

Could you briefly introduce yourself? Your name, date of birth and where you grew up.

My name is Camille Weiler. I was born here in Noertrange on 11/09/1935. I am probably the last person of my generation born here in the village. I have spent my whole life here.

Could you briefly introduce your parents? Their names and occupation.

My father's name was Theodore Weiler. He was born in 1909 and ran our farm. My mother's name was Thérèse Reis. She was born in 1900. The two of them ran our farm all their lives.

Could you briefly introduce your siblings?

My younger brother Jos Weiler was born in 1940. My sister Lydie or Lydia Weiler was born in 1937. Sadly, she has already passed away. I was born in 1935 and am therefore the oldest of the three children.

Who played a big role in your childhood and everyday life?

That's a very easy question: it was our mother. She was always there and our go-to person. For a long time, she was always with us. Our father had to work and manage the farm. That's why our mother was everything for us.

How old were you when the Wehrmacht marched into Luxembourg and can you yourself still remember that day?

I can still remember that suddenly there were 10-12 beautiful horses tied to a garden fence in the middle of the village. When I came back from school, the horses were gone. I didn't see any soldiers, nothing. You must know that if something happened somewhere, our parents shielded us from it. Always playing it safe.

What specifically changed for you and your family in everyday life as a result of the German occupation?

Firstly, I had to change the "C". I was registered as "Camille" with a C. Then came the order that the C had to be replaced by a K. In the evening, everything had to be blacked out, the stalls, the houses. Each locality had its own mayor. Not like today, where a mayor takes care of a municipality. This was a man who was responsible only for Noertrange. He had to make sure that the village has been blacked out at night because of the planes that flew over during the war. They dropped a lot of bombs over Germany. The village mayor was a very nice man. Someone had to do the job. He did no harm to anyone. He had a superior from Wiltz who rode through the villages on a motorbike in the evening to check whether the local mayors were doing their job properly. The village mayor had another responsibility besides the lighting and the blackout. Because so many planes flew over and sometimes dropped bombs - like down here in the village, between Noertrange and Winseler, where two bombs fell - a fire could have broken out. That's why the village mayor had to make sure that there were always two men keeping watch at night. They had to stay awake to monitor whether a fire broke out somewhere and to be on the spot immediately. Our fire-fighting system was not as perfect back then as it is today.

Did anything change at school?

We only had school in the morning, until 12:30. In the afternoon we had free time.

How was it with the languages?

Not a trace of French. We only learned German and arithmetic.

What about the Hitler Youth? Were you part of it?

That's a very good question. We had a teacher back then who made the Hitler Youth palatable to us. She said it was so great and we would go to summer camps, do sports, etc. She

promised us the moon. I came home and told my mother about it euphorically. I found it strange that she was neither for nor against it. I no longer understood the world. Otherwise she always had a clear opinion. Here she didn't want to take sides. Of course, we were made to like it at school. I was achingly waiting to turn 10 so I could join the Hitler Youth. Thank God it didn't come to that.

What was the food supply like during the war? Did you always have enough to eat?

Yes, because my parents had a farm we ate a lot of potatoes and eggs which we had in abundance. We also had cattle in the stall. Sometimes a pig was slaughtered in excess of what was on the ration coupon. During the war there were ration coupons, i.e. you were only entitled to a certain amount of meat. But because that wasn't enough, my father sometimes had to do things that were - how shall I put it - not quite allowed. I can tell you a story about that. When slaughter took place clandestinely, my sister and I, sometimes my little brother too, were called outside the door. We were then told: "Go to the back and shout!" Otherwise we always had to be quiet, at the table, and everywhere else. And suddenly we were supposed to be shouting outside. It was a long time before we found out why. It was in case the slaughter of the pigs went wrong. They were knocked unconscious beforehand. If they weren't hit in exactly the right place, they screamed. The children's voices outside and the pigs in the stall sounded quite similar. That's why it was hard to tell if there was clandestine slaughter happening. Suddenly the parents would come and call us in. As I said, there were these ration coupons and during regular slaughtering someone would come to check, a veterinarian from Wiltz. The meat was weighed. He then saw how much had been slaughtered. The man checked it strictly, because he had to do his job and was checked himself.

How did you feel about the atmosphere during the German occupation? Did it change over the course of the five years?

It got worse when the Gauleiter introduced conscription from one day to the next. People really became - how shall I put it ... it was bad for the Luxembourgers when their sons suddenly had to go.

