’s attic room to the soldiers when these descended the stairs past her apartment. Now the “Grüne Polizei” came and wanted to see Mrs. Heymann’s attic room. Fortunately the fascist lady had not come along with them and by sheer luck Mrs. Heymann still had the key to HER attic room! Cool as a cucumber she opened the door to that room which was located next to that in which Chanan and Ab were huddled! There were no young men in that room and the police left satisfied! A serendipitous by-product was probably that the fascist lady now believed that the two boys in the attic room could not be Jewish (D.H.).

My hidden relatives with whom I had lived during my school days had been kicked out for about two days by their landlady who had evidently become uptight for some unknown reason. That was on Saturday the fourth of September. We were just eating dinner when the relatives and their small daughter came upstairs in a dither and begged Mrs. Heymann to give them shelter for that night. Actually no person except for Norbert, Gideon, Kurt, and Lore knew where I was living but my relatives had begged me to give them the address in case I was late in delivering the food stamps which I regularly provided for them. Thus they could reach me but only in case of the utmost urgency. And so they had appeared totally unhinged. I had to argue long and convincingly with Mrs. Heymann. She only agreed in the end because her two children, Dieter and Sonja, were not in Amsterdam for the weekend⁴². Thus my relatives were allowed to stay that night.

I immediately rode my bike across town that evening to find shelter for them for the next night but without success. My attempts during the following day were equally in vain. I pedaled around all day on Lore's bike but I found nothing for them. I returned exhausted at three P.M. and planned to ride and search again at some later time. I was just about to leave the apartment when the doorbell rang. I called Mrs. Heymann who was sunbathing on the flat part of the roof and asked her to open the main front door two flights downstairs. Although I had already pressed the electric door opener once the door had failed to open. Hence I went downstairs to open the door myself manually. Meanwhile Mrs. Heymann had pressed the door opener and this time it had worked. Thus it came about that four grim-faced men accosted me as I was descending the stairs. I pretended to be unaware and tried to pass them to leave the house. At the first glance I knew exactly who they were. However, they blocked my exit and thus I returned upstairs where, at the entrance door to the apartment, I overheard the following dialog between the men and Mrs. Heymann. "Heymann"? "Yes, that is me". "German Police"! "ID documents"! I had entered the apartment in the meantime and was totally witless. I was engulfed by a terrible fear. So, that is the end of it!

The pulse in my temple throbbed and my knees trembled. The right back pocket of my pants still contained ten sheets of food stamps and the left pocket contained a blank identification document. A policeman demanded that I surrender my ID. He put it as well as the German passport of Mrs. Heymann in his pocket. I walked through the living room to the bay window and scanned the street in search for possible guards or a car. Nothing! The little square in front of the building bathed in the Sunday's sunshine.

⁴²By one of those remarkable coincidences Dieter and Sonja were never arrested; hence Lore was able to get eventually into the apartment the next day to fetch some incriminating evidence (D.H.)

Then I heard how one of the men commanded: "Get ready. Get dressed". I walked to the door of the apartment, demonstratively closing my coat as if I was about to walk downstairs. I intended to reach the stairs and to run as fast as I could but already on the first step I was rudely pushed back by the guy on guard there. I turned around totally helplessly and unable to think clearly. Almost mechanically I walked to a small room in the rear of the apartment where a Jewish co-hider, a Mr. Geismar of about forty years had already been living for several weeks. I threw the blank identification document behind a small cabinet in the room. Almost as though through a fog I heard Mr. Geismar asking me: "will you take your overcoat along"? I answered "yes" but my mind was really already elsewhere. As if by lightning a new plan was beginning to take form. Through the rear door of the little room I viewed the balcony and remembered that Norbert had tried to save himself when he was already arrested by jumping down from a third floor. I went outside but when I looked down into the gardens of the interior court yard I dropped this idea. However, I had hit on another potential escape route! I thought and acted almost simultaneously. I climbed on the balcony's banister and crossed in one step to the other side of the wooden partition between our balcony and that of the neighboring apartment! Now the men in Mrs. Heymann's apartment could no longer see me. I repeated this action several times until I was already several apartments away.

Several families were actually sunbathing on the flat roofs all around the square block of approximately 100 apartments. Much later I wondered what they might have thought about that adventurous climber. Meanwhile I went into an unknown apartment, ran to its exit door in order to leave the house and get into the street. Unfortunately it was tightly locked because the inhabitants were obviously still absent, possibly on vacation. This was lucky because what could I have told them when they had suddenly come home while I was still there? I was about to disappear quickly under a sofa to hide from possible pursuers when a better idea occurred to me. I climbed across one more wooden partition into the next apartment. Luckily nobody was there and the front door was unlocked.

I swiftly ran down all stairs into the street all the while scanning the scene carefully. As I turned a corner I noticed an abandoned Mercedes with a German license plate. I ran around for another hour shaking over my entire body. I certainly had the feeling that I had been saved but what if the Germans had found my secret papers? It concerned a bread bag with ID's, ink pad, and eighty sheets of food stamps.

It would be an unthinkable catastrophe for our organization if these were lost. I dreaded moreover the possible fate of Lore whom I had agreed to meet at 4 P.M. in the Argonautenstraat and who would certainly come to my apartment if I did not appear in time. I walked about helplessly when I suddenly ran into a friend from Werkdorp Wieringen, Erwin Kapellner. Judging from the expression on my face he guessed immediately that something bad had happened. He asked and I quickly told him the story. He promised to help me and the first thing he offered was to stay with him that night. My huge concern about a shelter for that night had thereby been resolved. I then asked him to catch my roommate, "Ab" (also known as "Appie"), at the nearby terminal of streetcar line 24 and to bring him to a specific meeting place. I then traveled without any ID to Hanna Neubauer. I asked her to provide me with another ID. She promised to get one for me as soon as possible. Thereafter I met "Ab". To get rid of our fear we dined

extensively. In the meantime I reported broadly what had happened to me. Next I went to the family Kapellner which was also in hiding.

The following morning Lore came and we were very happy to meet. She had indeed innocently gone to my former apartment in the afternoon but nobody had opened the door after she had rung the doorbell. We deduced that, luckily, no guards had been posted in the apartment. She therefore returned to the apartment the next day to retrieve the important items from it. She was admitted by Mrs. Heymann's children who had returned on the evening of that fateful, previous day⁴². She could therefore hand me the hidden ID's. One of these was given to Hanna who made it ready for my use. Later Lore returned once more to the apartment to retrieve some of my abandoned laundry.

Judging from information I gleaned later my relatives as well as the older gentleman Mr. Geismar were transported to Westerbork while Mrs. Heymann was first locked up in a jail in Amsterdam and then sent to the concentration camp of Vught. I continued to help Lore with her work despite her repeated urging to leave the country in the footsteps of so many others. The fellows who had gone to work in Germany disguised as Dutch workmen had returned precipitously because they had run into potential danger there. Within a short time they were working in France.

Slowly my role as an occasionally sidelined helper began to come to an end. Although I had dreamt of Switzerland and other countries I could only reluctantly separate myself from Holland⁴³

⁴³Here are several comments and clarifications of what had happened and of some of the aftermath.

a. Until 2004 Chanan had believed that his relatives had been followed by the SD to Mrs. Heymann's apartment. He was relieved when he learned then from Dieter that the young, semi-idiotic barber who came regularly to the apartment to cut Mr. Geismar's hair had betrayed the hideout to the Germans at an earlier time to receive the bounty of 2.5 guilder per Jew!

b. Indeed, nobody ever came to arrest the children Dieter and Sonja. They continued to live in the apartment. Dieter remained in high school and Sonja worked to earn their income.

c. Appie Keijzer survived the occupation and died in the 1990's.

d. Erika Heymann's punishment was "incarceration until the end of the war", which, in her case was essentially a death penalty. By another miraculous coincidence-a story too long to tell here-she was released on Hitler's birthday in 1944! Erika died of leukemia in 1949 in Amsterdam.

e. There is no doubt that Chanan's relatives and Mr. Geismar were murdered in some concentration camp, most likely in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

f. After the liberation of Holland in 1945 the fascist woman downstairs was given a lengthy prison sentence. All her belongings were confiscated.

THE GREAT TREK BEGINS

At this time the war went badly for Germany and her allies. In July of 1943, many units of the German army had been mauled in the Soviet Union during the battle of Kursk. The Red Army had pushed the Germans to the West across the Dnepr River during the fall. In the Mediterranean, North Africa was in Allied hands, the U.S. Army had occupied Sicily, and the Italian Government had formally quit the Alliance with Hitler. Hitler feared that the Allied invasion of Western France could happen any day. The consequence would be that his nightmare of war on two fronts would then become reality. Meanwhile Hitler and Goebbels had urgently asked the German people to wage “Total War” and Albert Speer had substantially ramped-up German war production. However, since the war swallowed German men, hundreds of thousands of German laborers were recruited from factories and offices and sent as cannon fodder to the East, West, or South. To compensate for the loss of labor, hundreds of thousands of non-German men in the age group of 16 to 60 were picked up in the occupied countries and hauled as ‘Fremdarbeiter’ (Foreign Laborers) to wherever they were needed. We shall later encounter Chanan and his comrades as such ‘Fremdarbeiter’ in France where they ostensibly but with falsified papers were supposed to participate in the construction of the ‘Atlantik Wall’, the German string of fortifications along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Another consequence was that the guarding of borders and factories was now increasingly done by elderly soldiers. We shall encounter one of these later when Chanan and his comrades were arrested by him during their illegal attempt to cross the Belgian-French border undetected on foot.



Menachem Pinkhof, one of the organizers of the Dutch resistance whose goal it was to assist Dutch Jews with their escapes.

Rain clouds hung deep over the awakening city of Amsterdam. By-and-by one was able to recognize the signs of beginning everyday life. The first trams clanged through the sparsely lit streets. The siren of a plant in one of the suburbs wailed the start of the workday.

There I stood, bodily exhausted but with a tense courage waiting for the streetcar that would bring me to the railroad station. The date was October 8, 1943. If everything devolved as planned it would also be the last day of my sojourn in Holland. However, it was frightening to think that far ahead. After all I was about to cross the most dangerous of the two borders. Instead of pondering that danger I was overwhelmed by my normal travel-mood which always came to me before an imminent great voyage. The one I was going to undertake could easily become adventurous. Finally the street car emanating from its depot to the terminal stop came rattling nearer. I sat down into a corner and closed my eyes. Despite my eagerness to travel I was overcome by a feeling of nostalgia. I was about to leave Amsterdam forever and consequently Holland where I had been comfortable for six and one-half years. Sure, my departure had not been wholly voluntary. After all, when one values one's life one makes sure to get away, provided one had the connections for it. Most Jews "disappeared" as it was called then and the others who did not have the opportunity or the means simply had to wait until they were arrested by the "Grüne Polizei" and deported via the intermediate camp Westerbork to Poland.

Therefore all stages of my time in Holland passed my mind: the school years in Amsterdam, Werkdorp Wieringen, Gouda, and finally the six months under a false name in Amsterdam.

I had not had much time to prepare for my departure. Menachem Pinkhof⁴⁴ had warned me a day and a half before. Initially I must have stalled as I had to attend to a number of concerns. However I was given a hand and everything was finished in time. Thus it came about that I found myself inside this streetcar.

My entire baggage consisted of a briefcase bursting at its seams and a meal package that had been prepared by my friendly hosts. I was to meet Zippi at the railroad station of Amsterdam and Menachem in Rotterdam who would guide both of us across the Dutch/Belgian border to Antwerp. As I rode past the street in which Lore lived I was sorry that I had not said goodbye to her. Last evening I had waited for her until a few minutes before curfew time but she had not returned home yet.

Every now and then I tried to recognize the otherwise well-known streets but all I could discern were the black outlines of the apartment blocks and the thin headlights of the many cyclists next to the streetcar. Shortly before six I arrived at the railroad station. It was the only spot which was already quite busy. I looked for Zippi but could not yet find him. Miriam, Menachem's wife, waited instead for us at the entry way. She wanted to say goodbye to us. We chatted for a while until my travel companion, who was also lightly loaded with baggage, appeared. He looked sleepy. Evidently he had not fallen asleep before two in the morning. Furtively we said goodbye to Miriam, who profusely wished us good luck. Then we bought tickets to Breda. We hurried to the train because we wanted to have seats considering the strenuous efforts that awaited us. We were not too early at all because the train was already pretty well occupied. However we did find two open seats for us. It was still completely dark outside. Our car was only lit by the lamps on the platform.

⁴⁴Menachem Pinkhof and his wife were arrested in 1944. Both survived the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen and moved later to Israel. Menachem died in the year 1969 (Chanan Florsheim).

When we had sat there silently for about ten minutes someone from behind suddenly talked to me. What a wonderful surprise for the two of us when Lore was standing there next to me! She was not about to pass up the opportunity to say goodbye to us despite the very early hour. I left the passenger compartment with her to go to the car's platform near the exit doors where we could talk without being overheard. After I returned Zippi went outside to her. It was already a quarter past six. Meanwhile the train had already left Amsterdam.

It had already begun to dawn in the East. The seemingly endless meadows were bathed in the uncertain twilight of the morning. I was glad that I had an excuse to return to the car's platform because I found it hard to sit still. Lore was to accompany us until Haarlem which meant that we had enough time to consider all issues that needed to be talked over. She asked me to convey her greetings to her relatives in France. I asked her not to forget my Uncle Carl who had gone into hiding. She then left the train in Haarlem. I returned to the compartment of Zippi. The train was now very crowded mostly with students on their way to the Technical University of Delft. The train proceeded at great speed. We exchanged only a few words because of Zippi's German accent. After all we were supposed to be Dutchmen! Meanwhile both of us were engaged by our own sad thoughts. As I have already said, I was sad that I was leaving Holland the land with which I had been so closely associated. Surely, the past months had been dangerous but also interesting and exciting.

At Delft and The Hague the train emptied. We now had window seats and were able to see the familiar countryside again. In Rotterdam Menachem joined us and while we proceeded in the direction of Dordrecht he explained to me the contents of a piece of paper on which he had sketched the border area. I hardly understood what it was all about but thought that it would become clearer at the border itself. By-and-by I began to sense the adventure of what was about to happen. It was wonderful to relax and realize that we might be in Antwerp at five in the afternoon if everything went as planned! Great! In Dordrecht we changed trains to Lage Zwaluwe past the great Moerdijk Bridge and from there we rode to Breda where we arrived towards ten in the morning. I was familiar with this region from former trips. We intended to use the specific border crossing which I had obtained from a girl in Breda, Chana de Leeuw, and which I had passed on to Menachem.

Only once did we notice "Gestapo-Ghosts" at the train station of Breda in the form of two young Germans whom we continued to watch intently. Ten minutes later the bus arrived with which we had to continue our trip. Zippi and I boarded while Menachem followed on bike. Breda, too, I saw for the last time. The pretty little town bathed in a gorgeous sunshine. Then we rode through the outskirts of Breda and soon we arrived in Ginniken from where we were to continue on foot. Menachem waited at the bus stop and furtively pointed in the direction of the road which we were supposed to follow. While Zippi and I walked together and agreed on several measures, pretending as much as possible that we belonged here.

I, who had the sketch from Menachem, would lead and he would follow at a distance of some hundred meters. He was to duplicate exactly whatever I did.

I swiftly scanned the sketch; then went ahead alone. I noticed how Menachem inspected the area ahead of us. Thus I marched on, secretly begging my "protector" for a load of luck.

Right away I got a big scare from a few German soldiers who were collecting mushrooms along the side of the road. Fortunately that meant nothing else. Thus we walked on each with our own briefcase. Every once in a while I looked back to make sure that Zippi was following at the correct distance.

The sun shone very hot at this time of the year and I soon began to sweat profusely because I had dressed in two or three layers in order to take along as much clothing as possible. We were asked to take a break in small woods where we would meet Menachem. I walked too far. When Menachem approached me from the opposite direction he pointed me towards the little woods. I turned around. I asked him whether everything was OK and got a positive answer. I jumped across a ditch and was among the bushes. The whole area appeared abandoned and we noticed only individual farm buildings. During our rest Menachem completed Zippi's border crossing permit and we ate heartily. Slowly I began to lose my fear and got the sense that I was on one of those earlier trips with my youth organization.

After about ten minutes we set off. Menachem now walked at a fair distance in front of us and Zippi, as before, followed behind me. For a while we remained on the country road but soon turned away from it. Now our path continued among fields to the left or to the right. I rarely consulted the map; in fact only once when I lost contact with Menachem who had started to walk at a very fast clip and I had to make haste to keep up with him. I did see Zippi a good distance behind me and gave him directional signals whenever needed to keep him from going into a wrong direction. Suddenly our path was blocked by a fence of barbed wire. Located behind it was a farm house. At a spot where the barbed wire was breached we stepped across to the other side and I suspected that this had to be the border. We continued for another fifty meters along the footpath. Then we crossed the courtyard of another farm. There Menachem told us that we had successfully completed our main objective. What joy! We were soaked due to the profuse sweating from all our pores during the past thirty minutes. We now found ourselves in a smuggler's den and there Menachem exchanged our Dutch guilders for Belgian francs. All sorts of riffraff around us entered and left the den. I tasted good Belgian beer again, which I had not drunk for a long time. I drank it to slake my big thirst.

Menachem inquired about the continuation of our way and the whereabouts of German guards. We had to wait a little while before we could proceed to avoid encounters with German patrols. We finally got up and left at one thirty. This time I walked last in line. We walked along several footpaths to get to a main road where a directional sign pointed to Breda-Holland. A little later we sat down in a coffeehouse that was swarming with smugglers. There were women loaded down with chicken, eggs, butter, and cheese. Because it was all in plain view the bus ride we had to take seemed risky. One suspected that it was often checked owing to this blatant smuggling. Fifteen minutes later we boarded the bus. I got a big scare when I saw a German bike-patrol turn a corner and ride off into the fields. At first I assumed that they had come to check our bus. That could have been big trouble for us. We moseyed along the secondary road passing single farms in the glare of the full sunlight. The locals held their siestas in front of their homesteads. Following Menachem's instructions we ordered tickets to Hoogstraten from the driver. In the town of Hoogstraten we got off the bus to wait for the fast rail.

Menachem meanwhile finished some tasks. The two of us hung around separately in the streets and scanned some shop windows. The fast rail for Antwerp arrived towards

two thirty. We bought a ticket for Antwerp. I felt completely out of danger now and was almost in the mood of a vacation trip. I sat down in the outdoor section and looked at the Flemish countryside which awakened many remembrances from my vacation tour through Belgium in 1939. Noisily we rode along a dusty road. In Oost-Malle we had to change for the regular streetcar number 70 to Antwerp.

We were now seated together on comfortably padded seats. For the first time I felt great tiredness. Soon we rode along the same streets that I had biked in the summer of 1939. We continued past posh villas and large estates. In the far distance we began to discern the contours of our goal: Antwerp.

Soon we rode through the suburbs, now across poorly repaired bridges then through lively business streets. It was just a little past five in the afternoon when we completed the first leg of our voyage. We were standing on Victory Square and were hardly aware that we had really met our goal for today: Belgium and Antwerp.

Menachem did not give us much time to reflect because we soon made our way to an address which was widely known to and appreciated by all the “Travellers to France” before us. It was a typical Antwerpian pub with a room in which one could sleep without the need to register. An attic was also available for sleeping. At the pub we deposited our baggage and had a bit of rest. The plan was to stay the next day, a Sunday, in Antwerp. On Monday, while Menachem was returning to Holland, we would travel with Willy, whose real name was Ernst Hirsch⁴⁵, to Paris. According to plans Willy should already have been in Antwerp but there was no sign of him anywhere.

One hour later we went for a stroll into Antwerp. It was already getting dark. Since we had nothing better to do we moseyed around and then returned in the direction of our ‘Hotel’ to get a bite to eat. We went into the dining room where we noticed a guest seated on a barstool in conversation with one of the employees. When we looked a bit closer we discovered that the guest was actually Willy. With much ado we greeted one another. Willy said that he had just come from Paris. Of course he forgot to mention his ‘little walk’ across the French/Belgian border. We all participated in a lively conversation. We learned that Kurt Reilinger was somewhere near the border of Switzerland.

We knew that Menachem intended to visit Brussels tomorrow, Sunday. Because we needed to save money we remained in Antwerp with Willy.

That evening we went to the movies. After that we had ice-cream of pre-war quality. The price of the ice-cream was also of substantial quality. We finally sacked out towards midnight, for the first time outside Holland.

⁴⁵Ernst Hirsch was arrested in 1944 and deported to the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen where he was murdered in 1945 (Chanan Florsheim).

Now it was Sunday. When we woke up Menachem was already on his way to Brussels from where he planned to return that evening. Willy got in touch with us a bit later. He had to travel to the Belgian/Dutch border to pick up three people who would accompany us to France. However, it took him so long to finish his grooming that it was too late for him to catch his train. He did go to the railroad station after all but the train had obviously not waited for him. Meanwhile we had also groomed ourselves and went outside into the Sunday streets of the city. We climbed the 'Meir', the famous high-rise building from which we had a gorgeous view of Antwerp and its surroundings. At the upper level one could purchase wonderful tarts for unattainable prices just as in a delicatessen shop where one can buy everything that pleases the palate: wine grapes, chocolate, nuts, and figs.

We stood there open mouthed ogling the delicatessen and the little cards that displayed the outrageous prices. In the course of the remainder of the day we visited a few sights of the city. I knew them all from my bike trip through Belgium in 1939. Nevertheless they filled me with the pleasure of seeing them again even though the sight of the city itself with its many German uniforms and sentries had changed. The only thing we then bought was the delicious ice-cream. That evening Zippi and I ate in a cheap saloon merely to get something warm into our stomachs. Then we stretched out on the bed from ennui and tiredness to wait for the return of Menachem and Willy.

We had just begun to doze off when they came together with the couple Bonn, then named Waasdorp, and a fellow from Amsterdam, Paul Landauer. I had known Max Bonn in Amsterdam where we had met. Now Zippy and I had to let the couple have the bed. Consequently the five of us had to sleep on a mattress in the attic.

Since the mattress accommodated only three persons, Zippy and Bonn stayed together in a bed. A bit of good will went a long way. Late that evening Menachem returned from Brussels and simply went to sleep on a table in the pub room because there was no other spot available for him. We had to get up at five the next morning anyway hence he could continue to sleep there undisturbed. We handed him a letter for Lore⁴⁶ and went to bed. I hardly slept and it was I who awakened the others at four thirty. We had plenty of time so everyone packed their belonging which was quite an art owing to the cramped space. Then we said goodbye to Menachem in the pub room with the customary good wishes and hopes for the future. It was only because Menachem had brought us here and was now leaving that I sensed the final rupture of my ties with Holland. But I did not have much time for sad thoughts. We went to the railroad station in small groups. After Willy had purchased the tickets for Tournai we boarded the train from Antwerp to Brussels. Outside it was still completely dark. Each of us sort of dozed away until the train was at full speed and it became possible to discern the passing landscape. We did not talk much to avoid drawing attention to us as foreigners. Because we had to change in Brussels for the express train to Lille we stayed at the railroad station. I was glad that I had known Brussels before because I did not feel sorry that I could not visit the city this time.

⁴⁶Lore Durlacher was in charge of the region Holland. After the war and until her death in 1991 she lived in Israel (Chanan Florsheim).

The train to Lille was jam-packed. It probably meant that we had to remain standing tightly squeezed in among other passengers until our goal of the city of Tournai was reached. It was possible to gaze out the windows and that was about the only solace. In this manner we rode to Tournai, except for Rie, who, as a woman had obtained a seat. I felt a slight sense of relief coming over me as we approached another border. Our fears that there could have been a control in the train did not pan out. It is true that Willy has some sort of paper with alleged marching orders from a construction company but its value seemed to be still questionable to us. At the train station of Tournai we had to wait for a streetcar. To kill the waiting time we went into a Flemish inn to eat our sandwiches with sausage and to drink a beer.

The streetcar took us past the ruins of the war of 1940 into the countryside. After about forty-five minutes we got off in a small village. Once again we walked, now on a road, then on foot paths. After thirty minutes we arrived at an inn. The innkeeper told us that we were very close to the French border; in fact, only two steps were required to get across. In the meantime we drank some lemonade because the propitious time for border crossing had not yet arrived. Moreover, we could not cross directly along a straight path but had to proceed along a much longer semi-circular route to avoid meeting German patrols. Once, when we were about to leave, three French border police with the typical Basque berets on their heads came into the inn. We had to wait again until they left. In the meantime, each of us had bought several little packages of tobacco because Willy had told us that one could do good business in France with them.

Finally we marched off accompanied by many good wishes from our host. We were, after all, not the first refugees who had passed through his inn on the way to France guided by Willy. We walked again along foot paths across fields. Because the terrain around us was so flat and open that we could be easily spotted from afar, we scanned the terrain with full attention. Because Rie was toting several heavy bags she could not keep up with the rest of us. I helped her carry some of them. All of us were moving across a field towards a farm house. When I glanced backwards once I discovered something frightening that took my breath away: in the far distance I noticed a German uniform on a bike. I drew Willy's attention to it but he did not utter a word.

It was too late to run away. We therefore calmly continued our march. Of course the cyclist had already seen us. He leisurely pedaled along the path in our direction, stopped and waited for us. He belonged to German border security. I figured that he was a veteran in his fifties with an honest sort of face. The first words he said were 'vos papiers s'il vous plait', French for 'your papers please'. Willy immediately answered him in German and explained our situation. 'Well, in that case, come with me you Dutch guys'. I thought that everything was lost because according to our documents we were workers of the Dickmann Company en route from Bordeaux in Southern France to Roubaix in the North. How easy it would be to call the firm to check the truthfulness of the papers.

Rie began a conversation with the soldier and I was on the lookout for an opportunity to flee. Rie had meanwhile succeeded to charm the soldier into changing to a good-natured banter which I, however, misinterpreted. As it happened we were just then passing by a cemetery and our guard opined as an aside: "Well, you will now get four weeks of jail time, then you will be shot and buried here".

I believed him! At that time I did not yet realize the miraculous effect that an officially stamped and sealed piece of paper could have on a German. When I shared my misgivings with Willy he answered coolly: 'Mark my words, he will eventually bring us to the streetcar in Roubaix'! This seemed to be so improbable at that moment that I began to question his sanity.

Zippy too had begun a conversation with the soldier. They were exchanging remembrances from their home-town as both came initially from Berlin and, moreover, from the same district where Zippy had lived. After all, according to the papers, Zippy was a Dutchman who was born in Germany. We were directed to the office of the border guards which was located on the same country road along which we had marched earlier but still within Belgian territory. The border barrier was exactly across from the border post. In the waiting room we found a German officer dealing with a Chinese whom they had probably caught smuggling.

After our guard had exchanged a few words with his superior we were ordered to open our belongings. I stalled and, instead, placed my packages of tobacco on the table. In total there then appeared twenty-eight packages, each containing 100 gram of tobacco. That was our luck because we could now recite our agreed-upon cock-and-bull story of how we had been moved to work in Roubaix near the French-Belgian border and had availed ourselves of a few days of vacation to buy some tobacco in Belgium to sell it in France for a profit to supplement our small incomes. That seemed to convince them. I was relieved when they did not make a phone call and we were allowed to repack everything.

Finally our guard admonished us: 'Next time when you buy tobacco in Belgium you must approach the border along the road and not furtively across the fields'. As we left Rie tried to present him a package of tobacco but he refused almost indignantly to accept it. Just one signal of his to the French border guards allowed us to proceed unhindered into France where a streetcar stop was located nearby. What mazzel we had had! Willy only opined imperturbable as ever: 'I told you so'! Thus we soon traveled for the first time on French soil in the direction of Roubaix.

After thirty minutes we arrived in Roubaix. Before doing anything else we bought wine grapes which cost no more than fifteen francs per kilogram. Next we rode another jam-packed train to Lille where we got off towards four o'clock in the afternoon at Theater Square. Originally we had intended to take the two o'clock afternoon train to Paris but because of the Belgian incident it was too late for that now. We therefore decided to take the six o'clock express train. We went to the train station and there began a learning process that we had to get used to very quickly namely that we were going to live at the expense of the German Armed Forces! Thanks to our valuable Travel Order⁴⁷ we were able to go to the army canteen where we ate a wonderfully thick soup and drank coffee surrounded by German soldiers. All of it for free of course. Willy and Zippy then went into town to get us provisions for the remainder of our travel.

⁴⁷This was a document issued by German military authorities for use by both soldiers and civilian workers on travel while changing from one to the next base or workplace. It was a permit for the gratis use of all train connections and to obtain free food and lodgings while on travel. Our Travel Orders were usually falsified (Chanan Florsheim).

Meanwhile some of us kept walking about the train station while one of us watched our luggage. I immediately bought a French-German dictionary at a newspaper stand. After we had waited in this manner for about forty-five minutes Willy and Zippy returned. Don't ask me how! I was almost dumbfounded by the stunning sight. You could hardly see their heads, hidden as they were behind mountains of army-issued bread loaves.

We had to suppress laughter when we saw them. In addition to the bread they brought us many pounds of butter and marvelous for us already rare to get sausages. We could hardly fit all in our luggage. As we trundled later towards the train, each of us carried two loaves of bread. Sausages and butter were stowed away in our pockets. Willy went straight to the conductor and showed him a Travel Order which stated that we were ordered to go to Paris. Consequently we were allowed to board an almost empty car reserved for members of the German army where we made ourselves comfortable. Of course our mood was excellent. Everything had gone according to expectations and Willy treated us with one surprise after another with his miracle-papers. Of course our trip to Paris did not cost us one centime.

