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**Interview Transcript Title Page**

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<b>Interviewee Surname:</b>	Gilbert
<b>Forename:</b>	Harry
<b>Interviewee Sex:</b>	Male
<b>Interviewee DOB:</b>	3 May 1924
<b>Interviewee POB:</b>	Stargard, Germany

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<b>Name of Interviewer:</b>	Marian Malet
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**REFUGEE VOICES:  
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE****INTERVIEW: 129****NAME: HARRY GILBERT****DATE: 30 AUGUST 2006****LOCATION: EDGWARE, MIDDX****INTERVIEWER: MARIAN MALET****TAPE 1**

MM: This is an interview with Harry Gilbert on 30 August 2006 at 3 Princes Close, Edgware, Middlesex. The interviewer is Marian Malet... May I first ask you to tell us your name at birth and the date and place of your birth?

HG: Yes, Marian. I was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1924, named Horst Giesener, a very German name and in a place called Stargard in Pomerania, which is now part of Poland since the end of the Second World War. And I am one of a family of two. I have an older brother, three years older, who now lives in the United States.

MM: Thank you very much. That's very kind. Now, I wonder whether we could start off by you telling us about your life before you came into exile. About your parents perhaps, about your brother, social background as a family. Could we start off with that perhaps, and then your education.

HG: OK. I know very little about Stargard because my parents and I left Stargard when I was about two years old. What I do know about it from what I have been told is that my father had a family business. He ran a family business which consisted of the supply of feedstuffs to the agricultural community, Stargard being a small market town, where there was a small Jewish community. And there were some other Jewish communities in similar market towns around the area of Northern Germany. The business had prospered until around 1923, '24, and '25, but folded up as a result of conditions in Germany at the time, but also I suppose because of failings of the way the business was being run. So I have been told. And my parents moved to Berlin, first of all into a very affluent area in Western Berlin ...

MM: Which area was that?

HG: Not far from the Grunewald area. A place that I can remember – the first one that I can remember – was Lietzenseeufer, Lietzensee being a little lake, where I remember going skating with my brother during the winter, something that I cherish very much.

And it was surrounded by a very pleasant, nice neighbourhood. And 'Ufer' really is the border of that lake; it's what the word means. And there we lived, and those are my earliest recollections really. And until we had to move right across town to an area called Oberschöneweide, which was really a new suburb of Berlin, built in an area where there was the AEG works, which is quite well-known. And a lot of their workers lived in that area. Not that my father had anything to do with it, because at that time he was doing some ... was a representative for a number of companies, - I can't remember which - and so he travelled, but travelled locally. And things at home were not good and, in fact, deteriorated very much. I think my brother being three years older would know a lot more about it than I did. But, suffice it to say that the marriage foundered and it resulted in my parents separating. My mother with the two of us - my brother Rolf and me - moved to Magdeburg. Magdeburg was the place where my grandparents lived, that's on my mother's side, and I ought to say that I have no recollection at all of my grandparents on my father's side. They may have been alive, just, when I was born, but I have no recollection.

**Tape 1: 5 minutes 53 seconds**

So, we moved to Magdeburg. I was now six years old, where you start school in Germany, six years old. My grandfather was a dentist, and they lived in a very large house, where he had his dental practice and I can recall all the particulars of that practice, including the moulds and so on being made of people's teeth and so on and so forth on the first floor, and second floor, that's where we lived. I went to school and on the first day at school children came and were being presented with what was called the 'Zuckertüte', which was a large, very large, bag filled with all the goodies, sweets and so on. And that was a very nice custom in Germany. And I went to school for a matter of months in the first year. My grandfather unfortunately suffered from, began to suffer from Parkinson's Disease. He was unable to carry on as a dentist, as one would imagine, and it became necessary to close the operation, as it were, and they moved to Berlin, Berlin-Kreuzberg, which is quite well-known these days as an area for young people to congregate and so on and so forth. And in those days it wasn't an area which was particularly well-known for Jewish people to live in. But that's the main reason that we moved there, that's my grandparents and my mother, my brother and I. It was that my uncle, which is the one and only sibling of my mother's, so her brother, had his practice as a G.P. in that area, and that proved to be very handy, and my mother for a time took a post there helping as a practice nurse. And that went on for quite a while. And I started school at an elementary school, the neighbourhood school, and I'm now six years plus, and we're now talking about the year being 1931. That was before the Nazis came to power and things were reasonably pleasant, and we played with the kids in the neighbourhood, and I went to the elementary school. And there's very little to be said about that, except that I do remember that one of the things in the neighbourhood was that there was a tennis court. Actually, Kreuzberg, where we lived, is not far away from Tempelhof aerodrome, and on the way up to the aerodrome there is a tennis court, and one of the things in winter that we did was to go skating. We talked about skating before; it was very popular. And the tennis court would be flooded and would ice over, and there you would go skating, and there would be places where there would be refreshments and

everybody would congregate. You would congregate with your friends after you'd done your homework, and that was quite a thing to remember, and one of the enjoyable things to remember. I suppose financially things were rather tight, because I haven't mentioned my father after the family split up. I saw very little of him. He had, as far as I know, worked as a representative, but I think this was a diminishing thing. I ought to mention really that he was invalided out of the army because he fought in the First World War and very early on during the war he was invalided out and was in receipt of an invalidity pension. And that was his main income, as far as I learned later on, and during most of the time from there onwards until we left Germany. And I ought to just go ahead for a moment that my father was not able to leave Germany and in fact became a victim of the Holocaust. I'll come back to that later on.

### **Tape 1: 11 minutes 1 second**

So, moving on, the first that I really knew of things changing were the appearance of the Nazis in the street, brown shirts, parading. Some of my friends, maybe so-called friends, certainly kids at my class at school, took to wearing armbands, Swastika armbands, and parts of the Nazi uniform, and they became enrolled, or joined, whichever the case may be, of the Hitler Youth. Just moving on to 1933, soon after the takeover by the Nazis, these kids appeared in school, with their armbands and with their uniforms, and were welcomed, as it were, as the months went by. Very soon after the Nazis' takeover of power, the headmaster would read in the assembly from the propaganda organ of the Nazi party as being the introduction of the day's work. We – there were about three of us in class, Jewish children – were made to sit at the back. We were separated during playtime, and these are things that happened progressively. We were then no longer allowed to take part in games, and that coincided with signs appearing in the parks on benches, 'Juden unerwünscht', 'Jews not welcome', as a precursor to saying 'Jews not allowed'. And there were signs outside Jewish shops or on the windows in large white letters, a big 'J' to say Jewish shop, to be followed by two Nazis in their brown uniforms standing outside, a virtual boycott of the Jewish shops. And this was apparent even to youngsters like me. After all I was less than ... I was nine years old, perhaps getting on for ten years old. And things became more difficult to take part, the things that kids would do, because you were precluded, or excluded rather is the word, from places to go to, such as swimming pools, which I felt very much. And since there was no access to a youth organisation, because the Hitler Youth was obviously not for Jewish children, there were Jewish youth organisations. I became a member of what was called the 'Werkleute'. I can't think of a translation for that really that would make sense, but it's a Zionist youth organisation, actually very left, politically very left-orientated. Perhaps I'm jumping ahead. This was a little later, when perhaps I was ... after I changed schools. Maybe that's what I should come to next. Because things were, conditions became so difficult at school, my parents decided - because it was time to change schools anyway at the age of ten - that I should go to a Jewish school. And that was to be the 'Jüdische Mittelschule', the Jewish Middle School, which equates to a grammar school, which was situated in the centre of town, very much the traditional area of Jewish life, where there was the largest synagogue, which is the one that's been rebuilt since and one often sees pictures of it with its golden dome and ...

MM: That is the Oranienburgerstrasse ...

**Tape 1: 15 minutes 51 seconds**

HG: Oranienburgerstrasse indeed, and which we have visited since. But in effect, so the school that I went to was called Grosse Hamburgerstrasse, which was only a few turnings away from the synagogue, and in fact the first two years of our school were absolved in the building right next, adjoining the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue. And the school was divided in the boys' and the girls' school and the boys' school was obviously the one that I visited. Now this is now from age ten onwards, and the curriculum would consist of Jewish studies in addition to normal studies expected in a grammar school, or I suppose it was something in between. It wasn't a Gymnasium, which would perhaps be the highest grade of school prior to University studies, but it was the one below that.

MM: Sorry, may I just butt in and ask? You said you did Jewish studies in addition to the regular curriculum. What did they understand by Jewish studies?

HG: Jewish history, Hebrew, and obviously linked to studies for the forthcoming barmitzvah at synagogue.

MM: Thank you.

HG: But, apart from that, it would take in two foreign languages. You started off with French and then went on to English. Unfortunately for me it would have been better the other way round, because it so happened that it's only the very last year that I was at school that I took English. During that period of time - I'm back now to the home background - I did mention that my mother worked as a practice help. Well, my uncle's practice obviously was shrinking due to the circumstances. People in the professional life saw their life virtually disappearing. That certainly happened for lawyers; it happened for doctors; and it happened for civil servants, who were thrown out immediately. And doctors could as from now - and that was the takeover, the Nazi takeover - onwards only look after Jewish patients. They lost their 'Kassenpraxis', which is the insurance patients, almost immediately, and that meant the larger part of their practice. So, therefore, and since there were not that many Jewish patients in that neighbourhood, as I mentioned before, it meant that my uncle's practice really shrunk. So there was really no point to my mother staying there. So she then took on a post with a Jewish family looking after the family - actually it happened to be where there was one other boy who was my age, very near my age, slightly younger. The marriage had split up, and so it was the man who lived with his son and my mother took over the running of the household there. And I moved into that household. And so I became friendly obviously with the other boy, who was also, his first name was also Horst, both very German names.

**Tape 1: 20 minutes 5 seconds**

MM: Was this man Jewish?

