

Transcript of the *Shoah* Interview with Maurice Rossel

Translation by Lotti Eichorn - Volunteer – Visitor Services – January to March 2009

Bobine No. 125

Rossel 1

Q. Dr. Rossel, what I am really interested in this conversation with you, is – after all you are a historic personality, and you have occupied a very strategic position – to learn, as I have understood that you had been delegated by the C.I.C.R. in Germany\* (\*handwritten note: this is true, isn't it) during all these years, well and, if I state that you are a historic personality, this means that everybody, there are more people today....like you, who have done what you did, having you experience and able to testify on the climate of the time...and in that context I would, for starting, question you, finally, what does it mean to be delegated from there, from the International Committee of the Red Cross, in Germany, in the middle of the war? And you were there, you had been delegated, you came to Berlin in what year?

A. I came in 42.

Q. 42

A. 42, yes, and, overall, you know that I was not involved in the International Red Cross as ..how can I say it, in the manner of a spokesman or the man who wants to spread the good word, I went there simply to escape the army. I was an officer in the Swiss army and we were occupying the borders, it was a horribly mindless occupation and ....I did, say anything, did whatever was needed to get away from this idiotic work and that is the whole reason why I went to work for the C.I.C.R. and that I was sent to Germany, where nobody wanted to go at that time, they accepted and took with pleasure the young ones and I went there, without training, without anything, at age 25 one is, after all, not a very mature man, I was

Q. You were 25 years old?

A. Yes, I was 25 years old, thus I was still quite naive, if I say so myself, however a real naive, a real know-nothing who had come from his village and studied in Geneva, who knew nothing of anything but that apprenticeship in the field, that was all.

Q. Well, how many Swiss were there in Berlin?

A. In Berlin we were mostly 6 to 8. 6 to 8 with a head of the delegation, Mr. Barti, who was a great man, a charming man, he was a friend of mine from college who had studied with me, older, which was the reason that I thought of him for getting me out of the military trap, and he did that immediately. I called him on Thursday and the following Monday I already arrived in Berlin.

Q. Well, that was fast.

A. Yes, with diplomatic passport and everything, as is known, at that moment it was important to do everything fast, between Thursday and Monday, all was in order.

Q. Well, how did that happen, tell me a little about your, your arrival in Berlin, your first impressions.

A. Oh, the impressions

Q. And then the duties.

A. The duties were visits to the prisoner of war camps, you understand, we must always, in the first place, I would say, make a distinction because the current generation does not see the difference, they think that all the prisoners of war camps and the camps for civilian internees were one and the same. This is absolutely false and this is one thing, I think, where one cannot insist ever too much on, the prisoners of war, mainly German, overall, were treated correctly, since we had, we have had, I think, 7 or 6 million prisoners of war who, on average were held there for 4 to 6 years, excuse me,

(Translator's comment: there is a noise in the background)

Q. I think we have to stop and get this kid out... get him out

A. Excuse me.

Q. Well, because without it, all will come again,

A. The prisoners of war, there were 6 million of them, they did on average 4 years and then went home, 90% of them went home.

Q. Yes

A. The civil internees did on average 6 months and 90% of them died.

Q. Yes.

- A. And if one does not have enough fairness to explain this in detail, I think that from the start that enormous difference .... one cannot understand anything of anything, really, and then one sees the reporting about the prisoners, I think you are mainly interested in the deported civilians, is that correct?
- Q. Yes, well, yes, but I am still interested to know exactly what is, what was....
- R. What was the work. Well, our job was in accord with the Geneva convention, to visit the prisoner of war camps, there was an opposite view. The opposite view was that other delegates visited the allied prisoner of war camps, you understand, which held Germans. Overall, our strength is strength; it is neither moral nor nothing at all, it is not at all based on signatures which have been produced before the war, it concerns the event of your arriving at a citadel where you are told "but this one has disappeared, he has gone across zones that are supposed to be ultra-secret, he is condemned to death." Ok, ok, ok, I can see him, I say hello to him, I tell him "don't worry, you will wait for the end of the war as condemned to death because I have in my briefcase 12 Germans condemned to death who await the same thing, because if they execute you, the others will also be executed," which is the only way to talk, it is absolutely horrible when it concerns the life of a man, but, in the end, there is no other...that was the bargaining which one had to do.
- Q. You played this way and it worked
- A. This play worked very well
- Q. But overall, where the prisoners of war were concerned, did the Germans observe the Geneva conventions?
- A. Overall, sir, I have, I have to say, yes, and better than the other allies, overall, naturally. Germans are quite respectful of decorum and regarding certain things concerning the prisoners of war, I have not, I must say, there were all kinds of camps, there were camps for resisting non-commissioned officers which were very, very hard camps, such as Ravarouchka in Poland, but it was not inhumane, there was no sadism, it was sufferable, livable.
- Q. Yes. And now, for example, .... I would like to say that you had to keep an eye on this, actually, what is called the treatment of the prisoners of war, what does one exactly keep

an eye on?

A. Well, the job was first of all a purely administrative one, we had to get there and see if the trustee could and had to give absolutely the receipts for the packages which had been sent to them, they were sent packages, you know, there was an enormous flood, tons and tons and tons were sent, we have whole trains, and we were there only to collect those receipts

Q. Yes

A. which were there, and the packages arrived. There was no loss exceeding 5-8%, let's say, never more than 10%, considering the war conditions and considering the transport conditions, plus the handling, this was, we considered it as extremely minimal.

Q. Yes, that means that there was no theft....

A. There was, there was theft, sir, there is always theft when merchandise is transported in a country with shortages, but it was really minimal.

Q. Overall, there was some honesty

A. Absolute honesty, yes

Q. Yes, good and...

(Bells are ringing)

A. What horror!

Q. I want to say, you had some relationships, how did that work, you had relationships with the German Red Cross, actually, but....

A. At times

Q. International, of the...

A. Sometimes with the German Red Cross, certainly... The people of the German Red Cross were people of the old order, they were absolutely not Hitler types, they were very charming people, but we had not much, not much direct contact with the National Red Cross Organizations, because, you see, the overall the organization of the National Red Cross Organizations, there is the Swiss Red Cross, the German Red Cross, but the International Committee is a separate entity, which only is active in case of war.

Q. I see, yes.

- A. Because he, it cannot function unless the league can no longer work and that it becomes inoperable due to the fact that 2 belligerents are unwilling to sit together at the same table.
- Q. Exactly
- A. The C.I.C.R. International Committee of the Red Cross goes there as an executive, but does not directly depend directly on the Red Cross. We are, e.g., very much ashamed of the Swiss Red Cross and.....
- Q. Why?
- A. And we, we paid extremely much attention to doing good, I, who am a man... as you can say, grandson of a watchmaker, son of a watch factory worker, man of the left, one inherits all these things, more than you think, one has opinions, often from these ancestors, and one carries them on and then, the Swiss Red Cross, what they did, they were quite Germanophile people who sent.. who had even sent people to the Russian front, you understand, for participation by having military hospitals of the Swiss Red Cross, they are quite careful today to forget these things, but one cannot forget, really...
- Q. No, certainly not, but I don't quite understand what it means "they sent people to the Russian front?"
- A. Well, because they...
- Q. For fighting?
- A. No, they did not fight, but if you send into 2 groups of fighting armies, if you send military hospitals and surgeons to care for only the Germans,
- Q. Ah, I understand
- A. You understand? Now, sir, that was the policy of all the countries, all the countries of Europe which were engulfed by the German forces. Everybody groveled, but one does not want, one does not much remember that everybody groveled.
- Q. Yes, this is a good expression, everybody groveled. But you think that the Swiss also groveled?

Q. Well, then, as you said, the Swiss sent medical teams to the Russian front.

A. To the Russian front

Q. But on the German side

A. That was the Swiss Red Cross

Q. Yes, that was the Swiss Red Cross

A. Well, that was once, that was done once, that was the policy of Pilet-Golat, who was our Foreign Minister at the time. Today, he has been much attacked about this, but in hind sight, he, considering the situation he was in, that was not a post that anybody would have wanted to occupy

Q. Yes

A. We had to continue existing, and we were

Q. Yes

A. We were surrounded, totally by the Axis, this is something easy to criticize today.

Q. Certainly,

A. Easy to criticize

Q. And it was also the time when everybody was convinced that...

A. That the Germans were going to win and that it was the fight against communism, actually, and our important citizens, you see, I don't have to say it, I never loved them very much and I still don't, but Switzerland was nevertheless always controlled by, lets say, 200 families and these people were much more afraid of Léion Nicole who was a Geneva socialist than of Mr. Hitler. Nicole frightened them much more and Hitler almost was like a barrier against this horror which represented communism. Thus, these citizens were all, or almost all, Germanophiles, but not active, if you look at the basis of their, you know, the spirit which made them act, there was always the fear of socialist-communism; they had an absolutely panicky fear which was also felt in Geneva, even within the C.I.C.R., for sure, there were absolutely adorable people in the C.I.C.R. who were above these kinds of things, I am thinking of Chenevières, I am thinking of Miss Vandershema, and of others, I don't want to name anybody personally as being specially Germanophile, but on the whole, the problem was very difficult.

Q. Yes;

A. Very difficult, very difficult and then, think, one, I repeat, one ignoramus, a certain bloke who came from the Swiss army officer's school, who finished taking his state exams and was catapulted into Berlin, what did I know, I did not know anything, the job has to be learned on the spot, I think that those who take part in the war have done the same thing, they were taught the handling of weapons, but the job is learned on location. And that was exactly what we were condemned to do, we had to learn the job on location.

Q. Well, that means learning by doing?

A. Yes, you know... that is, you are given a car and the order for a mission, you have just a paper which says that you travel with the authorization of the "High Command of the Wehrmacht" and you leave, you arrive - most of the time fortunately - accompanied by an Escort Officer OKV, these were those men

Q. Escorts,

A. Escorts, these were men with the rank of major, lieutenant colonel, officers of former wars, of the war of 14. Myself, I was always with a major Reum who had a "Ritter Kreuz," it was a man who promenaded his Ritterkreuz to get the camps opened for us, for the subordinates to open the prisoner of war camps to us. His mission ended there and I entered the prisoner camp, I requested to talk to the trustee and I had to talk alone

Q. The trustee, the one who is responsible

A. Responsible, elected by the prisoners

Q. Yes, yes

A. And that always worked, it was possible to have a conversation when I wanted, what I asked for... to talk one to one with that elected man. It was different in the officers' camps, there it was the highest ranking officer, the officers did not have the rights, well, they could do what they wanted, but as one allowed only that the highest ranking officer, let's say the traitor who had the right to talk, it was the highest ranking officer alone who talked to the delegate of the international committee, often assisted, I have to say, by a young officer who did the real work.