The anticipation of going to be in Paris, that much heralded world metropolis, augmented my already especially good mood. We continuously sang all sorts of German, Dutch, South African and even Hebrew songs while we traversed the mining regions of Douai and Arras. However, by-and-by one singer after another fell silent as everyone had become tired and sleepy, especially after the good meal. Willy had proposed to eat butter and sausage with bread instead of the other way around. Sandwiches; what paradox in those days of scarcity of foodstuffs!

We were comfortably seated in or padded seats and talked with some soldiers who had begun a conversation with us. Not one of them doubted that we were really genuine and trustworthy Dutch workmen on their way to a new construction site. It was a pity that we would arrive in Paris after dark. I would have preferred to enter the city in normal bright daylight. Now that was only going to happen the next morning. Our sleepiness was abated by our anticipation of the impending arrival. At exactly nine-thirty we entered the Gare du Nord. We got off, happy that this leg of our trek was also completed. A huge mass of people streamed towards the exit. We had agreed that we would meet at the exit barrier. I remained slightly behind the others with Rie whom I assisted with carrying her bag filled with foodstuff. Impatiently we moseyed towards the exit. I greatly enjoyed taking in the bustling atmosphere of the railroad station where express trains with signs in all directions attached to their cars stood wholly empty on the tracks.

The brightly lit station hall with its waving mass of people stretched out before me. Suddenly, about fifty meters before the exit, someone showed Rie an official photo-ID. He wanted to inspect her bag. It was a civil control for smuggled goods. The guy of course saw our German army goodies and was about to impound them all. We understood him poorly because he spoke French very fast. To all of his questions Rie answered only: 'Wehrmacht, Wehrmacht' (German for Army, Army). He, however, answered only 'Non Wehrmacht' to which Rie stubbornly responded with 'Si, si, si, Wehrmacht'. Meanwhile I quickly ran to the exit to fetch Willy. Again, the wonder-paper did its duty because this official had no choice but to yield to German stamps on a document whose content he could not understand anyway. Thus we entered Paris.

Willy was familiar with a hotel very close to the railroad station. It was named Hotel Atlantique and was located in the Rue des Deux Gares. There we registered and were given very simple but clean and large rooms. Zippy and I stayed in one room; Paul stayed with Willy, and the family Bonn lodged in the third room.

Later, as we were already sacked out, Zippy and I recounted the events of the day and we had to admit that we had not at all foreseen the course of events the way we had imagined they would when we had talked for the first time about France that day on the Nicolaas Witsenkade in Amsterdam. It had all begun well and ended well. With that thought we fell asleep. We intended to get to know Paris the next morning, this to us still unknown former city of light.

It was an unforgettable sight which I beheld the next morning from the window of our room on the fourth floor. In front of me lay the gigantic grounds of the Gare d l'Est with its milling masses of people and railroad-bustle. Beyond, perched against a slightly hilly terrain and still wrapped in early morning mist were the suburbs of Paris. Involuntarily my heart began to beat faster even though I was going to enjoy infinitely more beautiful sights later. We just stood there and were unable to comprehend that we had ridden by streetcar through Amsterdam three days ago and that we were now in the center of Paris. We had planned to stay here until Wednesday evening and we promised ourselves that we would try to see as much as possible of Paris.

Soon we sat at breakfast with the other four and ate far too much and to my taste for much too long because I was utterly impatient to go outside. Unfortunately Max and Willy wanted to get a haircut which meant that, in the meantime, the three of us had to bide our time nearby. We went for a stroll and took note of our environment. We also saw some Jews with the Star that was so familiar to us. Then we had to return to the Gare du Nord to meet the others. Thus we moseyed through Paris all Tuesday and the following Wednesday. We visited the Trocadero, the Eiffel tower, the Arc de Triomphe and other sights. Occasionally I was slightly angry when the others wasted so much time looking at shop windows.

However, let's now consider our serious plans. Originally Willy had intended to take us to Bordeaux on Wednesday night as chances for finding jobs were the best there. However, by luck we had met in the hotel an acquaintance from Holland who had been helped across the border by Kurt Reilinger. He had met a Belgian in Paris who had founded a new construction firm. He did not know any details but Max and Zippi were eager to join him to meet and talk to this man. They returned with good news. The company had not yet hired workers and we could be the first. Good salary, good food, a furlough every six weeks, and additional wonderful prospects such as our own food stamps.

We decided to risk the matter and to travel the next day, Thursday, to the construction site near Rouen. The owner would await us at a different but smaller town. Thanks to Gérard, the name of our acquaintance from Holland all problems seem to have been solved for the time being (he was actually a Viennese who belonged to the Hechalutz Organization⁴⁸.)

⁴⁸The name of the organization to which all Chalutzim or Palestine-Pioneers belonged (Chanan Florsheim).

We spent the remainder of the day in pleasant ways. We were satisfied with this solution because Willy did not have any tangible prospects for work in Bordeaux. In the evening we accompanied him to the railroad station Austerlitz. We were sorry to see him leave all by himself as we had hoped to make the trip with him. I believe that we returned to the hotel by subway. Because the day had been strenuous we went to bed soon.

At eight thirty the next morning we were already at the train station St. Lazare to ensure seats for us in the express train for Le Havre which was to leave at nine. Obviously others had been as clever as we meant to be and had arrived even earlier. All that we could secure were standing rooms in the hallway. Except for a brief stop the trip went directly to Rouen through a friendly hill country where we saw the river Seine every now and then. We arrived at ten-thirty in Rouen and continued at eleven with a slow train in the direction of Dieppe.

The name of the town where we were supposed to get off was Auffray. At the railroad station we were indeed awaited by Mr. Mol, the name of our future boss. We spent the next hours in a coffeehouse, ate our 'sausage with butter and bread'-these were slowly returning to ordinary sandwiches-and waited for further developments. We had already explored the town several times and were content when we discovered a movie house.

At seven Mr. Mol arrived and fetched us four men, Zippi, Max, Gerard and me, for a medical examination. We were thoroughly checked by a very friendly French doctor. There were no problems except that he found that Zippi, who had felt unwell all day long, had angina.

Zippi did remain behind in the hospital right away and we departed without him. Later a car arrived to take us to our future place of residence in a nearby village named Biville-la-Beignarde. When we arrived there we were somewhat disheartened by an empty shed in which we were supposed to live without water, light, beds, or chairs; in essence totally without any furniture.

A leader of O.T.⁴⁹ who had accompanied us took pity with the couple Bonn and got them a beautifully posh room in the house of the mayor of the village. Gerard and I had to do with the straw mattresses in the shed. When we were alone we discussed the situation. We hoped that we would have more luck with work and meals than with our home.

The next morning we wanted to start but immediately ran into a problem: how to wake up in the dark and not be able to wash up or find ones clothes? I decided therefore to find a room after work the next day because this situation was too primitive even for the most undemanding person. It was a wonder that I woke up in time the next morning. I went to work unwashed.

⁵⁰The Organization Todt (O.T.) was founded in May 1938 and was named after its first leader Fritz Todt. The O.T. was destined to be the construction organization for building military facilities important for the conduct of the war in Germany as well as in the regions occupied by the German army (Chanan Florsheim).

Max called on me. Gérard remained behind to guard the shed which also counted as having worked. On the way I ate breakfast. After forty-five minutes we arrived at the work site. Mr. Mol was still absent but joined us later. Max had registered as a carpenter and I as a gardener. Hence I was detailed with the earth workers. I was assigned to a group of young Frenchmen who were digging a hole that was eventually to become the foundation of a bunker. Now I tried out my first French conversations. I was not particularly enthusiastic as I returned that evening and neither was Max even though he had a better job. It was not until two days later that I found a private room. I was happy that I could sleep again in a normal bed. Zippi's health was improving and he was to share the bed when he returned to us. Our landlord was the baker of the village. The family was very kind to me.

The Frenchmen which I encountered had initially thought that we were Germans but they became very friendly when they learned that we were Dutchmen who had been requisitioned for forced labor. On Sunday we had the day off and we visited the movie house in Auffray where we viewed the movie 'North-Atlantique'. Obviously we understood only half of what was going on. The rest we made up with our fantasies.

On Monday evening when I arrived in the meal barracks after I had washed up at home I had a big surprise because the barracks was full of people. In the beam of my flashlight I first studied the individual persons. Among them I recognized Emil Windmüller, Herbert Liffman, and Paul Landauer. They had found work in Paris at the airport of Le Bourget. I then made the acquaintance of Max Windmüller, Emil's older brother, and Rolf Rothmann. A rumor had made he rounds that Le Bourget had become dangerous. There were fears of a *razzia* to snap up Dutch laborers who were to be sent to Germany. We were happy that our group had grown and that our life had become even cozier. The new arrivals had to suffer through the tough school of sleeping in the shed. A few days later, through the mediation of the burgomaster, we found a home where all could live. The home was therefore named Beth Chalutz⁵⁰.

I stayed with Zippy at the home of the baker's family where we ate fairly well after we quit eating at the German army's mess hall. Rie cooked for the fellows in their house but we did not want to dine there because of the limited space available. Now Zippi, Max Bonn, and Max Windmüller worked as carpenters. Paul and I were excavators. However, most of the time we labored with a Flemish crew of concrete workers. Herbert and Rolf were bricklayers. Soon Max Bonn became our representative with the company Mol. Later he got an even better position at the office of Mol in Auffay.

⁵⁰Chalutz: a Zionist who prepares himself for agricultural work in Palestine/Israel. Chalutz means literally 'pioneer' (Chanan Florsheim).

One evening we experienced both great joy and a scare when Willy suddenly appeared with Ludi Goldwine who had come from Holland. From him we learned the sad news that Kurt Hannemann with some of his friends had been arrested and were apparently already being shipped to Poland. That was terrible news. We were afraid that our remaining friends might suffer an equally terrible fate. Ludi was assigned to the carpenters. It was he who, together with Zippi, lazed about for the good cause while we, the concrete workers, often had to slave hard. Willy stayed another day and returned the next day to Paris accompanied by Max and Rie until Rouen.

All of us got along splendidly and everyone already counted down the days that separated us from our first vacation. All of us wanted to return to Holland once more to pick up our remaining belongings. Meanwhile we had received only uncertain news about Kurt Reilinger and we hoped that we might greet him here with us some day soon.

The last happened indeed promptly and precipitously: one evening during late Fall as it began to get dark and we were returning home from work we encountered someone who walked towards us in the street and said that Kurt and Willy had come. We were mightily happy because we had long expected Kurt to come and visit us but we suspected the he was in Belgium at this time. Something special must have happened when both of them had come to us together.

Zippi and I went to our baker's family for a quick dinner. That evening the meal was a head of pork to which some hair was still attached. Because of my impatience I ate almost nothing. The house which, as I have already mentioned, had slowly become a sort of Beth Cholutz was located only about five minutes from ours. We got there when everyone was still at the dining table. The greetings were especially cordial as we four Auffayers had seen Kurt for the last time in Holland. After I had told Rie the story of the hairy pig's head and had brought along proof in the form of the unpalatable hairy residue, she gave us some of their food. However, some hungry and merciful soul did eat the hairy remains eventually.

The real discussion began after the meal. I can still see how all of us were seated closely perched together around the table. Some of us still wore work clothes, others had already changed. We were all somewhat tense. Kurt, however, as was his normal habit, did not get directly to the major issue but gave us a report of the situation of the Jews in France and his recent experiences. Finally he began he report what his visit was all about. Thanks to a Jewish sister-organization which he had discovered a possibility to reach Spain had opened up. That was a grand surprise for us! To Spain! Freed of these false names and papers! However, not everyone was wholly elated. Rolf Rothmann, Paul Landauer, Emil Windmüller, Herbert Liffman, and I were the courageous ones willing to participate immediately. Kurt told us that it would not be an easy trek across the Pyrenees but that we could certainly manage it.

He also did not know whether all of us in Auffay could be taken along together. He would soon send us a telegram on this matter. If the number of participants was to be restricted, the following would be the order of those to go first: me, Herbert, Paul, Emil, and Rolf. We talked until two o'clock the next morning when Kurt wanted to return to Paris.

Midnight was actually curfew time but no one minded it one bit. Zippi and I went to bed after a lively discussion.

I was certain that I would have to leave Biville on Monday together with the three others. Kurt was to send his telegram on Saturday. Hence I went to work on Friday but did only very little. I intended to visit and view Rouen again on Saturday. I did go as planned even though the weather was not exactly conducive for sightseeing the town. However, as rain or hail had never stopped me in such situations I strolled half-soaked through Rouen where I visited the port, the cathedral, and the monument for Jeanne d'Arc. After that I took a wonderfully hot and refreshing bath because I could not return by train to Auffay until later that evening. Towards ten-thirty I arrived in Biville where a great disappointment was awaiting me, namely that no messages had arrived from Kurt that day. Well, I contemplated; if one is pleased about something too early, something is bound to go wrong after all.

Sunday came and still no telegram. All of us began to wonder whether something bad had happened to Kurt. After all, there were plenty of reasons why that could have been so. During the evening Max, Rie's husband, decided to make a phone call to Paul who had accompanied Kurt to Paris. Paul was astonished to learn that we were totally ignorant and told us that four of us could leave and had to be in Bordeaux on Tuesday morning. Herbert who stood next to me at the phone and to whom I loudly transmitted the message immediately ran to the place where one usually deposits the consequences of great excitement. That happened to me too but not as quickly as in his case. Big excitement all around! Herbert, Rie, Max, and I discussed some matters, especially financial ones. Then we woke up Emil to bring him the wonderful news. Next we said goodbye to the others because, as usual, they had to go to work the next morning and we were going to depart in the course of the day. That last evening in Biville I came home very late and could not refrain from awakening Zippi to tell him the whole story. Late, very late I fell asleep.

I woke up as Zippi was already dressed. The lamp was still lit. Dawn arrived slowly outside. Zippi gave me some addresses and bade me to write to his sister in England once I had arrived well in Spain. Our farewell was very warm. We had become very good friends since we had begun our joint trip from Amsterdam to Auffay. I was sorry that he was not tagging along but he wanted to wait for his girlfriend Lolly. We, the three candidates for Spain, packed our belongings and finished some last preparations. We were in a very confident mood.

We were to meet Rie in Auffay at three o'clock because she would do some shopping for us. I told my baker's family that I was going to take a vacation in Holland and presented them with a package of tobacco as I bade them farewell. Herbert and Emil went to Auffay first. I followed somewhat later. We had to avoid dangerous encounters as this was an illegal departure by flight. On the road to Auffay there suddenly came a German army bus from the other direction towards me. I feared that our bosses were in it and might perhaps recognize me. I therefore stood aside with my face away from the road to let the bus pass. Later I learned that some of our comrades, among whom also Hans Ehrlich, had been riders of the bus. They had just been brought from Holland by Gérard.

We met Rie and Emil Glücker, who had also just arrived for a visit, in the agreed upon coffeehouse. The farewell at the railroad station lasted a long time as the train was late to leave. Our mood was great; it could not have been any better.

We did not carry very much. I only had the briefcase which I had brought along from Holland. The others carried the same or else a bread bag because one could not be

heavily loaded for crossing the Pyrenees. Moreover, we also carried Paul's belongings. The poor fellow who was in Paris did not even know that he was going to come along as Rolf, whose turn to go had been before his, had relinquished his turn for him.

In Rouen we got off the train and had a good meal in the waiting room. Then we rolled with the Le Havre express train to Paris. It was already almost nine o'clock when we arrived at the railroad station of St. Lazare. Paul waited for us at the barrier with two Dutch friends.

In double time we ran to the subway and rode to station Austerlitz. On the way we told Paul that he was going to join us. In order to get seats for the ride from Paris to Bordeaux it was imperative that we should be in the train approximately forty-five minutes before departure time. Thus it came about that our small group of four guys swept through the entrance barrier waiving a stamped paper instead of a normal train ticket. We were lucky. Although we did not find an ideal car, we found seats albeit in between German soldiers. I threw my briefcase into the luggage bin and ran outside again to get something to drink because I had become very thirsty during the subway ride. It was very busy on the platform. The train was about to leave. I embraced the whole scene for a last time to preserve a memory from Paris. Then the command came: "en voiture"! Barely noticeably the train began to move and then rolled on into the cold night of this fall. It was November 8, 1943.

I do not know whether it was my fantasy or the many stories I had heard about Bordeaux. In any event, I had imagined it to be a southern metropolis; a sea of white houses, many palm trees and a blue sky.

What a disappointment! To begin with we were truly chilled to the bone in the unheated car. For a second, the train was two hours late and for a third; it rained when we left the train station. That was a rather poor first impression of a metropolis! Kurt picked us up at the platform. We went directly to a coffeehouse to fortify us with a black, hot fluid, so-called coffee. That felt good! Of course we overwhelmed Kurt with questions about "when and where" but he postponed all answers until later when we would be able to discuss matters unobserved. We deposited our baggage at the cheap hotel in the Tanasse Street which was known to us from earlier reports. Then we found a hotel nearer to the railroad station where all details were discussed.

The remainder of the day we spent in town, bought trifles, and went to the movie house later to view the film "Münchhausen". This entire amusement had a special catch because it was free of charge. Sesame opened at the entrance when we showed our Dutch ID; just as waving the magic Travel Order was sufficient to replace the train tickets at the railroad station.

On November 10, at eight-thirty exactly, we were ready for travel after we met at the railroad station St. Jean. We were excited that Willy and Lore Süsskind had arrived from Paris only slightly earlier. It was especially satisfying to us that Lore, who had been incarcerated in Camp Westerbork until recently, had been liberated. The original plan was that Kurt or Willy would accompany us to our next destination, Toulouse. However, word came suddenly that we would have to travel without them. They handed us a new Travel Order which also stipulated that I was the leader of the group. I would really have preferred to forego this honor because it was after all the first time in France that we were left to ourselves. At exactly nine o'clock the train left the station. Lore had handed me a letter for the parents of Hans Bandmann and asked that I mail it from Spain to England.

Crazy optimist that I was I viewed the unsympathetic contours of the city of Bordeaux with a last loving glance as if I was observing them for the last time.

Hard after Bordeaux we experienced the first test of our nerves. Although there was no longer a difference between the occupied and the unoccupied parts of France, ID's were still checked at the demarcation line between the two regions.

It was strange that we were ordered to produce our documents so soon outside Bordeaux. Pretending calmness we handed over our papers for inspection. The offices scanned them too long in my opinion. I already began to fear that something bad would happen but he returned them. However, instead of proceeding to the next compartment he walked towards the front of the train and disappeared from sight in the hallway of the next car. I was the only one of us who was able to notice this because I was ensconced in a corner seat from which I had a view of the hallway. I suspected that he had perhaps noticed something fishy because otherwise, if nothing was amiss, he should have simply proceeded to the next car. Only after some careful considerations I shared my observation with my travel companions who were eating innocently at the time. After all, one had to be prepared for trouble and had to be cautious. In my mind I swiftly scanned the contents of my baggage and concluded that the only incriminating item might be my French-Spanish dictionary. I expected that the officer would come back any minute but nothing of the sort happened. At Langon we crossed the demarcation line and all customs and border security officers left the train. However, I was not fully reassured. What if they had called Toulouse to cashier us there?

The express train, in the meantime, steamed on undeterred regardless of whether we were concerned or not. Our mood, which had been below zero, improved. We agreed that the swift early check had to be explained by the fact that our farewell on the platform had perhaps been too lively and that we as civilians used a car set aside for personnel of the German army. Meanwhile it had become gorgeous weather outside. It was truly a pleasure to view palms even though they appeared somewhat pitiful in their wintry environment. Time flew as we talked, ate, and scanned the landscape outside. We arrived at Toulouse-Matabiau at 2:10 P.M.

Compared to hotels which I got to know later in Toulouse, Hotel Gambetta was the best in which I have ever stayed there. The four of us and Werner Kahn, who had arrived in Toulouse before us, waited in a room of the fellows of the Hachschara⁵¹ in Gouda for their return because, as Werner had told us, the fellows from Gouda together with Heinz Meierstein⁵² would depart that same evening in the direction of the Pyrenees. We would follow them on Friday, two days later.

What a joy it was when I encountered the four from Gouda and Heinz Meyerstein because we had been separated since our time together in Holland. They were in a hurry to get to their train in time. However, whereas time for conversation was too short now, we would be able to make up for it later as we were going to make the trip to freedom together! Their rooms were now available for us and we slept in them for two nights and in decent beds for the last time.

⁵¹Training for life on the kibbutz in Palestine/Israel (Chanan Florsheim).

⁵²For details about Heinz Meyerstein see [“Gehetzt, gejagt und entkommen: Von Göttingen über München und das KZ Dachau nach Holland, Deutschland, Holland und durch Frankreich über die Pyrenäen in Spanien gerettet. Jüdische Schicksale 1938-1944”](#)

The next day we had to undergo a curious ceremony. We were sent to a specific address in the afternoon where everyone had to swear fealty and loyalty to Eretz⁵³ Israel on a bible and a flag adorned with a Star of David.

On Friday our adventures recommenced after we had done some shopping in town at the last minute.

Again we found ourselves in a train, this time on the stretch from Toulouse to Bayonne. Werner Kahn was also with us. Willy had come to Toulouse to fill out our falsified papers and to settle our final concerns. Once again I embraced the panorama of Toulouse with a last glance as if it was a farewell forever. The train was jam-packed. We sat on our luggage in the hallway and looked out the windows. Some of us smoked. It did not take long before we discerned in the distance the slightly veiled contours of the Pyrenees. Our hearts already began to pound faster. The final tense days were awaiting us.

I cannot know the private feelings of my comrades. I, myself, could not believe that we already had all troubles behind us. Nevertheless, the previous evening before I fell asleep I had painted a mental picture of how nice it would be to be able to write to England and America again and to get in touch again with all my friends of the past.

Soon it got darker outside. The emergency lights of the train were turned on. Meanwhile the mountain ranges had already come closer. We talked as little as possible with one another. After all, we did not want to draw attention unnecessarily as one could not know who the other travelers were. Finally, after five quarters of train travel we got off at a small railroad stop. We had to follow exactly the instructions that had been given to us in Toulouse. According to the instructions we were to divide our group among the two busses that were waiting in front of the station.

We were now in the dangerous zone of 40 kilometer width which stretched parallel to the Spanish border. Sure, we had our 'papers' but all sorts of unpleasantness might happen during a very strict control. Moreover, one always attracted attention as a foreigner as soon as one opened one's mouth. We always spoke Dutch which meant that the French thought that we were German and the German officials, who traveled with us in the train, were convinced that we were honest Dutch laborers on their way to a construction site. Though, mind you, a construction site which would certainly never enter the dream world of a German official!

Everything proceeded as expected. Following a bus trip of about one hour we arrived in a larger town where we had to change into a second bus. Some of us had to show their papers shortly before boarding.

As everything appeared to be O.K. we could proceed and board. The bus was also jam-packed and we were glad when passengers left at stops. After twenty minutes it was our turn. We had come to a small village. We could not discern more than a few houses.

⁵³Literally: the land of Israel; generally Palestine (Chanan Florsheim).

Inconspicuously we hid among the houses and waited on what would happen next. After a short while two men appeared and pointed in the direction which we had to take. Our tautness increased. This was it! We marched out of the village in groups of two. A waterfall murmured nearby. A cloudy sky spanned above us. Only very few stars flickered. Deadly silence reigned all around. We crossed a tearing brook and stamped up a steep path across a mountain meadow. That was a little foretaste of what was to come later.

A mountain hut emerged from the dark. I suspected that we had arrived at the destination for today. Our leader placed a ladder against the hut and bade us to climb it. We heard muffled voices from above. An unspeakable joy erupted next as we encountered our friends there. It was pitch dark in the hay loft and we tripped over legs and all sorts of other objects. We called out names aloud. I found the Gouda fellows covered with hay up to their noses. Questions began to be asked. There was not much room available but we, the new arrivals also got our living- and sleeping spaces after everyone shifted closer to his neighbor.

We shared our travel stories and were informed about the continuation of our trip. We learned then that we would have to wait until Monday, that is to say three full days, and we were slightly disappointed. It was mentioned that the meals here were excellent and rich. None of us had eaten that much ever in France. The waiting time was necessary because more people would arrive on the evening of the next day and our mountain guide would not leave on Sunday. One had barely time to eat before we immersed ourselves in lively conversation. We related our Gouda time and told about our experiences in Amsterdam. People inquired about common friends and thus it got late. It took some time before everybody could dig a hole for himself under the hay but soon we fell asleep. All of us slept until morning except when someone who had to relieve himself outside stepped on the feet of those in his way.

Depending on one's mood one greeted others with all sorts of idioms. I got a slightly inconvenient spot neat the exit. For once it was colder there and for a second everyone who went outside tripped over my feet twice, namely during leaving and returning. However, everything was forgiven and forgotten after a playful swearword was uttered. Abraham Hellman who lay next to me was slightly ill and still asleep. Across from me rested Werner Kahn who contemplated his eczema-covered face every fifteen minutes in a mirror. Heini Friedmann next to him who was also slightly ill just awoke.

Beautiful weather reigned outside. Real hiking weather but regrettably we had to wait. At eight-thirty a pretty woman came to bring a canteen of coffee and some mighty big loaves of bread. They seemed to suffice for us; however, this anticipation proved to be exaggeratedly optimistic. Fortunately, each of us also had brought along some provisions. Following breakfast some of us climbed down the ladder to wash up at the brook as well as was possible under the circumstances. Those who were lazy passed.

We had to be quite cautious not to be seen from the village. While we were covered by a few hedgerows this camouflage was not fully perfect. I must admit that I was much edgier these first days in the hut than I was going to be during future critical situations. My edginess was due to the unexpected delay and the idling around. We gathered in any old groups and told stories. It was above all Paul who related stories about the Jewish Council of Amsterdam in his own flowery style. He earned great cheers. Those who did not listen either read or tried to sleep.

For us Dutchmen, unfamiliar with mountains, the surroundings in which we found ourselves were very delightful, especially the village down there in the deep valley and behind us, steeply rising, the Pyrenees with their outriggers. Every now-and-then we consulted the map of our route and we discussed the length of the presumed marching route and its duration.

The meal that our farmer had cooked for us was very good. Above all it contained lots of meat. That evening, as we were almost asleep, three more men arrived. None was familiar to us. Two of them were about 40. The third man was 46 but looked much older. Initially we were not pleased with this growth as they were so different from us. However, they proved to be quite entertaining people. The older one among them continuously told Jewish jokes with which he earned much cheers. We were never bored because one had to tell so much about the events of the past years as well of stories that made the rounds in Holland and France in which the hero always was one of our friends.

We were supposed to start on Monday afternoon. The weather had deteriorated slightly but we did not pay attention. Heini and Abraham were quite healthy again. Emil spun for us and himself illusions by calculating of how we could be in Barcelona already by Wednesday or Thursday. I could not listen to such foolishness because of my principle: whenever I enjoyed something ahead of time, something else intervened. That I could rely on!

It was now Monday November 15. Someone had spread he rumor that it was Herbert's birthday. He was congratulated, received all sorts of fine wishes and a package of tobacco for his pipe which was always in a corner of his mouth, regardless of whether the pipe was cold or belching smoke. In the afternoon when everyone had packed, our guide, appropriately dressed for hiking in mountains, arrived with one of our French comrades who slipped us Spanish money and some extra food. We now counted thirteen persons. They were Berrie, Heini, Abraham and Dubsy from Gouda, Herbert, Paul, Emil and I from Auffray, two French lads and the three older men. We gave the friend from Toulouse all our papers. Accompanied by numerous "Good Lucks" and each armed with a thick walking cane we trotted off. The grand mountain tour had begun!

Immediately behind our hut a climb began on a rather steep path, across small brooks and over many rocks. Loud conversation was forbidden.

Our column offered a remarkable sight: every person with his bundle that was somehow firmly attached to his body, usually the back. Our mountain guide was the only one who was better prepared. He wore a leather cap which left only the front of his face uncovered. He had a good backpack, knickerbockers, and-something that impressed us mightily-a dangerously looking and loaded revolver in his rear pant pocket. We all hoped that use of this weapon it would not become necessary.

Already after the first few hundreds of meters our group began to stretch out. The older members were at the tail. After about thirty minutes it was necessary to pause because the 46-year old man could not go on. He sat down on a rock pale as chalk with sweat dropping from his forehead. He was given a swig of cognac which had been carried along for precisely this purpose. It helped but only for another ten minutes. Everyone and especially our guide could see how difficult the effort was for him. He was urged to turn around and return to Toulouse. It was not yet too late at this time of day to find the road back into the valley. Said and done. The incident did not contribute at all to an

improvement of our moods as everyone asked himself what he might do if something like this was to happen and there would be no safe opportunity any longer to turn around.

We still ascended rather briskly although we breathed heavily owing to the uncommonly strenuous effort. The weather had visibly deteriorated even more. The sky was totally covered with gray low-lying clouds.

During the course of the march we learned that the brother-in-law of Adrian, our guide, would wait for us higher up to report whether crossing the mountains would be feasible.

After a climb of about two hours we made our first ten minute pause. We ate a little and threw away superfluous objects such as newspapers and books. Then we were ordered on again: "Allez"!

The next stretch became increasingly difficult. In the meantime it was four-thirty in the afternoon and it had begun to rain lightly. We ascended heavily panting. A brief stop was made at a brook to get a drink of water. Then we met the brother-in-law who handed walking canes to those who did not yet have one. From now on the brother-in-law led and Adrian was last in line. Slowly, almost imperceptibly dusk fell. Now we found ourselves in woods and we noticed the first snow not far upslope. Thus we trudged along silently everyone immersed in his own thoughts. Herbert and Heinz Meierstein walked up front, I walked forward of the middle, and the older men formed the rear. The path became increasingly more difficult all the time. We were already trudging in freshly fallen snow and someone slipped almost every minute. Soon we left the woods and crossed a meadow. From far below us we heard the bells worn by cows and sheep. A farmer passed us with friendly greetings.