HG: Yes. Yes. And he was running a business, a small pharmaceutical business, running from home, from his flat. And this flat, we were now living in the neighbourhood of West Berlin, near the Kurfürstendamm, near the KaDeWe, and the street was called Neue (that's 'new') Ansbacherstrasse, quite a comfortable large flat, where the - very much typical Berlin flat - where you came in from a central entrance. There would be the front of the house, where the larger flats would be situated, or you could go through to what was called the 'Gartenhaus', where you would enter the flat from the courtyard, as it were, or the gardens from the back. And so we had this flat in the front and you entered it from the side of the main entrance, a few steps, and from there would be a small hall, and off that hall would be what was the office, but also the store room and access for people going to the business, and all the other rooms went off that hall. And first of all, there would be the large 'Berlinzimmer', as it was called, and that would lead to a corridor, and that would run the whole length of the flat, and all the other rooms would lead off that. Very much a typical Berlin flat. So, I had my room there, and my mother had her room there, and that was running, well, while I was still at school. I'm now talking about the time from 1934, 1935 to 1937. I was still at school until the age of fourteen, which was the earliest school leaving age. I worked whenever I could in this business, because I enjoyed doing that, after school, and it was like playing shop almost, you know. And people would come in there and place the orders, and I would get the orders together, and it was a very nice pastime. Came 1938. Things in the meantime had become - when I say things, I really mean conditions for Jewish people in particular with the increasing boycott, with the Nazi laws, and particularly the Nuremberg laws - had become much more difficult. So, in May 1938, there was a knock on the door of the flat. Two men from the Gestapo appeared, and they arrested on the spot Mr. Michaelis, who was the man whose flat it was and whose business it was. They took him away, and before they did they sealed the business completely, affixed seals to it, and it was no longer possible to enter that part of the flat. After he left we heard nothing from him or about him for a matter of, I think it was almost six weeks, when a letter arrived from the Gestapo that Mr. Michaelis had died in Buchenwald concentration camp of a heart attack, or heart failure I think was put, and on sending a certain sum of money we would be able to claim the urn with his ashes. And that was the end of that chapter, as it were. My friend Horst Michaelis went to live with his mother, who had remarried and lived in the Dahlem Grunewald area.

**Tape 1: 24 minutes 59 seconds**

My mother obviously had to leave the place, the whole flat was dissolved, all the stores had been requisitioned, and my mother took on another post. I went into digs. I left school at the age of fourteen. Because the conditions had become so bad, the future became so uncertain. I wanted to earn some money. Financially, our family circumstances had become very difficult. And so through the connections of that business I managed to find a post with another Jewish-owned business, it was still in 1938, where I worked for a few months until that business closed, also a pharmaceutical business. And I then took on, I worked there as a 'Bote'. 'Bote' is somebody that does deliveries, a delivery boy, and I did this with a bicycle, on a bicycle. And I then did a similar job with

a bookstore, a bookstore not far away in Rankestrasse. And that bookstore managed to function almost normally, and the reason for that was that their customers were almost entirely foreign legations situated in the centre of town, in the city, but which meant that my deliveries on bicycle with a large rucksack, you know, one of these things - or even larger - that backpackers use these days, filled with books, would take me on my bicycle through town and negotiating the tramlines - no sort of mean task that - to the city where I would deliver these books. And that would be my task. We are now in 1938. And I should say that I had my bar mitzvah jointly with Horst Michaelis before all this happened. My own bar mitzvah had been delayed by a few months so that we could have a joint bar mitzvah, which would make it easier obviously from my mother's point of view financially, and it was very nice, and we had a joint celebration, and that was of course before this happened naturally. It was, came the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1938, Kristallnacht, the Night of the Broken Glass, the day when the Jewish homes were ransacked, when the synagogues were set alight, when the shops were ransacked - hence the name the Night of the Broken Glass - and when Jewish life almost came to an end. I say almost because it was perhaps a ... what's the word I'm thinking of? ... a milestone which decided what was going to be left of Jewish life in Germany after that. I knew nothing of this when I started off on my journey on my bicycle from my digs to the place of work until I saw my journey took me past the synagogue where only a few months prior to that I had my bar mitzvah. And I could see the smoke billowing from afar, and when I came past it there were flames from the building; there were people all round it, standing around; there was no sign of any fire engine, and people were jeering, and there were prayer books thrown on the ground, and I cycled past this fast as I could, and I came to the place where I worked.

MM: Will you tell me which synagogue that was?

HG: Prinz Regentenstrasse.

MM: Thank you.

HG: And Dr. Swarsensky was the rabbi. And I came to the place of work, which was a scene of utter destruction. The glass was shattered; the books from the displays strewn on the pavement and inside didn't look any better. The place had been looted and practically destroyed. So my last task was in effect to clean up all the mess outside and inside, and it was also the end of my job as a delivery boy.

**Tape 1: 30 minutes 27 seconds**

MM: Can we pause there and I take you back, I have one or two other questions from this period, if I may?

HG: Do, please.

MM: So, you ...



HG: Can I just have a sip of water while you ask this question?

MM: Please do. Yes, yes. So you lived rather comfortably when you lived with your grandfather in Madgeburg ...

HG: Yes.

MM: ... and even before when your parents were still together, you lived reasonably comfortably ...

HG: Except for the last place where we lived, which was a very much smaller flat, but it was nevertheless a reasonably comfortable place, yes.

MM: Did you have maids or ...?

HG: Not any more, no.

MM: No, but in your earlier life.

HG: Not that I can recall, no, I was told we had it in Stargrad but ...

MM: Yes, but of course you left there when you were two, yes. Tell me about what sort of... You said you enjoyed skating later on. What other things did you do as a small boy? Did you have any hobbies? Did you have any ...? What sort of things did you do in your spare time? Did you read a lot? What sort of things ...?

HG: I suppose I read, yes, and I think it was really playing outdoors. We lived in a flat which was on a square, Chamissoplatz, so most of the outdoor life after school tended to revolve round that, as it were. And I tell you what I liked as well. I was collecting stamps, and any spare time that I had I spent on my stamp collection. And it so happened... I mentioned my uncle, the GP, and they lived only a matter of a few minutes walk away, and he was very keen on his stamp collection, which of course bore no relation to the one I had started. His was quite a valuable one, so I spent quite a bit of time with him, seeing what he did, and I suppose that really encouraged me to start my collection.

MM: Do you recall any holidays you took with your family as a boy?

HG: Quite frankly, yes. Yes, I should mention that. I had an uncle, that's the only brother of my grandfather, and he lived in a place called Rositz, near Dresden, and there he was, he ... I don't whether it was his own, or whether he was the director of this, of an estate and a sugar refinery. And that's where we went as youngsters, that's my brother and I, during the holidays. And there I can recall, and this was absolutely great, because we could ride on a 'Kutsche', a, what is it? Horse and cart?

MM: Carriage.

HG: Carriage. And one thing which I often talk about and because Ursula, my wife, likes asparagus: they had an asparagus plantation there and I watched how the asparagus was harvested when at dawn you'd have to get up, just before the asparagus would break the soil because it had to be absolutely white. So, in other words, no lights or no sunshine should have seen that, and then the man would take a very long handle with the long-bladed knife, and he would - it was called 'stechen'. What would you do with a knife when you stab somebody? You stab it into the earth and cut it, something like twelve inches below in order to get each spear of asparagus out. So that was one thing. Now, on my father's side - so this was a relation on my mother's side - on my father's side, and I should have said that, my father was one of three siblings. He had two sisters, one of whom married. So one was called Käthe and she married an Erich Krone, and they lived also in Pomerania, almost on the Polish border, really at the back of beyond. Now we would go there during the school holidays, my brother and I, on our own, which would mean my mother would put us on a train and we would take a train up to Stettin.

**Tape 1: 35 minutes 27 seconds**

Now you realise all of this is now Polish. And at Stettin we would change over onto a sort of, we called it 'Bimmelbahn', because effectively at every little crossing a bell would be rung, and it stopped at, I was going to say at every landpost, but it almost did, and its terminus would be in a place called Bütow. And Bütow was very near the Polish border, and at Bütow station my uncle or somebody working for him would await us with a carriage and a 'Leiterwagen', which was also used for farming implements, and on that, it was a great thing, we would be taken to their house. And they had a house on the central square, a very large house, and at the back of this house - so it was the main street and the central square, it was a little market town - and their business was having skins, skins of animals, which would be dried and then sold, and they also had a pigeon loft. Now that was all at the back of the building. The building would run from this very substantial square to the back of it, where there would be a parallel road, where there would be farm wagons and farm implements, and on the other side of the road would be... it's like a barn, that's right, and in the barn would be these skins hung, and the smell would be absolutely phenomenal [laughter]. And they also kept animals, chickens and geese, and we went there very often at Easter time, which tended to be at the same time as pesach, and they were quite orthodox, whereas we, our family, were not. So we went there and had our seders there, and I know there would always be, part of the ritual would be that the goose would be slaughtered, and we witnessed this, and I didn't like the spectacle at all. But, apart from that, it was something; it was quite a nice part of our life to go there. And we went for about two or three years, I think, during our school life, bearing in mind that my brother was three years older and obviously he left school earlier. And perhaps I should say that he left school also when he was fourteen and took on an apprenticeship - he was born in 1921, so that would have been '35 - an apprenticeship as a carpenter. And he wanted to emigrate to Israel, Palestine I suppose then, on aliyah. And he did in 1936 when he was - couldn't have been, it must have been 1937 - when he was sixteen years old. And you had to be sixteen years old to go on the preparation for aliyah and to be able to go to Palestine. And so he left and he went to the

very famous Ludwig Tieckschule in Ya'agov near Haifa, where he absolved a full apprenticeship as a carpenter and so I'll come back to that perhaps a little later.

MM: On that topic, did you go to synagogue at all in your youth?

HG: Very little. Not very often. Obviously as my bar mitzvah neared obviously we did. But we went on our holy days and during the last six months or so before my bar mitzvah; obviously I went on Shabbat, every Saturday.

