

Transcript of the Shoah Interview with Karl Kretschmer  
Translation by Uta Allers - Volunteer – Visitor Services – Spring 2011

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German Filming

German Cassette 10 / Side A

Bobine No. 104 – Interview with Mr. Kretschmer

Kretschmer 5

Q - ... Mr. Kretschmer?...

K - ... yes, but that's enough now...

Q - ... but do you remember me?...

K - ... yes, yes...

Q - ... yes, I'm for...

K - ... it's been a few years...

Q - ... yes, a few years ago... I'd like to speak to you about your letters. Do you remember?

K - ... yes, yes...

Q - ... yes?

K - ... but do you have to... so many...

Q - ...yes, they are my friends...

K - .....

Q - ... yes...

K - ... today is especially bad...

Q - ... why?

Q - ... yes...

K - ... today I have to work...

Q - ... yes, why is it especially difficult today?

K - ... because the handyman is here...

Q - ... ah yes, you have a handyman here – but we can talk here, just quietly...

K - ... yes, I just have to tell them upstairs that I...

Q - ... yes?... We can do that....

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K - ... yes, where can we...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... talk....

Q - ... I wanted to... you remember... to do a film interview...

K - ... yes, isn't that film finished yet?

Q - ... excuse me?

K - ... the film that you (*were making*) back then...

Q - ... no, no, no... that will take a long time...

K - ... I thought to myself that the Holocaust (*the movie*) would be the film...

Q - ... no, no... I don't have anything to do with the Holocaust... Did you see "Holocaust"?

K - ... yes, yes...

Q - ... and what did you think?

K - ... yes... what can I say to that?

Q - ... it was the truth or not?

K - ... well, yes... if one can get past the distortions which are built in unintentionally... well, by the director... unfortunately, it was...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... unfortunately, I'd have to say...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... but I would very much like to have a conversation about your letters – as I already told you, the letters were very impressive... about your... to your wife and your children... and I'd like to have a discussion, a conversation about Babi Yar. That would be very, very good for me and very interesting – and we can pay you... if you like...

K - ... well, I, eh, I already told you back then, I really don't want anything...

Q - ... why not?

K - ... well, I don't want to... that is, that is so, so... well, not the, the topic itself... but the facts, they are so horrible for me and I want... want... to be done with all that finally...

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Q - ... yes, but that's the history now, that's...

K - ... of course I know that it's history...

Q - ... 36 years later...

K - ... but, but for me, for me it's... the story never ends – '45... 3 years of imprisonment, you know... then in '48-49 there was the "Spruchkammer" court... then, eh, there were a few years of peace, then in '59 came those... those from the...eh, well from the Document Center...

Q - ... yes, Ludwigsburg...

K - ... they came from Ludwigsburg... then they put me through the mill again... and then, eh...eh, a few years later there was the court case which... it was really drawn out... and now it's finally over and I'm supposed to start all over?

Q - ... how many years were you in prison

K - ... well, not so... eh... I was in for 3 years...

Q - ... yes, but as a prisoner of war?

K - ... no, that was exactly the question... so, in... eh... at first I was in the American, then in the French, and finally in Russian internment...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and by the Russians... eh... I was charged by the "Spruchkammer" in Potsdam and the sentence was that was handed down was 2 years of prison...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... because of my membership in the criminal organization, the NSDAP

Q - ... ah, the Einsatzgruppen...

K - ... no, SS, as SS...

Q - ... yes, as SS... but were you a member of the Einsatzgruppe?

K - ... yes...

Q - ... yes, Einsatzgruppe C...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and eh... then came word that the sentence had been served because of the pretrial imprisonment...

Q - ... yes...

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K - ... yes, and eh... then came the question... after I was put through the mill by the, by the Soviets, then I was taken to the police of the East ...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and then I was put into prison again...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... was in prison then, well, I was there for... eh, prisoner of war camp... they argued back and forth whether... and then they said, well, let him go, you know... and then I was free...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and the judgment in... '69... in... eh... Darmstadt...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... that was declared a "free kick"...

Q - ... yes, and how many years did you get in Darmstadt?

K - ... excuse me?

Q - ... nothing... in Darmstadt you were free...

K - ... yes, no that was... first of all, one can't be punished for the same thing twice... and then eh, because of the lack of evidence, the judgment there was, you know...