Suddenly, when he was already two hundred meters behind us, he emitted short warning whistles and as I turned around he waved us in a certain direction. I was scared and all sorts of fantasies raced through my mind. We walked faster until we had disappeared around a corner. Now it rained no longer but it snowed instead. One could always see only the person in front, his head and the bag on his back covered with snow.

Soon we reached another woods. It had become dark in the meantime. It surely had to be seven o'clock by now. We ascended along a narrow path. To our left was a steep wall and to our right an equally steep precipice. The path seemed to consist only of rocks and holes. Continuously someone fell. Paul, who walked in front of me, was especially prone to slipping. I entertained all sorts of pious thoughts but only to expel the notion that I would eventually weaken and give up also. It was very hard to see the path in the darkness and to mind the steps of the person in front.

The path seemed to be endless. It was now more level but still as fatiguing as the earlier steep climb. Our guide had turned on his flashlight soon to be followed by those who had one too. I did not have one but someone pressed a flashlight into my hand. Since the sun had set it had become quite cold and my hand that carried the light was slowly becoming totally numb. I carried the walking cane in one hand and the lamp in the other and had to watch out not to fall. Nevertheless, the walking had become more tolerable thanks to the flashlight.

The plan was to stay that night in one of the typical huts of the Pyrenees and to proceed the next morning. Originally we had expected to continue marching during the night so that we would arrive in Spain the next morning. On the one hand we were glad

when we heard the talk about the hut; on the other hand we were concerned about our food reserves which had not reckoned with this delay.

Nevertheless, the thought of soon resting and staying overnight in a hut was very tempting and it was believed that one might be able to manage with less food later. Meanwhile we had left the woods. A sharp and icy wind blew into our faces. Everyone was soaking wet from top to bottom and was also thirsty. Fortunately the hut that was mentioned soon appeared in sight. Everyone sighed with relief. Soon we had reached our shelter for the night.

Everyone searched for a good spot in the straw. In the shine of flashlights some took their soaked wet clothes off. Others, including myself crouched fully wet under the straw to cover ourselves to the tips of our noses. Yesterday I had exchanged a sweater with Emil, which was much too large for me. It had originally belonged to a Frans from Haarlem. The advantage was that I could cover my entire head with it when I closed the zipper. From afar I vaguely heard that we would have to turn around the next day if the snowing did not stop. The seriousness of these words hardly penetrated my brain as I was too tired to comprehend. My consciousness was already a bit impaired even though a shouting match had erupted near me involving a certain Mandelblatt who suddenly espoused the role of our leader.

Because of the wetness in which I rested I woke up early the next morning. The snowing appeared to have stopped and suddenly I remembered the words of the previous evening. It was impossible to believe that we might have to turn around! All efforts of the preceding day would have been in vain and that while we were already so close to the border. I could not believe that Adrian's opinion had been serious. One of us checked the weather and reported that there was a thick pack of snow outside but that the snowing itself had stopped. We regained some courage! We ate some and noted that our nourishment reserves were totally inadequate because there was not any more food left for another meal. We soon got ready and stepped outside. The view was gorgeous! We were surrounded by mountain peaks with their overpowering heights and had a gorgeous view of the valley below. A deadly silence held sway over it all. The view was unforgettable not only because of the beautiful scenery but also because Adrian's decisive ruling that we had to turn around. Initially we did not quite believe him but soon we discovered that he was right. We attempted to march for about twenty meters but we sank into snow up to our knees. Then Adrian pointed at the high peak which we would have to climb before we could get to Spain.

Everyone thus realized that continuing was totally pointless. Deeply depressed we started on the way back. Perhaps depressed is not even a good word for the feelings that overwhelmed us. In the beginning one actually felt nothing. Finished, I thought, finished! Now that we had overcome all of these hurdles it had been for nothing. What if a German patrol would cross our path now! Gone were all the illusions one had cherished in spite of all the hardships! Now one's only thought was to reach Toulouse without further troubles. What would Willy's think when he saw us again! Nevertheless, everyone had to adjust himself to the new circumstances and our mood improved slowly but measurably. The descent was swift. We made one rest on the way. Then we slithered down the icy paths again. We reached the old hut near the village exactly twenty-four hours after we had left it.

With the same already-known safety considerations we climbed into the hut after two of us had somewhat plumped up the straw. Everyone collapsed in his old spot. First we did not say much because everyone was exhausted or busy changing clothes. Only later after the meal had been brought-by far not as ample as before-our tongues thawed a bit. Intense discussions raged whether it had been really necessary to turn around or whether we could have proceeded on our own. It was mainly Heinz Meierstein who championed this point of view. Outside it now rained and soon everyone fell asleep only to wake up when dusk came. The discussion that now ensued centered mainly on the future. It was clear that it would be impossible to make another try to cross within the next few days. Nevertheless, Adrian raised some hope when he said that another attempt was not out of the question if the weather improved. However, to wait for that we had to go back to Toulouse but how could we travel back without valid papers? After all we had given up all papers except our ID cards but these did not suffice especially in the dangerous border zone. It was decided that Herbert and Werner should travel ahead without papers. Werner's eczema had visibly worsened owing to the unsanitary conditions of the straw.

The others too began to show signs of small discomfort. Herbert attracted general anger by his repeated assertion of how he would get provisions in Toulouse for a renewed march and how he would eat to his heart's content in a restaurant. Meals had become so inadequate that all of us were hungry almost all of the time. Therefore both would travel to Toulouse and one of them would return with the necessary papers.

Nevertheless it eventually turned out differently. We had returned on Tuesday afternoon and Adrian had been in Toulouse on Thursday where he had fetched our belongings. Thus we decided that those of us that had arrived last would travel on Friday and the others on Saturday.

As we were condemned to idleness all day I continued to think about ways in which we could still get to Spain because there was no way that I would ever abandon this goal. After all, my justification for having come to France had been to move on. Thus I hit on the idea to cross the border by train. Sure, that first sounded a bit adventurous like in a novel of Karl May⁵⁴. However, the longer I thought about the idea the firmer it lodged itself in my brain. I talked about it with my comrades. Most of them thought that it was a bad joke. Only Berrie and Abraham allowed me to explain my plan's technical aspects.

Besides having read about it I had heard in Holland about cases in which people had fled Germany hidden under a train wagon. Because I always believe: 'what others can do, I can do too' I was going to investigate the plan more closely. The longer the three of us considered the plan, the more enthusiastic we became. Nevertheless, we first wanted to return to civilization before we could seriously study it.

⁵⁴Popular German writer (1842-1912) who specialized in stories about the encounters of white settlers and American Indians. He wrote several of his books while in jail for petty thefts (D.H.).

It was icy cold when the farmer called for us at the barn at six o'clock that Friday morning. First he brought us to his house where each of us got a cup of coffee with cognac and a slice of bread. Then we said goodbye to him. His sister brought us to the country road where we had to wait thirty minutes for the bus. By then we had no feelings left in our feet. The trip itself went smoothly. Everyone sighed with relief when we finally reached the train station where we were outside the dangerous prohibited area.

When the train for Toulouse arrived I could not refrain from kneeling down to inspect the undercarriage of the wagons more closely. However, I could not yet learn very much at that time. I really thawed in the well-heated wagon. The others had boarded further to the front of the train. It must have been about half past twelve. A terrible hunger raged in my stomach. I considered it wisest to close my eyes and sleep till our arrival in Toulouse.

When we arrived at our destination I was unspeakably satisfied about the good ending of the whole affair. Almost none of us were at least slightly sick. I was chilled to the bones. To make matters worse it rained as we walked through Toulouse to our old hotel "Gambetta". A French comrade had called for us at the station and had given everyone some pretzels which we devoured. He gave us bread stamps and arranged for meeting us the next day. Paul went to bed immediately because he suffered the most. We others first bought some food to still our hunger and then wolfed it down quickly. After that we went our separate ways. Some went to a barbershop, others to a bath house, each according to his own personal needs. All of us met in the Café de la Paix in the afternoon where we ate so much that we could hardly breathe.

There is no doubt that I felt some pleasure as I walked again through the streets of Toulouse. On the one hand I had said farewell to the city and had believed that I would never see it again; on the other hand I was relieved that the trip had gone so smoothly without any dangerous incident. The following evening, November 20, I went to the railroad station to call for the comrades that had stayed behind. I had already made reservations for a hotel room for them. However, only Adrian arrived. I immediately became scared because I feared that something terrible had occurred, which, after all, was always possible. I was accompanied by a French chawer. Adrian calmed us when he reported that they had been unable to board the bus because it had been overfull. Now they were forced to wait until Monday as there was no connection on Sunday. When I reported the story to our other comrades we all pitied the fellows because they had to sit around for two more days in that rat hole. We realized how great the disappointment must have been for them.

The ensuing period in Toulouse proceeded rather eventless. As anticipated, the second group arrived on Monday. They told us that the food situation had improved enormously after we had left. Meanwhile our French friends consoled us repeatedly with the news that another trip was about to start within a few days. However, these were only promises and after a while no one believed them any longer.

We were allowed to spend a specific amount of money every day for food and lodgings. The remainder we spent on entertainment and sweets. One day Kurt appeared and thoroughly discussed the situation with us. I believe that we had been already a fortnight in Toulouse. Our continued sojourn in the city was undesirable because of safety considerations, therefore it was impossible to wait in Toulouse any longer for another crossing of the Pyrenees.

Besides, we talked also about a project suggested from a French source, namely that we stay transiently in the 'Maquis'⁵⁵. Only Herbert, Abram and I were eligible because we spoke French. Herbert was the only one willing to go. However, he quit at the last minute when he discovered that the other two of us had no desire to go.

Meanwhile I was seriously working on the execution of my plan to reach Spain by train. Almost every morning I went to the train station to observe the undercarriage of the D-train from the platform. I found a promising spot near the axles and studied it as well as was possible under the given circumstances as I had to do this as unobtrusively as I could. In the afternoon I usually hung around in the shunting area to study the Mitropa-wagons⁵⁶ and the dining cars which were built on higher undercarriages than the other wagons. Abraham accompanied me to check everything out and promised to participate. So did Heinz Meyerstein. After Berrie had also viewed the undercarriage of a wagon he apparently got such a big scare from the menacingly looking rod system that he never again talked about them or, if he did, at best with greatly disparaging words.

Abraham and I seriously discussed the execution of our plan with Willy and Kurt. The problem was that they did not take us seriously. Kurt advanced several useful arguments. He suggested that we should make a trial trip first to find out whether the idea was technically feasible. I immediately decided to travel a short stretch under a car between Toulouse and Bordeaux. Our other friends tried to talk us out of it with all sorts of clever arguments to convince us to join them to the Maquis.

When we bade them farewell on December 7, 1943 it seemed to me that they did not believe that they would ever see us again alive. The mood was truly morbid. Our French comrades were also horrified and maintained that they would not let us go if they had any say in the matter. Moreover, it was a pity, they averred, that we would take the Spanish money along which they had given us. They pleaded with us that we should reconsider the plan in favor of the Maquis.

However, we were deaf to all objections. That very day Willy, Herbert, Abraham, and I took the train to Bordeaux. However, I refrained from making a test trip as that seemed to entail a needless risk. Herbert wanted to seek a job in Bordeaux to wait until another trip to Spain would materialize.

The two of us remained for three more days in Bordeaux where we lived in Hotel Lion d'Or, ate in the canteen of the German army, and decided to set our departure date on December 11. Abraham had an unshakable premonition that we would get to Spain before Chanukah. We planned to take the late express train to Bayonne and to use the six minutes stop there to crawl under the train. However, taking the train to Bayonne required a special document, 'Sonderausweis' in German. Willy, however, with his brilliant ideas helped us. He made us go to the O.T. with a normal marching order where we succeeded in obtaining a real 'Sonderausweis' which allowed us to travel gratis to Bayonne. Afterwards we said, suffused with joy: "Well, if something starts this well, it must end well". That evening Willy traveled back to Paris and we spent our time with gallows humor. It turned out that he himself had not believed either that we had been serious.

⁵⁵Literally: brushwood; jungle. Difficult-to-access areas of France where armed French resistance groups against the German occupation were hiding out (Chanan Florsheim).

⁵⁶Company of sleeping- and dining wagons (D.H.).

The crucial day of December 11 began! During the day we moseyed about. Our train would leave at six p. m. At four-thirty we were in the Rue Tanasse to leave behind everything that we could not take along. In order that I would not attract undue attention because I was traveling without any baggage I was going to take my briefcase which I would leave in the overhead storage net at Bayonne. The last who told us that we were crazy were Herbert and Ernst Kahn who had rented a room in the Rue Tarnasse. At a quarter to six we were on the platform. Regrettably the train was delayed by one hour. In my coat pocket I had a flashlight, thick gloves and a Busby. I wore only rough clothes. I had some food in the briefcase.

Thunderously the train arrived towards seven o'clock. We ran towards the front compartments because the wagons for the German army were in that section. Unfortunately we had to board by trial and error some other car because the wagons for the German army were outside the platform and completely in the dark. Later we would crawl under the car we were in. I must admit that tension slowly gripped me and I was glad that the trip to Bayonne would last two and one half hours. As the train departed I looked out of the window once more and this time I rally believed that I had seen Bordeaux for the very last time. Obviously either everything went well-we would reach Spain- or badly in which case we might end up in jail or worse. The saying 'It always goes differently from the way one thinks' proved to be correct.

The hour hand of my watch showed a quarter before ten when we finally entered the station of Bayonne. Our car was completely dark. We were the last to leave but away from the platform to be able to crawl under the car. Cautiously we got off on the "wrong side" without being seen. It was pitch-dark around us. Abraham walked in front of me and I followed closely behind. Now we were under the train!

We knew where our 'seats' had to be and tried to climb on the rods. I immediately noticed that something was amiss. I was already on my back but there was not enough room for the whole body and I could not pull up my legs because the space between rods and the bottom of the car was too small. My head banged against the rods and with much effort I tried to somehow squeeze myself in. However, I realized that we could not go on and also remembered in time that the stop of the train would end soon. I therefore told Abraham that we had to quit.

He did not want to hear of it. However, without any more ado I jerked myself away from under the car and jumped onto the platform. For good or for bad he had to follow me. With lightning speed I removed the cap from my head, and pulled off the mitts because of the risk that someone might think that we were terrorists about to commit sabotage. As we passed by the dining car I remarked that we should have tried that wagon because it was constructed the way I had memorized. Abraham wanted to try on the spot but I no longer had the courage as the train was about to leave any moment.

With resignation and deeply downcast we left the train station. Of course we had to search for a hotel now. On the way we decided to repeat our experiment the next evening. I believed that our failure was simply due to the fact that we had tried a German wagon. The next evening we were going to try a French one.

Fortunately we still had some French money with us and about hundred and fifty francs would be enough to pay for a room and breakfast the next morning. I had made thorough preparations and had not left all food stamps behind in Bordeaux. Upon our querying someone mentioned a small hotel nearby. The landlady answered looking very

suspiciously at us. When I looked perchance into a mirror I guessed that I knew the reason. It was only then that I discovered that my face, hands, coat and pants were covered with black soot. Abraham was covered less thickly than I was. However, we were lucky and got a small room for twenty five francs. Because we would have all of next day to make new plans we went to bed soon.

There was sunshine but it was also bitter cold when we woke up. We drank a cup of coffee, paid, and bade adieu. I dared hardly show myself in a coat that was covered with black streaks. I had the feeling that everybody could see that I had lain under a railroad car. Every once in a while I took my coat off but it seemed to be even more conspicuous as before to walk around with a coat over my arm on this icy cold day. I must admit that I was very nervous all day long because of how I appeared. I was only relieved when we went into a movie house in the afternoon.

All had to go well that evening because our food-stamps for bread and butter were nearly exhausted! At seven thirty we ate our last meal and at a quarter to nine we were again at the railroad station. Against our expectation the train was on time today. This time we positioned ourselves on the platform for the end of the train. When the train stopped we ran around the last car and tried to crawl under it. However, the unbelievable happened! The same problem of the previous evening! There was no possibility to find room for the whole body. Moreover a railroad man with a lantern was walking along the cars so we had to quit again unsuccessfully.

We had hardly returned to the platform when a German military policeman suddenly appeared and asked for our papers. Fortunately the 'Sonderausweis' did its job and we could proceed unhindered. Abraham immediately wanted to rent a room in the same hotel. I thought that it might appear strange to the landlady that we came back again on the same day dirty and without luggage. I finally gave in and we stayed in the same room of the preceding night.

That evening we discussed the situation for a long time. We considered the possibility of a third try but we were no longer truly enthusiastic. We considered other possibilities such as traveling seated on the so-called 'harmonica', the platform connecting two wagons, but as I have already noted, the real eagerness was gone. I was especially worried because we had hardly any money and almost no food stamps. I thought it might be best to look for a job either in Bayonne or Biarritz and to try a train again at a later time.

This Monday we ambled about with a terrible hunger. Perchance we met some Dutchmen in a restaurant at which we always used to eat inexpensively and well. I sold them a package of cigarettes which I always carried on me for one hundred francs so that we could pay the room for the next night. The Dutchmen also gave us the address of a Dutch firm in Biarritz and we decided to go there that evening to test our luck. In the afternoon we walked randomly through Bayonne and prayed to our lucky charm to be successful that evening.

That evening we took the streetcar to Biarritz. At the suggested hotel we found many Dutch workers. Abraham met some acquaintances from a construction site at Jonsac. That already eased our task significantly. The fellows gave us details about the firm and sent us to the room of the owner. Mr. Cleysteen turned out to be a very simple and friendly man. We told him something believable and he gave us bread stamps and suggested that we should come the next morning to the construction site at the airport of

Biarritz. We were overjoyed especially Abraham after he was given a package of tobacco in lieu of an advance. The Dutch fellows gave us each a loaf of German military bread which we wolfed down as if we had fasted all day long. Very confidently we returned to Bayonne.

The next morning, Tuesday December 14, I entered a construction site for the first time since Auffay. It was an almost ideal job. The hourly wage was 17.5 Francs, the food from the German army kitchen was excellent, and there was no need to work hard. Almost all day long we hung around a fire. It took only a few minutes to hack away the underbrush on a slope. Two days later we were paid our advance and now we had quickly returned to our feet without having to call alarmingly for help. Above all we were protected by our job against the Germans because until now we had relied only on false march orders.

We had some very nice days but, as the saying goes, it ended for some unknown reason. In this case it was because the firm had completed its work in Biarritz and was going to move to Mont-de-Marsan.

That was some blow for us because we had hoped to develop relations in Biarritz to get to Spain. That was wholly impossible in Mont-de-Marsan which was located further inland. Work stopped on Thursday afternoon and thus we had a chance to visit the famous Biarritz. We enjoyed a magnificent afternoon on the beach. On Friday morning at eleven our train would leave Bayonne. However, since our firm had its temporary headquarters in Biarritz and we had kept our rooms in Bayonne we were going to join the group at eleven on the platform in Bayonne to continue the trip with them.

Until the arrival of the train we sat down for a cup of coffee when a policeman in civilian clothes approached our table and demanded to see our IDs. We handed him our IDs and asked for an explanation. Although we this once spoke the truth he apparently did not believe us and simply put our papers in his pocket. Thereafter the three of us went to the platform. He wanted to check that we were really listed on the marching order of our group. When the train finally arrived and our foreman leaned out from a window to find us I cheerfully drew his attention. I then reaped the huge satisfaction that the policeman who had become convinced of the truth of our statements had to return our papers. However, we would not arrive that day at our destination. We missed our connection in Dax and in the afternoon we were too late for the stop-train to Mont-de-Marsan. We therefore did not get past Morceaux, too late to continue the travel. Because no hotel was available there we had to spend the night in the waiting room of the station.

It took until Saturday afternoon before we arrived in Mont-de-Marsan. It soon became obvious especially after our meal at the future construction site that conditions were much worse there. Hence everybody was downcast especially because the firm had not taken care of anything. There was not even a place for us to stay at night. The bad mood kept growing until, in the afternoon, someone offered the idea to spend one and one half day in the big city of Bordeaux as it was already Saturday and work would not start until Monday.

Abraham and I looked at each other and probably had the same thoughts. To travel to Bordeaux and to meet our comrades again! Wonderful! That evening a unanimous decision was made to travel to Bordeaux to meet the owner of the Cleysteen firm who was traveling elsewhere at that time. This proposal was greeted unanimously because we could then have a day off at the expense of the firm. We took the evening

train via Dax to Bordeaux and no one was happier than I when we arrived at the railroad station. Bordeaux, although it was ugly and unsympathetic, offered more security than Bayonne or Toulouse. In vain we tried many hotels but eventually landed in the by now well-known Rue Tanesse. There Willy surprisingly appeared shortly before midnight. As we were after all 'resurrected fellows' we greeted him joyfully.

The next day we enjoyed again sweet idleness. Every once in a while we got together with our colleagues to find out whether our job at Mont-de-Marsan had already been cleared. The owner of the firm, who had to have been back already for some time, was not seen anywhere. We intended in those days to stay with his firm for lack of better, although we had not much yen to do so. However, on Thursday December 22 fate intervened to bring about a totally different direction to our plans....

Abraham and I had just returned to the hotel Lion d'Or to eat dinner (it was very meager, only a bun and quark) when someone rapped on the door of our room. Upon our 'entrez' a tall, broad shouldered man entered the room and greeted us in Dutch. After we had exchanged some pleasantries he pointed at our simple meal which we ate seated on the bed: 'don't you have anything else to eat' he asked. We said 'today the food is indeed quite meager'. 'Well', he offered, 'come and eat with me downstairs in the hotel'. Although I first strongly declined I allowed myself quickly to give in and accept his invitation. During a short moment when Abram and I were alone we quickly exchanged our views. We decided to remain quite reserved and to find out what he wanted from us. We were convinced that he had not invited us on account of brotherly love.

As we were dining in the hotel together with a friend of his, he opened up a little. Our host, he called himself Christiaan Lindeman⁵⁷ was a member of an illegal resistance organisation which had connections in Holland and Spain and was charged with liberating an English pilot from the jail in Mont-de-Marsan. He was Dutch and hailed from the town of Roermond. His name, Christiaan, might be just as true or false as ours. He asked us about details of controls in the trains between Bordeaux and Dax. Since we knew this stretch well we volunteered the information.

After we had finished dinner the three of us went to our room and discussed the matter at hand. Christiaan explained his plan which asked us to be lookouts. When he and his friends were busy inside the jail we were to make sure that no danger threatened them from the outside and if that seemed to develop we were to warn them. Initially I was not at all prepared for such a role. However, the decisive factor was the promise that we would immediately be brought to Spain if the action failed and also if it succeeded but two weeks later. Given these prospects it was impossible for me to say no and we decided to leave the next morning. In the Rue de Tanasse we left a message for one of our colleagues and thereafter returned to our own hotel.

⁵⁷Christiaan Lindeman was a valued military aide of Prince Bernhard, the husband of the future Queen Juliana of the Netherlands and commander of the 'Oranje (Orange) Brigade' of the British army. Lindeman may have inadvertently given away some details of the plans for the September 1944 allied landing operation Market Square at Arnhem (D.H.).

In bed we discussed everything once again. The whole affair appeared very strange. A totally unknown fellow asks us to assist him in a hugely dangerous undertaking without knowing our cast of mind. He therefore had to be either very incautious or an agent of the Gestapo⁵⁸.

However, we quickly dropped the second suspicion because we remembered that he had earlier shown us the contents of his luggage: in it were two revolvers, a dagger, and a syringe with strychnine. He had also told us that he had been regularly in Spain. During the meal he had given his address in Paris to his French friend from Peyrehorade and Abraham had been so alert to write it down unnoticed.

On Tuesday December 23 we were already on the platform of the station St. Jean as early as five thirty and arrived in Dax towards nine with one hour delay. A taxi cab waited for us and Christiaan talked for a few minutes with two women while we boarded. We appreciated the fact that women participated in the organization. Perhaps it was only our illusion but we already gained more trust in our new friend. After less than one hour we arrived in Mont-de-Marsan.

At a garage we got out and soon followed Christiaan and a young woman. I kept carrying the briefcase whose content we had investigated the evening before. We passed by the jail and finally ended up in a café where we stayed a few hours while Christiaan went off with a few local friends. The two of us were quite nervous about what was supposed to happen next. In the afternoon Christiaan came back and we had a meal together. He told us that not everything had been fully organized. He was going to be informed later that day whether anything was still going to happen. Then we traipsed behind him again and reached another café where we waited for a goodly while. Finally we learned that the planned action would not go off that day but perhaps eight days later. On the one hand I was relieved, on the other also disappointed. We would return to Bordeaux and make a new attempt later. Since the train for Morceaux had already left we had to stay that night in Mont-de-Marsan.

We decided to take a bus to Bordeaux the next day.

We found a place to sleep with a working-class family. They were friends of the guy from Peyrehorade. We were given a dinner there and went to bed in the hay of their stable.

We got up at five in the morning. It was December 24, hence Christmas Eve. After we had washed up and eaten a little we said goodbye to our friendly hosts. Christiaan rewarded their hospitality with a gift in money.

⁵⁸Gestapo = 'Geheime Staatspolizei' = Secret National Police; a spying organization such as the STASI later in East Germany (D.H.).

Because the bus was more than jam-packed we changed to the stopping train of seven o'clock. While we were biding our long waiting time I opined that we would have to stay and wait in Bordeaux. Christiaan was silent for a while before he asked in the most natural sounding voice of the world why we could not join him to travel to Paris. We answered that we did not have enough money for this but that did not seem to be a hindrance for him: "Of course you will go at my expense. I will pay everything; you know that, don't you". Indeed, he had proven to be very generous until now and seemed to have access to large funding. He had earlier given us significant pocket money and after we had bought the train tickets we could keep the change. I would have loved to embrace him because spending Christmas in Paris was the last thing that I had expected. Paris, the city that I had desired so much to revisit! Abraham was no less joyful than I and we boarded the slow train in the best of moods.

Towards one in the afternoon we finally arrived in Bordeaux. I remained at the station to purchase the tickets for Paris while Christiaan and Abraham went to the hotel. When they returned Abraham showed me a note which one of our work colleagues had left behind and from which I learned that the group had returned during the preceding night for work in Biarritz. That did not bother me a bit because the more important thing was now that we were traveling to Paris. Thus my career at the firm of 'Zwart and Cleysteen' ended after three and one half days of work.

The two of us rode the express to Paris at a quarter before two. It was gorgeous weather outside and my feelings were similar to the ones I used to have in earlier days when I rode off for vacationing. I praised myself lucky that we had joined our newfound friend who had proven to be so generous. In the evening at exactly nine thirty we arrived at Paris-Austerlitz and thus what I had never allowed myself to dream about happened: after our lucky start in Auffay and the failed attempt to cross the Pyrenees I yet saw Paris again! Shortly before our arrival we had agreed to meet Christiaan the next day at two p.m. at a specific spot where he would also give us funds for our continued sojourn in Paris.

We said goodbye at the railroad station, wished each other a Merry Christmas, and took the subway to our old hotel Transatlantique where we rented a large room. As we checked in we discovered to our great surprise that another Dutchman stayed in the same hotel. It turned out to be Zippy. The management refused to give us his room number although we asked for it repeatedly with the justification that our meetings were always accompanied by lots of noisemaking. They had no objections to give us his number the next morning. Thus we went to sleep with the feeling that once again we had met great luck even though we had not really deserved it.

Wonderfully rested I awoke the next morning in this giant bed and suddenly remembered that Zippy was one floor beneath us. I badly wanted to meet him again after such a long time. I inquired about his room number and this time the management gave it to me without further ado. What a face Zippy made when I entered his room as if I had always lived there! Now we had time to exchange our experiences. For some time Zippy worked at another construction site near Rouen but still for the firm of Mol. He would soon receive his official furlough time. He had already requested it for traveling to--- Berlin. I had already heard of this in Bordeaux and asked him for his reasons.

Then the three of us rode to the Rue de la Chapelle to find out how we could get in touch with Kurt, Willy, or Max Windmüller. At eleven all of us met in downtown at

one of the many “Dupont”-Bars. Everybody was perplexed that we had met so soon again in Paris. We related to them our entire experience with Christiaan. Willy decided to join us for our meeting with Christiaan that afternoon. We had agreed to meet at the subway station Notre Dame-de-Lorette at two in the afternoon. Though we were a little late there was no sign of Christiaan, no matter how assiduously we searched for him. We thought that he might have left because we were late but he did not seem to be a person who would leave us without any clue for contacting him especially since we did not have his address and he did not have ours.

The longer we waited for Christiaan the madder we got with him. Abraham in particular was greatly disappointed. I, however, pondered that an unexpected incident had possibly happened and I therefore proposed that we should go back to the same spot at two o'clock the next day. Willy and Kurt had barely believed our lively stories about Christiaan. His whole behavior seemed equally strange to them as it had seemed to us back then in Bordeaux. The circumstance that he had not shown up only confirmed their suspicions.

In the afternoon Zippy, Abraham and I visited the Eiffel tower and enjoyed the gorgeous view of the city. In a restaurant we drank coffee substitute with milk, rare for French conditions at the time and had to turn in our bread- and fat stamps for cake. What I had not visited during my previous two days in Paris I now patiently made up for. I truly enjoyed the world-famous buildings that beguiled everyone.

The next day we returned to Notre Dame-de-Lorette. With the same result as expected. Abraham and I now went to work like detectives to find the house of our friend. As I have already mentioned Abraham had furtively jotted down Christiaan's address during our joint dinner in Bordeaux. It was somewhere in the suburb of Neuilly. We did find the house but, to our disappointment, no Christiaan Lindeman lived there.

Because the conversation had been in French which Abraham could barely understand it had to have been a different address which he had so eagerly jotted down. We had expected our new connection to be greatly helpful for our own organization and provide a new mountain guide for the Pyrenees. Some incident had obviously occurred to Adrian such that he could no longer bring people to Spain.