**Tape 1: 40 minutes 26 seconds**

MM: Good.

HG: But, of course, bear in mind that I was then at the Jewish school, so that for me, I already learned Hebrew, both biblical and modern Hebrew ...

MM: Ah, modern as well ...

HG: ... and so therefore my preparation for bar mitzvah in synagogue was relatively short because I was well prepared.

MM: I see, yes. So, at this time, we are, I think we are now at the end of 1938, you'd learned French at school, you'd learned some Hebrew through the Jewish studies, you had learned French and then one year of English.

HG: Yes.

MM: That's right, isn't it?

GH: That's right.

MM: That's where we are.

HG: That's right, yes.

MM: Good. Right, can we take up now, I think that we're up to about the beginning of 1939, or after all let's say after Kristallnacht ...

HG: After Kristallnacht. So after Kristallnacht I lived in digs, I did say that, and I went to my grandparents, who lived not far from there, and had my meals there, and really we are now talking about a time when everybody talked about emigration. Emigration, where to go? That was the topic of conversation wherever you were, whether you were with young people or whether you were with relatives, and we did have, of course, more distant relatives, which I haven't mentioned, where one went sort of at weekends for Kaffee and Kuchen in normal times, but to a lesser extent because there were less and less of them. Now I did mention a number of times my uncle, the GP. Well, after he had to give up his

practice...he had one daughter, and I was very close to his daughter, four years younger she was...and they went to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Now as part of our search for a place to go to, a country to go to, first of all I had hoped to follow my brother to Palestine,. But I had to realize that, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, I was too young to go, and time was pressing, we had to get out. Argentina was the next logical place to go to, and my family there tried everything to prepare the ground for us to go. Unfortunately, it was too late. The Argentinian government closed down the avenue for entry into the country, so we had to think again. We then started thinking in terms of some very distant relatives in England that we hadn't seen for... I don't know, I don't know. I couldn't recall them at all; my mother could recall them, and they lived in... All she knew was they lived in England. So she took up contact with them, and through them eventually it was possible to ... They provided or ensured that a permit for her was forthcoming as a domestic. It was called the domestic permit, whereby she would go a Jewish family in Manchester, and by some fluke or other it was possible for her permit to include me. So we are now talking about early 1939. So by the time ... and perhaps I can just go back a little bit ... I mentioned that I was a member of a Zionist youth club, and what we did do, we had regular meetings and that took up my leisure time as it were and because these were very like-minded youngsters. I can recall once when we went to the Harz Mountains, my one and only experience of going camping, and that was a very pleasurable experience. Apart from that, it was very difficult to go anywhere because everything was closed to Jewish people.

**Tape 1: 45 minutes 4 seconds**

There was one place near, much further out of Berlin, where you could still go for outings and swim, a place called Stölpchensee, the one and only place where Jews were still allowed to go, everything else was forbidden. And of course there were no places of entertainment except those that the Jewish community did themselves. So there was something called the Jewish Kulturbund, and that was something where you could go for lectures, where you could go for theatre programmes, where you could go to concerts, and that functioned until, certainly until I left Germany. And it was supervised as to the programmes that they could undertake and the theatre, the place it could be performed, and the composers that could be ... But I know that the first opera that I saw was *The Bartered Bride*, and that was at the Kulturbund in Berlin. It was now 1939. The time of our emigration to England was approaching. We left Berlin on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1939. In the meantime I ought to mention my father again. Now my father lived in a bedsit, and he'd moved several times. I did mention that circumstances were very straitened for him. He lived off his pension, a very small pension, and of which a small part was also earmarked for my brother and myself. We had very little contact with him. When I now talk to my brother he can remember very little contact that he had at all. Now I saw him from time to time in Berlin during the last year or two. It would be on a Sunday. I would visit him, or we would go to some sort of café and meet, and that is really all that I can recall of him. He was ... sorry, I could ... yes

MM: No, I just wanted ... Rolf went to Israel in '36?

HG: In '37.

MM: '37, yes. So he wouldn't be around in Germany after '37, would he?

HG: No. So he was aware obviously of plans for emigration and certainly ... and he had to give his approval for my mother to leave, and that brought its own difficulty because he was not very happy for me to go to Argentina, so that tended to delay the whole process and didn't help either. But he wanted me to go in for an apprenticeship as a 'Schlosser', which is a ...

MM: Locksmith.

GH: Locksmith, that's right, a mechanic, yes, and preferably at the ORT school, which was a Jewish-run school, training school, in Berlin. But of course so did a lot of others want to go there, you see, because that was one of the things to do, try and learn something which one could use in emigration. But we never got round to that. So I had, after school, I had no training whatsoever. But we are only talking about a matter of a few months. So the day came when we left Berlin from Bahnhof Zoo on the way to Holland and the ferry across to England. What I remember of that journey with a lot of other people, not a great deal, but the one thing was when we approached the border, the train was cleared by ... and there were police, I suppose the border police there, a place called [...], and we were searched. First the train was searched, and then we were searched, and it seemed to take an eternity until eventually we were allowed back on the train, until the train moved on and moved across the border. And there were the first signs in Dutch, and everybody cheered; there were tears, and it was great. So that was leaving Germany. So we were given tea and cakes at the first stop and then we came to Hook of Holland, and I don't really remember much about the journey. It would seem to be very uneventful until we came to Liverpool Street, Harwich, Liverpool Street, and there was... I can't even recall what - I mean they were so distantly related - I can't even recall what their relationship is, and he came and met us at Liverpool Street Station. And the journey into Liverpool Street Station at that time through the East End wasn't the most wonderful impression of England that England could provide, but there we are [laughs] ...

MM: To say the least ...

**Tape 1: 51 minutes 15 seconds**

HG: And so he took us on a bus journey through parts of London on top of a bus and to a hotel in Bloomsbury, where we stayed the night, and the next day to Euston Station. And this happened to be Good Friday, and Good Friday in Manchester on arrival was a total non-event, because everything, but everything was closed in those days on Good Friday. And so we tried to find our way across from the station in Manchester to the Jewish Refugee Committee in Manchester, who took charge of us. They took my mother to a family called Livingstone, who lived in Salford, Manchester, where she was going to reside in future, and they took me to a place called Kershaw House, which was a hostel for youngsters, Jewish youngsters, in Manchester. And that's where I resided for the next

few weeks along with a lot of other youngsters my age whilst - I don't know whether I had much of a part in it – trying to find a job for me. Bear in mind that in those days very few avenues were open to emigrants. You could either go into a domestic, as my mother did; you could go into nursing, which wasn't really open to me; you could go into the hotel trade, and that's what I did. So, a job was found for me at the Queens Hotel Manchester as a trainee chef, and trainee chef was something not terribly adventurous as on the vegetable side and cooking vegetables in those days consisted of... You sort of cleaned them; you put them in their pot or in a hotel rather into a steamer with some salt and some carbonate of soda in order to keep them nice and green, and then kept them in there, and that was cooking vegetables. So it was not exactly an expertise. But I did have an advantage that you worked shifts, so the shift would be from ... You would go away for lunch sometimes during the course of the morning and stayed on to do lunch and after everybody, after the last guests had disappeared and everything had been cleared up you'd have a couple of hours which you couldn't do anything with at all, except the Queens Hotel Manchester was located on Piccadilly Manchester. So for those that know Piccadilly know that it's near Piccadilly Station, and what I liked to do is to go and watch the trains at Piccadilly Station. What am I going to do with my two hours, you see? So, that was something. But the other shift would be from early morning to do breakfast, which means getting into work at about six in the morning and prepare breakfast and serve breakfasts and then you'd stay on until after lunch. I resided in a digs with an Austrian Jewish family, who had taken in I think it was only one other youngster. He was a Polish boy from ... and he was a bit older than I was, and I can't remember what he did for a living. But anyway, that's where I lived. I was earning I think fifteen shillings a week. But of course I had my meals whilst I was working at the hotel, and that was supplemented by the Refugee Committee, a few shillings. I can't remember. I think probably five shillings a week, or something like that. So there was not a great deal you could do with that, but that was something. And I could go and see my mother, or we could meet up on a day that she was free and that I had off, as it were. And I don't think I had very much free time, because it's a very unsocial job to work in a hotel kitchen because most of the time you have these late shifts, which means you are there until everybody has gone, which means sort of probably you are lucky if you could catch the last bus back to your digs. And, of course, at that time I was trying to learn more English. But you know you learn English very quickly when you have to, when you've got a job and you're thrown in at the deep end, and I had very little opportunity to speak German anyway with anybody. At the digs maybe, with the landlady. But that was really my life as a trainee cook for a number of months.

MM: Thank you. I think we must stop here to change the tape.

## **TAPE 2**

MM: Tape Two of the interview with Harry Gilbert.

HG: I was talking about my life in England and working at the Queens Hotel in Manchester. There was a change, a very rapid change, a very sudden change which took place because ... I ought to mention that of course in between the war had started. And

whilst I am not speaking about the war itself as such at this stage, I am talking about how it affected me. I was still working at the Queens Hotel Manchester, I was living in the digs until one morning the landlady came to see me very early in the morning, 'Two gentlemen are here to see you'. The two gentlemen right behind her turned out to be from Special Branch and they came to tell me that I should pack my case and come with them. And not that I would know what all this was about, but it turned out to be my first day of internment. I ought to say, to explain, something about internment at this stage. The situation for Jewish refugees coming to England at the onset of war was that they were all called in front of a tribunal. When I say 'all', everybody from the age of sixteen onwards. And they were classified as to whether they were friendly aliens, enemy aliens, or those to be locked up immediately. And not being sixteen at that time, I did not go in front of the tribunal. So, we're now talking about a time when, after the period of the so-called phony war, the Nazis had invaded the Low Countries in France and there was a very rapid advance to the coast. There was Dunkirk, and of course, there were very severe measures which were being taken in anticipation of a possible invasion of Britain. And one of the steps that was being taken was the internment of aliens, those that were classed as enemy aliens. Now there were the unfortunate few that were not classed as anything. So, my luck was to be classed as an enemy alien in the absence of any other classification, and hence I was arrested, I was taken to the local nick, to put it in the vernacular, for one night, and from there to Huyton internment camp, Huyton near Liverpool, which was I believe a holiday camp, which was being rapidly converted into and enlarged into a place where people, internees, could be taken. So, on arrival at Huyton, we were billeted in one of the existing houses. But, as the days and weeks went by, the younger people were cleared out into tents to make room for the older people who were being brought into and billeted into the houses. From there there were regular transfers to the Isle of Man in particular and, although we didn't know it at the time, people also taken on their journey to Canada. I was there for a matter of probably four weeks until July, or was it the end of June? We are talking about 1940, when...and I was in contact with my mother. I could send her letters. I found some of those and noticed that one could write a total of twenty-four lines, because it struck me when I looked at them again now: why was it that those letters finished up down two thirds of the page? And they were of a certain format, but that was all one could write, was allowed to write.