Q. Was this a tiring type of life?

- A. Not at all, it was quite a risky life because there were many bombardments, all along the routes, all along the stations, there were camps of, commandos of prisoners in, for example, "Reichsbahn Verbesserungswerk" (Repair plants of the Reichsbahn) which were actually centers where there were locomotives or such things, where we were bombed repeatedly, it was necessary to visit the Ruhrland, that means, if you have seen the pictures of what was left, this was not a restful thing at all, quite the contrary, it was often dangerous, but when one is 25 years old, one always believes that the danger is for the others.
- Q. Well, was it a shock to you to arrive in Berlin in the middle of the war, as, well, a man of the left?
- A. I did not, did not feel it as a shock, no, because I still was in a Helvetian milieu and they, these doctors who were there, who were after all friends, we understood each other, we had the same, well, mentality.
- Q. Did you remain among yourselves, the Helvetians?
- A. Among Helvetians.
- Q. Or did you have relationships with the Germans, with the civilian population?
- A. Very little with the civilian population, very, very, very, very little.
- Q. Very little.
- A. Very little, because, I think that it could have been dangerous for the Germans who would have come to us. We had very few Germans; we had visitors, certainly, some, but they were mainly Swiss, mainly Swiss, some Swiss who lived there, there were some
- Q. How did you live? At a hotel?
- A. No, no, no, we had a house which was assigned to us by the Foreign Department.
- Q. I see, you lived all together?
- A. First, at Balansleter Strasse, and later after we were bombed out, that means the house fell onto our heads, we were put up at Berliner Wannsee in a dream property, it was the property of Brigitte Helm
- Q. I see,
- A. A film actress of the time, it was a magnificent property....a little haven...



Q. At the lake shore

A. Exactly, this was a haven to return to between missions, at least one could relax and have pleasant times among friends. And we had the visit of Scapini, perhaps you remember Ambassador Scapini.

Q. Oh yes, with the...

A. It was a severely injured war veteran, he was blind

Q. That was it, yes

A. Scapini was blind, it was him who acted as Ambassador for Vichy France

Q. That was Pétain's home,

A. Pétain's home; well him, I have seen him more than once there, he always had his attendant who pushed him in his wheelchair, he was a charming man, we had an extremely correct relationship with these people.. but nothing more, you understand, each

Q. Did you sense a climate of oppression in Berlin, or not?

A. Yes. Berlin was, you know, after all a big city, a big city, and in a big city you have the little people and the "petit monde" who keep their cheekiness and their sense of independence that you just cannot extinguish. When there was a bombardment, for example, by 1000 airplanes, if there were more than 1000 planes over Berlin, you were entitled to supplemental rations of coffee, but, after suffering the bombardment, the people said, well, this time we will have our (background noise) coffee, they were entitled to their coffee and ...

Q. And that is Berlin humor

A. It was Berlinerish, which existed, and how it is.... as in all big cities, I repeat.

Q. Well, how did it happen that you got involved eventually with the camps of the civilian internees, as this is the formula?

A. Yes, well, the deportees, the civilian internees, that was the big problem, because it had no legal possibility or counterpart, the legality, one might have overlooked the legality, but there were no comparable camps on the other side. The Germans responded by saying "you have no right to anything, that does not concern you, there is no single convention that we signed which would authorize you to come into these camps of deportees who are

simply enemies of Germany but who are not soldiers whom we have taken for other reasons, we have not taken them on the battlefield.” This was correct. One had to be aware that we were working in a totally illegal climate, the C.I.C.R....

Q. Well, excuse me, at first, who asked you to do this

A. Well, this is very simple, the C.I.C.R. wanted information, and there have been many complaints to the C.I.C.R. and to Mr. Burkhardt in particular, not to have tried harder, not to have taken a position, and I agree. Officially very little was done. But those who make these complaints tend to forget, in my opinion, at least 2 important items: Burkhardt was one of the members of the 200 families, it was certainly in his basic being an honest, very cultured man...

### Rossel 3

Q. Well, let's continue at the point where you began to occupy yourself with the deportees... What were you asked to do and what did you yourself know?

A. Well, that will appear incredible to you, we knew nothing. We knew nothing at all, we had really been in Berlin for visiting the prisoner of war camps, we visited the commandos which were at Glacwicz, Biten, Katowice, near that region.

Q. In Upper Silesia.

A. In Upper Silesia, I am saying, among other things, really, I was responsible for the Wehrkreis 8, which comprised all that eastern zone because there were in general the privileged hosts of which we were responsible. In these camps we had the prisoners of war who have a “Stammlager,” a base camp

Q. Yes

A. of which some hundred thousands of men depended, these men left again for prisoner of war camps. We went into these mines, into these mines, into this absolutely terrible life.

Q. In the mines of Silesia?

A. Of Silesia or in other Arbeitskommandos of countrymen. But the prisoners of war knew nothing, did not speak to us, gave us no information, could not tell us: listen, things are going on...implausible concerning these deportations and concerning these people.

- Q.. Yes, but wait, excuse me, I do not quite understand, because in these Arbeitskommandos, well, who worked in these Arbeitskommandos?
- A. In these mines
- Q. That were prisoners?
- A. Prisoners of war
- Q. Prisoners of war
- A. Of war
- Q. Who worked
- A. Who worked, they, in the mines, for example
- Q. Really
- A. And here were people who were quite close to these, you might want to say, geographically, these camps for deportees, and who
- Q. Extermination camps
- A. Extermination camps, which became then extermination camps in the end, as I understand, as they were called, extermination camps. I don't think so. Concentration camps existed before the war, you know this as well as I do. Concentration camps existed before the war, they were facts of German politics and these concentration camps were simply enlarged. There was Ravensbrück, there was Oranienburg, as you know, where I also went to these various camps of Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, all of them, all these different camps, I did, tried to visit them. Well, these camps existed before the war.
- Q. Yes
- A. One tends to forget this, and the extermination camps have, the horrible things that were done before the war even by the French, if you have read Koestler, don't forget that there were already, the French had not, they had their internees but they did not do it perhaps with that cynicism or that type of voluntary abasement of people, but they let them die at the same kind of speed by disorder, by chaos, by letting go
- Q. Yes, you are talking now of what, which camp?
- A. Camps, the camps the French had at the foot of the Pyrenees.
- Q. Oh, yes,

- A. Yes, that was that, and really, these things were known, that there were extermination camps, German politics was involved in that, and only after they made it common law, and after they sent people there that they had assembled, French patriots or Israelites. That's what it was and well, these things were for us simply....
- Q. No, but what there was, a distinction still has to be made, yes, what you said is absolutely right, but, before the war, there were concentration camps for German politics and certainly concentration camps became extermination camps. After all, Auschwitz was once a concentration camp.
- A. Concentration
- Q. And at the same time an extermination camp
- A. That's true,
- Q. But that did not start as late as you said
- A. No
- Q. But, really, extermination began in 42
- A. 42
- Q. Even in 41
- A. Yes, I agree, but I am waiting.... with that, yes, the mass extermination really, yes, I am well informed and you even more so because you lived there and I did not, I just wanted to point out that I in 42-43, we were really ignorant, for the most part and also, as improbable as it seems, going around in that... we went from one camp of prisoners to another camp of prisoners in the commando camp, but we ignored, you understand this, that systematic extermination and
- Q. But, for example, you have said that you were in charge of Wehrkreis 8
- A. 8
- Q. Well, that is the region of Upper Silesia,
- A. This is a territorial region etc.
- Q. yes, yes
- A. Yes, Breslau
- Q. Katowice, Breslau

- A. yes,
- Q. Katowice, Glaswice, etc.
- A. yes, that's it
- Q. Etc., that means it is not far from Auschwitz, in the end,
- A. It is not at all far, no, yes once one is in the region, it is quite far, you have to go 2,300
- Q. From Katowice to Auschwitz it's 80 km
- A. Yes, perhaps, I can't remember
- Q. Not more
- A. I don't remember
- Q. And still, you visited the prisoners of war there
- A. Of war
- Q. Who worked in the
- A. In the mines
- Q. In these Arbeitskommandos and in the mines
- A. In the mines, yes
- Q. Who were actually mainly Frenchmen
- A. Many Frenchmen, yes
- Q. Many Frenchmen
- A. Many Frenchmen, yes, the majority, yes, that's true
- Q. Well, now, you said that they knew nothing
- A. Oh, no, because we had really open conversations with these men, and they knew nothing.
- Q. Well, tell me how it happened that you yourself got to deal with camps, after all....
- A. Deal with, that is really a very bad expression...
- Q. No
- A. How
- Q. No, I find this extraordinary what you have done
- A. No
- Q. Because few people have done it

A. Well, now, that is the way it happened. Geneva, obviously, for sure requested by the Joint or by many organizations, wanted to get information, so, they were asked for information that they did not have

Q. About

A. About the camps

Q. About the Jews

A. About the Jews or these extermination camps. Information they did not have and it...after all there were escapes, the Joint has certain information, you have more than I do on that subject, I am sure

Q. They had, they had information

A. They knew

Q. Since the summer of 42

A. They knew, yes, they knew, that's it. And then, they asked for information. Believe me, they absolutely did not ask for, and I, I forgive much, perhaps more to Burckhardt, who, as I already said, a reserved person, not quite along my line, whom I have never found very sympathetic and I forgive him because he had the responsibility for 4 to 5 million or even 6 million prisoners of war. If you have such a responsibility on your shoulders alone for all these people, you have to respect the signatures and the existing treaties in that regard, such a responsibility that he possibly cannot – as one believed today, but sir, why did he not speak up, why did he not make a solemn declaration or something like it. I believe that it would have been good if he had, that he would have been very, very proud afterwards to have done so, but I forgive him in the sense that this man had the responsibility which the lowly employees that we were, the little soldiers in the field could not even conceive of. So, if someone had an excuse, you understand, well, he had it, while we were just the soldiers in the trenches who never agree with his high-level officers.

Q. You did consider yourself a soldier

A. Well, sir, we were on the front line. So, on the front lines, I don't know if you have experienced that, when the, a spray of bombs comes in, it is said that they make fools of

the staff officers. Well, it was the same with us because one saw nothing of what was going on and then one said but what do they care, what do they care, and what do they expect.

Q. Yes

A. But this is easy. You might understand, in one limited aspect as it was for a delegate in the field.

Q. And when you were asked to try...

A. Well, that is very simple, I was told: this is the case, we have to get information, as much as possible, try to go there to see, try to go at least to the Kommandatur to take inventory of the various camps, to see them, see where they are. But in no case will you be covered by the ICRC, because we have no right to send you there. You just have gone there and if you let yourself be captured and if you have problems, you are on your own.

Q. That is not very nice.

A. That is not very nice as a job, it, we did the impossible, we assure you that we will do whatever possible to get you out of the grip of the GESTAPO, but, in any case, you will have acted on your own.