Must I write that all of us later attended a Mozart concert in the Music School? Kurt, Willy, Max, and Moshe Kohn were there. Abraham and I came too late when all seats were already sold out. I bought a ticket for a standing room while Abraham remained in the vestibule. Ernst Kahn from Bordeaux was also in Paris in those days. Together with Lore Sieskind we took a stroll in the afternoon. Anyway it seemed that someone had spread the parole that everybody should be in Paris for Christmas as huge numbers of our fellows had gathered there but accidentally. Günter and Ilse Aronade, Hand Ehrich and spouse, and some others from the Werkdorp Wieringen were there. If one hung around in the surroundings of the Gare du Nord for one half hour one would surely run into one of us.

Abraham was often invited by relatives who lived in Paris. Otherwise we usually spent the time together and regularly went to the movies in the evening. Zippy had soon returned to his construction site near Rouen and the two of us stood in the evening at nine thirty at the train station Austerlitz on Thursday December 30. This time we traveled very comfortably in second class, of course for free. We returned after a trip of nine hours in our old Bordeaux. I really had the blues because that city appeared even more

unsympathetic to me after my stay in Paris. The following day I immediately went to the hotel Lion d'Or to find out whether news from Christiaan was awaiting me there. Fat chance!

That evening Herbert, Ernst, me, and a girl from the Rue Tanasse went to a movie to celebrate the coming New Year. Afterwards Herbert and I sat in a café to wait for midnight. There was absolutely no celebratory mood in the streets or in the café's which should have been closed at that time.

Meanwhile Abraham was on his way to Christiaan's friend in the little town of Peyrehorade near Bayonne to obtain more precise information on Christiaan's whereabouts. After three days he returned with the news that Christiaan had suddenly been urged to return to Holland and was not expected to return until January 6th. Abraham had not obtained his address but only a phone number.

Meanwhile I had used my time to find firms where I and others might find work, of course for good salaries and paid in French Francs. After Abraham returned we decided to return to Paris to meet with Christiaan on January 6th. Thus we left Bordeaux on the evening of January 5th and arrived the next morning in Paris. We first went hotel hunting in Montmartre because we considered the "Transatlantique" too expensive this time. However, because we could not find any cheaper rooms we ended up in "Transatlantique" again. We met Zippy and also Ludi Goldwein who had just returned from a furlough in Holland. In addition the following were in Paris: the families Schlossberger, Kapellner, and Lewin who had been brought from Holland to Paris by Max Windmüller.

Again we played the detectives and discovered with some difficulty that our phone number was consistent with the address in Neuilly but that the owner of that number was not known to us. On the 6th of January we traveled to Neuilly but the concierge told us that Dr. F. had not yet returned from his travels. Again, a huge disappointment! We were not wiser than before. We tried telephone calls but no one answered them. One day Zippy came and asked me to help him with some affairs in Lille. I agreed because it was very convenient for me. After all I really did not know what to do with my spare time especially when the weather was bad. Moreover, my financial situation was not the best.

So Erwin Kapellner, Zippy and I traveled to Lille and from there in the direction of Boulogne. Our task was to pick up a bunch of suitcases in a small town. A group of our boys who had worked there had left them behind. A deadly accident had happened to a 'Fremdarbeiter' during the unloading of railroad cars at the station hence our comrades had feared investigations and questioning by the police. For that reason they had precipitously left and just in time. Everything went smoothly and we picked up the suitcases when darkness fell. That night we slept in a hotel in the village. The next morning we were back in Lille. The four of us went for strolls in town all day long. During this occasion we also met with Lutz Rosenberg who worked in Dannes-Camier and was on his way to Antwerp. In the afternoon we were again at the railroad station, accompanied Zippy to the train for Brussels and rode a little later with the express train to Paris.

The next evening we were at the Gare du Nord because Max would arrive with a new group of people from Holland among who were Henny Sperber, Lolly, and Horst Narkus. Zippy was with them also. Because of this there was a great hullabaloo at the

station. Kurt got worried about it and urged us to leave the premises. Abraham continued to call Christiaan's home but without success. We therefore decided to stop searching for him because it all seemed senseless and a big waste of time.

All of us were to return to Bordeaux on Tuesday January 11. Kurt arrived at the station Austerlitz only three minutes before the train left with some fellows from Auffay. I had a bad headache and did not want to spend all night standing in the train. Therefore Abraham, David Mühlrad, one of the escapees from the English Channel zone, and I decided to go to Bordeaux only two days later as we would miss nothing after all. David and Abraham had obtained the address of a mountain guide from an accidental acquaintance which meant that we were no longer so strongly dependent on Christiaan. Our main goal had been and remained to find opportunities to get to Spain.

On January 13 at seven in the morning we arrived at station St. Jean in Bordeaux. In the afternoon we met Kurt at the post office and discussed our next activities. Abraham and David were to travel to the mountain guide and stop on their way back in Peyrehorade to inquire about news of Christiaan's whereabouts from his fiend. Kurt was of the opinion that Christiaan had been arrested because he had learned about a number of such recent cases. I was to travel that same evening to Labouheyre where a group of fellow lumberjacks lived to iron out a number of affairs. We took leave at the railroad station and none of us suspected that our ways would part then unexpectedly but forever. I arrived loaded with some packages of crackers in Labouheyre and found the guys at the movies which I had to watch whether I liked it or not.

Afterwards we reviewed all matters in their living quarters where I stayed that night. The next morning I accompanied the lumberjacks to their workplace because I had ample time before my train left. At twelve thirty I was back in Bordeaux.

Abraham and David were supposed to be back on January 20th the latest. I harbored hopes that their efforts would have borne fruit. When that day came there was no trace of them.

I assumed that they had decided to remain in Toulouse but Willy who just arrived from there did not think that they were there. Just when we began to get restless Kurt appeared in Bordeaux with the fine news that he had discovered a new mountain guide and that the date of departure had also already been set. Kurt had already composed the list of participants. It became my task to visit some of them to explain the plan and obtain their consent. Of course I immediately participated. I had forgotten the disappointment of the previous attempt and had good hope that everything would turn out well this time. After all, if one counted the failed attempt under the train, this would be the third try and the third try is charm as is well known.

During the following days I visited Moshe Kohn, Erich Sander, and Emil Glücker in La Rochelle where they worked on a U-boat base. Emil was not there. Erich I saw again for the first time since Gouda. He was scared as I called his name amidst the circle of his Dutch co-workers. The weather was excellent and we went for a stroll without interference on the Navy shipyard La Pallice. There I could marvel at the gigantic U-boat bunkers. Erich accepted after he had thought some about the plan. Afterwards I walked some time through La Rochelle and returned late that evening to Bordeaux.

I telegraphed to Paris the results of my trip in the afternoon of the next day. It was agreed that the participants should gather in Bordeaux on Tuesday January 25th. Meanwhile I prepared myself for the trek. I was now very concerned about the fate of

Abraham. He and his comrade were already one week overdue. One had to assume that some accident had happened. Nevertheless, we considered a somewhat improbable solution namely that both had already gone to Spain for some unknown reason. However, most of our thoughts were already with the imminent trek. Willy arrived in Bordeaux on January 25th with Lore Süsskind, Heinz Moses, and Ludi Goldwein. The seven of us traveled to Toulouse the next day. This time I did not cast farewell glances at the city. I had wizened up!

Rolf Rothmann and Hugo Zadoks waited for us outside the train station Matabiau. While Willy had to attend an engagement with the French Chawerim we spent some time to find rooms. We had to stay in Toulouse until Monday January 31st; then we would travel in the direction of Pau. That morning we experienced a scary intermezzo-without nasty consequences-when police appeared in the hotel a six o'clock in the morning to check ID's. By chance Willy had registered all of us. He was our trek-leader who had all of the necessary documents. The police found him in bed with Lore which they shared because of a dearth of space. The police officer withdrew discreetly and swiftly.

At five-thirty that evening we traveled with the slow train towards Oloron-St. Marie. This section was already quite dangerous because it was not certain at all that our papers were valid in case of a control. We split into small groups. Ludi and I boarded a compartment. I must admit that I had never been as nervous as during the long waiting period in Pau and this trip. I calmed down only slowly while Ludi continuously prepared sandwiches which I wolfed down to divert my thoughts.

However, everything went fine. We left the train in St. Christau two stations past Oloron. Our guide waited for us in the tiny station. He made himself known by a specific signal. After Willy had talked with him all nine of us went outside. There was an inn nearby where we sat down for a while, drank beer, and behaved reservedly because of the presence of several strangers. Towards eight as it had already become completely dark outside we left. Willy still accompanied us. During the crossing of a road we had to lie flat on our bellies in order to not be caught by the headlights of a passing car. Without further incidents we continued. Soon thereafter we said adieu to Willy. He gave us an address in Pau where he had deposited some papers in case our effort would fail again.

The guide let us proceed without him after he had explained everything to Hugo Zadok who spoke French well. He had to return to the village with Willy to find a room for the night for him. Hugo now led our group. For a while we followed the train tracks. After three quarters of an hour we reached a bridge, the agreed upon meeting point, where our guide would rejoin us. We sat down on a slope while Hugo went to look out. Good weather was in store for the next day judging from the clear skies. Lights were on in some of the farms around us. The chain of mountains in front of us looked menacingly down on us. A muted whistle from the guide in the darkness urged us to begin our march. We were told that we had to cross a mountain pass before ten o'clock because the pass was guarded only after that time. Obviously we were constantly in dangerous terrain close to the railroad track. Now we marched on silently, each having their own thoughts and almost automatically following in the footsteps of the person before us. Every now and then a dog barked.

We circled a small railroad station and fifteen minutes later we arrived at the mountain pass. The guide asked which of us had good night vision. Erich answered. For a while the two whispered. Next Erich put on the guide's slippers while we waited at this

spot. The guide explained to us that it was not absolutely certain that the mountain pass was not yet guarded. One could not accept the risk by proceeding without some investigation. It took about ten minutes until Erich returned from his spying exercise. Everything was secure. There were no Germans in sight. We breathed a sigh of relief.

We continued all the while avoiding, as well as possible, making any sounds. Our road led over stony paths past steep precipices. Ludi once slipped and almost fell down slope. One had to keep hard to the right to avoid falling down slope. This path seemed to be endless but eventually we began the climb of a substantial mountain. The guide comforted us by announcing that we would soon be in our hut where we would stay until the next morning. So it came about. At exactly eleven we arrived at our bivouac for the night. After we had eaten we sacked out and fell asleep soon.

At six the next morning we trekked on. It was still pitch dark outside. We had to descend now which, in the darkness, was worse than climbing. Many slipped and frequent stops had to be made to make sure that we had lost no one. After we crossed a road the climbing started again. The guide explained that we had to be at a certain spot at midday where we would meet his friend, the second guide who would bring us to Spain. The climb became more and more difficult by the minute. The sun baked us and we had no drinking water. We crossed a wood in which one had to grasp blades of grass and tree roots to prevent slippage. Lore and Hugo had the greatest problems. We had to stop frequently because they fell increasingly farther behind. It turned out that several people had brought superfluous luggage even though I, who was experienced, had warned against it in Toulouse. Soon our guide lugged coats and other stuff. Towards twelve we, who were the first at the top, fell down into the grass to rest.

Above us stretched a gorgeously blue sky. Although the sun was uncommonly hot we enjoyed the beautiful view of the mountains and valleys around us. After a while, Lore and Hugo crawled up, more of the time on their knees than upright. We rested for about one hour. The guide had begun the search for his colleague together with Rolf. Meanwhile we passed the time with talking and scanned the distance where we believed Spain to be. However, to get there we still had to cross a high snow-covered mountain chain.

Rolf returned twenty minutes later with the message that we should follow him. Everyone was glad that we took off. Soon we met our guide who seemed to be unsure where the agreed upon meeting spot with the second guide was. He maintained that we had arrived too late. Next came what had to be the steepest climb of the tour. We ascended a rocky cliff. I who was last in line saw the others vertically above me. All items that had not been ripped before such as backpacks or pants were now thoroughly torn. We crawled forward on our knees grasping blades of grass to prevent us from falling down slope.

This lasted for about fifteen minutes. Meanwhile I was in the lead again. Soon we took a rest on a rocky plateau. Talking was forbidden because we had been told that German checkpoints could be nearby. Hugo and Lore had fallen a great distance behind and were at the ends of their tethers. It was obvious that they could not continue. It was decided that the guide would take them along on his return while his colleague guided us on. When Lore and Hugo had approached us to within about hundred meters they had probably lost their orientation owing to the shrubbery around us. Lore now gave the agreed upon call of recognition which was supposed to mimic a bird call. "Quack,

Quack” she called. However it sounded very plaintive. We hissed a warning: “Silence” to which she replied “Why”?

All of us took pity on her although we had been told that this crossing was easier than the previous one and was suited for women. Obviously the strain had been too much for her. It took little time before we reached a small cabin located next to a spring. We first slaked our thirst; then ate some.

There was not the slightest sign of the second guide anywhere. Meanwhile it had become three P.M. so we went off again. We descended the mountain for a while. We noticed footprints close to our path and they scared us. However the guide assessed that the spoor was from animals.

Soon we encountered another hut but did not find the second guide there. We lit a fire and decided to stay there for the night. Slowly clouds began to cover the sky. Dusk fell. The hut was too small to let all of us sleep in it simultaneously.

Thus I sat at the fire with two comrades. The whole time we stared pensively into the fire. Now and then we added more wood. I, wizened by experience, could roughly imagine how it might all end. Everyone around slumbered when the guide asked how late it was. It was ten-thirty and the second guide had still not appeared. Suddenly everyone woke up and now there came about what I had feared: we had to turn around and go back!

Everyone in the party was fully aware of the gravity of this announcement. We must turn around now that we were so close to our goal while Spain could almost be seen! We offered all sorts of suggestions to our guide but none brought a solution. Everyone dealt with the decision in his own fashion. Because my pessimism had prepared me for this I was not hit as hard as the others. Towards one o'clock we changed sleeping places. We, who had kept the fire alive, lay down on the hard planks with our backpacks serving as pillows.

The next morning we started off. After we had to climb a little we descended smoothly through the same wood whose crossing had given us so much trouble yesterday. Occasionally we were enshrouded by clouds of fog. The guide looked anxiously around. Once we slightly lost our way. Anyhow, I had the impression that the man did not know the directions too well. My hunch was confirmed but only much later.

Meanwhile the food supply had become very meager but no one felt the slightest hunger. During this second return I became fully aware of the situation in which we found ourselves. This was the second time that I found myself in such an adventure and how easily it could go wrong! In that case all perils, all of my efforts to avoid the Germans from catching me would be for naught! I wished that I was already past the train ride to Pau and safely in Toulouse.

Late that afternoon we arrived at a hut in the center of a valley. Unfortunately our guide was under the weather and we gave him aspirin several times. When we got to the hut he lay down and covered himself warmly. We remained there until darkness fell because we could not be seen as we were near the railroad track. Then we started off and were content to walk on level ground. We therefore proceeded rapidly. A brief but harmless incident happened after we had traversed a long tunnel when a freight train appeared unexpectedly from the darkness and thundered past us. We were quite scared.

After we had crossed the mountain pass of a few days earlier we were again near St. Christau. We were led to a cow shed of a nearby hut where we were to stay two nights and all day tomorrow.

Our guide had bought a large cheese on the way. It was a real treat to eat again because we had slowly become very hungry in reaction to our travails. It was agreed that Hugo, who spoke French the best, would travel to Pau the next morning to fetch the papers which Willy had left there for us. He was to return in the evening and the next morning we would travel to Toulouse.

As planned, Hugo left for Pau. A better mood returned because we had slept well and long. I only got up from my straw bed in the afternoon. We had accepted the unavoidable and pondered our next steps. That evening towards eight we heard not far from our hut the well known and agreed upon “Quack, Quack”. Hugo and our guide entered. The first brought us our papers; the second brought wine, bread, and cheese. We ate in the best of spirits. One hour later we said adieu to our guide. He promised to lead another attempt gratis once the issue with the second guide had been settled. He was sorry that our tour had failed and promised to find a home for Lore and Hugo who were not going to participate in a second try.

The next day we started off. We followed the railroad track. After forty-five minutes we got to the railroad station. Towards nine we arrived in Pau without any incidents. It rained and we considered that to be an omen of our return. We split up in groups and moseyed through town. Towards three in the afternoon we boarded a passenger train and arrived at precisely seven in Toulouse.

That evening Hugo and I went to the ‘Stadtkommandatur’⁵⁹ to get food tickets and a place to stay. Thus we slept in the comfortable beds of Hotel ‘Dobriac’ in the Rue Gambetta. There we registered and went to sleep later.

It was now Saturday February 5th. For openers we began by taking a hot bath in the local bath house to wash away the dirt of the past week. Then we ambled along the Boulevard Strassbourg across the market to buy a few trifles. Next we split up into small groups to study the posted restaurant menus to select the best deal. In the afternoon we amused ourselves with walks or going to a movie.

That evening as we stood at the entrance of the restaurant ‘Continental’ when Willy and a girl named Betty, which I had not known until then, suddenly appeared. He was quite perplexed to see us again and he had to admit that my early pessimism, which I had shared with him, had been on the button. We had dinner together and went to my hotel room afterwards to discuss thoroughly what needed to be done.

There we also learned that Kurt in his boundless optimism had mobilized ‘all of France’ so-to-speak because he predicted that everyone would be brought to Spain within the next three months. Every Chawer from Paris, the Maquis, from Bordeaux to Marseille had quit his job and was waiting for the day when he could begin his mountain tour to Spain.

⁵⁹Every significant city in occupied France had a “Stadtkommandantur”, the local headquarters of the German Armed Forces (D.H.).

Willy prepared us for the fact that we could do nothing but to return to work for some time. That was a hard blow for us. Numerous ideas were proposed but none was useful. Moreover, we had to leave Toulouse as quickly as possible because a large group from the Maquis was expected to arrive here any day now. We went to bed very concerned.

Small groups went for strolls the following day to talk mainly about the future. I was appalled by the prospect of having to work for the Germans again because I felt that I had left this behind me a long time ago. I therefore informed Willy that I would not do this, no matter what.

In the afternoon I met Heinz Moses at a coffee house concert. He was sunk deeply into dark thoughts. While the orchestra played sweet and entertaining melodies the two of us wallowed in all sorts of difficult problems. Towards six we went our separate ways. I returned to the hotel where I found a message that Kurt had arrived in town on the two o'clock train. Somehow the confidence that everything would turn out all right came back to me. I met Willy on my way to help the group from the Maquis. Shortly thereafter we saw Kurt standing at the railroad station. He insisted that we make no fuss about his arrival. I therefore returned to downtown to meet Lore for dinner in one of our beloved restaurants. Rolf Rothmann appeared while we were having dessert and brought me a note from Emil Waldmüller who wanted to talk to me in a restaurant near the railroad station.

I immediately rushed to the place. There ensued a huge joy of seeing one another again after more than three months. We had not enough time to recount all of our experiences. In addition to me and Emil there were Paul Lansauer and Sussi. Kurt had tried to avert the threatening 'Gathering of All People' in Toulouse by redirecting the people from the Maquis to Paris on the spot. I accompanied them to the station where I met numerous friends, many of them comrades from our first attempt to cross the Pyrenees, who had lived in the mountains of the Maquis until now. We hoped that we would meet again soon. Then they took off for Paris with Heinz Meyerstein as their travel leader.

Kurt, Willy, and I went home. We planned to meet that evening to discuss everything with everybody.

The meeting took place in Hotel 'Dobriac'. After much ado it became clear to everyone that it would be impossible to avert a short period of working because there was no better alternative. I was to travel to Bordeaux that same night to inform the Chawerim who were waiting there about news of all the events. At the station I was to meet Max Windmüller, who was arriving that evening from Marseille to inform him where to go as this was the first time he came to Toulouse. I therefore filled the backpack which Herbert Liffman had given me. I spent the long waiting time for the night train in Ludi's hotel room where we talked together until three that night. We then said farewell until we would meet in Bordeaux the day after tomorrow.

As it was curfew time there were almost no people in the streets. My lonesome shoes clattered on the pavement. I had never before seen Toulouse so empty. At the station I learned that the train would be one hour late. I therefore sat down somewhere and dozed off until the arrival of the train would be announced. No matter how much effort I made and rubbed my eyes, I did not see Max. I selected a compartment and was

lucky to find a corner seat. As the compartment was almost empty all circumstances conspired to let me sleep.

Towards nine thirty I arrived for yet another time in Bordeaux. Josef Heinrich was waiting for me at the station's exit. At a slight distance beyond the others were waiting, namely Arthur Heinrich, Kurt Mendel, Moos Hartog, the couple Schlossberger, and Lutz Rosenberg. We sat down in a café where I presented a thorough report. It was now February 7th. I rented a room in the Hotel 'Le Cocq' and spent the day with the boys from Labouheyre by eating well and visiting a movie house. That evening I was again at the railroad station when Kurt, Willy, and Zippy arrived with their whole entourage. They found rooms in a hotel. Then Sussi and I returned to our hotel.

The entire situation was discussed again the next morning. Kurt was already in a café near the railroad station early that morning in conference with the group from Labouheyre. There were no alternatives; they had to return to work at least for the time being. Later we went for a stroll in the busy streets, suffused by a fine February sun.

Still later I had a talk with Kurt alone. We considered what I should do next.

Thank God I did not have to return to work immediately. I was to move to Toulouse to become the contact person with our French comrades. I was to start the following Saturday. We discussed all the issues that had to be dealt with and I wrote everything down as precisely as possible. Then we went for a stroll along the Garonne River. Later that evening we ate in the Indo-Chinese restaurant Hanoi.

On the following afternoon I was again in a café with Kurt, Willy, and Zippi to affirm the last of the technical details for my task. I was given five thousand francs for six weeks or a daily rate of 120 francs. In addition I got five blank travel orders. Kurt immediately completed one of these but, as usual, in the form of a 'Sonderausweis' (Special Order).

I planned to travel to Toulouse via Pau, which meant through the 'restricted zone', for a stop in Peyrehorade to inquire about the fate of Abraham. Afterwards Zippi, I, and several Chawerim went to a cinema and viewed a light-hearted German movie. Zippi traveled to Marseille at six with a specific task. This time we had enjoyed only a short encounter. We hoped to see each other in Paris during the following week.

As I've mentioned already, I was supposed to be in Toulouse on Saturday to inquire, above all, whether another transport to Spain was in the cards. Kurt had given me precise instructions in case the answer was positive. If not, I was to return to Paris on the following Tuesday. Kurt traveled the next day, Wednesday, with Kurt Mendel to Labouheyre to settle several issues with the employer there. He returned that same evening.

That evening I went again to the cinema, this time with Ernst Kahn. We saw the French movie 'Vautrin' with the actor Michel Simon. On the way home I dropped in at the hotel of the boys from Labouheyre where I met Kurt who had not yet found a room for that night. We tried to find him an accommodation in the hotel of Horst Markus who worked in Bordeaux, but nothing was available. In the end he shared a bed with one of the fellows from Labouheyre. I myself was very concerned that I would wake up in time the next morning as I had spent all of the previous night in a train.

February 10th 1944, a day loaded with fate had begun. Thanks to providence I woke up in time. After I had finished preparations for the trip I rode the streetcar to the train station. There I met Moos Hartog, Josef Heinrich, and Ernst Röttgen who would

travel with me until Labouheyre. It was still pitch dark. At the third platform we found the regular train for Dax. From there I planned to take the bus to Peyrehorade. We found seats and the train left at seven thirty. We did not talk much. Slowly dawn broke in the East. We parted in Labouheyre where we arrived after two hours with the hope that I could bring good news soon. There they got off and I was left to my own thoughts.

It rained cats and dogs outside. When I consulted the bus schedule I discovered that I had been wrong because there was no bus connection that day. I therefore had to change my itinerary. After some hesitation I decided to travel via Bayonne. However, Bayonne was located in the coastal area for whose entrance special permits were required. Hence I did not know whether I would run into difficulties. Moreover, it was a long way around with a trip of five hours in a slow train. Shortly after Dax the train's security came to check my papers. Everything turned out to be OK and I inquired with an innocent face whether I would be allowed to get off in Bayonne. The answer was: "Of course you are allowed to do that".

After arrival in Bayonne I left my backpack at the luggage deposit and went into the so familiar city. From tradition and because I did not know better I ate in a familiar restaurant that Abraham and I had frequented in the past. I intended to travel with the fast train of two o'clock to Peyrehorade. Therefore I had plenty of time to finish my meal of beans and liver. I then ambled to the railroad station, fetched my backpack and boarded the train. As there was no longer a seat available I remained standing in the hallway because the trip would take less than one hour. Ten minutes after our departure I was subjected to a control by an army patrol. The military policeman demanded to see my 'Sonderausweis' and the sergeant who was in charge wrote everything neatly down into his notebook. I pretended to be worked up but was lectured that civilians were not allowed to travel with a 'Sonderausweis'.

As naively as possible I inquired: "Is that a new ruling"?

The answer was: "No the ruling has been in effect since last summer".

"I don't get it. One administrative department issues my 'Ausweis' whereas another declares it invalid".

I believed that this would end the matter. No way. I was next brought to the army's administrative office in the train.

"Can you pay this trip yourself? After all, even personnel of the N.S.V.⁶⁰ cannot travel gratis".

I answered: "yes I can pay but I am leaving the train at the next station and will continue to Toulouse only tomorrow".

That settled the matter. Indeed, the train was nearing my goal of Peyrehorade. The express train slowed down and came squealing to a stop. I fetched my bundle and got off. It was still raining but only thinly. The railroad station was located about eight hundred meters from the village. When I found that out I turned back because I did not want to carry my backpack unnecessarily. I left it at the luggage deposit. After all I planned to continue my travel that evening at six thirty after I had completed my mission. I tucked some food into my pockets and went off in search of hotel "La Roserie".

⁶⁰Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt. It was a Nazi organization charged with 'welfare of the people' in Nazi-Germany (Chanan Florsheim).

In retrospect I can only say that I had no premonition of what was going to happen to me next. I was probably still somewhat under the impression of the incident in the train and my thoughts were still engaged with it.

I also did not heed for one moment Willy's warning: "watch out that you will not be tricked like Abraham"! No, calmly and sprightly I marched on towards my fate....

My life was well shaped. I was greatly satisfied that I did not have to return to a construction site. I had to fulfill a task similar to the one I had been given in Amsterdam. I already anticipated with joy the next day, a Friday, which I planned to spend in Lourdes emulating Willy's example. My meeting in Toulouse was scheduled for Saturday afternoon.

Finally I saw the hotel. It was a house separated somewhat from the street by a neglected front yard. On a sign I could read the slightly faded name "Hotel de la Roserie". I noticed German soldiers in the garden who were busy grooming horses. I immediately realized that the hotel had been requisitioned by the Wehrmacht, something that was quite common. Nevertheless, it was still possible that the owner, Christiaan's friend who had dined with us in Bordeaux, still lived there. If he did not I could not change anything anyway and the search for information about Abraham would have arrived at a dead end.

I crossed the yard and asked the very first soldier that came my way where I could find the owner of the hotel. Judging from his German he was a so-called 'Volksdeutscher'⁶¹. He growled something about an orderly room and pointed to upstairs with his hand.

As I entered the house I asked another soldier the same and got the same answer but with the difference that he guided me upstairs. At this moment I realized that it would be better if I left and inquire about the person in the village. Unfortunately, my considerations came too late! I told the soldier who ascended the stairs behind me that it seemed superfluous to go to the orderly room as the house had been requisitioned and the person in question no longer lived here anyway. Instead of answering he pointed towards upstairs. I thought: "Oh well, what could possibly happen to me here"?

A lieutenant just left and went away when we arrived at the orderly room. I had to wait a few minutes before he returned and I was allowed to enter. The conversation that developed went roughly as follows:

"Good day"!

"Good Day" He looked questioningly at me.

"Could you perhaps tell me whether Mr. L still lives here? I have noticed that the house has been requisitioned".

"Are you a German?"

"No, I am Dutch".

"But you speak German fluently"

"Sure that is so because my mother was German".

"Where did you make the acquaintance of Mr. L.?"

"I do not know him at all".

"Then, what did you want from him?"

⁶¹ 'Volksdeutsche' were German citizens that lived outside the Reich (D.H.).

“Well, I was to bring him greetings from an acquaintance”.

“Well, from which acquaintance?”

“The acquaintance? De Jong, another Dutchman”.

“Where did you come from today?”

“I came from Bordeaux”.

“Aha, and this Schong was there also?”

“No, he was in Paris where I was a few days ago”.

During this questioning I slowly got an unpleasant sensation around my stomach. I had instinctively begun to lie and invent names.

The tone of the interrogation had also become sterner.

“With us one does not lean against the table like you do. Stand up straight!”

I took one step backwards and straightened out somewhat. The interrogation continued. Meanwhile I had placed my marching order on his table.

“Aha, you wish to go to Toulouse”.

“Yes I am going there to a construction site”.

In my confusion I had approached the table again and had begun to lean on its edge.

“You have again assumed an incorrect posture!”

Even more confused I stepped back. Now the lieutenant began to lecture me.

“On January 19th we rolled up in this house an Anglo-American terror organization to which this Mr. L. belonged. According to letters that kept arriving here other persons were expected to drop in and you are the first one to arrive. You may consider yourself under arrest on my orders because you are under the suspicion of belonging to this terrorist organization. If we can prove your guilt you have just now spent your last minutes as a free man!”

I stared thunderstruck at my interrogator. Even though I had imagined all sorts of unpleasantness I had not thought through this out. The lieutenant called something. A soldier entered with a military salute.

“Bring this one to the local headquarters. Take another soldier along”.

“Aye, aye Sir”.

I now left the room which I had entered as a free man as an arrested person.