**Tape 2: 5 minutes 4 seconds**

And so one day we were told - or a number of people, which included me - were told to get things together and take our suitcase and off we were marched to...I think it was buses to take us to Liverpool docks. And at Liverpool docks there stood a very shiny, large ship with the name Dunera on it, and this Dunera turned out to be a troop ship which was relatively new. But as we were to find out to our cost, it turned out to be something very different for us. We were taken up a gang plank. At the top of the gang plank and at the bottom there stood armed guards. Everything was taken off us that we carried, the case that we had taken, and we were only allowed to take one small case, and anything else that we had on us was taken off. We were taken immediately below decks and there allocated a space. A space consisted of - if you were lucky - a hammock, and that was, after when we sorted ourselves out, given over to the older people, and the

younger people and everybody else slept on the floor, under tables, benches on the floor, wherever. And that was the last daylight that we saw for a matter of days. And it was also the last we saw of our suitcases and our other belongings, definitely the last, because eventually we were allowed on deck - and I'll come to that in a moment. We were taken past a pile of suitcases like a mountain, and they were open, slashed open, probably with bayonets or whatever, and a few of the belongings strewn around and everything else disappeared. Our life on the Dunera in very cramped conditions with very few places of washrooms and toilets consisted of whatever you could make of it. We were not allowed on deck for the first three or four days I think after the ship sailed. It was in the summer and it was hot, but nothing compared with what we were going to experience later on when we approached the tropics. We were going - and again we wouldn't know that at the time - through the Irish Sea, but we were all fully convinced that we were going to be sent to Canada.

MM: Had you been told that, or ...?

HG: No, but we'd heard while we were still at Huyton that people had gone and been taken to Canada. There hadn't been anyone sent to Australia, or anywhere else except the Isle of Man. And, unfortunately, one of the ships going to Canada had been torpedoed, and those people who'd been saved had been brought back and actually came back into camp. Hence we knew that people had gone to Canada. And, as we were moving out of Liverpool into the open sea, a small convoy was assembled, three or four ships with one warship. And the way you could tell was if you could climb in the toilet up onto somebody else and reach a port hole, and there was a long queue for this, for you had to take your turn for going up to this port hole, and then you could get a glimpse of what was happening outside. There was no other way of knowing that. So, we would know, and of course, you see, rumours would be rife anyway; somebody had seen something else that somebody else hadn't seen and that became a story, you know, that was being told all about. And what was established was that we were moving out and what everybody thought was westwards. Until eventually one noticed - I don't quite know why, but people started talking about we were not going West at all, we were going south. I don't know how they... somehow they'd found out, because we were by then allowed out on deck, twenty minutes a day.

**Tape 2: 10 minutes 12 seconds**

We had to remove our footgear, go barefoot out on deck and run at the double, as it was called, round the deck with machine guns on either side, either end, and soldiers along the decks outside. And whilst that was no hardship for me, but of course there were older people of all ages amongst the internees, and that was our outing once a day. And as we came back we found that the soldiers had been down below deck again searching what was left of our belongings and taking what could be taken, and we were treated as criminals, I would say, and not even as prisoners of war, which would have been better. We learned later on that in the front of the ship there was a small contingent of German seamen, who were treated much better than the Jewish refugees who made up the bulk of the complement, and there were three thousand of us on board of this ship which was



intended as a troop ship to take a thousand troops. Conditions became awful. As the ship turned further south we were not aware of what had been happening, that in effect the convoy had dispersed, that the ship was on its own, that in effect there was an attempt at torpedoing the ship at one stage. These were things that we found out later. And that it was only due to the fact that there were these belongings floating around out of these open suitcases which were seen by the German U-Boot, who thought here were German prisoners of war being taken somewhere, that the ship wasn't torpedoed. That was the story as it went, but of course we were not aware of any of this. The thing that we were aware of was that food became more scarce, that we were getting thirsty because it was getting very hot and the short period on deck was really a relief from the very terrible conditions as we were approaching the tropics. And the first stop was Freetown, the Gold Coast I think it was called in those days. I think it's now ...

MM: Ghana I think it is.

HG: I think it's Ghana, right. And again, our only communication or glimpse of it was peeping through the port hole when we got the opportunity, because the ship was anchored way out of the port in order to take on supplies. And this went on as far as ... the next stop was Cape Town. And in Cape Town, by then there were a couple of casualties, people who were taken seriously ill and were taken off the ship. And as a result of that reports began to filter out as to what was happening on this ship called Dunera, the conditions and the treatment that was being meted out by the guard company under the command of a Captain Macdonald of the Pioneer Corps. And somebody managed to smuggle out a note of some kind, also probably through the people who were taken, and people also came out on small boats to the ship. Anyway, suffice it to say that from there onwards the boat proceeded further. We had few ... I think that we only had what we actually stood up in. There was no possibility of changing even your underwear except to try and sort of ... I mean, mind, you didn't wear very much because it was so hot, and of course it was, particularly in the Irish Sea, it had been very stormy and the conditions with sea sickness were absolutely awful, and the state of the decks was by then abysmal. It was better from that point of view as the ship proceeded further south because the weather was better even [though] the conditions were worse. And you couldn't shave - for me, as a fifteen, sixteen-year-old, it wasn't too bad - so the hygiene was awful. And the older people of course felt it particularly badly.

### **Tape 2: 15 minutes 50 seconds**

And it was only as the ship approached Perth in Australia that we were told all of a sudden to spruce up. Shaving gear was handed out, just a few between I don't know how many of us, and we were all ordered to shave and to make sure that we looked a bit better. And that was the next stop, and from there onwards it was Sydney. And Sydney was the end of the journey, and there was reception committee out on the dockside consisting of the Australian army, or a contingent of it, and nobody else, because what was expected by them was a boatload of prisoners of war. They had no idea that these were all Jewish refugees. Therefore, the disembarkation took some time before the Australians, I suppose, became aware of what they were facing and what was expected of

them and what arrangements they were to make. We left the ship eventually and were taken onto trains, and those trains were taking us for a journey of thirty-six hours due – let me see I get this right – due west of Sydney into the interior. And after we left Sydney, I mean, there was nothing wrong with the journey, except we didn't see very much after we left Sydney and civilization became very sparse. We were out in the bush, and this railway line ran - a single-track railway line - and eventually finished up at a place called Hay. So all we saw was the outback and kangaroos and that was it. And at Hay was a settlement, I think that's all you could call it, with sheep, a sheep station, and it was on a river called the Murray which is a tributary of the Murrumbidgee, which is one of the few large rivers flowing into the sea in New South Wales. Mind you, that was still New South Wales, because even I think it was something like five hundred miles due west of Sydney, and the end of the line, as I say. And from there we were taken from this little station, if one can call it that. We were taken by lorries to what turned out to be the internment camp and our abode for the next certainly twelve months.

MM: Can I stop there for a moment while I ask a couple of extra questions. First of all, did you stop in Melbourne on the way?

HG: No.

MM: You didn't. You went straight ... the first stop in Perth and then in Sydney.

HG: Perth, and then Sydney.

MM: And the second thing was, were there any Nazis on the Dunera?

HG: Yes, on the ... well, there were seamen, seamen from ships who were ...

MM: Yes, these seamen were POWs, Nazis presumably ...

GH: ... who were interned probably at the outbreak of war when their ships were in British ports ...

MM: I see, right.

HG: So, well, I suppose they were Nazis. Of course, we had no contact with them whatsoever.

MM: No, they were kept in a different area from you.

HG: They were kept quite separately. All we knew is that they had apparently better quarters, as it were, than we had.

MM: Yes, OK.

GH: So, there was no contact at all.

MM: Right. Good, thank you very much. I just wanted to clarify those two points.