Q. That was very courageous to do this.

A. It was not courageous, no, you know, it was perhaps a little reckless. I did have my escort officer of the OKV.

Q. And you were told what, that they wanted information, but did they talk to you, for example about extermination?

A. No, never, I never heard the word extermination.

Q. That was not spoken?

A. No, that was not spoken. Try to go there, go into these camps, try to see all you can see, do whatever you want, try not to be to illegal, just what we were able to do. Fortunately we had cartons of Camel, cartons of cigarettes, we had, even better, some nylon stockings, a little transistor if we needed it for a very important person, because we needed papers to pass, or be accompanied by one of these individuals. We could not depend on our good looks or with moralizing to get the right to pass by a barrage where

nobody could pass. But with nylon stockings for their sweethearts it was possible to get them to look the other way, it was possible to get to a camp commander, as I was able to in Auschwitz.

Q. Wow, that is still extraordinary, you got to Auschwitz.

A. Yes

Q. When

A. Well

Q. When?, when, do you know?

A. Oh, the exact date, I don't know, but it is in the report of the C.I.C.R., the exact date, I don't remember, but

Q. 43

A. 43, yes.

#### Rossel 4

Ro: To get to Auschwitz I had thus an escort officer who was an officer of the Wehrmacht, but at about 40 km from the camp, the main camp, we were stopped by barricades from the SS and the SD, he is asked to get out, he has not authorization, even as an officer of the German army, Ritterkreuz, to come into a territory which is absolutely closed to the German army. At that moment we said good-bye to each other and I said to him: "Well, my friend, if you have not seen me again within a certain time, I would like you to still file your report, you must file your report, thus good-bye" and at that moment I went away by myself, but I was not given any guards, you see.

La: But you did have an authorization to go to Auschwitz?

Ro: None, none, none, none.

La: But you were still expected there?

Ro: Not at all, not at all. There was no authorization, you did not get any written authorization, nothing and, it was simply..... I played the role of a big fool... the great idiot, and .... who arrives, thus I arrived, I had....

La: Oh well? There was not even a phone call?



Ro: Nothing, oh, no, nothing at all.

La: That is extraordinary.

Ro: No, no, there was no phone call, nothing at all because....

La: You had.....

Ro: at that moment I would have been barred at departure.

La: And then, you thought that....

Ro: It was refused...

La: Why did you actually go to Auschwitz?

Ro: I went to Auschwitz first of all... to see Auschwitz, to see the camp commander and I had from Geneva, from at least the representative and the head of the delegation in Berlin, my friend Marty, a trump card which did not have any value; I went to propose to them to send medications for their infirmary. We knew very well that this was an unrealistic bluff and that they would not accept it.

La: At Auschwitz?

Ro: At Auschwitz. When I finally arrived at the last gate, and then presented my papers and said: "Well, I would like to speak with the camp commander."

La: Wait, did you arrive at Auschwitz by train?

Ro: No, there was no train for me, it was a car.

La: It was a car?

Ro: Yes, yes, I had a small car...there...a...a...and I arrived .... in the end....passing all the checkpoints.

La: And then, what did you say to... to all the checkpoints which stopped you?

Ro: "I am going to see the Kommandatur. I... I am going to the Kommandatur at Auschwitz."

La: ....your papers from.... the Red Cross?

Ro: My papers as International Delegate of the Red Cross, but that was all. You know, I was very inoffensive, I did not scare them? I guarantee you, if the fear would have been palpable, well, no. One tries to swagger a bit, but you were not so much sure of yourself. Particularly when one is all by oneself. I arrived at that Kommandatur where I was received very correctly by the camp commander.

La: Do you know his name?

Ro: who.... no, I don't remember, but he must be in the notes, I think of the C.I.C.R, and I was...

La: Was it Heuss? The camp commander?

Ro: It was a young man, a young man, very elegant, with blue eyes, very distinguished, very amiable: "Please take a seat. Can I offer you some coffee?", that's what we did. "What brought you here," Well, one dreams. I said: "I came here to make you this proposal." He said to me: "Oh, you are Swiss? Oh, I like Switzerland very much. I have been bobsledding in Switzerland, in Arosa or, I don't know where...

La: Davos.

Ro: Davos, or rather St. Mortiz.

La: Bobsledding?

Ro: Well, I don't know. He did bobsledding. At any rate, he wanted me to know that he was of such society that he was able to do bobsledding. I, as the son of workers, I had seen bobsledding, by I never had the means to do it... to afford the Grisons for bobsledding. Then we talked about one thing or another and I told him: "Well, this is the situation. The C.I.C.R. would like some information. Can you send us something?" "Oh, I don't see why not. I would not say....."

La: And, you asked him questions?

Ro: I asked him questions where.... this went with great evasion, certainly, but, you know...

La: What did you ask him?

Ro: I asked him...if it would be possible that we would support the infirmary, that we would visit....

He said: – No, these are internees, you have no right to see whatever. But if you would like to send help to the infirmary, or medications, you can do that."

– Can I send you, arrange to send you fresh supplies?"

– I don't see why not. You may send them."

These packages, please note, some of them, were sent and received. It is incredible, isn't it? It is almost unreal, but they were received and, we even have receipts for some

packages. In the end, the results were absolutely miserable, that has to be understood.

La: Stop, no, but that is of great interest to me. How long did this last, your meeting?

Ro: Half an hour, 45 minutes.

La: And what did you see of the camp?

Ro: Nothing. Of the camp. I saw barracks. I saw those from where I was.

La: Barracks for...

Ro: Military barracks...

La: Of wood?

Ro: Wooden barracks. They were.... Possibly they were barracks for the guards. But at any rate, I did not see the crematory ovens in action from where I was sitting.

La: Because Auschwitz is not built of wood, it is bricks, red bricks.

Ro: Yes, bricks, but... these were regular barracks, military barracks. I have seen detainee groups, I crossed their paths; I crossed the path of several of those groups of detainees.

La: Who wore the striped pajamas?

Ro: The striped pajamas, a little cap on the head. These people were slim, like.... there is no need to say it, is there? And .... they watched this car pass with... a pennant "International Committee of the Red Cross," with their eyes....

La: Did you see the famous inscription at the gate: "Arbeit macht frei?"

Ro: I did not see that. I did not see that.

La: So, you did not come in that way?

Ro: No, I did not come in by that way. I did not arrive by the station, and thus I did not see that from that side...

La: And you are sure that you were received by the camp commander?

Ro: Oh yes, yes, yes, I'm sure! Because the guy was the type, yes. You know, they had few people, they had few visitors.

La: Yes, yes, no, no, but I do understand that.

Ro: !!

La: But when you said: "a young man," that surprised me, because....

Ro: This is... oh....

La: There were several camp commanders at that time,  
Ro: oh yeah, and they were....  
La: By the way, at the time, it was....  
Ro: There must have been fifty...five, not more...  
La: Oh, good, yes, I agree.  
Ro: Yes, it....yes... I have once met a guy who had the same bearing, the same style, in the Congo, he was....the....the head of the mercenaries, Schramm.  
La: Yes.  
Ro: He called himself colonel. When I was with Schramm, I had the impression as if I were with the exactly, ....the...the camp commander.  
La: At the time when you were there, I don't think that it still was Heuss, by the way, Heuss had left by then, but how long did you stay at Auschwitz? Not in the camp, but in the city of Auschwitz, because there is a city with the name of Auschwitz.  
Ro: But I did not see it, the city.  
La: Oh, you did not see the city?  
Ro: Oh... I did not see the city. I did not....  
La: You did not sleep there?  
Ro: Oh, no, oh, no. I did not have the possibility to sleep there, because it was a zone... for me ..., forbidden, totally forbidden. Thus, I was...  
La: And you did not suspect anything of Birkenau, for example....  
Ro: No, Birkenau, I did not....  
La: An extermination camp which is one kilometer away from the main camp.  
Ro: No. Exactly, nothing. But we knew at that time already, but I knew only through Geneva, what transpired at Geneva, but at the location, nothing.  
La: But what did you know at that time?  
Ro: I knew that there was a concentration camp there where masses of Jews were deported and that the Jews died.  
La: Oh, you, ....you knew when you were at Auschwitz.  
Ro: Oh yes, I knew it.

La: You, ....you... came with this knowledge?

Ro: Oh yes, I knew that, that these people were deported en masse.

La: And that they died.

Ro: and by train. And that they were condemned.

La: yes.

Ro: That was certain.

La: You did not encounter the train?

Ro: I did not see the train, no....

La: And it was.... out of the question, to talk to him about that?

Ro: Oh, this was absolutely out of the question, to say to him.... You know, these people were... were .... it is incredible, but actually, we talked just as we are talking now. These people were proud of the work they did.

La: How did this pride.....

Ro: Oh, nothing... but they had the impression that they were doing something useful. That was the impression that was given, because if one talked to them about the camps, the prisoners, the detainees, or things like that, they said: "Yes, but really... Germany now does a job here,..."

La: And for...

Ro: an incredible, extraordinary job, for which all of Europe recognizes us.

La: And yourself... because this is after all, quite an astonishing thing, to talk in a kind of intimate way with these people and they were master liars, after all, .....

Ro: Certainly.....

La: You..... trusted them, or....

Ro: Oh. Sir, trusting... if you wish... no, this was theater. Playing a game, that was all, that's all.

La: And then, the practical result of this, did you send them medications?

Ro: Medications, .... these prisoner packages, you understand, which were received by the prisoners, and they sent us receipts. That was absolutely unexpected.... we did not expect any receipts. Well we did receive receipts.

La: Receipts, which means: signatures of...

Ro: Signatures: I received the package... Receipt.... and...

### RO 5

Ro: The receipts were received in Geneva with not just one signature, because the packages were addressed to one person. This person, for them, it was an incredible occasion to tell their family: "I am not yet dead, I am alive, I am here." Because these people had no idea that such a deportee was in Auschwitz and alive. They understood very quickly, because instead of one signature on the receipt, there were five, six, or seven. This permitted the immediate sending of personalized packages, because the packages had to be personalized, they had to have... they did not give any list of detainees. They said: "If you know someone who is here, etc., send." These receipts coming with eight signatures permitted the sending of eight packages which, in turn came back. That could have been a snowball. I don't know the total number of packages, but really these receipts which were signed by five, six signatures which is the latest proof of life which a man had sent, this is something very touching and gets your guts, when you see them.

La: Yes, yes, absolutely. But I want to say at the same time, that this permitted the Germans to make believe that the conditions at Auschwitz were humane conditions. However, they have done that very, very frequently, because....

Ro: Yes.

La: they made them write post cards.

Ro: I think that...

La: the people just before they were gassed. Well, that is....

Ro: that is possible, but....

La: This is known.

Ro: Yes, I believe it, yes.

La: Exactly, so that the others would come without suspicion, well, they have always done that. But.... but you talked just before of cigarette packages or of....

Ro: Oh, yes, that was simply because at times it was still necessary to have a paper. For

example, in the region of Vienna we had contacts with the SS... Giving them cartons of American cigarettes which were enormously desired, or some nylon stockings, that gave us a stamp on a paper, a paper that we already had, for getting around. And if it was signed by an Obersturmbandführer.... or a member of the SD...

La: This means still that you.... when you... took on these hazardous missions...

Ro: Hazardous... we tried...

La: .... or dangerous... you still needed .....