In front of me marched the soldier with his gun slung over his shoulder and the second soldier followed behind me. Thus we left the house.

My thoughts wanted to work feverishly but the fright had paralyzed me. Moreover, I had incriminating materials on me, namely four blank marching order forms, sheets of food stamps, and a lag sum of money. I did not have the slightest opportunity to throw anything away without my guards having noticed. It rained quite heavily. I considered fleeing, but where to? I did not know anyone here and I had never liked rushed decisions.

The road followed the railroad track. With sarcasm I thought about my wonderful plans that I had forged for the next days, Lourdes and Toulouse. However, the concern about what might happen to me next overwhelmed all else.

Our strange group was stared at by the curious inhabitants from behind their windows. To be at the center of it all was an unpleasant sensation. The local headquarters was in a villa. We crossed the courtyard and I was led upstairs. After we arrived in the office I had to recount again what my business had been in this village and from where I

came. These were the same questions as before. Next, a sympathetic looking blond sergeant demanded that I place all the belongings that I had on me on the table. Everything, absolutely everything had to be produced. The whole junk including the rusted razor blade and my billfold lay on the table. As I fetched the billfold I hesitated somewhat because of the large sum of money in it. When the sergeant noticed the unused papers with the beautiful army stamps he whistled through his teeth.

“Have you obtained all of this from the O. T. (Organisation Todt)?

At that moment I thought that it would be better to admit the truth rather than to lie as I had to fess up later anyway. I acted more involuntary than consciously according to the proverb: “he who lies once is not believed”. And I would still have plenty of opportunities for more lies!

I therefore answered that the papers did not come from the O.T. but that I had received them with the money from the mysterious de Jong in Paris.

“What on earth made him give you all of that?” was his question.

I now had to think lightning fast before answering but I doubted very much that they would believe my responses anyway. It appeared to me that if the roles were reversed and I was the interrogator, I would immediately have noticed that all were lies because of the uncertain and forced manner in which I voiced my answers.

“Well, this is the way” I began ponderously only to gain time, “it is, however, a lengthy story. The following happened: Once I was in Paris. On the way there in the train I made a chance acquaintance of that Dutchman. We talked some as is common at the beginning of such situations. At any rate he gave me the address of a café on the Boulevard de Montmartre where I could meet him again. He gave the impression of being well to do. When I told him that I was searching for a new construction site he said that it was OK that I could meet him in that café if I needed, for instance, food stamps or money. Of course I thought that I would never need to use his offer but that turned out differently. After that I had obtained a job with a firm in Biarritz which I soon quit for some reasons. After the New Year I got to Paris. Meanwhile my financial situation had become quite critical and thus I remembered my Dutch acquaintance. I went to that café where I actually met him. After I had explained my financial situation to him he promptly gave me five thousand francs. To this he added: “In the case that you need something and I have not yet returned you can call on a friend of mine and tell him: “De Jong sends you and gives greetings to him”. Everything would then turn out O.K. He gave me the address of the hotel here in Peyrehorade and the name of the owner which I registered only vaguely.”

“Well Hendrik” said the sergeant “tell everything to the Sicherheitsdienst⁶² too. Always stick absolutely to the truth. If they have no charges against you they will let you go.”

⁶² The “Sicherheitsdienst (S. D.; Security Service) was part of the apparatus of Nazi-power. It began as the information service for the NSDAP, the Nazi-party, but was given the surveillance of political opponents in the course of the increasing entanglement of Party and State (Chanan Florsheim).

Then I was called to the major of the headquarters who viewed me as if I was some abnormality. In any case I found the man unsympathetic. I returned to the first room. They inquired about additional luggage. I mentioned my backpack at the station which was then fetched. Outside the rain continued unabated. I sat in a chair all the time waiting for things to come. An orderly sat at a desk and wrote down all my effects. Nothing was forgotten and in the end I had to sign. Meanwhile I ate some of the food that I still had left food such as bread, cheese and grape juice. I drank the grape juice with mixed feelings and wondered when I would ever drink that again. Never again, in my opinion.

I was totally aware of the danger of my situation. I passed the long waiting time with thinking and then some more thinking until that fatigued me. The Sicherheitsdienst was expected to arrive any time now. I must admit that all sorts of stories about the Gestapo crossed my mind. It was obvious to me that I was totally lost. I lied only to prevent that I would implicate some of my comrades. The windows had been darkened in the meantime and the lights were switched on. On top of all that the express train with which I had intended to travel on to Lourdes thundered by outside.

Towards eight a car arrived. A few minutes later the door flew open. A sergeant stormed in followed by three men in civvies. They first looked me over from all sides. Then the smallest of them, a fellow from Southern Germany judging from his accent, let fly. A veritable crossfire began. Where had I worked? What had I done and on which date? What was the name of the hotel and of the street, and so on? These were the worst minutes. I always had to answer quickly which, above all, meant fantasize. It was dangerous to mention exact dates because that meant that I could become entangled in my own lies.

In my briefcase they found a letter from Willy to Kurt with the address "Rue Paul Louis Landes" in Bordeaux. I said that was a café. What kind of café was their next question. I answered that this was a place frequented by many Dutchmen and Belgians and this Nano Mulder- the cover name of Kurt Reilinger had his mail served there.

"Who is Nano Mulder?"

"A Dutch laborer now on furlough in Holland."

And who was Edith who was mentioned in the letter. With the best of recollections I did not know. I pointed out that the letter did not concern me. Then they found my old marching order which I had used to travel from Toulouse to Bordeaux.

"Well, you were in Toulouse also!"

"Certainly I was on my way there."

"Why?"

"To find another construction site" was my answer.

Whenever I answered that I was looking for a construction site the little one shouted: "Fairy tales, fairy tales, nothing but fairy tales!" Of course he was right.

"Did I have acquaintances in Toulouse?"

"No" I answered, "I was there only two days".

In which hotel had I slept. I named some arbitrary hotel.

The whole inquiry was terrible and I longed for its end. Then they began to ask about the purposes of the objects that belonged to me. I almost got angry when they

began to doubt my -now true- answers. I would have loved to shout at them: you idiots you do not believe what is true but you swallow my fantasies without ado!

“So, for what is this compass?”

“That is still from the time when I was a boy scout in Holland.”

They looked at me unbelieving. After all I knew that they considered me to be a terrorist.

“And this looking glass?”

“That is from the time when I collected stamps”.

One of them interjected ironically: “all the things this guy had been in the past”.

I flared up.

“I do not understand why you doubt me. I’m sure that you were once young and collected stamps or were a boy scout.”

“Naw” one of them said in a drawl “that is not to the point. However, why do you lug all of this around with you?”

“Yep” I said, and this was again true, “I always have a hard time to part with old stuff and it takes something extraordinary before I throw it away. You can see that from the old marching order from Toulouse to Bordeaux which I should have discarded a long time ago as it was no longer of any use to me.”

“You must surely speak French well in addition to German and Dutch.”

“Not well, but I can speak and read some French.”

“English too, I am sure?”

“Naw. English hardly. Only a few bits and pieces.”

Now I believed that the interrogation was over. In the meantime they had rummaged through my backpack and had not found a revolver. The only metallic instrument they found was a tondeuse.

“Why do you lug that around?”

“I use it for shaving my beard.”

“Aha, but why these shaving tools?”

“Someone gave them to me as a present some time ago. I am sure that it will come in handy.”

I could see on their faces that they did not believe me.

“And this flashlight?”

“Oh that. I need it in the evening to find my way or a house number in the poorly lit streets.”

“Ha” they answered almost in unison.

“Well, now we shall depart for Bayonne where you certainly will tell the truth.”

The South-German was just jamming everything back into my backpack. I stood before him to claim it.

“Hey, do not imagine that you can run⁶³ now.”

Sometimes I did not quite get his dialect so I asked around what he had meant.

Another guy, a tall blond one, repeated: “If you try to run away you will get a bean into your belly.”

⁶³The German text uses the dialectic verb “lofen” instead of the High-German “laufen” (D.H.).

At that moment something struck my head and I tumbled backwards. The little one had finished stowing my backpack and had flung it against my head. Slightly taken aback I picked it up. Then the blond guy and I left through the darkened hallway. As we were walking along I heard the short metallic knock of the release of the safety catch of a revolver and jokingly I said:

“Do not worry I will not run away.”

From upstairs I heard the unsympathetic voice of the major who admonished my guide:

“Please report to me on this case as soon as you know something more definite. I will remain interested in the outcome of it.”

Then we emerged into the night.

It almost seemed to me that everything conspired to founder our trip to Bayonne. After I had boarded the back seat of the Citroen and the biggest of the three guards had sat down next to me one of the two others discovered a flat tire. I considered that to be a good omen. Soon they got busy repairing the defect. While I was rocked in the car every once in a while the youngest of them replaced the tire in a remarkably short time. Then we took off. As I said, the most sympathetic of them sat next to me. He was a tall blond man of about thirty years who had a not too unsympathetic face.

The driver, an unsympathetic bloke in his late twenties, sat in front of me. He was the one who had cornered me a few times with his questioning. Finally, in the front was also the third guy who had thrown the backpack at my head and who had yelled after each of my answers: “you don’t believe that yourselves. Try to tell that to your grandma but not us. All fairy tales!” Because he wore a beret he looked sort of French which he probably intended.

We raced through the night. A feeble moon shone through a gap in the clouds. I contemplated what was to come when the guy with the beret said:

“In thirty minutes we will be in Bayonne. Reconsider everything carefully and speak the truth. We will discover the truth anyway!”

And after a short pause he averred totally illogical:

“It does not matter whether you speak the truth or not, that will make no difference.”

I had to agree with him silently. Everyone around me laughed. All told, the gentlemen were in a good mood. Except for the driver who stopped and remarked that steam emerged from the radiator which meant that its water tank was empty. He then discovered a nearby house and drove to it. We stopped in its front yard and he went in search of water. However, the house was abandoned and locked. Then he discovered a sewage pit. They now wanted to fill the radiator with sewage instead of water but they needed a pitcher. With great hilarity they filled the radiator with sewage using his beret. Then I had to get out and help to push the car back onto the road, of course always sandwiched between two guards to prevent me from running away. We drove off. The mood in the car was now very upbeat.

The guy sitting next to me laughed all the time while he smoked a cigar. Only the driver cursed jokingly because he had soiled himself. I remained silent during most of the ride. My courage had returned. After all I had also given them a potent answer. The only thing unsettling was thoughts about what might happen to me in Bayonne. Above all I thought about the tortures for which the Gestapo was notorious.

Finally we neared Bayonne. Soon I saw the familiar streets and wondered to where they might take me. We crossed downtown and drove into the direction of Biarritz. However, before we left the city for good the driver slowed the speed and we curved into the garden that belonged to a large villa.

We entered through the backdoor. The house seemed to be quite roomy. I was certain that they had not requisitioned the ugliest villa to establish a branch of the 'Sicherheitsdienst' of Bordeaux. Soon I found myself in a large room with a billiard table where two men were playing. The man with the beret went over to one of them and talked to him in a low voice. The man who was addressed by him cast quizzical glances at me every now and then. The door to the next room was open. In it I saw a long table festively decked out for a large party. However, I did not have much time to look around because one of the billiard players began to tear into me.

"Speak only the truth, speak only the truth. Soon we will play together when the game is up. Yes, the game will be up soon and then we will play. Do you know what it means when the skin is closer than...I mean when your shirt is closer than your skin? The game will be up soon; you just wait!"

I had become quite intimidated by his threats which he uttered while he continued to play billiards with the greatest of coolness. Well I thought I must prepare myself for the worst. With a far-away stare I looked at the billiard table until the blond one came for me and brought me into a side room. The room seemed to function as some sort of office. In it there were mail organizers and type-writing machines. Otherwise the room was only sparsely furnished. My guide sat down and produced a note pad and pencil. I had to tell everything again. Meanwhile the driver of the car had entered and sat down at the other end of the table. While he smoked he listened to everything that was said. I got the impression that the blond inquisitor was not badly attuned to me. His questioning was objective; he smoked a cigar, and finally assured me:

"You are lucky that the fellow who normally sits here has not interrogated you today."

Well, I thought, my lucky star which seemed to have evaporated first is beginning to shine again, albeit still quite weakly. I must add that the blond guy had placed a bullwhip on the table in front of me at the start of the interrogation.

Apparently that was all for this evening. I vaguely heard something about "bring him to a hotel". I really believed that I would be brought to a hotel, albeit a guarded one. Soon I was able to ascertain that it concerned an ugly building which with the name "Kriegswehrmachthaftanstalt"⁶⁴, a term not commonly used for hotels. Now I knew what was in store for me. I immediately remembered stories about German jails which I had heard before. I thought it wise to pee while we were still outside because it was almost certain that the toilets in the jail would not be too hygienic. The gate opened. I entered through it. It closed shut behind me and now I was alone with the jailer.

⁶⁴I cannot possibly translate this pathetic German construction. It is made up of the following words: Krieg = war, Wehrmacht = armed forces, haft = arrest, Anstalt = institution.

I was brought to the jail's office where they checked my belongings. My tondeuse, cigarettes, canned fruit, and a pencil were confiscated. I was then marched past a number of heavily barred doors to a room where I could select a straw mattress and two blankets. The air in the building was warm and had a 'used' smell. A few lights burned dimly. I had to go upstairs. A cell door was opened and was then carefully bolted behind me. For a change I was alone.

Curiously I inspected the room. Then I made my 'bed' and sacked out, still half-dressed. Once in the cozy warmth of the bed I felt safe for the first time. I would be left undisturbed the rest of the day. What nearly unimaginable trick had fate served on me! After a while I got calmer. There will be a new day tomorrow I thought. Nevertheless, it took quite some time before I fell asleep. Thus ended the fateful 10th of February.

When the light was suddenly turned on in my cell the next morning I woke up. Next I only heard the steps of the jailer outside who marched from cell to cell sometimes yelling "good morning". I woke up from a dream and only slowly began to realize the dire situation I was in. I continued stretched out and thought about my situation until my cell door was unlocked and a jailer with the rank of petty officer handed me a broom to sweep my cell. After that I was allowed to wash myself outside at the wash basin but I preferred to fetch some water with the bowl that was provided for it. I was alone again. Curiously I looked through the small peephole in the cell door to case the environment of my future. Then I washed up and groomed myself somewhat. Next I paced up and down my cell to get some exercise.

Once again I went through all the questions they might ask me such that I would not hesitate to answer even for a second. I repeated from memory all the answers of the previous evening in case they would pose the same questions. Thus I paced countless number of times up and down the four meter-wide cell. Then the door opened and my jailer commandeered me to the next interrogation.

In front of the room where I was brought stood a tall blond man who resembled the blond fellow from the previous evening. We sat down and he placed a dossier on the table. My interrogator advised me right away to speak only the truth because he already had all the statements of the "Gang" in his dossier anyway. Then he began to repeat everything I had stated on the previous evening. Next he began to close in on this "De Jong" whom I had invented yesterday and who had allegedly given me the money and marching orders.

"What was his profession?"

"He did not tell me. I really know very little about him and he knows nothing about me."

"Where did you make his acquaintance?"

"In a café in Paris as I already said during the interrogation yesterday."

"Aha, and he gave you a task for Peyrehoarde?"

"No. What task? He did not even know that I was traveling to Peyrehoarde."

"You are lying because your initial statement in Peyrehoarde was that you had met him in the train to Paris!"

"I did not state that or, in the confusion of my arrest, I must have talked much nonsense. Please keep in mind that this is the first time in all of my life that I have been arrested."

"Please describe this De Jong to me."

“About your height, blond, a full mane. Broad like a boxer.”

All of that was written down carefully.

“Do you remember the suit he was wearing?”

“No, I had not noticed it and if I had I have forgotten what it was. After all I do not study the color of the suits of every person that I meet for the first time.”

“Come, come I am sure that you will remember. Was it checkered, striped, unicolored? Well?”

I thought that it would be wise to fantasize a design.

“Yes, I now remember. It was checkered with dots” I blurted.

“Pepper and salt?”

“Yes, I believe that is what it is called.”

My inquisitor seemed to be satisfied.

“Now tell me quickly what task you had.”

I repeated that I did not have a task. After all, at the beginning of the day of my trip I did not even anticipate that I would get to Peyrehorade. Although I was on my way to Bordeaux I had not taken the shortest route from Bordeaux to Toulouse because I wanted to visit a construction site at Mont-de-Marsan. Then I noticed in the timetable that I would pass through Peyrehorade. I therefore decided to get off the train and continue my trip the next morning.

“In any case, you had a task.”

“No, I had none”.

It appeared that my obstinacy had tested his patience to the breaking point. He got up, walked around the table and slapped me on both sides of my head. I thought: my God, now it begins! It had all obviously been all child’s play until now. But the slapping did not continue! Quietly, as if nothing had happened he sat down and repeated his question to which I gave him the same answer. Then he called for a jailer and commanded:

“Bring L. from cell 77, I believe.”

We waited. A few moments later the said L. entered the room. He was greatly changed since I had met him once in Bordeaux with Christiaan. He was unshaven, his hair was carelessly combed, and he wore a seaman’s pullover.

“Now tell this gentleman what you should have conveyed him from De Jong.”

On purpose I spoke French much worse than I was actually able to do. I stuttered something about greetings from a mister De Jong.

The inquisitor asked L.: “who is this De Jong?”

L. wrinkled his forehead: “I do not know him, Sir.”

“Is he a Dutch emissary?”

Of course both were amazed because De Jong existed only in my phantasm. However, I dreaded the nearing danger. Then the SD man began to bellow at us:

“Well now, one of the two of you tells a lie, either you or him.” With that he insistently repeated his question in French.

In order to present myself in the most believable light I began: “I cannot understand this. De Jong tells me that I can bring greetings to L. in Peyrehorade and this L. pretends that he knows nothing! Perhaps there are more L. families in Peyrehorade?”

The German translated my question into French for the benefit of L. who replied “of course not”. From the onset we acted as if we had met for the first time in our lives.

L. was given a cigarette and dismissed. Then the questioning started again.

“Where did you get the money?”

I replied: “from De Jong.”

“And you try to tell me that a totally new acquaintance gives you money for no reason at all? My dear fellow you cannot put that across me. He was either your lover or he gave you a mission.”

I replied: “indeed, I have no other explanation for it either. I do remember vaguely that I hesitated and did not want to accept anything from him when he gave me the marching orders and the money. He also said: “If I should need anything from you, you know the proverb: one hand washes the other.” To increase the veracity of my statement I pronounced the proverb in Dutch, the way he had told me.

Now I was asked to describe in detail the meeting place with De Jong.

(I must digress to explain the reason why I had the following fantasy: it is true that I had initially declared that I had met de Jong in a train. When I subsequently pondered this issue at great length in my cell I hit on a better idea. I ‘shifted’ the spot of the first meeting to a specific café in Paris with the objective of tempting the SD to go there to catch De Jong. Of course they could do that only with my assistance. I assumed that I would find an opportunity to escape during the travel to Paris, in the Paris subway, among the masses of pedestrians of the Boulevard Montmartre, or in the café proper).

“So you declare: in Paris? Where in Paris?”

“In a café of Montmartre.”

“What was the name of the café?”

“I do not know. I never saw its name clearly because I was always there at night.”

“Can you describe for me at which metro station of Montmartre you had to get off and how you had to walk from there to the café?”

I pondered. Then I remembered a café that I had visited one evening as I was ambling through Montmartre.

“It was on the Boulevard Montmartre not far from the metro station Montmartre. I made some sketch for him on a piece of paper. The only thing I remember of the café is that band of young fellows in blue blouses made music in front of it.”

He wrote down exactly what I had told him. Then, as he snapped the dossier shut, he said: “I think that you are a terrorist and spy! I will return this afternoon. You will have time to reflect until then.” I asked him before he left whether it was a usage to let terrorists and spies die of hunger because I had not been given anything to eat all morning. He did not give my question any attention but called for a jailer.

“Starting today this inmate must be given a single cell one floor below to prevent them from talking.”

“Yes, sure” muttered the petty officer “I shall talk to the first sergeant.”

And so I left with him.

In my cell I found a bottle of lemonade but I waited eagerly for food. After some time the jailer came and announced that I had to move from cell 78 to cell 66 one floor below. Only after I had made the new cell ‘livable’ did it begin to dawn on me that I had slept the whole night next to L.’s cell.

Despite the seriousness of the situation I had to laugh. Nevertheless, I was very agitated after the interrogation and anticipated with much trepidation the next one that afternoon.

Apparently they did not intend to let me die of hunger because when the cell door opened towards half past twelve I was given a tin bowl filled with cabbage soup and another bowl filled with carrots. I also was given a chunk of bread and some sausage. The view of the food raised my courage. Wildly I wolfed everything down except for a small piece of bread which I saved for the evening in case this was the only meal I would get that day. Then I cleared my little table, went to bed with my head resting on my arm to forget my bad luck by sleeping. However, I slumbered only restlessly, did not really fall asleep because I heard every ring outside at the main gate. At every ring of that bell a scare raced through my body. Each time I imagined that the jailer would come to take me to the next interrogation.

Thus I passed the time scared with anticipation. Evening came, I was given food, and I still expected the SD man from that morning. When the jailer came later to turn off the light I asked him whether there would be any more interrogations that day. He only answered: "naw, none today, good night!"

"Good night!" I answered and installed myself in my bed.

The next fortnight was the worst of all of my jail time. I was awakened at seven in the morning by the repeated and bellowed command "get up!" from the neighboring building in which members of the German army apparently lived. Thirty minutes later our jailer went from cell to cell to turn our lights on. Ten minutes later every cell was opened and a German inmate distributed a black, badly sweetened liquid that was named coffee. Then we got thirty minutes of respite.

At eight thirty the cells were swept. Once that was finished, each inhabitant could wash up either at the wash stand in the hallway or, as I did, by bringing a bowl of water into the cell. Usually I washed myself only one hour later because it was first too cold and also because I had no energy left in me. The large space in front of the cells on both floors was swept by inmates after all cells had been cleaned. Next we were given a bottle of lemonade that was to last the whole day.

Towards eleven o'clock we were let out of our cells to get half an hour of fresh air in a square courtyard of twenty-five square meters that was barred like a cage. There was no opportunity to talk with others because every inmate walked in a different courtyard. At one o'clock we got the menu, every day the same tin bowls filled with cabbage soup and carrots plus a piece of bread of three hundred gram, a slice of blood sausage, corned beef, or regular sausage. You were allowed to eat as much of it as you wanted but it was wiser to save some for the next morning, something I rarely succeeded to achieve.

Only on Sunday's there was some variation. At noon we got noodles instead of carrots and a real piece of, usually tough meat and for dessert a table spoon of good jam. For me it was a real treat. The afternoon usually went by eventless. In the evening at six we got cabbage soup and beans. The jailer came half an hour later. One had to place one's pants and shoes on a chair outside the cell door so that one could not run away at night. The result was that one went to bed at seven to spend a terribly long night until seven thirty the next morning. This was my daily routine.

Wednesday was a true holiday for every inmate because the little packages from the Red Cross were then distributed. Depending on one's wolfing habits one could enjoy their delicious contents for one, two, or even several days. I remember one package that contained: two oranges, one hundred gram of sugar cubes, two pieces of chocolate and one hundred gram of cookies. Another time the contents were: a piece of honey cake

instead of oranges and candied fruits instead of chocolate. In any event, for my discerning tongue these were like manna from heaven. The content of the very first package lasted for three days. However, as time passed everything was usually gone by the end of the second day. And then there were the diversions of Friday when packages sent from the outside arrived and were distributed. While I could not realistically expect anything from such sources the jailer brought me sometimes a baguette, two eggs, and once a substantial piece of sausage and real white bread.

I was curious to learn who the goodhearted donor was but got only vague answers to my questions: "from the office" the jailer said. I also suspected that some of my fellow inmates whom I had gotten to know in the meantime were among the sources. Later it turned out that the first sergeant was a decent German, who either removed something from packages of inmates for those who, like me, never got any package or simply distributed packages of inmates who had already left the jail. My advantage in this respect was certainly that I spoke German fluently.

As I have already mentioned, the first two weeks were really bad. I had no lecture except an old magazine which was still in my backpack. I solved the crossword puzzles in it by using my safety pin to scratch letters into the respective fields. When I did not read I marched up and down my cell because I was cold or I sat down, and fell asleep with my head resting on the little folding table. The cell had only few pieces of furniture although I had expected this to be much worse. There were: a folding bed with its steel support for the straw mattress and the two blankets. Opposite it was the small table with chair and under the window there was a plank bed for a possible second inmate. In one corner was a French-style toilet, that is to say a hole with running water which amazed me greatly. Against the wall above it were fastened two little planks where one could store one's toiletry.

The window had double bars. It could be opened by pulling it down with a stick attached to it. I had a vista of the coal storage and part of the high outer wall of the jail. I often considered how one might perhaps escape across these barriers but it seemed an impossible enterprise. When I was not asleep or otherwise busy I stood at the door and peered through the peephole to catch a glimpse of what was happening outside. Although that was never much, every occasion satisfied my curiosity. Most of the time I only saw the jailer when he was called by an inmate to bring him shaving cream and razors from the office or else some water. Often he came without having been called to fetch inmates for interrogations.

With regards to interrogations, I did not understand at all where my interrogator from Friday had gone. I still got a scare by every ringing of the alarm bell and I occasionally imagined that I had heard my name called out among a jumble of inmate voices but these always turned out to have been hallucinations. I awaited a new interrogation every day but none came.

Meanwhile I had plenty of opportunity to review my entire case and I prepared myself to answer any and all questions. I was especially concerned during the first days of my incarceration by a little scrap of paper that was among the incriminating material left in my briefcase on which were written all the addresses for Spain which they had given us in Toulouse. On it were also the addresses of Zippi and Kurt Mendel's relatives as well as addresses of my own relatives and acquaintances abroad.

I could imagine what the SD men might think if they had found it. However, I who had initially lost all trust in my lucky star could see that fate was beginning to be more favorable to me. During all of this time I was wearing corduroy pants. Suddenly I noticed the small pocket at the seam for carrying a ruler. In an instant I was awakened by inspiration and began to poke around in the pocket until I had the little scrap of paper with the addresses in my hand. I almost did not know what to do for joy. I danced like a wild Indian in my cell after I had carefully ripped it up and flushed it down the toilet. It was an incredible stroke of luck that I had kept the paper in that 'secret' pocket since the last attempt to cross the Pyrenees. Nevertheless, this good luck would not bring much relief to my present situation. My mood of joy quickly switched to resignation again because of this thought.

I enjoyed the half hour in the courtyard every day regardless of whether it rained or the sun shone. Often I had to pull myself together to keep marching back and forth. I stood still most of the time to observe the sky where birds flew around in freedom. And when, exactly at that time, I also heard the express train Bordeaux-Hendaye pass by I became thoroughly morose and miserable. Once I would have to ride such a train but in the direction of Germany.

On every tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth day of the month inmates left after their case had been completed. They traveled to Bordeaux and on to Paris, Strasbourg, and Freiburg⁶⁵ in specially designated wagons.

Meanwhile I still had not heard anything about my case. However, there had been some contact with L. when I had a walk in another courtyard which was directly underneath his cell window. We were able to talk for a few minutes and when he heard how I had invented this De Jong he had to laugh. Initially he thought that he had to warn me that I should not greet him like someone I knew but this seemed to be superfluous anyway. Then he advised me to give a new twist to any future interview by maintaining that it had been his wife to whom I was asked to bring greetings. This would also explain the puzzle why L. did not seem to know this De Jong. His wife was in no danger because she had already succeeded to flee to Spain some time ago.

Meanwhile I asked for more reading material. Every once in a while I obtained the "Paris News" from my jailer which I treated like a jewel. I was also sometimes allowed to clean the areas in front of the cells and to dust. Later I was asked to do this regularly. In this manner I got into contact with other inmates. I learned how the normal case of an inmate developed: first you were seriously interrogated. Then you had to sign three copies of the protocol which was then sent to the army court of Mont-de-Marsan. The verdict arrived two to three months later. It was commonly transportation to Germany or penal work at a concentration camp in Bordeaux.

I also got to know all of the members of the so-called "British-American Terror Gang". They were the already mentioned L., two chauffeurs who had brought people to the Pyrenees and a young fellow of my age who was surprised by the Germans at the moment when he was set to leave with a number of Americans. None of them expected a lenient verdict and neither did I. I knew nothing about the other comrades of our sorrowful fate. There was a constant coming and going. Occasionally a few inmates were freed while others disappeared in transports.

⁶⁵ A city in Southern Germany approximately 30 kilometers East of France. The implication of this sentence is that the inmates were probably transported to a concentration camp in Germany (D.H.).

I felt terribly lonesome and abandoned and I often wondered whether I should consider it my luck if another inmate was assigned to my cell. There were many cells with two inmates. However, I did prefer to remain alone because one never knew who would be assigned to one's cell.

The days went by slowly and boringly. I scratched every day into the wall of the cell with my needle. I found it incomprehensible that nothing happened in my case, yet no one came to fetch me for an interrogation. I was also fearful about our own organization because they had found on me several addresses such as that of the café of Albert in the Rue Paul-Louis Landes in Bordeaux. I could imagine that the SD had cased the joint and that it would have been easy for them to catch some of our boys. Moreover I had been asked to name the last hotel where I had stayed in Bordeaux. In this case I had to suppress my propensity to lie because it would have been too simple for them to check my statement. Unfortunately there usually lived one of us in that very hotel. However, there was no point to despair because I could not change anything anyway. I did however wonder often why this had to happen to me. My greatest fear was that the SD would check my personal data in Holland and call me for an interrogation, especially because they considered me to be a spy and terrorist. Their first question would then be possibly as follows: "Now tell us your real name and stop lying to us!"