**Tape 2: 20 minutes 2 seconds**

HG: So, from there our first acquaintance of this camp was a large area with huts and barbed wire around it, and that was really all one could see of it. And there we were allocated to huts with bunks, and there was an area where you ... for recreation, for playing games and the like. There was a dining room, there was something later on which became a canteen, and something which later on and we ourselves with help from outside converted into a school and lecture rooms. Now, I must say that the Australians, unlike our British captors, as it were, on board Dunera, looked after us well. Of course, we had plenty of food and variety, we cooked our own food, and we had freedom within the camp to do what we wanted to do, and we went out in small working parties as time went on to do jobs for the guard parties, and I should say that the guards were Australian army, the equivalent I suppose of Dad's Army in this country because their serving army was in the Middle East at that time. This was 1940, July, no, we were now eight weeks away from Liverpool, so this would have been September 1940. So what we'd missed, of course, was the Blitz because we left England at the end of the phoney war and before Britain became the object of the Blitz and then the hostilities. So then, as soon as we reached the camp there were letters waiting for us, there were letters from my mother informing me that amongst other things she was hoping that my release papers would be arranged by now. She had taken up the matter through the family that she was with and their local MP in the House of Parliament and later on I saw excerpts from newspaper articles where the boy Horst Giesener was debated in Parliament as to why he should have been kept as a dangerous enemy alien and shipped without informing his mother, shipped all the way to Australia. And, of course, this was all part of what happened at the time. The fact remains that the matter was taken up with the Home Secretary by the M.P. and before we reached Australia it was agreed that release papers should be issued for me. Well, that was fine except there was no way once we'd reached Australia of any release because the last thing the Australians were going to do was to release anybody in Australia. That was made abundantly clear to us on several occasions as time went on, so that the only possibility of obtaining release was to come back to England. And my mother was frantically trying to establish some means for me to be released in Australia. It so happened I had a cousin who lived in Sydney, who had left Berlin and lived in Sydney, and of course she took up contact with me, or I took up contact with her immediately, and she sent parcels. I mean it was no possibility for her to visit because it's much too far to come and I don't think there was any facility for people visiting us at all. But we were well looked after, not least because no sooner were we settled in there arrived a captain from the Pioneer Corps on a recruiting drive amongst the refugees, who had just been ill-treated and mistreated on the Dunera by other contingents of the Pioneer Corps. Some people did say yes, found that as a means of getting back and getting out quickly. But one thing that I would not have was to join the Pioneer Corps after that. So, the other visit that we had was somebody from the Home Office who would then visit us in order to take up what complaints there were after stories of the Dunera and all it meant had filtered through to England. And, by that time, the captain commanding the guard

had been ordered to appear before a court martial to account for his role as commanding the troops ...

**Tape 2: 26 minutes 12 seconds**

MM: Sorry, was this the ...?

HG: The commander on board ship.

MM: On board ship, yes.

HG: Not the captain, but the commander of the guard on board ship. So, somebody was sent out in order to establish what complaints the inmates had and also some means of compensation for losses of belongings and so on and so forth. So, as we were and as life progressed in the camp, it seemed to take a certain cycle because, as I say, we were situated, the camp was situated in the bush, out in the outback, and it was getting rather hot, and the only difference that I found between the seasons... There aren't any seasons in terms of spring and autumn. There is summer and there is what is called winter, and the only way that winter differentiates itself from summer is that the period of stifling heat gets shorter, and what happens is that, after such a period, you would feel the wind bringing sandstorms out of the ... from the desert, from the outback. And life then in the huts becomes very difficult because the sand would penetrate everything, you know, into the bunks and it becomes very unpleasant. And this would go on for quite some time and then eventually you'd see the clouds gathering and then the heavens would open up, and then it becomes rainstorms, and this would last for hours, for days, and the whole place becomes an absolute quagmire. And it's just the difference, as I say, as: how long do the rainstorms last before the next cycle starts and it starts heating up again? But that was sort of the cycle of the weather that we experienced. We made a life for ourselves in the camp. There were some very distinguished people amongst the internees and some very learned people from all different professions. And one of the things that was started was certainly a school for youngsters like me whose education finished at the age of fourteen and beyond that a what was called 'Hochschule', a high school, the equivalent of university.

MM: A university, really, yes?

GH: And eventually we managed to obtain not only writing paper, but also books through the community in Sydney and also through the cooperation from the Australian authorities. Because I started talking about the guards, as I say, they were the age of sort of Dad's Army and friendly enough, but they also liked an easy life. And, as I say, when we were taken out on these working parties to maybe do some maintenance jobs at the guards' houses, then ... and we would be left, and these would be small working parties of maybe half a dozen or a dozen people. We would do whatever chore we were allocated to and the guard would sit there taking his nap and we would go back. So there was the one occasion that I remember very distinctly. So we wanted to go back and he was still fast asleep, nodding there, as we thought, and we couldn't wake the poor man, so we had

to gather him up, and his rifle, and carry him back to the camp. So, the poor man had died of a heart attack or whatever. There were also times when we were allowed out in small parties to go to the river. That was at times when the river had water, that's in winter, to bathe. I mean not that one could swim, but there was some water there. And there was no contact except eye contact with the residents there because the river where this little... I suppose it was no more than a hamlet, a settlement, but there were people living there, and then we were taken back to camp. Things that happened was we were running our own kitchen so since I'd worked at the hotel the obvious thing for me was to work in the kitchen, and I must say I learned an awful lot more from those ex-German and Austrian cooks than I ever learned at the Queens Hotel Manchester. I became quite expert. And from there onwards I graduated with the canteen. So the canteen was started and also manned by internees, but things which were sent from home, parcels, parcels that were sent from the Jewish community in Australia, mainly from Sydney, but also Melbourne and elsewhere, and were things one could buy or ... if one had some money sent out from the community ...

**Tape 2: 32 minutes 5 seconds**

MM: Yes, because there was no money.

HG: No.

MM: You didn't earn any money for all this work you were doing.

HG: No. No. And that was really life, and of course that camp divided itself up between people, the orthodox community, and those who were more secular, and what else?

MM: Which camp were you in? I think there were two, weren't there? Seven and eight, or six and seven.

HG: I can't remember.

MM: Do you remember which one you were in?

GH: No, no.

MM: Weren't there two?

HG: Yes, but I'll come to that.

MM: Oh, sorry.

HG: In Hay there was only one enormous camp. But after – and I can't remember exactly when - I think it must have been just over a year we were transferred to a place called Tatura, near Melbourne, and that consisted of compounds, and those various compounds held people of different types and there was a strict distinction made between various

types of people. But I was only there for a short time. And that is I think where people of course who stayed there much longer, because those people who were not released – I'll come to that in a moment – of course stayed on in Australia. I did mention that certainly during the time that I spent in Australia, eighteen months, there was no facility whatsoever, opportunity to be released in Australia.

MM: Yes, you did.

HG: I believe there was none for any of the others later on until the end of the war, but maybe a few of the special cases that may have been the case. So I wouldn't be dogmatic about that. So, that was the time in Australia. My papers had arrived, my papers for release had arrived and amongst the first who were going back were those who had volunteered for the Pioneer Corps who went back to England.

MM: They went back before you?

HG: Yes. And then there were those who had their release papers and, as I say, mine came through, one of the earliest ones. It was now November when my release came through, on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1941.

MM: Yes.

HG: And between that time and the time that I was actually leaving Australia something else happened, and that was Pearl Harbour.

MM: Of course.

GH: So that by the time we finally ... a ship was available and we were allocated – and this was only a small party of maybe twenty odd people – to go onto this ship, not only had Pearl Harbour happened, but by then those two British war ships had been sunk off the coast of Malaysia, the Repulse and the Prince of Wales. And by then, of course, we knew what was happening; we were getting reports of the progress of the war. We had newspapers in the camp too so we were no longer precluded from all this as we were in England in the camps and of course on the journey on the Dunera, and we knew what was happening. And so some people who were due to be released thought: well, maybe it was safer to stay. And so back they went to camp from the transit camp. But the day came that we went to the docks and on board of what was a, not a container ship, no, but a freighter used in the trade, in the meat trade, refrigerated meat trade from Australia to England, and hence it could not be heated. But it had a few cabins. It had a few cabins and those cabins were allocated. We were now travelling in style. We were in cabins, [Laughter]

### **Tape 2: 37 minutes 0 second**

free men, and across the Pacific, through the Panama Canal and up on the coast of America. Across the Pacific I had the misfortune to contract chickenpox and so I finished up in the isolation hospital on board ship for something, I suppose, like two weeks of the

journey. But I was out again for the passage through the Panama Canal, and that was quite an adventure, except that I stood there without anything on my head and I think I had to suffer for that afterwards. And the ship stopped again at Curacao to refuel. From there, now this was January, we'd come through the heat of the Panama Canal and we were now sailing up the west coast, sorry east coast of America to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where we arrived in mid-January on a ship that could not be heated but was waiting for ten days in the harbour of Halifax to be part of a convoy going across the Atlantic and was festooned with icicles from bow to stern and it was perishing cold. But there was very little that could be done about it. And so we waited and eventually off we went across the Atlantic in a convoy of I don't know how many ships escorted by war ships. And I'm glad to say that it crossed the Atlantic without any events. And we arrived where I started from, in Liverpool. And back I went to Manchester and was given my official release papers and I went back to the Queens Hotel as well for a short time. So by that time my mother was no longer working with the family there, but she was allowed to take on other jobs, and she was working as a shop assistant in a department store in Manchester. And one or two of her friends had gone to London and they wrote letters enticing her to come, so the decision was made: 'off to London'! So, to London we went and this was 1942 now, in the early part of '42. I also had some relatives who had left Berlin - I don't know when. I'm sure they must have left before us; I'm sure they did. He was a lawyer, and they lived in Canfield Gardens in West Hampstead, an area frequented by a lot of Jewish refugees. I think by that time the period of internment had passed. All those who'd gone to the Isle of Man had probably come back by then, and also those from Canada. So it was a question of finding jobs. So the obvious thing was to go to a hotel. So I went to the Mount Royal at the back of Oxford Street. Unfortunately, I have to admit I only lasted three weeks because I fell out with the head chef and we parted company. I found myself a job for a short period; I think it was only a few months, for a company called Dobrin. They came from Berlin, people who made chocolates. Now, believe it or not, this was in the middle of war, and they still made chocolates - a time when there was already rationing - in a place in Hampstead Garden Suburb, in the Market Place of Hampstead Garden Suburb. I don't why [sic] they managed to do, but, anyway, chocolates were made and sold, and whatever. But whether it was that they had closed down altogether or whether I felt I really ought to do something more worthwhile - I like to think that's what it was - I started a job with a ... doing war work, as it's called, first in Park Royal, a company who were repairing tanks, and from there I went to a company on the Great West Road making aircraft parts. And this is now, we're talking about 1942, 1943 and early 1944. I lived in Hampstead, in digs, with a Jewish family first, with these people, these relatives in Canfield Gardens, and then with a lady, a friend of my mother's who had a small flat and room in Goldhurst Terrace in West Hampstead, same area. And that's an area a lot of emigrants lived in. I joined a club, if you'd like to call it that, called the Free German Youth. Now those were young people, similar situation, similar age, partly social. But, what I soon discovered, it had a political axe to grind as well, very much linked to left-wing, German, partly Jewish, partly non-Jewish emigrants and eventually thinking in terms of at the end of the war being able to go back to Germany and help in reconstruction. That was the political aspect of it. And it had the social element of dances and I was in the choir, not that I can sing at all, but somehow, and where I spent a lot of my time over the years until a further development. It became

possible for the first time for Jewish emigrants from Germany and Austria to join the army, not the Pioneer Corps, but the fighting units, and I volunteered. I wanted to go into the tanks, but for whatever reason I wasn't accepted, so I joined the Suffolk Regiment. A good reason for that, because I thought it was nearest to London, and I'd be able to come back to London for leaves, on leave. So the Suffolk Regiment it was and I got sent up to Maryhill Barracks in Glasgow to do ... [Laughs]