Ro: We tried to have. But at Auschwitz, for example, I did not show any papers except those officially signed in Geneva.

La: Oh, yes. You had nothing, ....

Ro: Nothing.

La: from... the Reichssicherheitshauptamt.

Ro: Nothing at all, nothing at all.

La: Yes, now, you made..... after your return from that visit to Auschwitz, you made...

Ro: I made my little report of a visit to the Kommandatur of Auschwitz. But, you know... really, this is awfully little. You go there with chills down your back; you say to yourself: well, I really only want to get to Auschwitz and on coming back bring nothing. But you have to be fully lucid.

La: Yes, you bring nothing back and then, you are there and you see nothing.

Ro: And you see nothing. Yes, that's what I want to say, take back nothing. No information that is valuable.

La: What I want to say, did you sense it, because when I was in Auschwitz, which was much later, I want to say.... even when you see these... when one sees this today... I don't know, it is a type of horror sensation that grabs one, really, one has....

Ro: Yes, the sensation of horror...

La: It is fear...

Ro: You know, you would have this even more .... when, as you enter, you cross lines of prisoners, in groups of 30 or 40, skinny... skeletons

La: Yes.

Ro: Yes, ... when you encounter them like that, I don't know... 400 to 500 at the end of the walk, what do you do....

La: When you saw those people, did you have the impression that these were people who were suffering severely, and that.... in fact, they were dying, or condemned to die...

Ro: It was..... it was..... that was it. They were really walking skeletons, because they had not been fed.

La: Yes.

Ro: Really, Only their eyes were alive.

La: Only their eyes were alive, yes.

Ro: Yes.

La: Thus, they were, as you call them.....zombies, they have....

Ro: Hum.

La: They were looking very intensely.

Ro: Yes, very intensely, very intensely. These people observed you with incredible intensity, as if saying to themselves: "Oh, here is someone who comes... what?... a live one who passes by" and one who was not an SS.

La: Yes, yes. And that... you were in civilian clothes?

Ro: Always in civilian clothes.

La: You did not have.... any kind of uniform?

Ro: Oh, no, no. That would have been a catastrophe.

La: Certainly. And did you speak of these groups of detainees?

Ro: Yes.

La: In your....

Ro: Certainly...

La: In your report?

Ro: Yes... That did not lead to anything.

La: Yes.

Ro: That did not lead to anything. These things were already known, you think. One can never say enough about how trivial.... trivial.... and sad that this was.



La: But you say that these things were known, and just before you said that nothing was known.

Ro: We, no. Well, myself. It was known in Geneva. I learned that later. I knew it later. I knew, for example, that the Joint knew such things. I am surprised.... in hindsight, you understand? That these people never made contact with the Delegation to say: "we, we have such and such information, such exact information, we know that and that. What do you know? Do you know something?" Like that.

La: But... this means, after all, that when you were in the office of the commandant... of the one who presented himself as the camp commander... at Auschwitz

Ro: Yes.

La: You, at that moment, I want to say, this is an exact question, because it is important. Did you know that you were in the center of an extermination camp?

Ro: I did not... I did not know the scope of this matter. Not at all. I knew that it was a terrible camp and that those who left for Auschwitz did not come back. But... we had absolutely no idea of the scope that this represented. It was known that this was a terrible camp, that was all.

La: Did you see any glows? Because all the people who lived in Auschwitz...

Ro: Yes.

La: The Poles who lived in the city tell still today that...

Ro: they saw glows...

La: That one saw glows and ....

Ro: I saw neither glows nor fumes.

La: Nothing?

Ro: Nothing.

La: and no odors?

Ro: No odors either. Those military barracks always smell very bad and such things, .... but talking of odors from burning flesh, such things that have been smelled or seen, I did not see anything.

La: No, no, but... that depended on the wind also.

Ro: That is possible.

La: Yes, of the wind and of.... Well, now have you seen other camps?

Ro: Oh, yes, we have cited, in passing, Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, where we also visited...

La: Oranienburg, you were there....

Ro: With Marty. We also went just like that. Under pretexts... we had .... prisoner camps in that region and he said to me: "This time, we have to go there, and we will enter there into the camp of Oranienburg."

La: Which is near Berlin?

Ro: Yes. It is quite near. And we went in. We were received with the same scenario.

La: Nicely?

Ro: Very.

La: Yes.

Ro: Very. And then .....we became aware that we were not in our right place, that.. It was necessary to start over, to come to rub shoulders, because we had absolutely no right to be there... that was all.

La: what exactly did they say? What exactly did they say?

Ro: Well, they said very precisely...

La: You always came with your offer of medications?.... of parcels?....

Ro: Yes, that was.... that was the only.... What do you want to say? Act as the good little apostle and than it was just necessary to play the role of the idiot; the village idiot, who came her like the members of the YMCA: "I come to bring toys for your....? There was no other possibility.

La: But did you not wish to know more?

Ro: Sir, that was the reason for our going there.

La: Yes, no, no! I understand, but at the same time...

Ro: !!...

La: !!... no, but it is....

Ro: We did not go... we did not take such risks and made trips which... which... I don't know if you imagine that this was a pleasure trip, but it certainly was not a pleasure trip. And

when you have to deal with these people there. You feel absolutely powerless, and you cannot imagine... how shall I say it? The impression of power of these people who murdered, you understand, for whom one life more or less counted for nothing and where one more cadaver... one could have easily hidden that as an accident, ... you have no... you have no desire to sing the Marseillaise as loud as possible, certainly not.

La: You were afraid?

Ro: Oh yes, sir.

La: Yes.

Ro: Yes, sir, I have to say that.... fortunately... at the age of 25, I repeat, one is unaware, and...

La: How old was Marty?

Ro: Marty was five years older than I.

La: 30 years old.

Ro: But he was not at Auschwitz, but I speak of [unclear word], I have to say, this was... really, yes, we were afraid, yes we were afraid. Just like in a bombardment. Who says that he is not afraid? This is not true. When bombs fall above your head, one is afraid. One is afraid.... with a time-lag.

La: Outside of your visits at the camps... after all, it was known where you were... in Berlin, did the people, the individuals try to contact you?

Ro: Yes, yes.

La: That took place?

Ro: There were escapees, for example, from the concentration camps who came even to our delegation, even when they were on the run. And they gave us permission to make quite detailed reports because they were escapees who got out of a concentration camp for women where the niece of General De Gaulle was, and....

La: and.... that was Ravensbrück?

Ro: Ravensbrück, yes. And... there was a Swiss woman who came with a French woman, I can still see them; and... they have... we could talk to them very well. She was placed in a camp of civilian French internees. That is where it was possible to hide them best.

RO 6

La: Dr. Rossel, let's now talk....

RO 7

La: Well, Now, Dr. Rossel, let's talk about Theresienstadt.

Ro: Theresienstadt.

La: Yes.

Ro: That is a great problem. This is a very great problem. Theresienstadt was an organized visit. It was organized by the Germans. This was a... the first visit, it was also [unclear word] as it was mad with...

La: It was, excuse me? The first visit...

Ro: It was the first visit that was made there.

La: OK.

Ro: I made it with... accompanied by employees of the consulate who were Danes or Dutch, I don't quite remember.

La: Danes?

Ro: Danes.

La: Danes.

Ro: And.... I had never seen these two gentlemen. We visited Theresienstadt. I repeat this, now, as you said, this visit was authorized and guided.

La: Yes, because it had been requested, repeatedly by the Red Cross.

Ro: Repeatedly, to see for once, a camp, and particularly Theresienstadt. Theresienstadt, in the view of many... of the world, was...

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Ro: We said that Theresienstadt was a visit that had been organized, and which had been organized by the Germans, under the repeated pressure of foreigners, particularly of the C.I.C.R., but also by neutral countries. I have made this organized visit.

La: Oh, you were the representative of the C.I.C.R.?

Ro: The representative of the C.I.C.R. at Theresienstadt, for this visit.

La: For this visit.

Ro: The first.

La: The first.

Ro: Because there were three visits, if I remember right.

La: Two.

Ro: Or two. There was a later visit. This visit... I was... ordered to go and see what they would show me. I made a report which I don't deny and which I maintain to be absolutely valid. As I was sent there, I was the eyes, I had to see, and I had, if you want, to try to see beyond, if there was something beyond to see. It is said that Theresienstadt was a Potemkin camp, you understand, which was... a well arranged camp, and for the visit of the Tsarina. It was perhaps even worse than that, it was an obviously arranged visit.

La: It was on June 23, 1944.

Ro: 44, thanks for saying it. I would not have been able to give you that date. It was an arranged visit. This was something that one could consider as a piece of theater but: one thing has to be made very clear. You asked me what the impression was, what was the atmosphere in Berlin, "what was the atmosphere when you went to Auschwitz?" Well, here you had the impression of a fake atmosphere. First of all, because the visit was ordered, because it was expected; as always in the middle of a war, when something is expected, there is a set-up, but, for me which bothered me right away, was also the attitude of the Jewish actors. It was a Potemkin camp, a trick camp and... I must excuse myself being frank, because it is now.....

La: It has to be.

Ro: At that age, if one does not say what one feels....

La: Absolutely.

Ro: This was a camp that was reserved for the privileged ones. It is awful to say that, because, my God...and then I cannot accuse anyone, I cannot, I don't want to, you understand, bless people who suffered horribly. But, unfortunately, there were

“prominents” and this camp gave the impression that very wealthy Jews had been put there, or.... those who were important in their small towns, whom you just could not make disappear to brusquely. There were a number of notables there which .... which was totally abnormal, compared with the... the other camps, even those for prisoners. I don't know how many doctors were there, there were notables at every street corner and... the attitude of these people was very curious too, because... for a man whose job it is, for months, to visit prisoner camps, is used to see a certain type that winks at him, who attracts his attention on a certain matter, it is obvious, you understand? Well, there, nothing, nothing. A docility, a passivity... Which appeared to me.... created even worse malaise. If, today, I have to go deep into my thinking, it was that this camp was not only for a visit... certainly ... prepared by the SS, on which it was possible to make a report stating: “I have seen this, I have seen that, I have photographed such a thing.” By the way, I could photograph anything I wanted. Thus I brought back many photos... at times, it is said, a photo says more than a thousand words. Well, I took many pictures, but the climate was staged by that impression of these Jews who considered even themselves, you understand, to be “prominent people” like, it is the word which was very much en vogue at that time, like privileged people and who had no desire to risk to be deported because they had permitted themselves an illusion or a remark, or passing a piece of paper or a report, which would have been easy, sir, because we were not spied upon, nor filmed, there were none of the means available that are today to follow someone. But there, passing through small passages which one does when going through a city, when going into a room, if, you understand, someone had wanted to put something into a pocket, be it of the two other men or myself, it would have been extremely easy.

La: How long... I understand very well what you said, but, this, this, this is a very important point. How long was your visit to Theresienstadt?

Ro: My visit was, I think, I would say two hours, two or three hours.

La: Not more?

Ro: Not more.

La: Oh, I have the impression that it was more. That in your report you said.. You said

longer.