A small interruption of my thinking occurred next when one afternoon during mealtime the cell door was opened and another inmate entered. He was a 22 year old Bask who had been arrested at the railroad station for black marketeering and who arrived without any luggage. We therefore shared everything, including my toothbrush, which I did not particularly enjoy. Nevertheless it became a relatively good time. There was now someone with whom I could talk and improve my French vocabulary. We often sang all sorts of songs in the evening although all whistling, singing, or making of loud noises was strictly forbidden. He was hopeful that he would be released any day because he anticipated that the verdict would only be a fine. The best of all, however, were the packages which he received. I remember how, one Sunday, we truly guzzled to bursting chicken, bacon, cheese, and bread. These packages were always ample to still our hunger for a few days.

In addition I made another advance with regards to food because the old German cook, another inmate and an NSKK man⁶⁶ seemed to like me. In any event, I often received the remainder of his big cooking vessel after he had served all other cells. Thus I sometimes ate two full bowls of white beans but then I had stomach cramps at night because I had eaten too much. These were also the days when I felt relatively fine.

⁶⁶ National Socialistic Trucker Organization, a paramilitary branch of the Nazi party (Chanan Florsheim).

Meanwhile time went by faster because I had opportunities to borrow books from other inmates. I was also significantly better off with regards to my inmate-job. I now worked regularly together with an older man in the courtyard of the jail where we cut wood all day long. That was indeed an enormous step forward because I was all day outdoors except when it rained. I sawed and cut wood with a zest that I had not known before. My companion turned out to be a former representative of the lower chamber of the French parliament. He was arrested because for allegedly helping Jews. He had been longer in jail than me. Finally I was now able to have serious discussions about all sorts of themes. Moreover, I learned the latest news about the war from a sailor from the Alsace who was incarcerated for desertion⁶⁷. In short, I had the feeling to breathe a little freer.

This sailor was not the only case of a deserter in our jail. The other was also from the Alsace. Both had been arrested in Bordeaux en route to Spain. In the German wing of the jail there were another fifteen deserters among whom one from the French Foreign Legion as well as others who were there for petty crimes. After about fourteen days my friend and cellmate was gone. He believed that he would be free within two days. We had agreed that he would get money in Bordeaux, send it to me and to tell what had happened. He also promised to send me food. I was at a loss how I could repay him. We fantasized that we would both be free and I promised him that I would invite him then for a big dinner. I had not told him anything about myself except that I had already tried three times to reach Spain.

I was alone again but I could bear it more easily now since I had regular work. I also slept better now. In the past I used to wake up in the middle of the night and then again numerous times afterwards. Now I slept through the entire night because I also could no longer take a nap during the day.

My attempts to find work were crowned one day when I was allowed to leave the jail with other inmates to work in Bayonne. A group of six men had recently been commandeered regularly by the army to work in its garage. I was allowed to come along because one of them had fallen ill. Was it ever a wonderful feeling to board a truck outside the jail and to see some of the world outside the jail walls for the first time after three and one half weeks! The people, the girls, the street, and the cafes! It was a joy that I will never forget! I felt like reborn! Regrettably the joy did not last very long. After a trip of only ten minutes we arrived in the garage where we unloaded tires all morning which had been requisitioned everywhere in France. At noon, during our return to jail, I had the same joyful emotion. However, in the afternoon the group left without me and I was very downcast.

⁶⁷During the occupation of France Hitler annexed the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine and commanded that all males of German descent of these provinces had to serve in his armed forces. Thus, a person who had been a Frenchman before the Nazi annexation could become a deserter (D.H.).

It now became my only goal to be allowed work regularly in this garage but I was not very successful at first. Meanwhile I had once been allowed to mail an official postcard. On March 1 I sent it to café Albert in Bordeaux. In it I asked for clothes and food. On the day before I had succeeded to smuggle an illegal letter out of the jail to Rue Tanasse. In it I reported all that had happened to me. However, I heard absolutely nothing from the outside world which seemed to confirm my suspicion that our organization had been rolled up; otherwise they would have sent me at least some clothing.

On March 15 I wrote another official postcard with the same requests but got no answer again.

The days now passed by rather swiftly. I had become infested with lice even though I was able to wash my few belongings every now and then. Thus I made my first acquaintance with these pests. I simply did not understand why the SD did not show up and concluded therefore that either a catastrophe or else a miracle were about to happen. Because my wisdom told me that miracles do not exist I had to expect a catastrophe namely that they would discover who I really was.

Meanwhile one inmate after the other with who I had been together this whole time left the jail. In the course of time I had memorized their faces and we felt connected by an invisible bond. Among them were alleged spies, English paratroopers, Gaullists and persons which had been arrested for some unknown cause. The “Gang” from Peyrehorade, including L., had been sent to a concentration camp in Bordeaux. In the meantime I had another chance to talk with L. From him I learned that Abraham had visited his place only once. Consequently he must have been arrested at the Pyrenees-guide’s home. L. also asked me whether Christiaan had not warned me that the meeting place in Peyrehorade had been discovered by the Germans. I explained to him that I had never met Christiaan again after our arrival in Paris. Now I learned that Christiaan had returned from Holland after a few days delay and at a time when we had already given up the search for him.

L. offered to inform Christiaan of my fate but I considered that useless as Christiaan would hardly remember me. L. must have believed that I was one of his collaborators.

I could figure out who would be next to being sent away from the prison and that my turn would come soon also. One day, after I had frequently requested to be allowed to join the work detail in the city, I was lucky that this came through. Now I rode regularly through the city four times every day. We did not work too much. This was, relatively speaking, the luckiest time of my incarceration. I actually was only in the jail for eating and sleeping. It now appeared to me that fate was beginning to favor me again.

My thoughts now centered not only on the place where I worked but also on the issue: “How can I get out of here? How can I escape?” I now had more opportunities to do so. There were days when our work-gang was divided into two groups. I remained with the group in the garage whereas the others worked at the railroad station. Our guard, an old soldier, accompanied the group at the station. Now I might just walk out of the garage during a moment of relaxed attention although there was a risk that one of the several soldiers present in the garage might catch me. However, the men’s room offered an opportunity to disappear without being noticed. But where was I to go without money and papers? For that problem I also had a solution: the representative with whom I had

sawn wood earlier lived about twelve kilometers outside Bayonne and had given me several addresses where people might help me. However, I had to remain in Bayonne until nightfall before I could dare going on the roads.

I had half-decided to escape but my heart was not really in it. I scolded myself because of my indecision which was due to the return of trust in my good star. One day when there was no longer an opportunity to escape I would blame myself bitterly that I had not tried. Thus, one day followed the other without me being able to decide.

The administration of the jail must have begun to consider my case quite strange. One day the administrative sergeant asked me whether I had had a regular interrogation. I said “no” and he responded: “well, they must certainly have forgotten you; we ought to call the SD.”

I felt simultaneously scare and joy. Forgotten! Wasn't that impossible with the pedantic Germans! However, it seemed to be true. I had already been incarcerated for weeks and had not yet signed any protocol.

The following day, Wednesday March 22, a nice recruit born in Frankfurt came to fetch me from my work in the afternoon. I had already been informed by telephone that one would get me which prompted the officer-guard to ask: “What have you been up to that they come and get you? Smuggled letters out of jail, I am sure!”

I was sure that the cause was the expected interrogation but since I had smuggled letters out of the jail, the latter could also be the reason. This time I had to walk from one end of Bayonne to the other. Always through busy streets which made me feel semi-free. In the meantime I considered quickly my answers which I had prepared several weeks ago and which I had already partly forgotten. When I arrived in jail I was brought immediately to the room for visits. There I was awaited by the long sympathetic blond guy from the first evening with my open dossier in front of him. I immediately addressed him in an uninhibited and jokingly way and said: “well, you have let me wait pretty long. Your colleague was to return on the second day but never appeared again.”

“Yes, he was transferred and thus your case was delayed. However, we will make short shrift now. Just tell me the truth.”

He was determined to go mainly through the issue of the marching orders.

“Has captain Wetzel really signed this marching order?”

“No, that was done by a Dutchman who knew his signature. He also filled out the entire marching order.”

“What is the Dutchman's name?”

I was prepared for questions such as this and told him the name.

“De Meester you say?”

Yes, but with two e's. And by the way, he is now on leave in Holland.”

“And this Wetzel signed that document?”

I was dumbfounded by so much lack of understanding. “No” I said “all that is on this document was filled out by this De Meester. He knew the signature from a real document and has forged it.”

I believe that he still did not understand that one could falsify such a holy document as a marching order. Then he removed three typed sheets from my dossier and began to read the entire protocol. At some passages I could hardly suppress a smile. Ever now and then he paused to ask “Is that correct?” and I answered either “yes” or suggested

some corrections. When the entire protocol had been gone through I had to sign in threefold.

Then he produced a box that contained all the belongings that had been recovered earlier from my pant pockets and jacket. It gave me the joyous feeling of being reunited with old friends, to see these trusted objects again. He produced photos from my youth and from Holland and turned these over one by one.

“Where was this photo made?”

“In Amsterdam”, I answered.

“And this must be your father?”

“Yes, it is.”

“And this is....,”

“My mother.”

And so he continued. In every case I had to tell him who was in the picture.

Then he returned everything to the box. In deep thought he picked up the protocol with one hand and the marching order with the other and said: “Well, the only offenses for which you could be penalized are these papers. That’s shit my boy, big shit.” (He did not use the German equivalent “Scheisse” but “Schiet” from the Hamburg dialect). At that instant I had so much courage again that I almost asked him to simply toss this “Shit” into the oven. Finally he opined: “Well, let me find out whether I can get you to work for the O.T.”

“How long will it take for the decision to come”? He shrugged his shoulders but did not answer. “And what judgment am I likely to get considering that the case is only about this marching order?” “I cannot tell you”. Then we parted.

It made no sense to return to work. When I returned to my cell I first made a small dance of joy because the expected catastrophe had not materialized. Nevertheless, I could not be certain whether they had checked my ID in Holland. The unpleasant aspect was that I would now have to wait three months for my judgment. If I was lucky the time of my arrest might equal the time of my sentence.

Hence I might recon that I could be a free man in two or three months. I had good hopes again. I no longer had thoughts of being shot as a spy or terrorist. There was even a chance that I might not be sent to Germany as the SD man had mentioned something about the O.T. Thus ended Wednesday March 22.

Thursday March 23 began, like all of the recent days, with radiating sunshine, a deep-blue sky and a slight breeze from the sea. In the morning we were picked up, as usual, by the work-truck. During the ride I told the others about my interrogation. We were only four men now and one of the three others would be discharged within two days. I feared that they might dissolve our group. This day I doubly enjoyed the trip through town. Although my expectation might be too great, there was now some movement in my case. I was somewhat sad that I had not heard anything from my comrades in Paris or Bordeaux. No single piece of clothing or food had come even though I had begged for them repeatedly. Ergo, I concluded, the whole organization had been rolled up by the Germans.

There was little to do that day, hence it was possible that we might not return in the afternoon. We only shoveled a little charcoal. For the rest of the time we stood in the sunshine and watched jealously the summerly clothed people walk by.

The streetcar for Biarritz rode by, jam-packed, and I did not comprehend why I could not be in it. I had become really hungry for life.

Indeed, time passed after the midday meal while I remained in my cell. I reckoned that I would have to spend this beautiful afternoon in its coldness. However, my fate was favorable to me again. The first sergeant called me for work in the garden. I had shown the jail my propensity for gardening before by planting onions. Today I was to seed spinach and other greens. That was at least a partial replacement for the work in the garage as I was still within the grey and unsympathetic walls of the jail. I had been seeding for about three quarters of an hour and had just begun to rake a spinach bed when the first sergeant appeared at the garden entrance and loudly called my name Hendrik Werkman. My first thought was that the truck had arrived to pick us up for work outside. When I joined him he said: "Get ready! You are leaving."

"Well" I said "we are then still going to work then."

"No, you are released!"

I stood there with wide-open mouth, totally surprised.

"What?" I said "but that is impossible. How can that be?"

Now the commandant of the jail got rude: "are you impugning that I am telling you a lie?" he thundered at me. I did not know what was happening to me. My head was like a whirlpool and thinking straight was impossible. I was ordered to my cell but packed everything wrongly into and again out of my backpack until the jailer became impatient and called: 'Hurry up I do not have infinite time for you.' In a trance I shucked everything into my backpack. My blankets and mattress I returned and brought some of the borrowed books to jail mates and told them something like: "I believe that is am released" and said adieu to them. We wished each other the best. Then I was brought to the jail's office where an unknown man waited for me.

There my giddiness was dampened somewhat because I suspected that they had come to take me to Mont-de-Marsan. Not so, because they made me sign for the return of exactly everything that they had taken from me, namely all papers, food stamps, and money. Then I took leave, wisely, without saying: "Au revoir, see you again."

The jailer who released me with my companion once again wished me the best. He was a decent chap, a sergeant, who happened to hail from Leipzig. Anyway, all of the jailers had been decent and to this one I remarked: "well I hope that this was the first and last time with you. To be honest, I had imagined that it might be much worse than it actually turned out." Obviously I did not consider the terrible first fourteen days. It was a wonderful feeling to leave the brown building behind me. Meanwhile I had not the foggiest idea of what was in store for me.

About one hundred paces from the jail I suddenly remembered that I had left my scarf in the garden and I asked my guide whether I should leave it behind. I added: "If I remain in this area I can always come back to get it?"

However, he said that I should get it now. I ran back again, took leave of my comrades of the garden, and left this gloomy hospice behind me for good.

On the way to the railroad station we passed through the lively streets and I curiously inspected every store. We had to wait thirty minutes for the streetcar which brought us to the regional construction bureau for Biscay. After a few formalities were completed I obtained an employment order at the O.T. firm of Züblin. My guide opined:

“well, if we have some work to do in the garden I may come and get you back”. Then we went into a small room which was probably his office.

He sat down and began to give me a long lecture of approximately the following intent. The previous day he had by chance seen my report of the SD and he had been able to have me released from the jail.

He might also be able to forestall that the case would appear permanently in my file because that would be damaging for the remainder of my life. I could see for myself that these documents had been signed by the chief of the SD. Indeed, I noticed the signature of the chef Mulder. My guide continued that he had done all of this as a favor to me and now he expected a favor in return. I would meet many people soon and it would become my task to report to him all that was going on among them. For example whether there was communist or Gaullist propaganda, whether there was rabble-rousing against Germany, whether there were complaints about foremen or the food; he was interested about all of that.

I had no choice but to accept. I agreed. However, he would be surprised by the messages he would get from me! He added the following justification: the objective was to find those elements which incited the workmen so that they would no longer be able to cause more trouble. I should not tell anybody about my task and should not be boastful.

“I am clever enough myself to know that” I answered.

To avoid any risks I should sign my letters always with the number 26. And I should report once, preferably twice every week.

I promised to do everything he wanted and was able to leave after he had given me his address in Bayonne. From this moment on I was truly free! I could hardly believe it and I savored fully these first hours of my freedom. I traveled to Biarritz and could shout of joy when I traveled through the sun-bathed landscape. I was going to see Biarritz again, that wonderful town on the sea! It was a marvelous evening! I registered with the Züblin firm as a new laborer. Then they sent me to the Hotel “Régina” which had become the O.T. barracks. I was given a bed, bought cooking utensils and dropped my belongings on the dirty fourth floor. In the hallway I met a Dutchman and it turned out to be hard to speak Dutch again after such a long time. After I had eaten some in the canteen I ambled into town because I was determined to get in touch with the normal world again.

I began by having a decent meal. For sixty francs I ate fried eggs, meat, carrots and white beans. The beans seemed unavoidable in this region. Next I took a stroll and I became conscious of the good luck that had happened to me and how well fate had dealt with me when I noticed the stars above me, the heaving sea in front of me, and everywhere around me the contours of the elegant palaces of hotels!

Evidently my calculations had been right: there would be either catastrophe or miracle! And although the latter normally does not occur, it had happened to me! I was filled by a deep thankfulness for my invisible protector. Only when it got too cold I tore myself away from the contemplations and returned to my “hotel”.

The next morning at a quarter to six I got up. After all, I had rested exactly six weeks and went fresh, albeit not enthusiastically, to work. I joined the Dutch workers and assisted on the beach of the Chambre d’ Amour with the weaving of iron rods for building bunkers.

At lunch we were given bad soup but at least enough to get a full stomach. In the morning and in the evening we rode a bus. I could not send a message from me because

the post office was already closed at that time. I had wanted to send a telegram but that was forbidden in the coastal zone. Thus I waited patiently until Sunday for mailing two postcards, one to Paris, the other to Bordeaux.

Meanwhile I had rented a small room for 200 francs per month and mentioned my new address (on the postcards). The reason for this was that I needed to leave the room of the louse-infested “Hotel” as quickly as possible and I also longed to live again in a decent place. Thus I enjoyed real bedding that first night; it was a true sensation! I was in a grand mood because my first and independent ventures had been so successful. I was going to be twenty-one on the following Sunday. Because that was the only day off for that month I planned to go to Bordeaux which had become the city of my dreams while I was in jail. Thus I worked at the beach during the day and ambled through town after work to do some shopping. I no longer was hungry.

I had not yet touched the 5000 francs which Kurt had once given me for my stay in Toulouse because the weeks in jail had been very inexpensive from the point of view of spending. Now I played catch-up with lost time. I spent the evenings with reading or I talked with my Dutch colleagues from work. I also, as promised, wrote my first letter to the O.T. “guardian” in which I informed him that people in general complained only about the poor food. I thanked him again for his efforts to have me released.

One evening I traveled to Bayonne for a movie and saw my “guardian” sitting in the house. However, I made sure that I was not seen by him. The weekend arrived and it was rumored that the free Sunday had been shifted forward by one week because it would then be Easter when we were to have two free days. That was a big disappointment for me because I had to forget about Bordeaux. Thus I spent my birthday alone in Biarritz and that Sunday I worked until four o’clock in the afternoon. Then I went sightseeing in town with the Dutchmen. Meanwhile I had learned the trade of the iron weaving but I soon was given a much more convenient job at the cutter for the iron rods.

Anyhow, we did not work hard although the firm was in a hurry to finish the bunker for the Atlantic Wall. I made preparations to leave for Easter and fetched my leave-permit on Friday. A Dutch colleague who watched my preparations opined that I would not return but I assured him of the opposite. Even I was convinced that I would come back.

One evening as I returned home I found a letter from Willy. I jumped with joy when I read that our cause looked better than ever. Twenty-five fellows had reached Spain safely and he was just about to leave with three more. He wrote that I should consider joining again. However, I was standoffish because Spain was finished for me after the three failures.

However, on Saturday afternoon as I was packing my backpack I selected not only the necessary clothing but also, to be on the safe side, the photos from home which I had placed in the room. After all, it was impossible to know what lay in store. Thus I left the heavily bombed railroad station of Biarritz at two in the afternoon. It was a sunny day and I would also have fine weather in Bordeaux. In La Negresse I took the express train Hendaye-Bordeaux and it was a sort of comical moment when we passed the wall of the Bayonne jail! Evidently another wish of my jail time had been realized! The ride to Bordeaux seemed to be endless. I had a seat at a window and enjoyed viewing the landscape. I was eager to get to the end of the ride. Here lay the sun-bathed city in front of me from which I had already dreamt in jail! The world seemed to be smiling at me.

The pinnacle was the entry into the railroad hall. Now everything that I had pined for was becoming reality.

With an unspeakable feeling of joy I squeezed myself through the enormous mass of people on the platform. Because of the impending Easter holidays all trains were jam-packed. Finally, after ten minutes I got closer to the exit but it took some time before I had passed the control point. To my surprise I saw Ernst Kahn standing in the crush. I had not expected anyone because, after all, I was to have come one week earlier and I had only mentioned the postponement in one of my postcards.

The two of us left the railroad station together. I scanned the familiar sight and this time not in my dreams as if I had escaped to Bordeaux. I doubly enjoyed my legal entry into the city. All of my secret wishes had been fulfilled and I had no cause to complain my fate!

On the Course de la Marne we sat down in a café. Over a glass of beer I told him my adventures. When I had finished we went to the restaurant "Hanoi" for dinner. There we met other acquaintances: Horst Markus and his wife and Günter Schöneberg, all from Werkdorp Wieringen in Holland. On the way Ernst had told me details about our organization and I learned with horror that they were still using the same kind of marching orders that had been found on me even though Kurt Reilinger had known exactly what had happened to me. Then I learned how well two transports to Spain had succeeded. They had used both trails that I had tried in vain. Ernst told me the names of those who had already crossed. It turned out that most of them had been among the groups of my failed earlier attempts. Ernst planned to trek to Spain the following week and he asked me as an aside whether I was eager to participate too. That was going to be a difficult problem for me.

On the one hand I was still paralyzed by the scare from my incarceration. On the other hand I was tempted to dare something again, perhaps this time successfully. Moreover, I had left some of my belongings behind in Biarritz. I wanted to wait till the next day, when Willy was expected to come to Bordeaux, to discuss all possibilities with him.

That evening we went to Ernst's room where I was also going to sleep. There I dressed decently for the first time in a long while. Then we rode to the railroad station with the vague hope that Willy might have left Paris a day early. However we returned without having achieved anything.

On Easter Sunday April 9 we were again at station "St. Jean" in the morning but with the same result. Then, when we went to the café in the Rue P. L. Landes, we found him in front of the Wehrmacht's city headquarters. It was a hearty greeting between us and then the three of us went to café Albert. He too knew that I had been in jail and was pleased to see me again. I told them, as I had always done, that the reason for my bad luck had been that I had been arrested when I tried to enter the forbidden coastal zone without the needed permit. Later we went for a walk and Willy listened to my entire story. Then he suggested three possibilities: for once return to Biarritz, for a second "disappear" in France, and for a third to come along to Spain. I could not opt for Biarritz hence only the two other choices remained.

I decided to travel along to Toulouse where I would make my final decision. I was not yet wildly ready for another adventure. During the course of our talk I also learned why I had never heard from them while I was in jail. They had received my first illegal

letter of February 29 but not the official cards. They had considered what they could send me and when but lost much time in the process. Moreover, Lolly Eckhardt had mailed me a package from Paris.

That same evening Willy traveled to Labouheyre to inform the next candidates for Spain. While I painted in my mind the trip to Toulouse I got sick from the thought that I would have to sit in a German army compartment and fear to be controlled again.

On Monday April 10 Ernst and I met Willy and other comrades in a café opposite the railroad station “St. Jean”. I was extremely surprised to see there Walter Posnansky from Werkdorp, also known as “Uncle”. He had “disappeared” in Holland shortly before my departure to France and I had not seen him since that time. There was another fellow, David Neiss, named Duftsche, who was from the Loosdrecht⁶⁸ group. However, he was to stay in France to help with illegal work.

At exactly nine o’clock we departed with the express train Bordeaux-Marseille. Secretly I hoped that this would be the last time that I traveled on this leg but after my earlier experiences I had become distinctly pessimistic. Of course I was also very nervous and I thanked my maker when we arrived safely at two o’clock in Toulouse, another one of those cities which I had never thought I would ever see again. Joop Andriessen and Betty Britz picked us up. Willy had to leave us immediately for an appointment. We went in search for a hotel. In the afternoon we all went for a walk. As I considered the whole affair that evening as I lay in bed, I came close to deciding against going to Spain.

My doubts had not disappeared the next morning. Many and diverse preparations had to be made. Not everyone had a rucksack and it was also necessary to buy all sorts of small items. Thus the day passed quickly. Eight Dutchmen were to participate. The remainder was Frenchmen. I got a scare when it turned out that a total of thirty persons would form our group. I thought: ‘If that does not bode failure!’ Yet-despite it all-I agreed to come along. It was as if I was pulled into this adventure by invisible hands. It was now Wednesday April 12. At exactly nine o’clock, Willy, “Uncle” Walter Posnansky, Ernst, Ab Pach, Herman Italiaander, Franz Pollack, me, and the only woman Ruth Ehrenfest, rode the express train in the direction of Bayonne. Of course we sat again in the compartment for the German army which made me very nervous. Except for that it was a wonderful ride along the border of the Pyrenees, exactly as it had been during the past January. We sat down for dinner in the dining car, enjoyed the beautiful sight of the mountainous landscape, and uttered meaningful wishes when we raised our glasses. The weather might have been better but it might still change.

Everything repeated itself except with different participants. This time I suffered the trip from Pau with the slow train into the dangerous prohibited one with less trepidation than before perhaps because we were seated in a civilian compartment. We got out at the small station of Oloron St. Marie so that we would not arrive at St. Christau before dusk. This meant that we had to walk all the way to St. Christau.

⁶⁸Loosdrecht is a small town to the South-East of Amsterdam. Apparently there was a group there similar to Chanan’s in Gouda (D.H.).

Our guide was waiting for us in the small railroad station. I already knew him from the previous attempt. Then we marched through soaking wet meadows in the direction of Oloron. Willy and a young woman, the escort of the French group from Toulouse were still with us. In the meantime it had become dark. After two and one half hours we stopped and the guide brought our escorts to Oloron because they had to return to Toulouse to pick up the second batch of our transport.

Meanwhile we shortened our waiting time as our French comrades told us stories from the Maquis. After two hours our guide returned and we proceeded. The road seemed endless in the dark. A badly wrapped package of sugar cubes which Hermann carried in this hand had become soaked and had to be thrown away. We also had, as usual, the little adventures like seeking cover in a ditch because of cars that suddenly appeared. On one of these occasions I rolled down an embankment. We continued with an ever increasing marching speed.

Finally, late that evening, we crossed St. Christau and arrived wet and tired in the shack in which we had bivouacked one day and two nights during our previous attempt. We only straightened out the existing straw beds and lay down to sleep.

The next day, April 13, we spent all day with discussions, meals, and sleeping. We were not allowed to leave the barn because we could be seen outside by German patrols. That evening at nine we heard the familiar "Quack Quack". Willy, the guide, and the French woman Evelyne entered. Everyone grabbed his belongings and we went outside into the dark night.

We met the other group, which had just arrived, at the nearby railroad track. The moment of the big farewell to Willy had come. I jokingly said to Willy that we would be certainly back within three days but he answered: "the third time is the charm". Everyone sent greetings to those that remained behind. I had already written to my landlady in Biarritz and included one hundred francs. I had asked her to send my belongings to Paris.

Thus we continued to march along the railroad track. On the way our guide bought some cheese at a farm to supplement our food rations. Then we crossed the dangerous pass which allegedly was no longer checked by the Germans. Then through the endless tunnel in which one had to proceed by feeling one's way with one's hands. Then we left the valley and reached a hut after a short climb. Here we could sleep until the next morning.

On Friday April 14 we continued climbing the same mountain again on which Lore and Hugo could not make it the first time. However, we took an easier road this time which bore no comparison to the difficulties of the previous one. We had frequent rests, were not bound by the clock, and did not exert ourselves too much. At a little past noon we were on the crest of the mountain, I was now certain that our previous guide had not known the road too well because we could have chosen the easier climb that time. At the top we rested and ate some food. In the afternoon we had a slight descent on the other side and arrived at a concrete hut. It appeared to me that this was the hut that we had tried to find the previous time but in vain. Time passed slowly. The weather had become worse in the meantime and a strong wind blew around the hut. In the distance we saw the next mountain chain and among it the peak that we still had to climb.

Towards eight in the evening the second guide arrived. This was a great relief for me because I had fantasized that he had been arrested like his predecessor. At least that was how our earlier guide had then explained his failure to appear. Soon we continued.

The road descended steeply again and I already anticipated that we would have to climb on the other side of the valley. Slowly night fell and now the descent became dangerous because one had to guess where to step. It was no wonder therefore that some of us slipped and rolled down slope a little ways, fortunately without breaking any bones. Almost down in the valley there were a few dangerous minutes as we had to pass a customs house occupied by Germans. They only told us later what the innocent looking farm really had been. We all filled our water bottles at a small spring. After a short rest a steep ascent followed which made us work hard. Luckily it did not take too long and soon we reached a hut where we would stay until the next morning.

When we woke up the next morning it rained cats and dogs. Our guides said that it would be impossible to go on. We looked at one another in resignation. The misfortune was to happen again. The food, above all, would not be sufficient. Moreover, one of the French fellows had become sick with a high fever. Outside it rained without interruption. We dozed off until we were awakened at ten by the message to get ready to continue marching. It was still raining but lighter than before. After we had taken leave from our first guide we went off.

The following leg was quite difficult again and we had to stop regularly. It had stopped raining. The guide spurred us on by telling us that we would cross the border this afternoon if we continued marching well. This prospect gave us new energy. One even forgot one's thirst because there was now a shortage of potable water. Every now and then someone had to lighten the load of his baggage by throwing it away. I was glad that I had not taken along much. After all I had the experience to know that it was useless to tote along too much. Our group of twenty-seven young people sometimes became so stretched-out that the last ones in line did not always know which direction to take. They had to be informed by whistling. When that happened we rested and we proceeded only when all were together again. Slowly we came upon our first snow. It turned out that we could not reach our desired objective by noon. Towards one o'clock we rested at a spring and had lunch. While it was not ample we counted on dinner that evening in Spain.

We continued climbing spurred on by the optimism of reaching the border soon. Towards four we saw the crest that we had to master and three quarters of an hour later we were already close to it. The small automatic weapon which had been taken along to protect us in emergencies was disassembled. We wrote short notes to hand to our guide to take back. The weather had become worse again. Hail came down. Everyone longed to leave this unreal environment as fast as possible. Thus we went off to leave the last of French soil.

We were a short distance from the specific crest. I hurried to leave the bulk of our group to join the leading climbers. That was not easy because I was already pretty tired. However, I ran all the time looking at the crest in front of me. Suddenly the unexpected happened! First I only saw how our guide fell down like he was struck by lightning. Others followed his example. Shots already began to ring out. I turned around immediately and ran back as fast as I could. A few times I fell down into the snow to seek cover but when I saw the others running back I could not remain down and I also ran back. There were some isolated shots. The group that had formed the tail saw us coming down the mountain side and began to run in panic in the opposite direction.