MM: Very far away from London ... [Laughs]

**Tape 2: 45 minutes 35 seconds**

HG: ... to do my initial training. But from there eventually I came to the headquarters of the Suffolk Regiment at Bury St. Edmunds, and from there I did manage to get back to London now and again, [laughter] including one time...It wasn't easy to get back, or it was easy to get back to London because you always managed to hitch a lift, getting back at the end of the weekend was quite another matter. So you had to get a train to Cambridge and from there on a branch line to Bury St. Edmunds and that wasn't always a good thing, or you didn't get back in time when your leave expired, so how do you get back into barracks? You climb over the back somewhere. So, and I remember the time when I got caught on the wire, and that was the end of my trousers, and I was up on a charge, so it was a week of what was called spud-bashing, peeling potatoes. [laughter] Anyway, that's part of the army. From there it was training in Norfolk near Cromer, for assault, beach assault, for a matter of a couple of weeks, and back again to Bury St. Edmunds, and ready for draft to overseas. The regiment had two battalions. Now, we're talking about after D-Day, before I finished my training. One battalion was in Burma, and the other battalion had gone across to France. So I did manage to see the adjutant and he was fully aware of my background and he said he could not guarantee anything. I said I'd joined the army in order to fight the Nazis, and he said he'd do his utmost, but he couldn't guarantee. So there were two occasions when I was fitted out with tropical kit and stood on the parade ground where the lorries were there, and the names were called out for the draft to Burma, and each time my name was called out 'Stand over there', and I stood there and waited until the lorries had gone. And the third time it was my turn to be sent to Southampton for embarkation. And embarkation to Ostend, which by then had been liberated, and from there to Louvain (Leuven) for a week or two in barracks, and from there to Venlo, which was then the front line on the Maas. And Venlo it was for a period throughout the winter of '44, '45 in very difficult conditions, purely not because we did any fighting because the Germans were across on the other side of the Maas and the front line didn't move, but you were dug in, in trenches, in territory in which it was very difficult to dig in at all because it was water-logged. But in winter it was cold and miserable, but anyway... And nothing happened, except now and then you could go into the Dutch side of the town and visit families, Dutch families, and I became quite friendly with a Dutch girl there in Venlo. And then off we went further north in preparation for the Rhine crossing, and more training with assault training and, eventually, we had a leave in between for a few days in Holland in ... no by then, no, not Brussels. Brussels wasn't liberated by then, that was later ... and training for the Rhine crossing. And it was



then early 1945, I think it was already after the Arnhem affair and the debacle and the Battle of the Bulge in the ... what's the forest in ...?

**Tape 2: 51 minutes 2 seconds**

MM: Oh, yes, begins with A, doesn't it?

HG: Luxemburg

MM: A, Ardennes.

HG: The Ardennes, yes. Thank you. So, we were destined to take part in the Rhine crossing in these armoured vehicles which came up to waist high, and then across the Rhine, which of course was near Nijmegen. It was fairly wide and under fire from the German side, but one survived and ... But I did leave out something, because I knew there was something in between we had. There was the fighting first in what was called the Reichswald and around Cleve, Cleve, and that was very intense, and I think that was perhaps the fighting I got caught up in which was very hard and there were great losses when the Germans were still fighting, very hard, and it was there, from there, that we were sent on leave. I should also say at an earlier stage I was a member of a Suffolk regiment, but of course being sent over to Ostend, we were sent over as reinforcements and the reinforcements were required by the Royal Scots. So I became a Royal Scot from there onwards, not with its kilt, but with all the other type of uniform from there onwards, and my army life I stayed a Royal Scot. So, after the Rhine crossing and the fighting on the other side, things became easier because the Germans were then in full flight and it was then a question of trying to keep up with them more than anything else. And by then of course it was well-known that I spoke German. I ought to say something else. When I enlisted in the army, everybody gets a pay book, a soldier's pay book. Now I had a name of Horst Giesener, and it couldn't be more Germanic than that.

MM: Indeed.

HG: So, I said 'I would like to change my name. So I changed my name. I thought, what was it going to be? I thought I'd keep the initials of H.G. and I became, I'd heard of Gilbert and Sullivan, so Harry Gilbert would do fine. So my pay book was sent off to register the change of name and in due course it came back with Horst Giesener neatly crossed through and Harry Gilbert put over the top of it. So I thought, well, that won't do at all.

MM: No.

HG: So ... but you know, this is the army for you. So, anyway, they put it right. So it reminded me when I ... talking about using my German language.

MM: Yes.

GH: We conquered, or whatever it was, a fire engine in a place soon after crossing the Rhine in the first place we came to. And, together with three other Tommies, I was sent - and by that time I had one stripe - I was sent in order to requisition billets further on in territory which hadn't been visited by the army as yet. And on the way we found German soldiers ready to throw their arms away, their rifles away, and wanting to know where they could go as prisoners. So all we could do was send them in the right direction where we came from. And we went further on and then to a place to where we thought the army would catch up on foot or on lorries to where we'd got to with our fire engine, and there we prepared, which really meant turfing people out of their houses in order to find billets for the army. And that happened on several days because by then the advance was very fast.

**Tape 2: 55 minutes 50 seconds**

And that went on, and this was now March, April 1945. There was only one obstacle, and that was the Elbe, the river Elbe. And the river Elbe we had to cross, again. And on the other side there was the, what was called the 'Volkssturm'. Those were older men past military age and youngsters, boys given a modicum of training in order to fight the Allied troops. But they were fanatics, and they did. And so we crossed the Elbe again in those amphibious vehicles called ducks and up a steep bank on the other side. And the only time that I got anywhere near being hit was when - I discovered afterwards - when I undid my pack. Amongst the rations you had some soup in there in self-heating tins, and that soup was all over the rest of it, and I was hit by a piece of shrapnel, which luckily hit that soup tin. So, anyway, for me the end of the war was approaching and we moved on very quickly from there onwards, and the particular unit that I was with eventually found themselves in a village between Hamburg and Lübeck in northern Germany and that was when we were told, you know, things were coming to an end, fighting was coming to an end, and that's where we got stuck for a while as the occupiers. And from there we were transferred to various other places, first to an area which was subsequently taken over by the Russians, which we had to cede to the Russian army, and from there to a place near Hanover called Celle, from there to Lüneburg, and from there to further up north. I'll stop there for a moment with the place called Celle. It was now August, or thereabouts, 1945, and I approached the commanding officer with a request for leave to go to Berlin. By then, and it was really the first time, one had become aware of the Holocaust ...

MM: I think we have to stop this tape now.

HG: OK.

MM: Thank you.

**TAPE 3**

HG: Yes, I'd just started talking about the Holocaust. I think it was in the nature of things that, unless as a soldier one came across something directly, one did not have any idea of the impact of the Holocaust, or certainly not the extent of it. Now I do recall there was only one instance that during this headlong rush across Germany we came across a camp.

It turned out to be a camp of Russian prisoners of war. We came to it, and the sight that greeted us was unbelievable. These were living skeletons, and these people really – and, of course, there were real skeletons there as well – and these people, whilst we had no means of talking to them, we could only gather the sort of thing that had happened to them. And the difficulty was, of course, to stop them from running out and from there on to the countryside and causing havoc. But we never really had any opportunity to do very much about it, but had to leave it to the troops that followed because we were front line and had to move on. So, I was saying that I asked my commanding officer, who was very approachable, explaining to him at the same time my background and that I would like the opportunity to see whether I could find any trace of my family. So he said: ‘Leave it with me, and you come and see me again tomorrow’, and the next day he had ready for me a piece of paper, which turned out an instruction to the unit stationed in Berlin or one of them. I had a jeep and a driver to take me, and two weeks in which to do what I could. And off we went along the Autobahn to Berlin. The object of the exercise, as I said, was to try and trace my father and any of my near relatives. So far as my father is concerned, I am not sure whether by then – I think I did – already have information through the Search International Search Commission that he had been taken to Theresienstadt in October 1942 on a transport for older people. And nothing further was known about him. My two aunts, that’s his two sisters, all I knew, I knew their last addresses, and the last address for one of them turned out to be one where Jewish people were gathered together like a mini-ghetto before transportation. And the house had been bombed out, so there was nothing further to be found out. The other one was standing, the other place was standing. I located the concierge, and she told me that me aunt had lived there with a gentleman whom I also knew in a flat until some time in 1942 and she was out walking out with her yellow star, when the Gestapo arrived and took him. And when she came back she was warned that’s what happened, and she didn’t go back in the flat, but she went to the same place and that was it. None of the other people, that’s relatives of mine, could I find out anything at all. So, from that point of view that was really the end of the object that I had other than that it acquainted me with the way Berlin looked then compared to what it looked when I last saw it, and that whole area had been totally reduced to rubble. Yet there were others which were standing and areas that I knew well and could still recognize, some of the outlying areas that I could find, and, believe it or not, the Opera was functioning and it was in the what was to become the Eastern sector. But, of course, at that time there was no absolute frontier, as it were, between the two halves and, so far as the occupying powers were concerned, it was possible to move quite freely. So whilst I was in the Russian sector, and there were Russian personnel sitting in the audience, so was I, and it was really, I mean, civilians weren’t allowed to go, so this was mainly for the benefit of the occupying powers.