Ro: That is quite possible, sir. You know... you said that this was in 1943....44.

La: Yes.

Ro: A lot of time has passed since. I don't want to make a point of it, I don't want to be... but at this time, I have the impression of two or three hours maximum.

La: Yes. You arrived towards 10 in the morning,

Ro: Yes.

La: ... you had lunch, and you left again toward 6 in the evening.

Ro: Oh, yes, but, there was a party outside of the city, to be sure. We were well informed that there was the "kleine Festung," where we had....

La: The little fortress...

Ro: where we had no right to enter. We were told: "In any case, you pass by it, .... but there, these are "common prisoners." "Common prisoners" which are detainees... these are our detainees, that is none of your business, you have the right to visit... the city itself." As you know, this city, like Vauban, very, very close by.... [inaudible word], a little, if you wish.

La: Yes, yes, yes.

Ro: Which was done by, by the way, by a little bit the same style of architecture.

La: Yes, Fortress.

Ro: Closed fortress, but fortresses which had never been attacked, which had remained intact.

La: Yes. But... you made this visit in the company of these...

Ro: Always accompanied by these two gentlemen...

La: These two Danes and...

Ro: and always by Germans, escorted by Germans.

La: And also by the SS.

Ro: The SS, those responsible for organizing this visit, I don't know any names, that I can tell you.

La: Did you not ask for the names?

Ro: Well, no, no, no. Did I know them at the time? I don't remember at all. But.

La: We have them, the names.

Ro: Oh, well.

La: they were known.

Ro: Possibly. But... certainly, I am sure that you have all that, but I just don't remember, I can't even see them, you see?

La: And then... Did you see many Jews?

Ro: Many.

La: Yes.

Ro: Many.

La: And....

Ro: They were, they were all Jews.... I did not see any other people there.

La: At that time, there were only those.

Ro: There were only Jews.

La: there were only those, there were only those.

Ro: They wore the stars, they wore the stars, by the way. And for me, I only saw Jews.

La: Well, and one of them talked to you, at least one of them...

Ro: Oh yes, the doctor...., so-and-so who introduced himself..

La: Eppstein.

Ro: Eppstein; as camp leader. And it was he who led us, you understand?

La: Yes. And he was introduced to you as the mayor of...

Ro: As the.... the... the head of the community, etc. But he, at no time... this is .... this is incredible... you understand... that nobody said: "But after all, this is a.... is a farce, if this really was... was at that time and then..."

La: But I don't understand. Why are you now saying that this was a farce? Did you know at the time that this was a farce?

Ro: No, no. But it was well known that when one was invited, thus it was known that when one was invited to visit a camp, that was not the camp... that was an exceptional camp. That was known....

La: Yes, but....



- Ro: ..... right away.
- La: You know today that you have reasons to say that this was a farce. But it was a farce in more than one way to think about, because all had been prepared “ad hoc” precisely for your visit.
- Ro: Yes.
- La: ..... or for the visit of the delegation....
- Ro: Yes.
- La: of the C.I.C.R.
- Ro: But there was.... I believe that there was...
- La: for....
- Ro: Yes.
- La: for months, they worked on this. This is...
- Ro: I...
- La: ...what was called in German the “Verschönerungsaktion.”
- Ro: That’s so. But I believe.... readily, but we were....

### RO 9

- La: Yes, I say this: I say: “You are absolutely right to say that this was a farce,” but it was a farce that was extraordinarily well prepared. They prepared for your visit for months and what they called the “Verschönerungsaktion” means: “beautification action.”
- Ro: Beautification.
- La: To know.... you really visited, actually, they had prepared for you a Potemkin ghetto, completely, and they.... and... the question I want to ask you: You say this today, because you know... in reality today, that this was a farce. I don’t know, by the way, with what degree of certainty that you know it, but I would like to be assured of this: Did you sense it at that time, when you had....
- Ro: At the time?
- La: at the time of your visit?
- Ro: No, no. I felt, and I believed... and I still believe that it was a camp, but, the impression

that I had at that time, when I was shown a camp for Jewish notables, privileged people. That was the impression that I had and that I took away. I never wrote it black on white, but I had the impression, the behavior of the people was also such that... it was... very antipathetic. The attitude of the Jews in this... this city. Because, in the end, sir, it is evident that they had selected what they wanted to show us... what they wanted us to see, but I think that nobody, nobody from the C.I.C.R. was duped that this was a camp, because it was the choice of the Security Service of the Gestapo; but I myself had the impression that there were really Jews there, and I still think so, who arranged their situation with dollars and with dollar payments in Portugal, and which permitted them to remain. Because, in the end, you know it just as I do, certain fabulously wealthy Jews even had exit visas, signed by Himmler, and, one has talked to these people – not in the camp, my God – it was talked about, but... I understand, it was talked about among us, one knew if one was rich enough to own, for example, a car from Budapest [unclear word] and company, and if one was Mr. So-and-So, who today.... the dynasties...

La: But this arrived in Hungary, with the family Weiss.

Ro: The...the... the family Weiss. Well, these people, you know, had enough money to clear their name and.... get visas. Well, I had the impression that I had people who did not have what? The international stature.. Of the Weiss or Rothschild, to be able to get out of... these clutches, but who were powerful enough and who had to deposit enough money to be there. This is the most sincere impression that I took away from my visit to Theresienstadt. And I ask myself still today – I still believe it – in spite of all that I have been told.

La: What were you told?

Ro: Oh, well, that this was just for the visit and that afterwards, these people were exterminated immediately. I still believe that these were Jewish notables, rich enough to pay for surviving there.

La: They.... were exterminated before your visit, and they were exterminated afterwards.

Ro: Yes.

La: In the same way.

Ro: This I know, that many were exterminated after....

La: after your visit.

Ro: yes.

La: Well. Moreover... at the start it was Himmler's idea; by creating Theresienstadt he wanted to create a ghetto; first for the Jews of the Reich, of the great Reich consisting of Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, for those for whom it was still a little bit difficult to touch them, because....

Ro: That's it.

La: ..... they were the former combatants of the First World War, they were elderly people...

Ro: Yes.

La: old women and [unclear word]. And it is true that among them were those whom you call "prominent people"... to wit, people who had worked within the organism of the Jewish Community, etc. Well. Who were deported to Theresienstadt. But Himmler, wanted precisely to camouflage the general enterprise of extermination and Theresienstadt was something which one could show.

Ro: Yes.

La: Well. But... the truth is that before the visit of the Red Cross... almost 100,000 Jews had passed through Theresienstadt and had been deported to Auschwitz and Treblinka where they died, and after the visit, the same. Well. And this ghetto of Theresienstadt lived in total terror. Well, now, what you have seen, in effect, I understand very well your feelings, but you have seen the terror... the terror of these Jews. And the one who received you, the famous mayor of Theresienstadt, or the president

Ro: Yes.

La: of the ghetto, Doctor Eppstein, and... of whom you said a moment ago that he spoke a little like a robot, is that so?

Ro: Yes, it is.

La: Well, he was executed exactly three months after your visit.

Ro: This is always.... This is always.... you understand...

La: At the "kleine Festung," the little fortress

- Ro: At the little fortress. But you know how much this was the.... the... peculiarity of the Germans, and I think of all regimes which organize extermination camps, to hire certain people as administrators and as organizers and they themselves, after a certain time, when they are totally in the know about what goes on under the covers, that they themselves have left to be massacred, they know that they will not survive.
- La: Yes.
- Ro: But this is the extraordinary sadism, that they don't even have to see it, they, the administrators and the staff, and that they found among those politicals and among the Jews always a layer of people who believed in surviving or lasting some months, by being employees of.
- La: this is a very big problem, really...
- Ro: But this is the horror, sir, but this is the horror, because it is there....
- La: Really, really.
- Ro: where man.... where man descends to the depth..
- La: Yes. It is a very big problem, this is the problem of .... this happened in all the ghettos of the East, well, this is the problem.
- Ro: In all the ghettos of.... it happens, yes.
- La: This is the problem of the.... Judenrat. But in your report you still paint a picture .... sufficiently satisfying of
- Ro: sufficiently satisfying
- La: of Theresienstadt.
- Ro: The hygienic conditions of... of all of what I saw. When you are..... sir, when you are sent to be the eyes to see.
- La: Yes. You said that before: to be the eyes and see beyond...
- Ro: Beyond... the....
- La: of that which is visible.
- Ro: Well, what I have seen beyond, that was this subservience and this passivity which is something I have never digested.
- La: Yes. No, because you speak, for example..... this is interesting, because I have the details

of that.... that which they have done...

Ro: Yes, yes.

La: of what they have prepared for your visit. And all the measures which were taken.

Ro: Yes.

La: And this is extraordinary, because this is exactly what is in your report. You say that you were able to take all the photos you wanted. And they actually wanted that you take those photos.

Ro: Certainly.

La: They wanted it. For example, they had all the streets cleaned and had them asphalted. That was a first measure. Well. At the main square of Theresienstadt, across from the café [unclear], they had provided for the construction, a few days before your visit, a music pavilion with an orchestra which played, and you have seen that orchestra of which you speak in your report.

Ro: .... I have to say that I don't even remember.

La: Yes, yes.

Ro: Oh, I think, I think...

La: But this did not exist before.

Ro: I believe that.

La: and did not exist afterwards. No, I tell you this to show the immensity...

Ro: Yes. Yes.

La: the immensity of the deception, and how this had been prepared. Afterwards they put benches on the square and in... in the... in the famous... in the so-called public garden, etc. Well. You mention this in your report with... amazement, a little, well, of a children's place, for the infants, and for the little children a sort of "children's pavilion," decorated with animal pictures, with kitchen, showers and little beds. That was done...

Ro: Yes.

La: ... a few days before your arrival, that disappeared afterwards, and for a very simple reason, this was... births were practically forbidden.

Ro: Yes.

La: At Theresienstadt. And compulsory abortion, and....

Ro: Yes.

La: that was contradictory to the policy of extermination to have births. Thus, equally, they had put up colored signs with arrows “to the bank,” “to the post office, “to the café,” as they had done, by the way, in the extermination camps, in Treblinka, that is similar. There was a train station with a clock, which was nicely decorated, but showed always the same time. Well. And the few houses that they let you visit had been totally renovated. Well, you also said that you were present at a meal, where there was a server who had a starched bonnet. All of this, all of this had been prepared entirely for you, and still, this had been very much, because you talk about it in you report of, .... of.... of.

#### RO 10

La: Yes, you also speak in your report, and this is one of the rare negatives you cite. You talk about overpopulation.

Ro: Yes.

La: and... you said: Well, in effect, there is an overpopulation... But the overpopulation had been such that for the preparation for your visit they had deported about 5000 persons to Auschwitz where they were gassed immediately, so that it would be a little less overpopulated.

Ro: Some more space.

La: Some more space.

Ro: Yes.