Q - ... yes... yes...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... yes, but it was very good – today, you are no longer at risk, because that's over...

K - ... no, with or without risk...

Q - ... it's all behind you...

K - ... I never had to fear being at risk... that what I (*told*) you...

Q - ... but...

K - ... what they didn't do, is...

Q - ... tell me a bit about Babi Yar – Babi Yar was a big...

K - ... back then...

Q - ... a psychological burden...

K - ... I wasn't part of that... thank God...

Q - ... why "thank God"?

K - ... eh, yes...

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K - ... that was, that was in '41, right at the beginning, eh, or '40...

Q - ... no, Babi Yar was September 30, '41...

K - ... yes, yes...

Q - ... in K...

K - ... '41 and, and...

Q - ... and you were in the area?

K - ... but I joined them only in '42... by then the big... the big murder action was over already...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... you know?

Q - ... yes... yes, but how long ... Babi Yar, that was September '41...

K - ... yes... yes...

Q - ... yes, but you saw a lot of shootings... also...

K - ... well, that...

Q - ... that's what you wrote in your letters, didn't you?

K - ... well, yes...

Q - ... yes... many? ...it was a heavy psychological burden?

K - ... well, yes, for... for, for a new person, let's say, eh?

Q - ... yes, but you were a human being, weren't you?

K - ... well, yes...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... but still...

Q - ... you were not weak?

K - ... yes, but still...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... my son...

Q - ... but you know, you wrote in one letter about that... this morning another 96...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... that was the... he was in Darmstadt too... where I... eh... got free...

Q - ... yes, but why... in your opinion, did that happen with the Jews?

K - ... about that, we could... about that, we could... eh,... let's just say, we could debate about that for days... yes, when the... when the secret police is sent in to keep the... the occupied area... free of saboteurs... then you can... stretch the concept of saboteurs pretty far...

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Q - ... yes, but these little children... they weren't saboteurs, were they?

K - ... well, yes, but... well, there were...

Q - ... were you a father or not?

K - ... I was, lucky for me... always – I keep saying it was my luck – I didn't have to decide about that...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... you know?...

Q - ... why?

K - ... well, because I was a procurements officer...

Q - ... yes, procurements officer... administration... yes, but you wrote that you saw a major shooting... and said it was very hard... you said that to your wife...

K - ... my... my letters, I don't have them anymore... and eh... what I wrote back then, I really don't remember today... and then it always depends... eh... to whom I wrote it... whether I wrote it to my wife... what was I thinking back then... well, that's...

Q - ... your wife, what did she think of it back then?

K - ... I don't know... she was here...

Q - ... yes?

K - ... was in Karlsruhe, you know, and that's...

Q - ... you were born in Karlsruhe?  
K - ... no, no... we're... we're Berliners...  
Q - ... ah, yes...  
K - ... in '38, when the Westwall came, the police force was stocked up here and then I came from Berlin to here...  
Q - ... yes, did you know Globel?  
K - ... Globel?  
Q - ... yes  
K - ... I don't know...  
Q - ... no?  
K - ... yes, I know the name... but that was the man, who did that... he wasn't there anymore during my time...

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Q - ... he was Einsatzgruppe C too...  
K - ... yes, yes...  
Q - ... yes, but could you... what were you thinking during this time of the mass executions of Jews?  
K - ... I told you, I don't feel like anymore... I want to stop, I want...  
Q - ... but... it's very important for me... it's a historical question without passion...  
K - ... back then – history here, history there, but... I don't want anything more to do with it...  
Q - ... how many Jews did you see... being killed?  
K - ... I can't answer that question...  
Q - ... why?  
K - ... because I... because I didn't stand there with a diary and make little marks and count...  
Q - ... but to the contrary, all the Jews were counted...  
K - ... well, yes but...

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#### German Cassette 10 / Side B

Bobine No. 104      Continuation from Side A  
Interview with Mr. Kretschmer

Kretschmer 5

Q - ... but to the contrary, all Jews were counted...  
K - ... well, yes but...  
Q - ... but why didn't these Jews revolt? Was that possible or not? ... in your opinion... do you know that I'm a Jew?  
K - ... yes, you told me that back then...  
Q - ... yes, I already told you and I'd like to understand...  
K - ... the only thing... the only thing that impressed me again with this history... that the people were so compliant... that among these people... never, not one... not a spark of resistance...  
Q - ... yes...  
K - ... yes, now let's stop, let's stop with this, there's no point in it, you know – I won't do any

more...