**Tape 3: 6 minutes 30 seconds**

What else can I say about that? Not a great deal. I returned to where I was stationed in Celle, I was soon transferred to Lüneberg, from there to the headquarters of the British army on the Rhine for a spell at Bad Oynhausen, that’s O-Y-N, at the interpreters’ pool to be trained as a – it was only a question of a couple of weeks – as an interpreter. I was then first of all stationed with the Military Police, of all places, in Itzehoe, Itzehoe and

Neumünster, up in northern Germany, not far from the Danish border. In Itzehoe I met someone who became a pal of mine, Jack Solomon, who was there with a unit of artillery with the Army Educational Corps, and it was extraordinary how little education those boys in the army really had when they came out and it's sort of elementary education that he dished out, or handed out, to them. It was also there where I conducted my first wedding as an interpreter. By then the restrictions on fraternization absolutely forbidding any dealings with German civilians had been lifted and one of these guys in the artillery unit was being married to a German girl and I had to do the translation of the service in front of the notary public. That was there. From there, in Neumünster was the Military Police and that was very much concerned with any relations between the occupying forces and the German population. From there I went to what I really wanted to do, and that was war crimes investigation. I joined up with an officer as a small unit. By that time, I had been made a sergeant. And what we did was to take up any reports either by people who had been affected as victims, or people to whose attention it had come as what you might call by-standers, or people who had an axe to grind - and there were those as well, plenty of them - concerning what could be considered to be war crimes. Now, I would say right away this was not a question of the type of high-Nazis who were taken to the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal. These were small fry, and there were innumerable small fry. Let me just give you one example that on our travels right across northern and north-western Germany we were warned of a place in the Harz mountains where there was a company of road maintenance and road building company employing a number of people who had been sent to the Eastern front and who became involved in war crimes. And partly because they bragged about it that it had come to our notice and partly because people had been made aware of it and said "there are those people". What transpired as a result of taking statements, and that was my preoccupation, interrogation and taking statements from people who were either witnesses or who were accused of war crimes. These people from this building site were drafted out to the Ukraine to employ, or take on - employment is the wrong word - slave labourers to do the road building and road repairs, and part of their preoccupation there, and they were invited by the SS to take part in a little fun, and were told what was going to happen. And it was not something that even at this late stage seemed to bother the men that I was talking to, that he was asked, would he like to take part. It's not a question of orders being given. And they went, and they took the gun, and they shot those people, and it didn't seem to mean anything to them. These were Jews, not people, not Germans. They were people that didn't exist any more for practical purposes. It was like an action of lighting a cigarette. It was that kind of action that kind of war crime, that we would as a little unit become concerned with, and the result of our interrogations would go to the prosecutor for these people to be accused of war crimes.

### **Tape 3: 13 minutes 0 second**

This is just one example. And it is because of that, that although my army service was due to come to an end, I stayed on for another six months because there were too many of these - I would call unfinished business - that I felt I wanted to deal with. I was demobbed in April 1948, long after many others had gone before, and I came back to London and the hard slog of finding a job and doing something with my life. Having left

education at the age of fourteen, what was I going to do with it? I lived again in the digs where I stayed before, took up some contact with somebody else whom I knew out of the army, and now comes the important part, with a girl I got to know in the Free German Youth, Ursula G. And in due course we married. Ursula was doing some working for a company of market researchers, and I was still looking for a job living on the proceeds of my army gratuity and with my demob suit and I did a job at Earls Court in an exhibition as an interpreter and then found a job with a metal finishing company for a few months, and started evening classes. I was there as a stores clerk, evening classes and book keeping. I moved on to another company after having done the book keeping as an accounts clerk, and I was fortunate enough to have a lecturer at the evening institute, which was Marylebone College of Commerce, who would write to the Association of Certified Accountants to see whether I could get an exemption from their preliminary examination, which was the equivalent of the Matriculation, as it was then - nowadays it's the A Levels - which was the entrance qualifications. Nowadays, of course, you've got to be a graduate. And I got it. So I worked by day and learned by night, and I went through the exams, and I can't say that I passed every one with flying colours, but the first one I did when my first son arrived and was bellowing all night and I was sitting there with a towel round my head trying to learn, and not very successfully. Anyway, we then lived in Earl's Court, if I remember, yes. First, our married life started in Belsize Park in two furnished rooms, and then my pal from the army phoned me. He was living in Earl's Court, and he said: 'Harry', he said, 'I'm moving back to Cardiff.' He'd married in the meantime; he'd married a German girl, and he comes from quite an orthodox home, and his parents weren't at all happy about it, and so it took months and months before they would see him. And, anyway, eventually he moved back to Cardiff. And he left two unfurnished rooms, and that made all the difference, and the use of a kitchen and a bathroom, in Earl's Court, on top of a greengrocer's, and that was heaven. So, that's where we moved, and from there to a flat, which was absolute luxury, on a square in South Kensington, where the second one arrived, second son. And I was still doing my studying, and I was still working by day and learning by night until we decided we had a few bob together and maybe we could get a house, and so we moved to Edgware. So we came to Edgware.

**Tape 3: 18 minutes 35 seconds**

MM: When was that?

HG: That was 1954.

MM: Right, to this house, in fact.

HG: Not this one, no. No, we couldn't afford that.

MM: Too big a leap.

HG: Too big a leap. No, we found another smaller one and, interestingly, we could only afford it because we could let two rooms at the top to a couple who were both working on

the buses. And that was very useful. So they paid us a bit of rent and they also did some baby-sitting, very useful indeed. And we were both playing bridge. We didn't know anybody in Edgware, so we put an advert in the paper, 'Young couple looking for likewise in order to play bridge'. And we had some answers, including one couple whom we still play bridge with after so many years. And, in the meantime, my brother lived in Israel. He had stayed on the kibbutz learning to be a carpenter, and then subsequently moved to Tel Aviv, and married, and married a girl who came out of Auschwitz. And she does not and will not ever talk about it. And her children often ask us whether we can persuade her, but no, she won't. And, in the meantime, they've gone to the States and they live in a place called [...]. But that's his story and, coming back to ours, to mine, yes, to ours: I finally qualified as an accountant in 1957, and moved up in the company that I was with, the company who build furnaces, where I associated with the steel industry as such, and also built furnaces for the glass industry. I became the Company Secretary and their financial accountant, and became involved in travelling to India in order to start a branch there, and to South Africa, and then moved to an offshoot of theirs, who were south of London, I've forgotten, in ...

MM: Basingstoke?

HG: No. No, Richmond is where I worked first and ... Chessington.

MM: Chessington, where the Zoo is.

HG: So I was always involved in travelling from Edgware, a long way. That was part of my problems as ... And then ...

MM: Please may I ask, why did you come to Edgware. The original idea to come to Edgware. What made you come? I think you were in South Kensington before?

HG: Yes, I don't really know. I think we must have known somebody. But I don't think it was even Edgware. We were looking in Finchley ...

MM: I see.

HG: ... and we found a place which we dearly loved, but it was just too much. I think the difference was something like £200, we just couldn't squeeze that out.

MM: You may have realized that it was a little cheaper if you went a little further out, I don't know. I mean, maybe ...

GH: Yes, so we started looking here and we could find that place, which we could just about afford then. And then to come here was four years later. By then I was, of course, more established, my income had grown, and so on. And I will also say that we both benefited a little from restitution monies from Germany, which helped towards the deposit on a house, and later on a pension. So I then moved. I had an offer from a very distant relative of Ursula's to join his company - he'd asked me before but I wasn't ready

for it then – in East London as their financial director, and that’s what I did for about another ... up to 1980. So, we’re talking in terms of years, so that was from 1970 to 1980, yes, about ten years. I had roughly three jobs: the first one with the steel furnace company, the second one this one which is a firm of steel stockholders, and then finally one nearer home in Colindale, who were importers of equipment from Italy for the motor industry as their financial director.

**Tape 3: 24 minutes 28 seconds**

MM: Right. How did you get on? You were both refugees. How did you get on making contact with English people when you were moving around these places and then coming here to Edgware?

HG: I don’t think it was any difficulty in the sense either through working or through synagogue, although I will say we’ve joined the synagogue, which is – or was then – very largely made up of refugees from Germany, the one in Belsize Square.

MM: That’s right.

HG: After that, and that was very much later, of course, we joined the U3A, University of the Third Age, where I became treasurer of the University after my retirement. The B’nai B’rith Unity Lodge, Shlomo Awath Unity Lodge, which we joined very soon after its foundation, and of which we are both very active members. All English Jewish with very few exceptions. No, there are one or two refugees there as well including their present president. Contact with English people beyond that? People that we play bridge with. We joined the Harrow Bridge Circle and got to know quite a few, and these were all English, non-Jewish people.

MM: And I suppose perhaps through your children, school and all those ... when you have children, that’s another channel, isn’t it?

HG: Of course, of course. Yes, yes, of course, Ursula through taking the kids to school, their friends and of course her friends also. Ursula’s friends, through her work and later on through her studies, because she studied to take a degree at Hatfield.

MM: Did you ... I’m just thinking also about language, did you always speak in English with Ursula?

HG: Yes, I think almost entirely, I would say. Funny that you should ask that because as you get older your mother tongue does tend to enter into conversation a bit more, so there are a few things, expressions that have come to mind for which you can’t find the English equivalent. But I think, generally speaking, the answer is yes, we did. Now, I should also say that through the synagogue, which hosted the Anne Frank exhibition in this country – I think the first time that it came over from Holland and the Anne Frank Foundation was founded here – we became involved as acting as guides, and have done so ever since for the last fifteen years, whenever the exhibition was anywhere near London. And most

recently the second time at St. Paul's Cathedral. But you know, at various places, it might have been at schools, it might have been very often at churches, at St. Alban's Cathedral was one of the more successful ones, at the R.A.F. Museum at Hendon, at the Central Hall, I remember, when we shook hands with David Blunkett, when he was Education Minister and came to witness what we were doing and how the children were being taken right through the exhibition, and he listened to us talking to the group of children, and then as I say through the U3A, University of the Third Age, and we then talked to schools at various times, particularly at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, and of course since the Holocaust Memorial Day was instituted. So we took part in the first one at Central Hall and activities associated with it. The most recent one would have been Belsize Park Synagogue and which invited schools in the area of Camden and was so surprised by the response they had that they extended the sessions by two days in which we were asked to talk to the children and which filled the synagogue, and that was quite satisfying.