La: And so that you would have a better impression. And.... also, you talked about the bank. Well, all this had been prepared for your visit; you are talking of a..... they even had.... they renamed the streets also, to which they gave other names etc. You are talking about the freedom of worship, you visited the synagogue. There was not.... There was no synagogue. This was a type of gymnasium which they had transformed, eight days earlier, into a synagogue etc.... so that you would.....

Ro: Yes, yes.

La: .... see this.... they had changed everything. They even changed the names. They replaced the word “ghetto” by “Jüdisches Siedlungsgebiet”.... The Jewish Elder, who was Eppstein, they had even changed his name. He was called the mayor of Theresienstadt. They prohibited the “Grusspflicht,” which was: all the Jews had to salute the Nazis. And this you did not see, because it had been prohibited on threat of death to salute the Nazis in front of you. Well, well etc. And, I would like to say, they even had dress rehearsals before your visit, because the nervousness was palpable, they were so afraid that you might have doubts about something, well, they repeated it like crazy, really, your... I want to say.... your visit was equally teleguided but... at close quarters and to the second. And then, when you speak about the.... living conditions, for example, saying that they seemed to you quite decent and really convenient, and that you saw nothing of Theresienstadt. Because.... it was necessary to go to the barracks where the people lived like at Auschwitz.

Ro: Oh, yes.

La: They lived in beds at...

Ro: Of that...

La: four or five.

Ro: I am aware of that now.

La: Four or five per bed, really, they lived in dreadful conditions. You talk about food. And, in your report you even provide the numbers of calories, well, you speak of 2400 calories,

Ro: That is what I was told.

La: the calories were 1200. The people perished from hunger. You are talking about twelve to fifteen deaths per day in your report, which amounts to about four hundred deaths per month, in reality there were five thousand deaths per month. And they did not show you in Theresienstadt that there was an extraordinary crematorium, which compared well with that of Auschwitz, with four giant ovens and... they burned the people, I want to say, Theresienstadt was... That is the reason that the history of this is scary. The conditions were atrocious and the people were deported to Auschwitz, to Treblinka without

stopping, without stopping, without stopping, it never ended. And this... Eppstein, of whom you speak... was in reality a very courageous person, and because of his courage, actually because of a talk that he gave three months after your departure, they executed him at the little fortress.

Ro: At the little fortress.

La: But... what I wanted to ask you, I want to say, that you were duped was no surprise, because they wanted to dupe you.

Ro: Certainly.

La: They wanted to dupe you totally... totally for that. But, you say that the attitude of the Jews bothered you, actually, their passivity, that is what you said...

Ro: That's it.

La: etc. But also I would like to know why you say that today, why did you not talk about this in your report? Because in your report you state: I saw a normal provincial town.

Ro: Well.

La: Almost normal.

Ro: Almost normal, that what I was shown. And I had nothing to say, I could not invent things that I had not seen.

La: No... You could not invent things that you had not seen, but.... you might have had your doubts...

Ro: You might have...

La: Because you said that the problem was to see beyond....

Ro: Beyond...

La: Were you not able to sense the....

Ro: In these....

La: the parody?

Ro: Oh, well, in these case there one expects all the same.... as I said, a wink, an assist, a... a... a nothing. But sir, nothing, it is nothing. Nothing, it is nothing. And... now still, I don't understand that these people why knew, as I know, as one says now, that they were lost, damned, that... how...



- La: One considers oneself never totally lost, there is always still a little bit of hope.
- Ro: Yes, they had hope. And for myself, I am telling you, they lived with that hope that being in that comedy, as you have said, and as it can be proven, they played, their chance their last chance to endure.
- La: Oh..... they played a comedy under terror. Well, this is very clear. By the way, you did not talk to any Jew, none.
- Ro: None.
- La: Only.... Eppstein talked to you.... who was...
- Ro: a few words....
- La: Yes.
- Ro: a few words.
- La: I think that he made an introductory talk and at departure, of which you draw the essential....
- Ro: This is .... possible.
- La: this information is contained in your report.
- Ro: I don't remember this introductory talk very well.
- La: No, but you say, for example... This is this which is still interesting. You say in your report: "We are saying that our astonishment was huge to find in the ghetto a lively city with an almost normal life..."
- Ro: Yes, that is the impression which this.....
- La: "We had expected much worse, etc. We had said to the police officer of the SS who was in charge of accompanying us, that the most surprising thing was the difficulty we had encountered to receive authorization to visit Theresienstadt."
- Ro: Yes.
- La: That is exactly what they wanted you to believe... to believe...
- Ro: make us believe.
- La: .... in a way. But afterwards, why did you say.... on the one hand you say: "this is a normal city," and later, you write: "This Jewish city is really surprising." I want to say: if it is normal, what is surprising in this? What surprised you?

Ro: It is difficult for me to get back into the skin of the man that I was at that time. But in reality I had not expected that. I had expected a visit to conditions like I visited with my prisoners of war, or of disciplinary prisons for non-commissioned officers, where one say people.... you understand, skinny, gaunt, people... as we came across in camps of deportees every day, in the stations, even, you understand?

La: Yes.

Ro: One usually saw those things. But Theresienstadt gave me the impression to be a city for privileged Jews.

La: Yes. But were they not skinny?

Ro: No, not skinny.

La: [unclear words] but they succumbed to hunger.

Ro: Oh, they were not skinny. Those I saw were not skinny.

La: They succumbed to hunger. They hid the skinny ones from you.

Ro: Oh yes, they hid the skinny ones from me, and the children were not skinny at all.

La: You say... you say... oh, yes, I wanted to ask you also about this, regarding family life... You say this, excuse me, you say: "Because of overpopulation, family life is unfortunately difficult in Theresienstadt. Many people live... living in collective barracks are separated, these people naturally have the freedom to meet again in the morning, and, as they are generally old people, there is no complaint." That is something I did not understand, what this was supposed to say.

Ro: Oh, I probably wanted to say if these couples were separated, and that it was an old man and an old woman...

La: Oh, yes, they did not suffer...

Ro: Like this, they did not suffer of.... of... like...

La: Yes..... ok... there were no problems....

Ro: That is probably what I meant there, I don't know.

La: Yes, yes, certainly. They showed you, also... You say that you attended for a short time a court session, a matter of theft, that was totally prepared, like a piece of theater.

Ro: I have absolutely no memory of this court session, you know? It has been forty years...

La: Well, this has disappeared?

Ro: Oh yes, this has disappeared from my....

La: But in the end, but.... overall, you made... you told me a moment ago that.... you had a very, very disagreeable impression,....

Ro: Very.

La: Very. But you did not say that at all in your report.

Ro: Because it was not up to me to... to... you understand, it was not up to me and I was much too embarrassed to say something bad about these people. But if I had been forced to say something, it was the only thing that I had in my conscience, of the attitude that I had not expected at all. You said to me: they played theater. Certainly, it is known now.

La: No, but you say...

Ro: But there...

La: You are saying that... no, it is not to me that you said this, you said it to my collaborator... you say that you had the feeling that the people avoided you like the pest.

Ro: Oh, yes, absolutely.

La: Yes.

Ro: Certainly. The people avoided me. That is a fact.

La: And there... was it theater that they avoided you? Exactly, they felt incapable to pull of the act.

Ro: Maybe, maybe. But that gave me the impression.... exactly.... that nobody had the....

La: No, you are saying that...

Ro: the... the.... the...

La: that if you had let your sentiments speak in your report, and a report, according to which I understand, that had to be objective, there is no need to....

Ro: Ok, ok, no sentiments should be included.

La: Must not... must not let the sentiments speak.

Ro: Must not let the sentiments speak. Good. I was sent to look, take pictures. I did that, that is all. Beyond.... this is invention.

RO 11

- La: Yes, you also say – this interesting to see that.... Because this hit you a little, like a kibbutz, kolchosa, or.... all the type of collective. You say.... and you wrote this:  
 “Considering the collective type organization of the whole life in the ghetto, many things are free. Because of this the salaries are sufficient, although very low. They vary between 65 and 300 talers-couronnes. Everybody gets a minimum salary, etc.” And, also this, they told you stories. There were no....
- Ro: But certainly.
- La: There were no salaries at Theresienstadt.
- Ro: Certainly.
- La: They said anything. And.... you said at the end: “The ghetto of Theresienstadt is a communist society, directed by a Stalinist of high rank, Eppstein.” And that is funny because the word “Stalinist,” in 194....
- Ro: Yes.
- La: 194...4... was not so much used....
- Ro: No.
- La: You were a.... a pioneer!
- Ro: !!
- La: Because this came.... this came later.
- Ro: Yes.
- La: And... but this is.... is your leftist education.
- Ro: Yes. That is the leftist.
- La: That’s obvious. Well, let’s get back to the story. You were hit by the side.... by the total groveling of the Jews.
- Ro: That’s true. It is very difficult to admit, but I am obliged to admit it. This passivity, and.... and even in hindsight now, you understand, it was, incredible, not to believe. And I am sure that many of the people did not believe it. But nobody..... as I have said, did not even give a wink, did not try to say something. Since these people, according to what you said and according to what has been proven, were condemned and ... they knew it, that there

were massacres, that nobody took it upon himself to say: “Well, I will still let out a cry and will still say something.” But, nothing.

La: That was the impending death.

Ro: That was the impending death. But... this was... I don't know how one would react, .... I was not.... I was not ever, you understand, with a gun to my back, but still, this passivity is something which is hard to swallow.

La: Yes, But you told me just before that.... a report has to be totally objective, and... that it is not permissible to include sentiments, still....

Ro: I believe that, yes.

La: .... thus, no interpretation.

Ro: No personal interpretation.

La: Yes.

Ro: No, because....

La: But at the same time, but at the same time you said in the beginning that it was necessary for you to look beyond what they were showing you. Thus, this is still some interpretation.

Ro: Interpretation. But I have not seen anything beyond of.... what I have put into my report.

La: Yes. But.... I want to say, well. You were still shocked by the passivity of the Jews, by their lack of courage, etc. And .... I want to say, good. That implicates that you impute them with .... culpability, still.....

Ro: Well, no, I don't implicate them, it is not for me to judge, again, but... to be astonished, yes, certainly, that it was possible to make play so many actors, a role which.... let's say, a piece of theater which.... which involved several hundred persons and that... that would come off.

La: Yes, but.... I agree. The Jews were the actors and... I fully admit, that they had their part of the responsibility, but the directors were the Germans.

Ro: The directors, there is no question.

La: were the Germans. And.... and I want to say, the.... you end your report as follows; in the last sentence you say: “Our report will not change the judgment of anybody. Everybody

was free to condemn the attitude taken by the Reich for resolving the Jewish problem. If, however, this report dissipates a little the mystery engulfing the ghetto of Theresienstadt, this is sufficient.” What exactly did you want to say there?

Ro: Oh, well.... exactly, this ghetto, being..... a city about which a lot of people were interested, I was shown... what I was shown. I took photos that I was authorized to take, photos which... are photos of scenery, rigged, if you consider it that, but these photos are there.