Q - ... why?

K - ... no...

Q - ... that's really too bad...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... because we Jews today would like to understand what happened... for there weren't many people in the Einsatzgruppen, were there? How many of you were there... in the Einsatzgruppen? Which special unit were you, which Einsatzkommando...4? 4a or 4b?

K - ... 4a...

Q - ... 4a... yes... and how long were you there?

K - ... from '42 till eh... '43...

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Q - ... and you were never in Kulmhof...

K - ... where?

Q - ... went to Kulmhof?... Did you hear about Kulmof? No? That's in Poland ...Did you see the gas trucks?

K - ... ah, we were...

Q - ... in the Ukraine?

K - ... It wasn't used anymore... it was discontinued... it wasn't used any more...

Q - ... why?... why?

K - ... I don't know...

Q - ... but you saw one?

K - ... no...

Q - ... no?

K - ... well, there was one once that belonged to the Kommando...

Q - ... yes?

K - ... now see here... from seeing to talking about it to being part of it... sometimes you have to draw a fine line...

Q - ... yes... I understand... a big difference... an enormous difference...

K - ... yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...

Q - ... but you...

K - ... but... but... but I...

Q - ... but you (*knew?*) exactly about the activities...

K - ... I... I am stopping now, I'm stopping now... I have to, I have to keep working upstairs... we're checking the wall for electrical cables under the plaster...

Q - ... but could we make an appointment?

K - ... no, no, I told you...

Q - ... I will pay you...

K - ... I don't want anything...

Q - ... I will pay you... real money... that is my... not special Kommando ... but a special offer...

K - ... no, no, no, no, no...

Q - ... no?

K - ... no... eh, with money I don't want... eh... I'm not for that...

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Q - ... don't you want my....

K - ... did you film?

Q - ... my... no, not at all... don't you want my special offer?

K - ... no... one of these days I'll get a heart attack... I'll be gone... I'm at that age... I'm going to be 72...

Q - ... you are very young... you look very young...

K - ... yes, but still, still... one of these days... this morning I saw an obituary again in the... paper about an acquaintance... died very suddenly, you know... or like that Roeder in the Saar area... is... and is gone... what good is the money... and then will my heirs have to deal with it?... really, it... really, it... it makes no sense...

Q - ... and in the end, did you find this Persian fur coat for your wife?

K - ... oh, for heaven's sake...

Q - ... as a present?

K - ... ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Q - ... mh...

K - ... ha ha ha ha ha ha, oh, goodness... it can't be... you're... that...

Q - ... I could give a Persian fur coat, a Jewish Persian to your wife... today as a present... maybe you could ask...

K - ... that's over now... my wife isn't 20 or 40 anymore... she's 65 too now...

Q - ... your wife is where?

K - ... I said she's not 40 anymore...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... she eh, eh...

Q - ... she's 55...

K - ... she'll be 65... she's eh... she has everything she needs... we... we're done with the world...

Q - ... yes... are you still against Jews?

K - ... no...

Q - ... no?

K - ... only, eh... what's happening down there in Arabia, sometimes I don't like it...

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Q - ... yes... but I hope you aren't an anti-Semite, are you?

K - ... no, I was never an anti-Semite...

Q - ... do you have a daughter?

K - ... yes...

Q - ... could you let your daughter marry a Jew?

K - ... well, that's a question... she's married to a Swiss man...

Q - ... a Swiss... yes, that's calmer...

K - ... and ... and she told me once... she wouldn't marry a Swiss again... because every culture has something different from the others and with time it becomes evident...

Q - ... yes, but there's not such a big difference between Swiss Germans and...

K - ... no, that is... I want to end here... there's no sense...

Q - ... yes, you want to end this?

K - ... I stop now...

Q - ... that's too bad... where is your wife?  
K - ... my wife is at a treatment facility at the moment... she was sick and was... sent to this place to get well...  
Q - ... where is she?  
K - ... somewhere in the Black Forest...  
Q - ... in the Black Forest, and you'll go there?  
K - ... what?  
Q - ... will you go to the Black Forest to your wife?  
K - ... no, no...  
Q - ... when is she coming back?  
K - ... I don't know that yet...  
Q - ... no?  
K - ... it doesn't have anything to do with this... but the time of my wife's absence, I use for renovations...  
Q - ... but please, I'm offering ... again...