In the meantime I had fallen on a snow-covered rock and injured my knee but I had become totally inured to pain. Desperately I considered what would happen now. I

would not join another return! I would rather hide in a crag and try to cross to Spain in the dark. In any event, my old pessimism had been right again. Every now and then I looked backward but they did not pursue us. After a breathless descent of fifteen minutes we stopped for the first time. We reassembled the automatic weapon and discussed our situation. I was glad to hear that the guide was willing to give it another try either at night in the dark or the next morning. For this purpose we had to make a small detour. Everything was fine with us if the purpose was to cross the border.

It was quiet around us. No more shots were heard. The path often led across slippery rocks and one could slide into the meters-high snow as a result of a misstep. That was why we proceeded only slowly. We marched for about two hours and the trek seemed to have no end. Finally the marching became easier. We walked through a thinner cover of snow and the slope of the path was now only shallow. Everyone was wet throughout their undergarments but who cared? Only few knew what our exact goal was. However we soon became aware of it. We came upon a small hut in which only nine of us could rest. I too crept into it. The others had to use a larger hut about one hundred meters away. We were glad that we could take off our rucksacks and that we were protected from the rain. It was only later that we discovered that an icy wind blew down from the mountain crest.

At first we just sat there crouched in our overcoats. Our teeth clattered due to cold and wetness. Then we began to check our belongings to get warmer. I removed my overcoat and hung it in front of the hole in the wall behind me through which the icy wind blew. Everyone tried to exchange the wet for dry clothing from the rucksacks. Meanwhile our guide tried to start a fire which he succeeded to do after several vain attempts. Nevertheless it took about one half hour before it became warm in the small room.

Outside it had become night, a cold winter's night with a clear star-studded sky. We were glad that our adventure had ended so well. However, I was not calm because we were so close to the border. How easy it would be for them to discover the light from our fire if they were looking for us! Every now and then someone from the other hut came with the proposal to continue the crossing but it was decided to wait until the next morning to go under cover of dawn. Soon it became quite cozy in our hut especially for those close to the fire who also tried to catch some sleep. From time to time we changed places. Our wet belongings began to dry out as the night proceeded. We became optimistic again. We felt strength returning for our last efforts even though we were all dead-tired. However, the friendly heat of the fire did us good.

The next day, Sunday April 16, we went off towards five in the morning.

It was still dark but dawn was coming soon. We set off with fresh courage. By sheer luck I had dry shoes and felt as well as never before. The march began on a steep downward slope and the group began to stretch out again. As usual I did not look around often but marched on, looking at the feet of the fellow before me. Suddenly we stopped again. I immediately thought that there was another emergency. No way! The guide up front was explaining things and shook everybody's hands. Really! We had arrived at the crest! In front of us was a steep descent. When it was my turn to say adieu to him I asked, to be certain, whether we were really at the border. He affirmed and we were now left to ourselves.

Slowly we descended in gigantic S-curves. We slipped more than we walked. I was filled with an unspeakable joy! We were finally in Spain! How our comrades in France would enjoy this! Regrettably we had thrown our last letters into a fire after our escapade of the previous day to make sure that they would not be found by the Germans.

Slowly it dawned in the East. The guide had told us that we had to always take a south-westerly direction to reach the valley. However, that was easier said than done because we had only one compass and that was not too reliable. Thus we walked into the direction that we suspected to be the correct one.

There was of course no lack of hefty discussions among the French who had understood the explanations about the directions to take and who disagreed with the decisions of the leader of our group. Now we climbed up rocks, then down again. Now we were too far to the right, then too far to the left. The real danger was that the course of the border was not a straight line. If we made a directional mistake we could find ourselves again in French territory.

Thus we strayed for hours. At breakfast we had eaten our last food which was the principal reason why we had to reach the specific valley that day. Many became impatient. Some began to grumble which was understandable given that the nervous tensions of the previous days began to surface only now.

Towards noon we heard two comrades who had gone ahead call excitedly, waving their arms. As we approached we could hardly believe our eyes: far away in the distance was a broad valley with a river bed in the center and individual farms. We walked on with renewed energy. We almost ran because that was now possible in the open country. It took not long before we got to a small brook where everyone refreshed themselves. Some even shaved.

Then we moved off but it was still going to be a long way. Every once in a while we would see the valley but how were we to get to it? Herman Italiaander and I walked for a while along a different road but at another meadow we rejoined the group. I slowly felt that my feet were getting raw. Others were in even greater pain and everybody longed for the end of the march. According to the instructions from Toulouse we were to try to get to Barcelona. However, given our condition, we were glad to be received by the very first policeman.

To make things worse, we once descended into a steep gorge hoping that it would lead into the valley but when we were already quite deep into it the cliff became so steep that it would have been life-threatening to continue. Thus we had to climb again even though that seemed impossible for many of us. I hardly believed that I would manage; yet, while we were climbing, I suddenly passed my so-called dead point and I began to climb as fast as never before. Thus I was the first at the top. When the others arrived breathing heavily I was already rested.

Thirty minutes later we went off again. Once again we thought that we had discovered a descent to the valley but we were wrong again. Finally we met a shepherd. Those who had learned a few words of Spanish asked for the road and he showed it to us. At the same time those most fearful among us had our doubts dispelled that we were really on Spanish soil. We soon found the path he mentioned and now we descended merrily. It seemed wise to destroy our false ID's and thus the existence of Hendrik Werkman ended on that mountain of the Pyrenees.

Another rest was taken a few hundred meters above the valley. We discussed details about the many questions we might be soon asked. Then we went off because clouds of fog approached us rapidly. It did not take long before we reached the valley. Here we were able to fill our flasks with fresh mountain water. I became filled with an indescribable feeling of joy. My greatest wish had become reality! Some farmers, whom we had taken for border police when we were still on the mountain, showed us the road to the next village. We tried to buy food from them but they had nothing to sell.

My only wish was to return to the civilized world. Therefore Ernst and I walked faster than the others but I had serious troubles because of my swollen feet. Finally the others caught up with us and walking together as a group was easier. We even sang. From a farmer we had obtained a donkey to carry a sick one who could no longer walk. They formed the leading tip of our group. Thus we met our first border policeman. With his guidance we now marched through an immensely beautiful region. All around us were shepherds and their bells truly gave us a real concert of reception.

At the post of the Guardia Civil⁶⁹ they inspected all luggage, even the seams of our clothing. After one was checked one could wait at a smoldering fire in a hut until everyone was inspected. Then we formed a marching column to walk to the next village, Isaba.

Most of us only plodded forward. Every five minutes I consulted my watch because it seemed that a half hour had already gone by. Nevertheless the natural beauty in which we found ourselves did not escape my attention. Next to us was a torrential mountain brook with wonderful clear water and on both sides of the road were high mountain chains partially covered by clouds. Our guards, two Guardia Civil walked next to us. Farmers in their folkloristic outfits overtook us riding on donkeys. Many times the road curved and every time we hoped to behold the silhouettes of the village.

We plodded on while we sang French and Dutch songs. Towards nine we arrived in Isaba. We were surrounded by numerous Guardia Civil.

We were led into a side street and had to wait in front of a large building. We believed that we would be brought into some sort of hotel but were soon greatly disabused. We were so tired that we could hardly remain on our feet until we were called into the building one by one. Inside we had to fill out forms for the police and our luggage was inspected for a second time.

It was here too that we could mention our real names for the first time in a long while which was a really great occasion for us. However, we did not give our real dates of birth. In Toulouse we had already been warned about this trap and were given the appropriate instructions. Everyone who could rationally pretend to be younger than eighteen or older than forty claimed to be so. I was among them. The reason was that the span from eighteen to forty was the military age and one risked therefore to become a prisoner of war. When all of us had been registered they brought us to a barn with a little hay and straw in it. Soon they brought us potatoes cooked in oil and water which was our first meal in Spain. It was much too little for our hunger and somewhat disappointing. Nevertheless we fell asleep happily.

⁶⁹“Guardia Civil”. Literally: Civil Guard. In reality a semi-military national police force of Franco’s Spain (D.H.).

It was on Monday April 17 that we fully realized that we were in Spain and safe. As we realized this we accepted the small disappointments rather uncritically. After they had assured us that we would not be locked up in jail we thought we had heard a hotel mentioned. Whatever, our shelter did not resemble a hotel at all. We were without food all morning and in the afternoon a woman brought us exactly the same menu of the previous evening. Everyone asked: "Is this Spain where there is plenty of food?"

Towards three in the afternoon a Guardia Civil appeared and read several names among which was mine. These were the names of those who would travel to Pamplona on that very day. We had to travel in two separate groups because the seating of the bus was limited. Thus the "select" of us gathered on the side of the road at the bus stop. There we met the only female climber Ruth Ehrenfest who had been lodged in a hotel thanks to her gender and had been treated grandly. She had bought oranges for us and we enjoyed this wonderful fruit while waiting for the bus.

The bus arrived towards three-thirty and now began the wrenching five hour long ride to Pamplona. On the first leg from Isaba to Venta we rode through a still beautiful region. However, soon we reached a broad plain and since the bus with its gas-generator (yes, even here in neutral Spain there were gas generators) moved at a snail's pace the trip became very boring. I constantly looked out the window to learn as much as possible about this for me new country. Frequently we saw ruins, remains from the Spanish civil war that had ended five years ago. Meanwhile, most of our group was seated on the roof of the bus owing to the shortage of seats inside, something very common in Spain.

We stopped in Saguessa, a little town on the Rio Grande. Our mouths watered and our eyes popped when we walked past the shops. All of these goodies made us believe that we had arrived in the land of Cockaigne! I was especially turned on by the confectioners and fruit stores. During our stay we bought waffles and bananas. These were moments that I will never forget. I believed that the inhabitants of all occupied countries dreamt, like us, to once truly feast again like before the war. However, there the transition was likely to be very gradual after the end of the war whereas we found ourselves suddenly amidst all of these long missed pleasures.



Chanan Flörsheim's Spanish Identification Document which lists his nationality as „apatrida“ = stateless.

In the evening at exactly nine we reached the bus station of Pamplona. It was dark and there had been some rain. Nevertheless, what wonderful view were these brightly lit streets and houses. Here blacking out was not the law of the land. We enjoyed this view no less than the pleasures of this afternoon. They brought us to the ultra-modern police headquarters. There we had to pass more formalities. Here we obtained Spanish ID's. We liked seeing our old names in black on white before us although some names had been slightly mangled. Our nationality was "Apatride" which means stateless. After all of this they brought us to a hotel which was called "Fonda" here. The full name was "Fonda Poscuaterra". They seemed eager to correct what they had withheld from us in Isaba. With unusual extravagance, very different from the evening before, they served us rice, omelets, wine, soup and desert. Quietly we took back our silent or loudly uttered criticisms of Spain. Then they brought us to our rooms in private homes. We had already agreed to meet the next morning in the Fonda for breakfast. When we got to our rooms each of us experienced anew the added sensation to undress and to be able to sleep in a real bed.

Of course nobody was on time in the Fonda on the next morning of Tuesday because we had been much too tired. Our small group which had their rooms in a home arrived at ten thirty after we had studied the stores along the way. We had difficulty to tear ourselves away from those Olympic fares of figs, chocolate, sardines, almonds, oranges and tarts. We assumed to be the last at the breakfast table but no, to our chagrin, we discovered to be the first.

A few Englishmen and Americans who paid no attention to us were already having breakfast. The breakfast brought us another small disappointment because a cup of chocolate and a few tiny pieces of bread were not enough for our stomachs. Meanwhile the others had ambled in.

We were eager to visit the town afterwards but the owner of the Fonda said that that was, strictly speaking, not allowed because one could not know when we were going to be picked up again. However, we got permission for small groups to go out albeit for no longer than thirty minutes. It was already afternoon when my turn came. I spent the meantime by bringing my luggage to the Fonda and by writing a long letter to my sister Edith in England in which I sketched for her my adventures of the past few years.

Our lunch had been epicurean again. Ruth, moreover, had managed to bring some sweets from her escapade into town and so we tasted chocolate and figs again.

Ab Pach, Herman Italiaander, Franz Pollack and I went into town towards three. We made a few little purchases ourselves. We were amazed how modern, clean, and above all expensive everything was but Pamplona as a whole made a very sympathetic impression on us. Just as we returned a little tardy a policeman waited for us. When everyone was together he accompanied us to a small railroad station.

We arrived there much too early. Our slow train left towards five. We already knew that we were to be brought to a village at about thirty kilometers from Pamplona. I would have liked to stay longer in Pamplona. Perhaps I would have an opportunity to visit later.

The trip with the rambling train went through countless tunnels and gorges. We had a great view of nature outside. Ab and some French comrades had to get off at a town named Lecumberri after about one and one-half hour. It was explained that those older than eighteen could not remain with us. We, on the other hand, arrived towards seven at our goal. Our future residence was named Leiza, located between Pamplona and San Sebastian in the Province of Navarre.

For the time being, my road to freedom came to an end here.....



In Leiza

EPILOGUE

Spain 1944

Leiza. Today is May 1, 1944. Since a few days I have the desire to restart a diary. I am not sure whether this will become an exact description of every day or, like in my previous diary, will be merely notices about certain thoughts and problems that were then dominant for me. In principle I would like to do both. In any case I am sorry that I did not have any opportunity between April 1943 and April 1944 to write because I believe that this was the most exciting time of my life. I will therefore try to jot down as much as I remember. Moreover I am sad that I will probably never see my former diaries again. It would have been nice to have the fitting tales of those years at hand.

Above all I can already thank my maker that I have overcome all dangers and that then worst is behind me. In every situation I had a firm trust in God. However I never used it in any of my considerations. For example, I always reckoned with the worst and acted accordingly. Then everything happened as I had thought....or better. Therefore the bad endings never disappointed me.

In jail, during the most dangerous time, I sent a quick prayer to heavens once every day, however funny that may sound. Nevertheless, it was truly a wonder that it worked out in the end for me.

One begins a prayer with "dear God". However, my concept of God is not the childlike-naïve picture of an old man with a large beard. By God I imagined this mysterious power which guides all of our actions and possibly thoughts. Such a power exists in the world; you can name it fate, luck, star or dear God. These are just different words for the same concept.

Even today I do not understand how I earned the luck to have come through everything so well whereas so many others, parents, friends, acquaintances did not survive those years. I and everyone else who now lives outside the zone of terror have been granted this lucky fate for which I cannot thank my maker enough.

May 26, 1944

Today, following numerous days of writing-laziness, I write again a few lines. Perhaps I have been stimulated by the beautiful weather, perhaps by the hangover of the previous evening. It was a harmless one, however. Uncle Ernst and I, especially me, drank more wine than usual and soon we displayed the first signs of mirth. Two cognacs followed the red wine and all was topped off with a Muscatel. In any case, I woke up early in the morning and decided upon a short walk into the mountains. It was really a long time ago since I had enjoyed a spring's morning. It did me good and so I got all sorts of literary ideas which begins with these lines and probably also ends with them.

We are now waiting to be transported soon to Madrid perhaps within one or two weeks. I believe that we will proceed from there to the harbor of Malaga and on. We talk much about our near future however unclear and nebulous it is. I have real cramps in my stomach from it but that is my problem.

Our daily routing is the following. I get up at eight thirty every morning and do morning gymnastic from nine to a quarter to ten outside in the Plaza with a dozen others. Then we have breakfast. Until lunchtime at one-thirty I usually study Spanish. After the

meal I make the homework for my Spanish courses and study English sometimes. Afterwards I write letters or have a nap. At about seven we have chocolate milk and then I and two others have Spanish lesson.

Afterwards at eight thirty I have a walk or I join a discussion. Supper is at nine thirty and subsequently at about eleven thirty I go home and to bed. There was often story-telling including dirty jokes until half past twelve.

22 June, 1944

Yesterday summer began officially with much rain. In the meantime we are stuck in this boring village and wait for a speedy Alijah⁷⁰. Because of the recent events associated with the Allied invasion of France on June 6 this had become very questionable. Nevertheless we hear from Madrid time and again that everything would soon take a favorable course. Let us hope it!

Recently we received mail from Adina and she wrote above all the news which Fritz Lichtenstein, our Jewish Consul, had brought during his visit. He said that almost our entire organization in France had been rolled up by the Germans. That was of course a bitter blow. Nevertheless, some optimism about the fates of our friends is not totally unwarranted.



Everyday my knowledge of the Spanish language increased. To the best of my ability I teach Spanish to Uncle Ernst and English to Franz. The latter is every time a load on my nervous system. In any case, and that is the most important aspect, I make my days productive and thus they pass quickly. When the weather is good we do some mountain climbing. Thus the best way to characterize our sojourn is by "Ferien vom Ich"⁷¹. Finally, I have still no mail from my sister Ditha in England although I have written her several times.

Cadiz October 12, 1944

I will not soon forget the days before September 26. There were rumors that our ship was to leave soon but we had become skeptical. However, the tension increased towards the weekend. We expected some message from Madrid, either good or bad. Finally, on Monday September 25 there simultaneously arrived in the afternoon a telephone call and a lengthy telegram. We were ecstatic when we learned that all steps had been taken with the authorities to take us to Madrid. Our joy was really indescribably big in contradistinction to the feelings of our host of the Fonda Gogorza, which we would rather have left today than tomorrow.

⁷⁰ Immigration to Israel, literally Ascension (to Zion) (Chanan Florsheim).

⁷¹ 1934 lighthearted German movie directed by Hans Deppe. A rough rendering of the title is: "My vacation" (D.H.).

We Dutchmen had passed the last few days mainly with playing cards such as rummy, poker, or bridge. This barren waiting-time would finally come to an end. It seemed unthinkable! The Spanish commissioner-in-charge told us in the course of the afternoon that we would depart on Wednesday. Some of the over-optimistic among us hoped for Tuesday. To be certain we went to the railroad station at seven in the evening to find out whether a second commissioner had arrived to accompany us the next morning. None had come, however. That evening we had a joyful meal because we knew that it would be the next to last one here. Afterwards we newly minted bridge players sat down for a game.

We had been playing for about thirty minutes when the commissioner entered to tell us....that we would depart the next morning! We threw the cards on the table and ran upstairs to inform the other card players in the dining room. Then everybody ran into the street singing and yelling. We were in one word: over joyous. Then we packed our few belongings and sat together to forge new plans. We finally went to sleep late and excitedly.

Following a restless and sleepless night we arose towards six, got dressed, and went to the Fonda to find out what was going on. A gramophone upstairs droned tirelessly old Spanish hit songs. Everyone was there. Despite the early hour we made good-bye visits and raced for a last time up and down the familiar streets. Our group of 22 set off for the railroad station at eight thirty. The train which we had waited for five months arrived to take us away from this town. The farewells from the inhabitants which had been noisy and warm were behind us. Soon we saw the little railroad station disappear and we ourselves disappeared into one of the numerous tunnels on the way to Pamplona.

When we had left the large curve on top of the mountain behind us we caught a last glimpse of the village and saw that all of the inhabitants hung out of their windows to wave us farewell. Then the last house disappeared from sight. After having crossed a picturesque language, now dirtied by the smoke of our locomotive, we soon reached the plateau on which the city of Pamplona with its 70,000 inhabitants was located.

How I was amazed to see once again tall houses and pretty parks. We were directly brought to the "Gobierno Civil", the police, where all commissioners who had served us in Leiza greeted us. From there to Fonda Pascualerna, our hotel, and then we were allowed to walk until lunch. Everyone did some shopping according to his own needs. The city impressed us as well-to-do and well kept. It had tasteful parks with gorgeous flowers, modern homes and broad, clean streets.

In the evening at 5 we had to meet again in the Fonda. We then traveled to the railroad station of Norte at 2 kilometers from Pamplona accompanied by two commissioners. From there we took a slow train to Alasua where we boarded the express train to Madrid. It was so full that one could hardly stand, let alone sit. Our prospects for at least half a night sleep were therefore nil. We rode via Vittoria, Miranda, Burgos, and Valladolid to Madrid where we arrived at 9 in the morning. I and others had taken turns to sleep, half-stretched, in the hallway of a first class carriage.

It was a gorgeous morning that awaited us outside. We crossed the Sierra Guadarrama, saw the Escorial from afar, and raced across the plateau to Madrid. No one was waiting for us at the railroad station. Our two nervous police commissioners led us

into the subway. Thirty minutes later we arrived at the building of the Police Armada Militar, where we could leave our luggage and say goodbye to our commissioners.

Next, to our great surprise, we were brought to a jail in the basement.

Nagging, protesting, nor grumbling helped. We were searched for knives and other knick-knacks and locked up in a large cell. We were all dumbfounded and were sure that there had been a misunderstanding. We assumed that we would be freed quickly if our counsel Blickenstaff knew about this. But how could we reach him? The officer on duty reassured us and said that everything would turn out OK soon. However, that did not change anything in our condition.

In the meantime a loud discussion ensued in the cell. Some of us, me included, lay down on the steel mattresses to catch some sleep. Two hours later I was wonderfully rested. Now they wanted to send us to the showers. Once again loud protests were heard and some feared that they would be shaved. It did us no good. We had to shower and that would not have been so bad if we had been given towels to dry instead of some rags. I enjoyed the hot water which washed away my dirt from the trip. Suddenly we were told that we were free and would be picked up immediately. Because of my excitement I did not take enough time to dry myself. I jumped half-wet into my clothes. Ten minutes later we walked through the long labyrinth of hallways towards the exit.

Soon a young man appeared and asked us to follow him. We did not deign the court of the police headquarters one more look. We marched behind him into the street where some taxi cabs were already waiting for us. Our mood improved as we rode the sunbathed busy streets of Madrid in this elegant fashion. Soon we reached the diplomatic quarter and stopped at the house with the familiar address of Eduardo Dato 20, the office of the American consul Mr. Blickenstaff. There we learned that the cause of our bad experience had been the fact that we had arrived in Madrid one day earlier than expected and that the police of Madrid had not yet received confirmation of our departure from Pamplona. They took pity on us but soon the formalities began. We were given the address of a pension where five of us could stay. We were given money to buy clothes and cigarettes. Then we left for our new dwelling. It turned out to be good, fine beds, good food, and situated on the principal street of Madrid, the Avenida José Antonio.

In the afternoon we went shopping. Soon those of us who had been wearing the drab "Jointclothing"⁷² were transformed into gentlemen. Everyone had a new suit, new shoes, and some packages under their arms.

That evening we went to the movies for the first time in Spain and saw the fairy-tale "The Thief of Baghdad" in Technicolor. However, I was so tired that my eyes closed often and I saw little of the film. I was glad that I could finally sack out at one in the morning. The following day, Thursday, we went shopping again because we had been told that we would not be allowed to take Spanish pesetas onto the ship. Since we had saved a lot in Leiza, because there had been only few opportunities there to spend much money, all of us owned a considerable sum and we had to spend it all during the next three days in Madrid.

⁷²Joint (American Joint Distribution Committee) = Jewish organization of assistance in the United States of America (Chanan Florsheim).

I made a quick trip to the Retiro, Madrid's most beautiful park and see also some of the city. We also enjoyed the long missed goodies of pasties and ate ice constantly.



Hans/Chanan Flörsheim in the Retiro park of Madrid, October 1944?

We liked Madrid and were sorry that we had to leave again the following day. We had also been seen by a doctor who had administered vaccinations. At the English consulate we obtained our entry permits for the mandate of Palestine. The day went by much too fast. Nevertheless, I was in a movie house in the afternoon to see a French movie and then an American flick. In the evening a cowboy film of poor quality. It was again long after midnight before we went to bed.

The next morning we all had to meet at eight at the railroad station Atocha to wait for the Alija-train with our boys from Barcelona and to board ourselves for Cadiz. Now arrived the moment for which we had waited for more than five months: to be rejoined with our old friends! It was a most memorable meeting! The train arrived with a few minutes delay and then the hullabaloo began! They all hung from the windows. Countless hands were stretched out for us and we were showered with questions. It was truly a great occasion. We took seats in the compartment with all the Dutchmen. Each of us was given a food package which was to last until Cadiz and then the train began to move. Soon we had left Madrid behind us and the ride from nine in the morning until two at night began. No trip of this length had ever passed by so quickly. Time flew with telling stories, questions, answers, meals and just talking. Every once in a while we looked outside at the generally dull landscape that we passed through.

The temperature rose as we went increasingly further southward. Soon we had to buy refreshments at every station where the train stopped. Typical for this southern region were the sellers of water who sold their precious fluid from large jars for a few centimes.

The only small incident of the long ride occurred in Cordoba. Normally the train continued after repeated whistles. A group of about nineteen men must have failed to hear this warning signal because as we departed those who were left behind waved desperately but that did not help. However, at Seville, the next station, the train waited until they had returned by taxis and boarded.

We arrived in Cadiz late that night and it took some two hours after much ado before we were finally given hotel accommodations. Those from Barcelona got their quarters in a hotel located two kilometers outside the city. We “Madrilenians” got rooms in the city. Together with Herbert Liffmann I had been given a bad room. It was not until five in the morning that we were able to go to bed.

It was Saturday September 30, 1944

Each of us who had thought that the ship would really arrive within two days soon realized that this was an illusion. Soon it became apparent that the crossing of the Mediterranean required the agreement of all warring powers and that could take quite some time. After two nights I moved out of the hotel in the city and obtained quarters in the large hotel “Playa” where most of the friends that I had not seen for a long time stayed. By-and-by a daily routine developed so that we would not frit away our time. In the morning there was gymnastics at a nearby beach. We organized courses in Hebrew at different levels and there was even a theoretical engineering class.

One day we decided that it would be impossible to leave Spain without having attended a bullfight. It turned out, however, that I had no money left. Obeying the decree that we had to spend all before we boarded I had spent all pesetas that I had saved in Leiza in the shops of Madrid.

Fortunately some of us had obtained funds from relatives which they had contacted. I was thus invited to join and attend a “Corrida”. Those who invited me stayed in my former hotel in the city. We agreed that they would be at a specific time in a streetcar that passed by my hotel. I would simply board it and together we would proceed for the Corrida in a nearby town. Easier said than done! When the streetcar arrived it was jam-packed and, as was usual in Spain, people hung to the outside of the cars. When I saw this I decided to forgo the pleasure. Afterwards the others told me that I had not missed anything but that could not console me then.

(Only many years later when I saw bullfighting on TV I concluded that I had really not missed anything then. The whole affair was not to my taste. Even during our trip to Spain in 1990 I did not want to see a bullfight even though it would have been very easy for us to attend.....)

Thus the days went by slowly. Rumors came and went about a speedy departure. All told our lazy life took its course and the only thing that really interested us was the course of the war and the advances of the Allies and Russians in Europe.

Thus the month of October neared its end when we were surprised one evening with the news that the Portuguese ship “Guinee” had arrived in port and that we would board the next morning.

ON BOARD OF THE “GUINEE”

October 26.

The whole morning went by with waiting. The buses arrived only after lunch to bring us to the port and to board.



Cadiz, October 21, 1944



The passengers of the Guinee before boarding.

At three in the morning there was a solemn ceremony on board to memorize those who had contributed to our saving and for a final adieu to Europe.

At four we departed.

October 27.

Gorgeous sunset in the Straits of Gibraltar. At 10 we anchor in the port of Tangiers in North Africa.

We depart from Tangiers at 4 in the afternoon. At seven we arrive in Gibraltar. The illuminated rock is very impressive.

October 28.

We leave the port of Gibraltar at 10. All around us are warships. We enter the Mediterranean. We are passed by a convoy of 17 ships. Every now and then a plane flies over our ship. The sea is quite calm. In the distance we see a light house.



Hans Floersheim's ticket for the boat trip from Cadiz to Haifa.

October 29.

Sometimes we can see the contours of the coast of Algeria. We are passed by a Red Cross ship that came from the opposite direction. Many of us are seasick.

October 30.

In the distance we can see the coast of Sicily. In the evening we pass the isle of Pantelleria. Another light house.

October 31.

Today we sail very close to the coast of Sicily. One can distinguish villages and houses.

This whole sea trip is becoming a great joy! The sea is quiet. Silence all around us. Only the endless stretch of the blue sea and above us a blue sky. At night the romantic lighting of the black surface of the Mediterranean by the Moon. Everything appears to be mysterious.

We follow the course of the sail by moving little flag-pins on the ship's map every day. We are told that everything is going according to plan and that we would arrive in Haifa after 4-5 days, which is to say on Sunday.

November 1.

Navigated around the island of Crete the entire day.

November 4.

Towards 11:30 there was a great commotion. One of the Portuguese sailors waives to us and shouts: "Palestina vista!" We all run to the railing and, indeed, in the far distance we see the vague contours of mountains.

As time went by we came closer to our goal. We enter the Bay of Acco at 3 in the afternoon. Then we anchored in the port of Haifa. We can see the city before us on the slopes of Mount Carmel. She appears to be a modern town.

Thus I return to the land of my ancestors. However, I cannot pretend that a dream had been fulfilled. Although I had been a member of Maccabi Hazair, the Zionist youth organization in Amsterdam and had lived later in the Zionist living quarters of Wieringen, all of that did not mean very much to me. To be honest, today I still explain my arrival in Palestine as the result of the kick in the butt that the Nazis had given me. Without it I would live today in Germany, the country of my birth, without giving a thought to immigration. However, owing to the stormy times in which I became trapped I landed to my good fortune in a circle of friends led by some comrades of the resistance which had chosen the goal of reaching Palestine.

During my long waiting period in Spain I had the opportunity of choosing a different direction. The parents of my friend Ali from Leipzig invited me to come to the United States. However, my feeling of solidarity with those comrades who had sacrificed themselves for my deliverance and whose ideal had been Palestine came forcefully into play. Thus it came about that here were only very few who decided in Spain not to travel with us to Palestine.