La: No, but you say: “Our report will not change the judgment of anybody. Everybody was free to condemn the attitude taken by the Reich for resolving the Jewish problem.” Which seems to say, that there were people who... still, who were persons of whom you would have wanted that they change their judgment? You want.... you want to say...

Ro: this was.... this was that...

La: According to....

Ro: at any case, at any case, you understand, we were absolutely all against all types of racial segregation, against this.... this parking of Jews in.... in ghettos. This is something which is so contrary to our mentality of this little Helvetian, who had never seen that, so that in itself it was already an horror, even if we have no conscience, I repeat, we have no idea of these massive exterminations.

La: Yes.

Ro: That.... that... one cannot say that we had \_\_\_\_\_ or prescience, not at all, not at all.

La: No, but... no, but... One gets the impression there that it is.... even somewhat the opposite, because .... one has the impression that there are people who think that what is going on is atrocious, yes, and that.... like you, the report that you make, is a report.... You say: “Here, this is what I saw.” And this is normal, as you have only seen that. “Here is what I saw, and it is not bad.” So. You still make a report, rather positive.

Ro: Yes.

La: of the situation in Theresienstadt.

Ro: Yes.

La: So. And when you write: “Our report will not change the judgment of anybody,” this

means that you wish to change the judgment of people....

Ro: No.

La: who....

Ro: Oh, I don't think so. I believed.... I believe... to the contrary, the people... were.... at that time... in our Europe... you could say, all anti-Semites, 90% of them.

La: You think that?

Ro: Oh..... I think so, and I still think so.

La: Yes.

Ro: I still think so. This is.... this is awful. I have read Sartre on the Jewish question, and you did too. Well...

La: Absolutely.

Ro: Oh well, Oh well.... I still think that still today it would not be difficult to mobilize... the opinion with the same... quasi unanimity, that is... that is with simple shamelessness that one has, today... I have a very, very, very sad opinion of the ... of the opinion when it is a mass opinion and of the attitude of people vis-a-vis Jews still today.

La: I think that you are right.

Ro: This is appalling, this is appalling, but....

La: Why is that?

Ro: Sir, explain it to me. You are the sociologist who... I am not.

La: Yes.... why is it coming back?

Ro: Why is it coming back? It is still this way.

La: Why is it coming back?

Ro: Why is it coming back?

La: Do you feel it here in Switzerland?

Ro: No. I have never felt it. We have no Jews here. I am here a.... I have always been a.... peasant, child of .... of the village.

La: You are no peasant, you are a country doctor.

Ro: But I hear, I sense very well, I sense very well that a lot of people could be mobilized hastily... concerning an antisemitic problem.

- La: But when you say: "As everybody is free to condemn the attitude by the Reich for resolving the Jewish problem"..... what does that mean?
- Ro: Well, that means... that everybody... in my opinion, was aware and had to take his responsibility concerning this attitude towards the Jews who were thrown into the ghettos. That is how...
- La: Yes.
- Ro: I interpret this sentence, forty years later, you know.
- La: Yes, yes... no, but what hits me all the same, in this report... very, very detailed, balanced, well written, is still that you did not have the feeling that you were attending a parody. And at the same time, you had [unclear word], I have the impression, because....
- Ro: Yes.
- La: when you say: "This city is really surprising"....
- Ro: Yes, but...
- La: What is surprising in a Jewish city? Is it because....
- Ro: Oh.....
- La: Is it because there were only Jews there?
- Ro: No. It is because... I expected to see a real ghetto, and there was... what I was shown was... a ghetto, alright, but it was like an open city, still, the life appeared open.
- La: Except that it was not possible to go out from it.
- Ro: True, but the circulation within was not at all a circulation... where we were shown a single barbed wire, a single..... you understand?
- La: a single...
- Ro: a single watchtower, there were no watchtowers, there were no..... After all I had spent quite some time walking within fences, and always with watchtowers, and always machine guns aimed at the people who I was visiting.
- La: Yes, yes, I understand.
- Ro: So, there, this was not the case at all.
- La: [unclear] camps of prisoners.
- Ro: This was not so at all.



- La: Did you get the impression of a big city?
- Ro: No, no. I had the impression of a small city. If I try to put myself into the frame of what I experienced then, a small city.
- La: And the....the parody, it is fabulous.
- Ro: Yes.
- La: The bank, you know? You talk about that, by the way. You say that it issued money. There was a currency which was the currency of Theresienstadt, the couronne of Theresienstadt, which was valid only within the ghetto.
- Ro: Yes.
- La: And the people had no right to have.... Reichsmark.
- Ro: Certainly. That would have permitted an evasion, I am sure there were no Reichsmark.
- La: That....

#### RO 12

- La: Yes... You write: "The state of dress is generally satisfactory. The people we meet in the street are correctly dressed, with the differences which one normally encounters in a small city between people who are more or less rich. The elegant ones have all silk stockings, hats, scarves, modern handbags. The young people are equally well dressed. You even see the "zazou" style."
- Ro: I don't remember writing this, but I don't deny it.
- La: There were.... elegant people, it's written black on white, they had..... prepared for you and... I want to say: when... when did you know what I just told you in detail? That they had you....
- Ro: I knew it.... oh, after the end of the war.
- La: Yes.
- Ro: I knew it after the end of the war. Even well afterwards. Because... there was, after all, after... after I left the Red Cross, I had to resume my studies, because I was certainly not... what, ... I had not sunk to the level to make being a peddler my profession. I resumed my calling, and, quite frankly, I got totally disinterested in these problems; I had

enough, more than enough of it.

La: More than fed up.

Ro: More than fed up... A little detail which.... perhaps.... and I like very much. I have met again with a secretary which we had in Berlin, an extraordinary person, Ursula Rauch, who married a Lehner, also.... We met again once, we see very, very little of each other, we met once some five, six years ago, I think. We talked about those memories of Berlin, of the bombardments, the horrible fears through which we lived, of the camps, of these reports which she herself typed, and when we separated, she said to me: "I have to confess something to you, Rossel." "So, yes, Ursula, what is it?" "Well, I have the impression that we have been talking about things that were told to us, but which we have not lived through."

See, we had not been able to tell each other lies, neither she nor I, when we separated, she said exactly: I believe that we have that deep in our heart: after living through these things, I think a sane part of our brain has erased them. And today you reread to me the report that I wrote at that time about Theresienstadt. I remember writing it, but of this thing, this visit which you brought back to my memory. But I have to say that... a normal brain... for me, I live without these memories.

La: You live, you have them...

Ro: I have them, I think... because one has to live in a sane fashion, to live one's small life, one's daily and mediocre life. Well, it is erased. Fortunately for me.

La: Why, why are you saying fortunately?

Ro: Because it is not possible to live constantly with the horror. And I think that those rescued from the camps are in the same situation. At one time they had to draw a line under that life, under those things which were outside of the normal, too close to the monstrosity. I think, in order to get on with life it is scarcely possible to... to continue to live without... always thinking of these things. I have children, grandchildren, a daughter of 30 years, a daughter of 28, one of 25, all university graduates. I never talked to them about my concentration camps. The first times that they heard talk about this, because they saw me on French television, or something like it. But overall, this is in our home a

subject....

La: But... I understand this very well, but don't you think....

Ro: but in the past.

La: but don't you think that for.... that for a subject like Theresienstadt, there should have been another way of.... – and I am not blaming you for what you did – this is a question I am asking you, and which I am asking myself..

Ro: Yes.

La: Another way to approach this? Because in the end, when you visited the camps for prisoners of war, at final count, that was not fun to be a prisoner, everybody agrees. But these people there were not in danger, the prisoners. Not in mortal danger at any rate.

Ro: That is right, yes.

La: Yes. But in contrast.... to visit Auschwitz or Theresienstadt, that was something else, that was another universe.

Ro: Yes, sir.

La: That is not the same. And the best proof is, that this did not even depend on the existence or not of barbed wire fences... Would there have been not the need for another type of investigation, actually harder, nastier, more determined? Not taking as valid currency what was said....

Ro: I think so, sir, I think so. You are right. But... you did not... did not live... you understand? You are living today, forty years after a situation.... of which you cannot imagine, even faintly, the impression of the might represented by these police states.

La: Did you hate the Germans?

Ro: I did not like the Germans. I'm ashamed to hate, because this is something which makes me ashamed, and this is against my character. I detest...

La: Yes.

Ro: I detest nobody. But I don't like the Germans, sir, no, I don't like them. It is in my guts and I have never liked the Germans. And, particularly, I was horrified of all regimes of the right....

La: But did you know that this were....

Ro: and of the extreme right.

La: this were liars?

Ro: Oh, yes.

La: That they were master deceivers.

Ro: Well, possibly at the time...

La: ..... extraordinary.

Ro: at the time that I found out later, I was unaware at that time. Certainly, sir. But that they were.... they were people capable of anything, well, that, there was no doubt about it for anyone. For anyone.

La: And... you remember this Eppstein? Physically, what he looked like?

Ro: I... I don't see him. I see an old gentleman, I see... but, no, I would be... no, I don't see him. I can't say that I see him, and that I could describe him to you.

La: But you know what happened... The killed him exactly three months after your visit. There were.... the deportations to Auschwitz restarted, which was the great terror of Theresienstadt and... there was a panic.

Ro: Yes.

La: In the ghetto. And he gave... he gave this speech of which I want to read to you a small excerpt which I translate very approximately, which is:

“Theresienstadt only assures its survival by radically mobilizing itself for work.” He thought that the work would save them. “Don't talk but work. No speculations. We are on a ship which waits to get into port, but which cannot penetrate into the harbor because a barrier of mines prevents it.” This was in September 1944.

Ro: Yes.

La: There were still news about what was going on.

Ro: Yes.

La: outside. “Only the commander of the ship knows the narrow passage which leads toward the harbor. He is not supposed to pay attention to the deceptive lights and the signals given him from the coast. The vessel has to stay where it awaits the orders. You have to have confidence in your commanders who does all that is humanly possible to assure the

security of our existence. Let's start the New Year" – this is the Jewish New Year, in September–

Ro: Yes.

La: "Lets get aboard the New Year seriously and with confidence and with the firm wish to hold out and do our duty."

And two days later they killed him with a bullet to the neck at the "kleine Festung."

Ro: Yes.

La: This is a document....

Ro: Yes, this is an absolutely heartbreaking document...

La: Very.

Ro: Very... But this was.... this was a little like that all the same: try to... the impression one was giving, this was: try to... last, at all costs.

La: Well, yes... but...

Ro: Because.... they sensed quite well... all the same, the Germans were... losing, that started, I think in 44. They had to imagine that the information that they must have had.

La: Certainly.

Ro: Thus... it was necessary to hold out until...

La: Certainly. Yes. Certainly. But... I don't know. It might have been possible to do something else. Do you regret this report? Now?

Ro: .... I cannot see how I could have made any other.

La: and...

Ro: I would sign it again.

La: You would sign it again?

Ro: Oh yes.

La: after knowing all that I have told you?

Ro: Yes, certainly.

La: Oh, knowing that you were totally deceived.....