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Bobine No. 105

Kretschmer 6

Q - ... are you a rich man?  
K - ... no...  
Q - ... take my money... take my money...  
K - ... no, I don't want the money...  
Q - ... all the same...  
K - ... I'm telling you again... I'm telling you again... the day after tomorrow I could be dead and what use is the money to me?  
Q - ... no, you will...  
K - ... maybe 40 years ago...  
Q - ... you'll live longer than I...  
K - ... no, no... that's... that's... let's leave it as is... let's end here...  
Q - ... okay, no... I won't say any more... I'll be back... we have to decide something... you have an awful lot to tell...  
K - ... you see, that's the thing... the concept "have to"... back then it was... as a German you "have to", you know... everything has to be just so and today one doesn't "have to" anymore...  
Q - ... Hitler said that...  
K - ... yes, yes... today, you don't "have to" anymore...  
Q - ... and do you still trust Hitler?  
K - ... no...  
Q - ... no?... that's over... you're no longer...  
K - ... I saw... I saw later at the end... that they were all, were all crazy... you see how that... how that... let's assume you're making that film and you expect from the reviews that everyone will say "that's a nice, yellow film" and now someone comes along and says... eh... the film is black, completely black... and he says it to the person who wants to hear yellow...



then he says, well, that is... what kind of a guy is that, who says that the film is black... the film is yellow, you know?

Q - ... yes...

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K - ... and that was that...

Q - ... I think the truth was much blacker, wasn't it?

K - ... well, yes... now this is the end...

Q - ... reality wasn't yellow...

K - ... now I'm done... it's over...

Q - ... yes?

K - ... bury your hope about me...

Q - ... okay, okay... all the best... all the best but... we'll be back...

*Lanzmann and interpreter return to the house later*

Q - ... Mr. Kretschmer, yes, could you come please... I have an offer... I have a suggestion...

K - ... what?

Q - ... I have a suggestion...

K - ... I don't understand at all what you want...

Q - ... I said, I have a very interesting suggestion...

K - ... ah...

Q - ... please... excuse me... but I have to ask once again... yes... I'll give you 2000 German marks for... we can talk here in the garden if you like...

K - ... ah...

Q - ... for one hour... with the camera...

K - ... now, first of all...

Q - ... only a commentary about...

K - ... now see, at the moment we're in the middle of...

Q - ... just a commentary about your letters...

K - ... we're in the middle of our work... I don't have time now... besides, I told you that I won't do this...

Q - ... but in principle, in principle, can you accept that?

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K - ... now, first of all, just what do you want from me?

Q - ... I'd like some comments about your letters... I'd like... it's not clear for me... I'd like some comments...

K - ... yes, for example?

Q - ... why... for example, I'll pose my questions... why, for example, do you write... it's September 27<sup>th</sup>, '42... you write... "since the war, according to our estimation, is a Jewish war... the Jews get to feel it first-hand"...

K - ... yes...

Q - ... first of all, what does it mean: "according to our view, a Jewish war"... what does that mean?

K - ... eh... don't you know the Propaganda Minister Goebbels... they constantly played that tune... and did that... that was drilled into us...

Q - ... but that means... that you believed it... back then...  
K - ... yes... I can... what I believed back then and what I (*believe*) today... there are... eh... 35 years difference... my opinion has changed significantly...  
Q - ... but back then, it was your opinion... my question is very clear... what is the meaning of...  
K - ... now, eh...  
Q - ... of this expression, “a Jewish war”?  
K - ... we had to... we had to somehow... eh... eh... after all, there were propaganda speeches held over and over again...  
Q - ... but there was no war with the Jews... it was a war with America... with Russia... not the Jews, no Jews...  
K - ... yes, well... we were... who was involved in the American administration... there were Jews all over it... today, there are Jews inside there again...  
Q - ... in the American administration?  
K - ... yes...  
Q - ... there are... yes... not all of the Jews died.