During the sail we maintained a daily routine similar to the one in Spain. We continued to teach the various courses and organized some festive evenings. However, on the whole, each of us thought about his future and made plans. Initially I had diverse thoughts about the profession I wanted to choose but I returned soon to agriculture, hence the Kibbutz. However, at least for me, Kibbutz was still a nebulous concept.

These were roughly my thoughts as our ship lay at anchor opposite the illuminated city of Haifa on Saturday November 4. We had to be patient until the next day in order not to desecrate the Sabbath.

The next morning, Sunday, the time had finally arrived. Before we left the ship we were greeted by some officials, solemnly sang the "Hatikva", and everyone was given an orange. A curious mass of people that had come to greet us waited on the quay. The arrival of a ship with refugees from Europe in the middle of the war was, after all, a special event.

News reporters tried to ask questions but we were not given time to answer. We marched to the waiting buses. Accompanied by the first English soldier I had ever met we rode in wonderful sunshine along the coast to the quarantine camp of Atlith. There we were housed in wooden barracks and were told that we would remain in the camp until some bureaucratic formalities had been accomplished and we had been interrogated by the British Secret Service.

We were not the only group in the camp. A ship from Rumania had arrived the day before us. There was always much jostling especially at mealtime. Suddenly the weather changed and it began to rain heavily. The entire camp became muddy. We, who had bought new suits and shoes in Spain had trouble to stay on the narrow concrete walkways to avoid stepping into the mud.

With regards to ideology our group of about 65 from Holland was quite homogeneous until we arrived in Atlith. Until now the primary goal of survival had motivated us all. Now that this had been achieved and we had even arrived in the long dreamt-about Palestine, we were soon confronted with the local conditions. This implied that one had to choose for some political party.

Of course there had been no arrivals of ships with new immigrants since the war had begun. The agrarian settlements, and in particular the Kibbutzim suffered much from the lack of growth. The arrival of our ship with young people gung-ho with ideals was therefore the cause of a fight to corral as many as possible of us newly arrived men. Among the Kibbutzim movement there were three distinct political directions and each had made sure to have a representative in Atlith to make propaganda under some pretense. Joop Slijper represented “Chawer Hakwuzot”⁷³. He appealed to our Dutch past because Kibbutz Chuliot in the north of the country consisted of Dutch and Tschechoslowak settlers.

“Kibbutz Hameuchad”⁷⁴ was represented by Kurt Benjamin, a comrade who had followed the same path that we had taken and who had arrived in the country nine months before us. He sketched his Kibbutz as one that was still in its infancy and challenged us to join.

Present or “Kibbutz Arsi”⁷⁵, the most leftist of the three movements were Chana Tal and Erne Sängner from “Kibbutz Hasorea”⁷⁶. They invited us to join a Kibbutz that had been founded by German emigrants ten years ago.

Only very few of us had formerly supported a political movement. Those who had could decide quickly. Others had relatives in the country and preferred to join these first. However, most of us were undecided and began to ponder during the days of Atlith which Kibbutz to choose. It was simple for the few religious chawerim because they were awaited by their own Kibbutz-organization.

Those who were attracted by the Dutch ambiance eventually choose Chuliot. Those who wanted to build a new Kibbutz from the ground up decided at the time for what was then named Raanana after the village where it was transiently located before they could resettle at its final destination.

Hasorea promised a familiar German ambiance including many opportunities to learn or practice various trades, to learn Ivrit; in short, to acclimatize first and decide later about one’s future destination.

It was not an easy decision for me. It was not easy for others either. Because of what we had experienced together during the past few years we had become very closely knit hence it was difficult to part now. No one had foreseen this situation. However, this was the dreary reality!

⁷³Parent organization for social democratic Kibbutzim (Chanan Florsheim).

⁷⁴Parent organization for center-left leaning Kibbutzim. Most Kibbutzim belonged to it and it had also the largest, some with up to 1000 members (Chanan Florsheim).

⁷⁵Parent organization of all left-oriented Kibbutzim in Israel, usually with settlements of no more than 400 members (Chanan Florsheim).

⁷⁶Kibbutz Hasorea is the topic of the publication “Die rettende Urkraft der Utopie. Deutscher Juden gründen Hasorea” issued in 1990 by Walter B. Godenschweger and Fritz Vilmar. Title: “The saving primal force of utopia. German Jews found Hosarea.” (Brigitte Meyer-Christ/ Heinrich Nuhn)

I was not much interested in the “Dutchness” of Chulioth. Instead I was moved by the prospect of learning Ivrit and a profession as promised by Hasorea. Moreover, many of my good friends had decided to join this Kibbutz because they had once been members of this movement in the past. Thus it came about that I traveled to Kibbutz Hasorea after ten days of sojourn in Atlith in a group of about 25 Chawerim, among whom six from France.

Thus began my “Kibbutz-career” which has persisted until today.



Top: Kibbutz Hasorea in 1937

Bottom: Kibbutz Hasorea in 1942



Seated in the first row Chanan and his wife Miriam. They are surrounded by their children, grand children, and great-grand children.

APPENDIX

A Last Word

When I look back at these fateful years I had “more luck than brain” as the saying goes. However, although luck was a significant factor I would never have reached Palestine without the sacrifice and help of my comrades and their Dutch friends. For that reason I wish to name in chronological order those persons to whom I owe my deliverance.

Schuschu (Joachim) Simon, the “driving force” of the resistance (he committed suicide in the Breda, Holland jail in 1943).



Kurt Hannemann, his friend and collaborator, murdered in Auschwitz.



Kurt Reilinger (Nanno). Active in France, arrested in 1944, survived, was killed by a truck in Holland in 1945.

Lore Durlacher. Was responsible for the region Holland. Until her death in 1991 she lived after the war in Israel.

Menachem Pinkhof. He and his wife Miriam were arrested in 1944. Both survived the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen and came later to Israel. Menachem died in 1969.

Ernst Hirsch (Willy). Arrested in 1944 Died in the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen in 1945.

This list would be incomplete if I did not mention **Joop Westerweel** whom I did not get to know personally. He was body and soul of the illegal cooperation between the Dutch and us. He was arrested and shot in the concentration camp of Vught in 1944.



Joop Westerweel, executed by the Gestapo in 1944

All other comrades whose names I occasionally learned came at various times to Israel and most of them are still alive today in 2007.

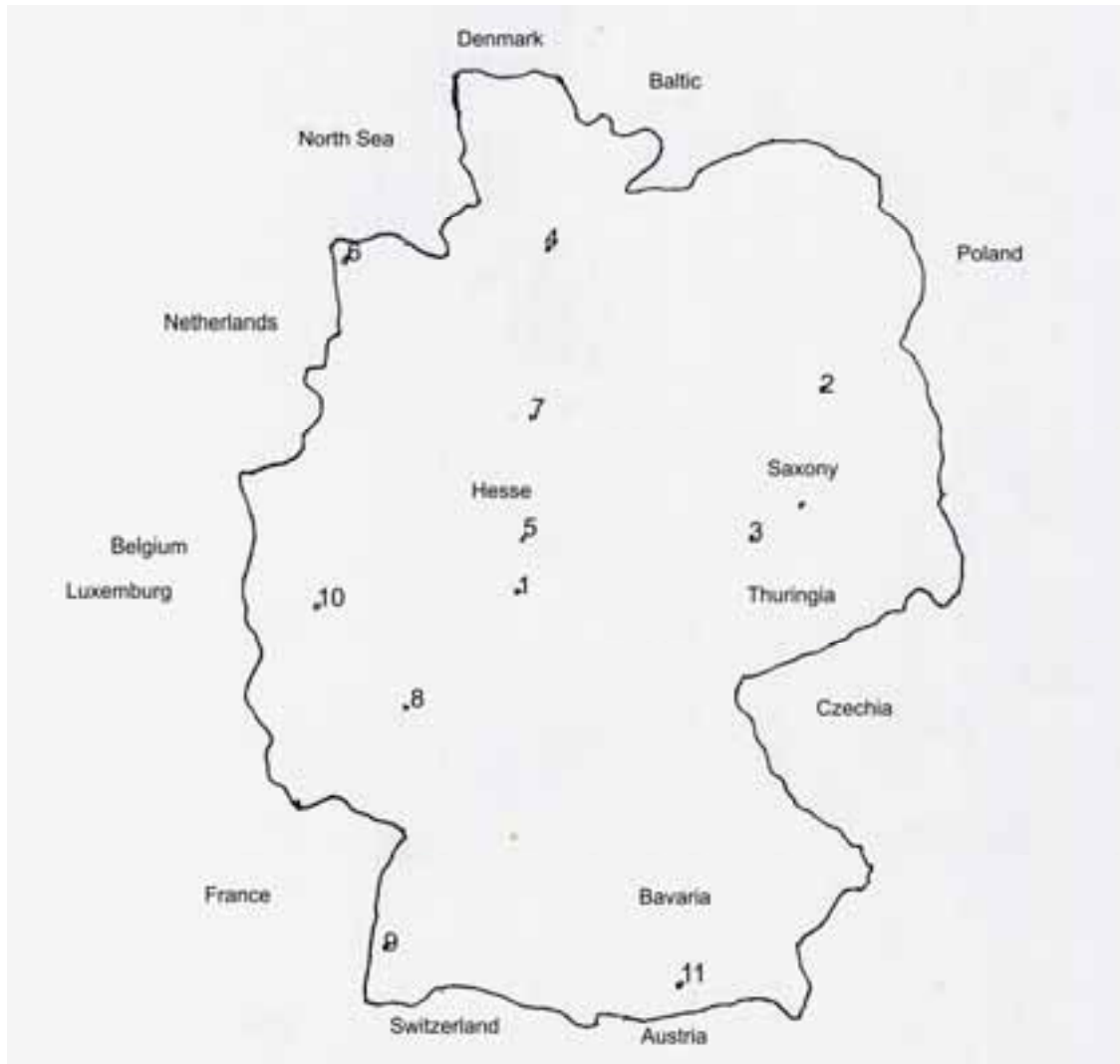
Finished on June 11, 2008

NOTES FROM THE TRANSLATOR.

I am Dieter Heymann, the son of Mrs. Erika Heymann who gave shelter to Chanan in the Argonautenstraat in Amsterdam. Following the daring escape of Chanan in 1943 we did not re-establish contacts until many years later. In the meantime I had married and immigrated with my family to the United States. In 1985 when I rummaged through old photos I found one of Chanan and immediately exclaimed: “but that is Henkie”! We had always called him Henkie, a Dutch nickname for Hendrik (Henry), while he lived with us. I sent a copy of the photo plus an explanatory letter to the “Search Bureau for Missing Relatives” of The Jewish Agency asking them to find Chanan for me. Within the shortest of times I learned that he lived in Kibbutz Yakum in Israel. Again, several years went by before Chanan announced in 2003 that he and his wife Miriam planned to visit us in Houston en route to his sister in Austin. It was a wonderful and emotional reunion. A few years later my youngest son Erik and I visited Chanan and Miriam in Israel. In early 2008 Chanan wrote me and asked if I could find a German-to-English translator for his memoirs. I suggested that I might be able to do the translation myself which Chanan thought was a good idea because I was familiar with many of the conditions in German-occupied Holland during World War Two.

I am not a professional translator. I have done my utmost to ensure that the English text is as close as possible to the original German rendering. Obviously that was not always possible because of the significant idiomatic differences and also because of major differences in sentence structures of the two languages. With the approval of Chanan I have added several footnotes which can be recognized by the initials D. H.

On the next pages are simple maps of Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Spain with specific geographic landmarks from the text marked to give the reader a rough idea where these are.



GERMANY

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1. Rotenburg an der Fulda | 5. Kassel | 9. Freiburg |
| 2. Berlin | 6. Emden | 10. Königswinter |
| 3. Leipzig | 7. Hannover | 11. Munich |
| 4. Hamburg | 8. Frankfurt | |

From Berlin to Leipzig is 150 kilometers; 94 miles.

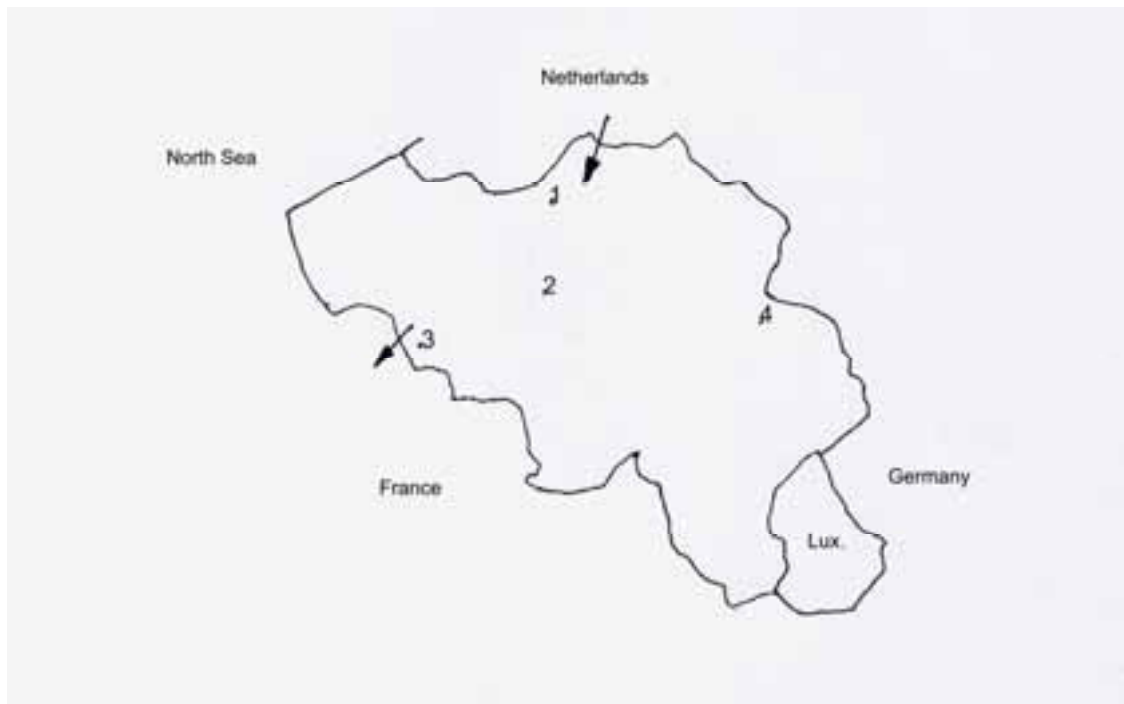


NETHERLANDS

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Amsterdam | 15. Delft |
| 2. The Hague | 16. Concentration Camp Vught |
| 3. Rotterdam | 17. Arnhem |
| 4. Utrecht | 18. Dordrecht |
| 5. Gouda | |
| 6. IJmuiden | |
| 7. Zandvoort | |
| 8. Haarlem | |
| 9. Wieringen | |
| 10. Loosdrecht | |
| 11. Breda | |
| 12. Roermond | |
| 13. Camp Westerbork | |
| 14. Ommen | |

From Amsterdam to Zandvoort is 25 kilometers; 16 miles.

Chanan crossed illegally from the Netherlands to Belgium in the area of the arrow.

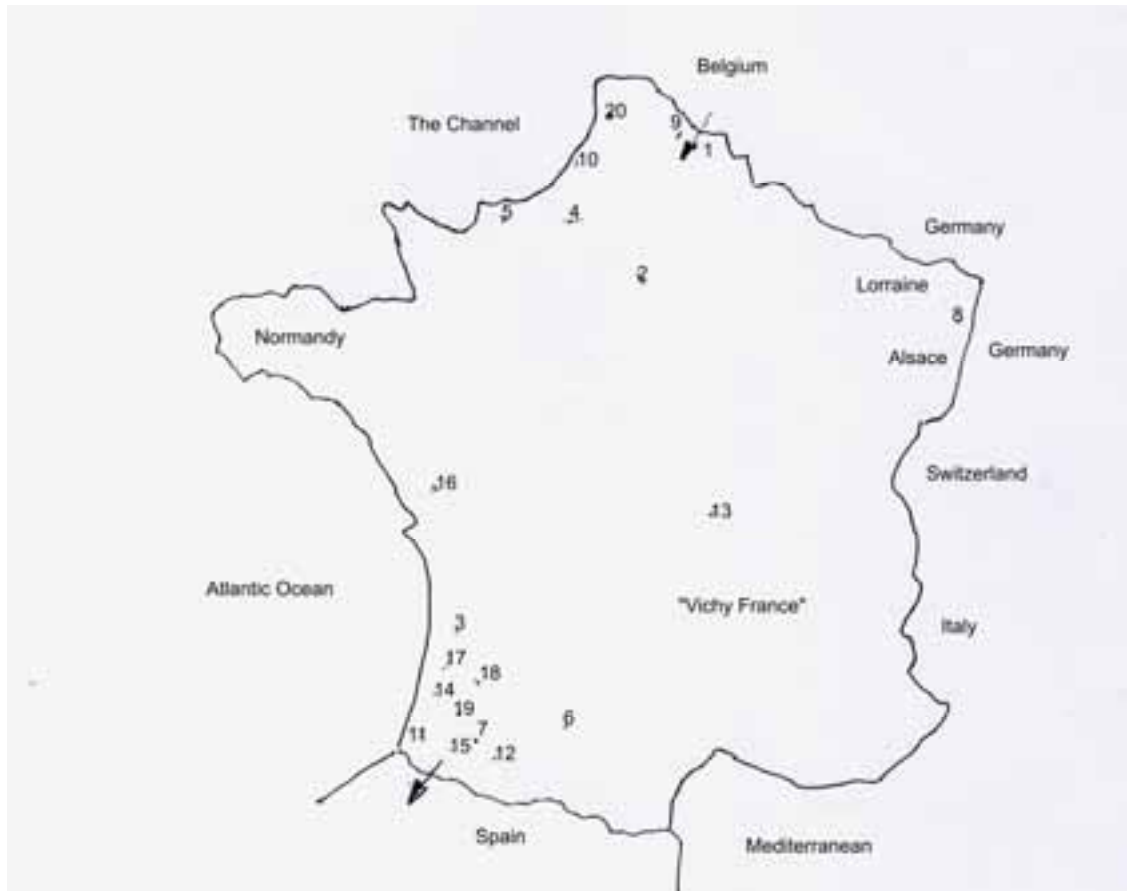


BELGIUM/LUXEMBURG

1. Antwerp
2. Brussels
- 3 Tournai
4. Liege/Luik

The distance from Antwerp to Brussels is 50 kilometers; 31 miles.

The arrows indicate roughly where Chanan crossed the borders from the Netherlands to Belgium and from Belgium to France.

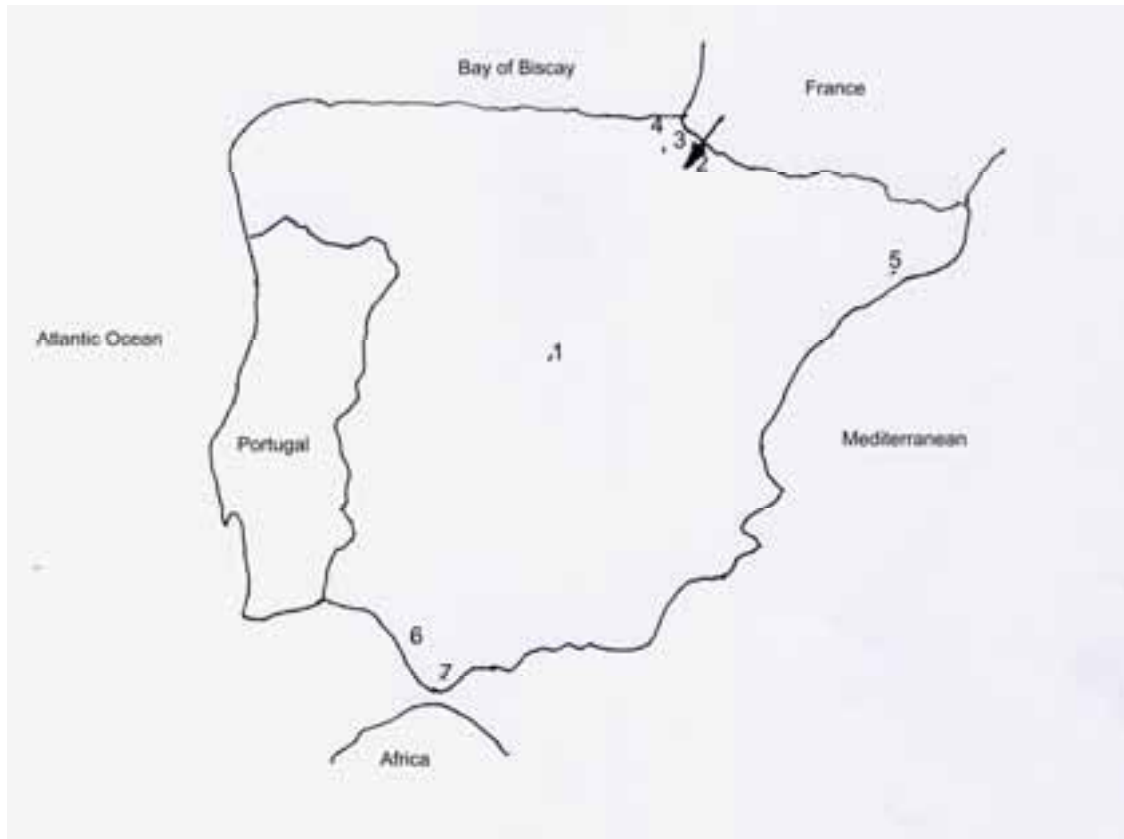


FRANCE

- | | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Lille | 9. Roubaix | 17. Labouheyre |
| 2. Paris | 10. Dieppe | 18. Mont de Marsan |
| 3. Bordeaux | 11. Biarritz/Bayonne | 19. Peyrehorade |
| 4. Rouen | 12. Lourdes | 20. Boulogne |
| 5. Le Havre | 13. Vichy | |
| 6. Toulouse | 14. Dax | |
| 7. Pau | 15. Oloron/St. Christau | |
| 8. Strasbourg | 16. La Rochelle | |

I could not find Auffray, Biville-la-Beynarde, and Morceaux on Google, but all three must lie within the triangle Bordeaux-Toulouse-Biarritz. The arrows are roughly in the regions of the crossings Belgium-France and France-Spain.

Distance Paris-Bordeaux 430 kilometers; 269 miles.

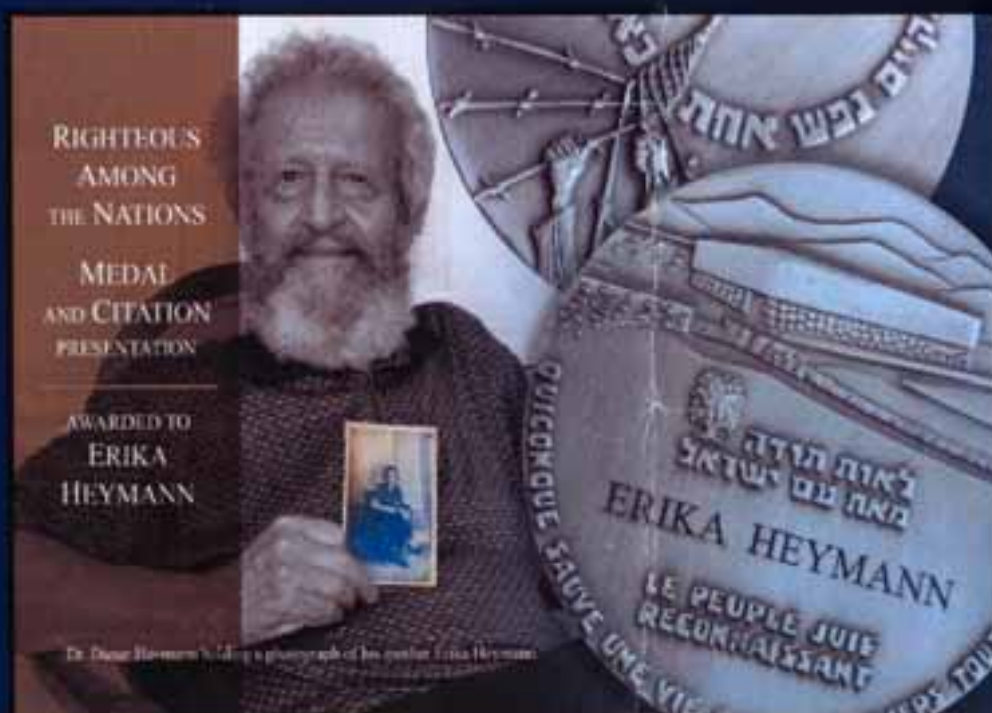


SPAIN

1. Madrid
2. Pamplona
3. San Sebastian
4. Isaba/Venta/Sahuessa/Leiza
5. Barcelona
6. Cadiz
7. Gibraltar

Roughly at the arrow Chanan crossed the Pyrenees.

The distance Madrid-Cadiz is 410 kilometers; 256 miles.



RIGHTEOUS
AMONG
THE NATIONS
MEDAL
AND CITATION
PRESENTATION

AWARDED TO
ERIKA
HEYMANN

Dr. Dieter Heymann holding a photograph of his mother, Erika Heymann.

The Consulate
General of
Israel
&
Holocaust
Museum
Houston

Wednesday
Sept 7th, 2011



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Local relatives of Jewish protector to receive Yad Vashem award Mother named "Righteous Among the Nations"

The Houston-area family of a German national, who protected three Jewish men during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam, will receive the prestigious "Righteous Among the Nations" award in her memory during ceremonies this September at Holocaust Museum Houston.

Dr. Dieter Heymann, a retired

chemistry professor from Rice University, and other family members will accept the medal and a certificate from Israeli Consul General Meir Shlomo, on behalf of the State of Israel, in honor of Heymann's mother, Erika Heymann, who later died in the Holocaust after being betrayed.

Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust

memorial, named Heymann's mother one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" for harboring the Jewish men and enduring more than one year in the Dutch concentration camp, Vught.

Heymann and his family will receive the honor at a ceremony co-hosted by Holocaust Museum Houston and the Consulate General of Israel to



See Award on Page 3

Dieter Heymann holds a photo of his mother, Erika Heymann.

UP CLOSE

JEWISH HERALD-VOICE
AUGUST 4, 2011

Award

From Page 1

the Southwest on Wednesday, Sept. 7, beginning at 7 p.m. in the Albert and Ethel Herzstein Theater at the museum's Morgan Family Center, 5401 Caroline St. Admission is free, but seating is limited, and advanced registration is requested. A reception will follow. Visit hnh.org/RegisterEvent.aspx to RSVP online.

The speaker will be Chaja Verwee, an HNH board member and Holocaust survivor, who was protected by a family active in the Dutch resistance. She will talk about the importance of those like Erika Heymann, who stood up against the Nazis to protect Jews and others persecuted by Adolf Hitler's brutal regime. The family that protected her was betrayed, and the father and Verwee were sent to the concentration camps. After the war, the family was recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations."

Heymann, a German citizen who married a Jewish politician before Hitler's rise to power, fled to Amsterdam when her husband was arrested in 1933. With the assistance of a British family, she became a permanent resident and opened a boarding house there.

The Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940, spending the family's world and outlawing assistance for Jews.

Heymann knowingly broke the law by allowing three Jewish men — Erwin Cohen, Albert Keijzer and Chanan Flörsheim — to live in her home beginning in 1942, according to Yad Vashem.

The men disguised themselves and pretended to have jobs in the city, in order to fit in; one even attended Catholic mass on Sundays to dissuade interest in his religious affiliation. Their

lives were at stake, and they knew it, but Heymann sacrificed everything in order to resist the injustice.

"To defy the Nazi regime was to risk your life, and to risk your life for a stranger takes an astonishing act of courage," Shlomo said. "The heroism Erika Heymann displayed and the valor that was demonstrated are truly inspirational. She did what is right, not for glory or recognition, but because it was right. The State of Israel recognizes the sacrifices she made that made her a truly righteous person."

Susan Myers, HNH executive director, described Heymann's courage in the face of the Nazi regime as inspiring. "As a museum, we teach that there are only four roles any individual can play in society. If we are not to be victims, then our only choices are to be perpetrators of evil and injustice, indifferent bystanders who allow it to occur or upstanders who do the right thing despite risk or peril. Erika Heymann chose to be an upstander."

Heymann was arrested by the German intelligence agency and imprisoned in the concentration camp, Vught, in 1943. Her children were not at home at the time and came back only after the Nazis had taken everything that mattered out of their lives. Their mother was released from Vught in April 1944, but she was very sick and died in 1950 after having developed leukemia in the concentration camp.

"Righteous Among the Nations," a title taken from Jewish literature to describe non-Jews who came to the aid of the Jews during times of need, was established in 1954 by the Israeli government to honor those

who risked their lives to assist Jews during the Holocaust. Recipients must be nominated by Jewish non-family members and go through an application process, based on signed and notarized testimonies and documentation, that verifies accounts of their actions. Heymann was nominated by Flörsheim, one of the three men who sought shelter in her boarding house. He escaped when the Nazis arrested everyone in 1943 and eventually made his way to Palestine. He currently lives in Kibbutz Yakum, Israel.

Dieter Heymann, who was 16 at the time of her arrest, described his mother as a courageous woman.

"She was the kind of woman who

would stand up and say, I will not bow to evil," he said. "We all knew what was going on, but we were trained to deny any knowledge that they were Jews, if my mother was ever caught."

More than 5,100 people from the Netherlands have received the title, making the nation second only to Poland for the highest number of honorees. Recipients are given a medal, a certificate of honor and their names are added to the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous on the Mount of Remembrance at Yad Vashem.

HNH is free and open to the public. For information, call 713-943-8000 or visit hnh.org.