MM: Indeed, indeed.

HG: And we both feel that this is something, activities that we want to do ...

MM: I'm sure.

HG: It is something which we find very important and useful.

MM: Absolutely. Yes.

**Tape 3: 30 minutes 23 seconds**

HG: We've been back to Berlin, once in order to ... on a visit - no, I'm mistaken - once when Ursula was invited as guest by the city as an ex-Berliner, and the second time when I went to a reunion of my school.

MM: Oh yes, oh, goodness me.

HG: Of the Jewish school.

MM: Jüdische Mittelschule?

HG: Mittelschule, which was quite an emotional affair ...

MM: It must have been.

HG: ... and it was, to go back to this school which was quite interesting in the sense that it was badly damaged during the war, and we went there during... Well I saw it when I was in Berlin during my visit in 1945, and it was, well, you could see it was a ruin. It was then some attempt was made to carry out some repairs. But then, the last time that we were there, and that would have been in, for this reunion, not the last time, the last but



one time, this reunion, it had been reopened as a Gymnasium by the Jewish community. And that was of course after the wall came down and the two halves had been unified, because the school is in what used to be the eastern half, and it was interesting in the sense that I found my way through Berlin very easily. Most of the people going along there were quite happy for me to lead them there from the place where the reception was to the school, and it was quite uncanny, because the school had been repaired and reconstituted exactly as it was before, and it looked just the way it was when I last walked out of there ...

MM: Very strange.

HG: ... with the exception of the statue of Moses Mendelssohn, which stood in the forecourt, and that was no longer there. Instead of which, there was a plaque of him there. And right next to it there is also a little cemetery with a statue to the people who were deported from there, because the school and all the buildings around it became the transit camp for the Jews who were deported from Berlin. And the last time that we went to Berlin was when our younger son, who is now in his early fifties, decided he would like to know more about our roots. He would like to see where we came from; he would like to, and we said: 'OK, Stephen, we'll take you'. And we went to Berlin with him and showed him where we came from.

MM: So these must have been all very emotional visits obviously.

HG: Yes.

MM: But you wanted to go.

HG: Oh yes.

MM: There was no hesitation.

HG: No.

MM: You, of course, had been straight after the war, which was, you know ... Talking about your son leads me to the fact that you have two sons, don't you?

HG: That's right.

MM: And they, I suppose, grew up as little English boys obviously.

HG: Oh yes. They were born in the 1950's and, although my mother, who lived of course in England and at that time worked...I'm not too sure what she did. I think she stayed with a ... no, she worked, she did a job in Hampstead ... But anyway, she took an interest in talking German to them, which we thought was a good idea and we wanted her to, except that she forever from German went back into English, and the boys weren't really interested. I'm talking about when they went to school and of course in the late 1950's,

early 1960's nobody wanted to know anything about German or about their German connection, their German roots, and they certainly didn't want to publicise it. So, that wasn't on, no. And as time went on, Raymond, the older one, has not really expressed much interest, whereas Stephen has, so much so that he also wanted to go to Auschwitz, to which we said, no that is not for us. But he did go on his own, and that was only a matter of a couple of years ago.

**Tape 3: 36 minutes 0 second**

And the grandchildren are becoming interested, and we have six of them. Raymond has three boys and Stephen has got, what am I saying? Raymond has got three girls and Stephen has got three boys.

MM: Yes, well, they would probably be interested in your histories.

HG: I retired in 1989, and since then I did two years as a consultant for the company that I was with. After that, before I retired completely, in the early 1990's, and from there I've been busy with the U3A, with the Lodge, with synagogue, with what else? The grandchildren ...

MM: Sounds quite a programme!

HG: ... playing bridge, walking, travelling, enjoying life generally. Such is my life.

MM: That sounds ... well, when I think back on what you've told us, it sounds a very nice life. Did you feel well integrated into life here, I imagine.

HG: Oh yes.

MM: And assimilated into life in this country.

HG: Yes. I think I would say that our social life, with very few exceptions, centres round the Jewish community, and we have friends who have got a similar background. We have friends through the B'nai B'rith. And it's astonishing in a way that rather late in life we have made some good friends.

MM: Oh, that's rather nice.

HG: It is.

MM: It's not what one expects when one gets older ...

HG: And through playing bridge, through walking groups, and we're generally always ready to 'muck in'. When it comes to whatever may be wanted, we're always there to help.

MM: One's own attitude is very important in these things.

HG: To give something back to the community, that's what I feel.

MM: We spoke about Germany and later visits to Germany, but I didn't actually ask you about your feelings towards, vis-à-vis Germans, because that's also important.

HG: You're right, I have missed that out. You remember I talked about the Free German Youth?

MM: I do.

HG: And it wasn't very long after I joined the Forces and actually found myself fighting the Nazis and saw what they did, that any ideas of ever going back to Germany went out of the window absolutely. So that was something when I broke any contact I had with the Free German Youth. Some of those people who did go back, some to Eastern Germany, some to Western Germany, I did meet up with one or two of them later, and I made quite clear how I felt about it, that I could never see myself living in a country which perpetrated what Nazi Germany did. And so that was the end of it. Having said that, we have met a lot of younger Germans and of course through the Anne Frank exhibition more perhaps than other, who are interested in the sort of things that they have never been told about, something that their grandparents didn't want to broach at all and that their parents tended to brush aside and didn't want to become involved in and which they now feel they want to know more about. And so, you know, when we travel and when we meet Germans, as one does when one travels, particularly when we meet them en masse, a group of Germans, one looks at them and, you know, the age group matters. When I see people our age, the curtain comes down. You just, I don't want to know. Younger people, I have no hesitation in talking to them. Something else perhaps I missed out: whilst in Itzehoe I came into contact with somebody who – an Hungarian Jew – who'd survived and who was very busy in the film industry and who had started something again immediately in that place, who with the help of the occupying authorities, had started, opened up a cinema, and it became my job to ensure that house by house, street by street, every German in that place was brought to that cinema and was made to look at films about Belsen and see what they all said they never knew anything about.

**Tape 3: 41 minutes 42 seconds**

MM: And that was the initiative of this Hungarian Jew?

HG: And mine, and mine.

MM: And you, yes. Because in newsreels right after the war something similar was done.

HG: Yes.

MM: Of course. Absolutely essential. So, what is your sense of identity. Can you tell me how you feel?

HG: British [Laughs]

MM: Sorry?

HG: I'm British.

MM: You're British!

HG: When somebody talks, and sometimes it happens, you know, I don't know in what connection, it comes up sometimes, 'well, of course, you were German' ... No, no, no, no, that's ... I don't want to know about that. I said I do not want to consider myself German in any way whatsoever. No, I left it. I was slung out; they didn't want me, and I certainly do not want them ... as a country. Having said that, we've travelled through Germany, and we generally find that we are, that we like in terms of it's a lovely country to travel in. It's got some beautiful places, and the people who grow up there now I've got no quarrel with them, but I don't consider myself one of them. No.

MM: So you consider yourself British, but of course Jewish as well.

HG: Yes.

MM: Those two, are they sort of equal?

HG: Yes, totally intertwined. I can see no conflict whatsoever. I consider myself as very much a supporter of Israel, but a critical supporter of Israel, and we go out of our way not only to donate but to raise funds for hospitals and so on and so forth. But we do also with both hands in the sense that we raise money for charities in this country as well as for Israel, which again comes under the same heading as giving something back to the community in which we live and that in which we have affinity to.

MM: Do you have any message from your life for the people who are going to see this interview?

HG: Yes, and particularly the younger people, because that's particularly, it's for them that it's intended, and it's the message that we have for everyone that we take through the Anne Frank exhibition, that it is very difficult for people who grow up now, what does it mean that six million Jews have died? It's incomprehensible to anyone who lived through that time, certainly to adults who haven't lived through that. How could you expect young people to visualize that, for that to be meaningful? But if we, so long as we are still around, can give young people, and people in general, because we've talked to older people as well, something of our experience, to let them know what it means to have lived through that period and what lessons one can take from that, that it started with pin pricks, that it started with burning books, it started with boycotts, it became a matter of

denunciation, it became a matter of persecution, and it ended up with people being killed, and what was it, racial hatred, wasn't it? We see racial hatred now in many parts of the globe, and we see it in this country. And when we came to talk to youngster there were very often black youngsters there and they could see it of course immediately.

MM: Well, thank you very much indeed, Mr. Gilbert, for this interview.

HG: My pleasure.

**PHOTOS**

This is a picture of my mother, my father and my brother at a resort on the Baltic called Swinemünde. This was before I made an appearance, so it must have been something like early 1920's.

This is a picture of my brother Rolf and myself taken when I was about four years old all got up in the type of clothing that young children were dressed in at the time.

These are my maternal grandparents, that's Rosemarie and Alfred Bendix, living in Magdeburg, and taken, I would think, in the early 1920's.

This is a school photograph. I was about nine, I would say, and you can see on there some of the children already in their Hitler Youth uniform, some in parts of the regalia of such a uniform, with the class teacher.

This is my mother, a picture taken in the early 1940's, when I was in Australia.

And this was my time in the army, and it must have been taken shortly before embarkation to Europe.

This is a family group. My brother and sister-in-law came over from the USA to spend a week with us and take my mother to Bournemouth. And my mother would have been 93. And it was taken in 1990.