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K - ... well, yes, so, and... and exactly the same thing was told us then... but eh... I won't make comments on my letters...  
Q - ... but you wrote – and that was in '42 – “in Russia there are, as far the German soldiers have come, no more Jews...”  
K - ... yes...  
Q - ... that means – at this time, all the Jews had been killed?  
K - ... whether they had been killed, I don't know... at any rate, they had all disappeared... and then, I didn't know at all... when I came from Germany to Russia, and knew nothing about Russia... I had no idea how many Jews were running around there...  
Q - ... yes...  
K - ... that's just... eh, just an expression, nothing more...  
Q - ... but were there many Jews in Russia?... at that time?... before the war?  
K - ... I don't know that either... I never dealt with that then...  
Q - ... and what is the meaning of this other sentence...  
K - ... now, eh, eh...  
Q - ... you wrote to your wife... “You can imagine that I need some time... to get over this...”  
K - ... yes...  
Q - ... what does that mean? ... it was hard for you... this...  
K - ... I can give you no... no explanation for that...  
Q - ... these shootings... these executions... they were hard... it was a psychological burden...  
K - ... yes...  
Q - ... yes?  
K - ... that's all true... but it's... I can't give you an explanation...  
Q - ... and, for instance, I (*read*) in the court case of the Einsatzgruppen, what Ohlendorf and the others said... and they all said that they talked about the so-called psychological burden... what does the “psychological burden” mean? ...why was it a psychological burden?

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K - ... no... no comments – I ...

Q - ... why no comments?

K - ... no, I don't want to... because I don't... because I don't want to, and besides, I have to get a move on to get upstairs, the... my...my... my electrician needs my help...

Q - ... and you wrote "I wrote you that I might be able to get a Persian fur coat for you... that won't be possible; for one thing, I'm no longer in the area... besides, the Jews who deal with that are no longer alive..."

K - ... yes...

Q - ... what does that mean?

K - ... well, it's very simple... if... if one wants to buy something, one needs the market... you know...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and when no one is left to make a deal, you can't buy anything... you know...

Q - ... yes... why?

K - ... besides that, my wife didn't want a Persian fur coat, rather furs... and to make one herself... she's a seamstress...

Q - ... and the Jews who dealt with the furs had all been killed?

K - ... originally... originally I had thought I would be sent down, down to, to the Black Sea... that's the area where the... where the sheep, sheep are, you know...

Q - ... yes... why... and the administrative head who was in the unit before you, why do you write that he's a coward?

K - ... I don't know that now anymore...

Q - ... you have no idea?

K - ... no... no... no...

Q - ... it's too bad that you don't (*answer*) my questions...

K - ... no... I don't... I don't want that stuff anymore...

Q - ... answer...

K - ... I have to, I have to, I have to get upstairs and look... the worker... he's costing me...

Q - ... yes...

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K - ... he needs my help...

Q - ... but I can give you money... 2000 German marks...

K - ... no, no, no...

Q - ... for one hour...

K - ... I don't want it... so, no money from you... I don't have explanations for you at all...

Q - ... and why this joke about... you wrote "you can soon see blood – so blood sausage isn't popular with us... what is blood sausage?"

K - ... sausage out of cans from... we got everything out of cans for our nutritional needs... we baked bread... and eh... butter was provided but...everything else was obtained from cans...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... and, and blood sausage... eh, don't you know blood sausage?

Q - ... what is blood sausage?

K - ... pigs blood and beef blood...

Q - ... with blood... that's a sausage of blood?

K - ... only... it's a sausage... that consists mainly of blood and it's looks black...

Q - ... and why was blood sausage no longer popular?... because there was too much blood... you couldn't...

K - ... no, I don't know... at any rate it seemed... when they... from eh... returned... we had gone on an excursion, you know... when they came back from the excursion, there was a table set... where they were supposed to eat dinner...

Q - ... yes...

K - ... eh... and there was blood sausage on the table... and they all .....

Q - ... I think you mean precisely that after a shooting... after an execution... it was impossible to eat blood sausage...

K - ... I...I... I... I ...I...

Q - ... please, that's very interesting...

K - ... no, no, no, no, no, no, no...

Q - ... that's very interesting...

K - ... yes but...

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Q - ... maybe it's the last time in your personal story that you have a chance... to talk about this matter and to reflect... and to think about it... that's important... but I work too, Mr. Kretschmer...

K - ... yes, yes, yes, now...

Q - ... that is my work...