Ro: Yes. But....

La: and that .... the reality was...

- Ro: ..... was....
- La: The reality was...
- Ro: ..... was...
- La: a hell. And you still explain in this report that you say that it was no paradise, no, but you say.... this is... it is rose colored, your report.
- Ro: Yes. I had to make a report of what I was shown. I have nothing... no, I ... I kept the courage to....
- La: But, this is not a question of courage. But don't you think if you had written another report, the world would have been alerted and that..... that might have...
- Ro: But.... what would I have based it on, my report?
- La: .... help to save....
- Ro: Sir, I did not know anything.
- La: Yes, but why....
- Ro: ..... Obviously, if I had the foresight today, if I had...!! It is easy to be a prophet in hindsight.
- La: That's true.
- Ro: But still at the.... at the moment, I had wanted to....
- La: No, but you could have said: "This does not add up, there is something false in this."

### RO 13

- La: Yes, you say.... Dr. Rossel, that you knew fully well that this was false, because you had been invited. Thus... this appears to say that if you knew that, because you were invited, you did not see anything real? Is that what you mean to say?
- Ro: That's what I meant to say. And we had never been invited to visit a camp for civilian internees.
- La: Yes.
- Ro: .... of deportees, or of Jews. It was sure that.... because we were invited with these Dutch and these Danes, that there was something there which was certainly.... which was not the reality, which had to be false. But that, that was... such evidence that... I said so, the

report....

La: No, but... I am asking: if there was such evidence that.... that you would not see the reality, that you knew in advance, so, why even go there?

Ro: Oh, but sir, if you have orders for a mission and have to be on a certain day, at a certain hour at a certain place, I ask you, if it is up to me to have the possibility to say....

La: No, no, but this is not you.... this is the C.I.C.R.

Ro: !! Oh, that's the International Committee of the Red Cross. But if the Committee – I say that I don't know who made that decision – had the invitation, which it had asked for for a long time, the right to enter once into a camp, and then is told: "You can enter such and such a place," and then would not go, I ask you, what kind of criticism that would have caused at the time, and still today.

La: Yes, yes.

Ro: So... they went to a comedy, because it was known, for... a visit, but this.... this report did not come from the C.I.C.R. The C.I.C.R. did not make an account of it to anybody.

La: This means, you say, by the way, at the beginning of the report... "The whole report is to be considered confidential."

Ro: That is so, because, at the C.I.C.R. there were a number of people, you know? And if it is an enormous organization like that.... an organism of this kind, it was absolutely necessary that something like this.... a report... would not get into the hand of .... typists or of employees, and... that is the reason that the C.I.C.R. did not pass on this report to anybody.

La: There was certainly no publicity.

Ro: There was absolutely no publicity. There was no publicity. Consequently... it is known today that the Germans spend enormous amounts of money to arrange this trick visit. But I don't see how that helped them, because it stayed in the hands of the directors of the C.I.C.R., and did not move.

La: Oh, well, yes, it still helped them. It still helped them to make believe that, in the end, Theresienstadt... was not bad, was not so bad.

Ro: Yes, well, I am questioning if they believed it. What do you think? Because....

La: At any rate, that's what you wrote.

Ro: What I wrote is what I saw. But....

La: The people to whom you sent it had no reason not to believe you.

Ro: But we know, you, sir, we now know indisputably in hindsight that all the governments knew the truth regarding... this problem of extermination of Jews, while the little soldier on the front line, which I was, who was only the soldier sent to the front line, ignored everything. All the while that the governments, be it American, British or even Swiss, knew the truth. So... what was expected of this report, you understand? Because they who had everything under control did nothing. Not even... not even letting us know.

La: Oh yes, that's true...

Ro: That is....

La: you can imagine...

Ro: That is...

La: if the Red Cross had, if the C.I.C.R. had...

Ro: this is the world, isn't it?

La: had taken a.... had violently and publicly protested but this... these are speculations...

Ro: Speculations, and I repeat: there is also this.... this apparent excuse saying: they did not want to compromise the outcome of these.... six million prisoners of war on whom...

La: Who did not risk anything.

Ro: Yes. They did not risk anything, but still, if the Germans blocked the provisioning which were sent weekly, I can guarantee that this would have been awful.

La: Yes.... they would have been.... they would have been less well nourished, that's sure.

Ro: And then, they were no longer checked.... they were no longer checked from a judicial point of view, and they would fall straight into the regime of internees at such a time.

La: Yes.

Ro: As we have seen with Italy, you understand? When Italy changed direction in the camp... well, they transformed their prisoners of war into .... Italian military internees, the enemies, from one day to the next. The people that I had been used to see and whom I visited as prisoners of war, I no longer had the right to talk to them. And the Germans,



could have done as they pleased. They could have....

La: And then, after the war, you have stayed with the C.I.C.R., but now it was the camps of German prisoners that you visited...

Ro: That I visited, which were mainly American. Yes, the Americans are very strict with their prisoners, very, very strict, often stricter than the Germans were with the British and French prisoners and... the French were, themselves, awful. Very simply.

La: And....

Ro: Because they put there the heroes of the last chance, and.... or colonials who wanted to retrieve their.... past....

La: Very true.

Ro: ... Pétainists ..... by gobbling up the Germans, by killing the Germans and more.... the more they saw die, the more they were... patriots. We had prisoner camps, and I think, this should be said, as I stated a while ago. It is just necessary to stop the really fantastic notion that there was in Germany a Hitler clique, good Germans, that is wrong. All Germans were Hitlerites. And... one tries today to make oneself feel not guilty by saying: "there was only an awful scum." That was not possible if all the Germans had not been really for Hitler. Well, after the war we found that the French had German prisoners of war with them, the war is over, it is signed. And we have the same number of deaths per thousand as died at Ravensbrück. At Torr -de-la-Fl che, where I got into the camp, we had the same mortality rate as at Ravensbr ck. I have photos of prisoners of war which I can show, which I have kept because I wanted them, because everybody has always thought that.... there are things of which one does not speak and which one does not dare to say. Well, I still wanted to keep these documents, the photos where... I will show you these photos, you will say to me: "Well, you have seen that... you have seen Ravensbr ck, you have seen Oranienburg; how did they make them die?" Well, no, you only have to look behind. Those who are in the holes and die, as skeletons, and who die of hunger, and who have awful edemas of hunger, are German soldiers. The war is ended. And the guard are the French army. Every country which we call today democratic, which are not simply police states, is capable of producing the same horror as the

Germans have done. You also forget and I believe that .... our people like to forget. They cling to the massacre of the millions of Jews. That was so horrible that one is still stunned, that one can rouse the masses by rigged settings as .... as.... "Holocaust." It is good that people revisit certain horrors, that they refresh certain memories.

La: Why are you saying "rigged?"

Ro: Because it is a movie.

La: Oh, yes.

Ro: Because it is a movie, it is a movie.

La: Oh, yes, yes.

Ro: And in this film exactly, there are, exactly, Hitlerites. It seems that we are shown a type of fringe of Germans.

La: Exactly.

Ro: who are responsible. And for me, this movie is false and gives a bad image of the.... of the situation in Germany at that time. That is why....

La: Yes, yes,

Ro: I say that it is rigged. But..... we forget the millions of Jews.... the millions of .... of... Russians. The millions...

La: Absolutely.

Ro: that the Germans had captured, who they made to die in the same way.

La: Did you deal with Russian prisoners of war?

Ro: Never. Because Russia has refused to sign the conventions.

La: The Geneva conventions.

Ro: Yes. You know, for a Russian, the prisoners did not exist any more. They just had to die. That is the opinion of the Slavs. "You are... you have managed to have yourself taken, you did not fight until death, you die. And you.... you have earned it." But these millions, these millions that were left to die, one.... one gets excited about Malaysia and so on, and one does the same thing... Thailand refuses refugees. But Switzerland has refused... how many Jewish refugees? They presented themselves at the gates, they were chased away because they did not have bank accounts in Switzerland.

- La: That's true, yes.
- Ro: But sir..... but sir.... The shame is there. Because every country is capable to create these types of horror.
- La: Yes, the Swiss have not always been very good in this history.
- Ro: No, sir, nobody was very good.
- La: Oh, yes.
- Ro: And then.... you must believe that the French collaborators were even worse than...
- La: I know.
- Ro: the SD.
- La: awful
- Ro: This is after all a matter of our conscience at which point a man is a wolf towards man.
- La: Yes.
- Ro: And this is not just about what is past, it is what is, what is... what is done today, who is capable today....
- La: Yes.
- Ro: which permits us to say that it is the same thing today.
- La: Yes, this is true. And I get back to the moment at Theresienstadt. This is interesting because, as you are a doctor, one of your greatest astonishments was, that Theresienstadt was overflowing with medicines, as you say. We have had great difficulties to believe this, we had to convince ourselves that this was really the case, etc., well, ....
- Ro: Oh, yes, and they had a number of doctors... incredible, among all these people.
- La: Yes. There were doctors, but they had no medicines.
- Ro: Yes.
- La: There were no medicines. You see? There was a lack of medicaments, terrifying, at Theresienstadt.
- Ro: Yes. I believe it now, I believe...
- La: You were made to believe that....

LANZMAN READS THE SPEECH BY DOCTOR EPPSTEIN

RO 14

La: “Theresienstadt only assures its survival by radical mobilization for work.” He thought that work would save them.

“It is necessary to not talk, but to work. No speculations. We are like a ship which waits to enter into port, but which cannot penetrate the harbor, because a barrier of mines prevents it. Only the commander of the vessel knows the narrow passage which leads into the harbor. He must not pay attention to the rigged light houses and the signals which are sent to him from the coast. The vessel must remain where it is and wait for orders. It is necessary to have confidence in your commander who does what is humanly possible to assure the safety of our existence. Let’s start the New Year with seriousness and confidence and with the firm wish to hold out and do our duty.”

This is a letter from early September 1944, and he was killed .... three days later, at the “Kleine Festung,” a bullet to his neck.

RO 15

La: Yes... I am reading to you, Doctor (Rossel) an excerpt of the speech by Eppstein which he gave to the people of Theresienstadt for the Jewish New Year in September 44, at the beginning of September 1944. And this is which cost him his life, by the way. Here it is, roughly translated:

“Theresienstadt only assures its survival by radical mobilization for work.” He thought that work would save them.

“It is necessary to not talk, but to work. No speculations. We are like a ship which waits to enter into port, but which cannot penetrate the harbor, because a barrier of mines prevents it. Only the commander of the vessel knows the narrow passage which leads into the harbor. He must not pay attention to the rigged light houses and the signals which are sent to him from the coast. The vessel must remain where it is and wait for orders. It is necessary to have confidence in your commander who does what is humanly possible to

assure the safety of our existence. Let's start the New Year with seriousness and confidence and with the firm wish to hold out and do our duty.”

And they killed him.... a few days later, exactly, at the little fortress, “kleine Festung,” with a bullet to his neck.

But this is heartbreaking, as a text.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH MR. ROSSEL.