So this was a mood full of fear or what exactly?

Fear. The Nazi regime threatened to relocate those who didn't go along with this. Our parents were always afraid in the evening whether we would still wake up at home the next day. The relocations always took place very early in the morning. The people were all still at home then they caught them all together. At 4 or 5 in the morning the Nazis came and relocated whole families. There was always a degree of fear.

Did you experience anything of resistance or collaboration in your everyday life during the war?

I was aware of it without knowing it. Our parents, family members and acquaintances made sure that we children didn't find out anything. Because children and crazy people tell the truth. It would have been easy for the occupier to find out from the children what was going on at home. Either they sent us away when they talked, or they always spoke between the lines so that we didn't understand what was going on.

On 30 August 1942, compulsory military service was introduced in Luxembourg. Do you remember that day?

I remember the man on the motorbike from Wiltz racing through the villages with a loudspeaker. He announced that anyone resisting would be brought before a summary court martial. The farmer had it easy, he went to his field. But the people in the offices were forced

to go to work. Otherwise it would have been the same for them as it was for the teachers in Wiltz.

You have now mentioned the strike in Wiltz. Did you notice anything about it here in the neighbouring village? Were you in Wiltz yourself? How did it go down?

We were not in Wiltz, but we learned very quickly that the workers refused to work, that they did not go to the factory. The teachers didn't teach either. That quickly made the rounds.

We were just talking about forced recruitment. Your father also hid two men, didn't he?

Yes, that's why animals were slaughtered clandestinely as I told you about at the beginning. There was an older family from Wiltz who had no children and therefore got fewer ration coupons. They had to feed the two men in addition. I don't know whether my father had committed himself, but in any case he helped these people out with meat and potatoes to get the two young boys through.

And it was immediately clear to your father that he would help? After all, he was putting himself in danger.

That's right. Let me tell you another story. In this case, too, animals were slaughtered clandestinely and each household got half a pig. One of the recipients was so clever as to rub his mouth and say to the landlord: "Mmm, I got a pig from Mr Weiler from Noertrange!" There were some people sitting there listening. It wasn't long before they came for my father, on a motorbike with a sidecar. He told them a lie, of course, that he needed the money. But that wasn't true, it had been a favour. He got himself a telling off.

Can you tell about when you watched the attack on the Ideal leather factory in Wiltz?

At that time, tanning bark was still being peeled off here. Not like today with power saws. At that time, all the poles were brought down to the village and put on a pile. The neighbour's son and I were playing on these poles, it was nice weather. Suddenly two planes came and there was shooting. We couldn't get down from the pile fast enough and take shelter. That was the story with the factory. They turned around and came back to attack the factory a second time. Up at the crossroads, before you get to the dual carriageway, there was an anti-aircraft gun during the war, which we didn't know. Suddenly the sky was full of planes and the anti-aircraft gun started firing. The two fighters - sportier, smaller planes - suddenly buzzed with a different sound. We thought they had hit them. But they hadn't. The two turned back and took off. And the "flak" fell silent.

How did you experience the liberation in September 1944? Do you remember that day?

We had a clergyman who was very fond of music and singing. When the Americans came, he had a freedom tree put up in the centre of the village. The villagers helped him. It was a tall fir tree with flags and a loudspeaker on top. Luxembourgish songs were played. When the Germans came back later, they were looking for our priest. Fortunately he had disappeared in time, otherwise it would have been too late for him. Of course, the people were euphoric. But just as disappointed when the Germans returned. When the Americans came for the first time, a V1 fell into the wood between Derenbach and Eschweiler while we were asleep. We fell out of bed, the windows shattered, the houses shook. And the wood was reduced to firewood. This V1 must have misfired, because it wasn't meant to explode there in the wood. But it crashed.

Then the Battle of the Bulge began. Where and how did you experience it?

Suddenly we were told that the Germans were coming and had already crossed the border. We quickly loaded up a horse-drawn cart and drove it to Doncols and then on to Tarchamps. "Where are you going?" – "To Bastogne." – "There's no point. The Germans are already

there.” So we stayed a few days in Tarchamps, where the Germans were already looking for young men and horses. My father, my cousin and someone else came to our house at night and hid in a barn outside the village during the day so the Germans wouldn’t find them. At some point they said, “We can’t stay here either.” The Germans had confiscated our horses in Tarchamps, but still allowed us to use the horse cart to go home. Then the horse was unhitched and the soldier took it back to Tarchamps. With that, the horses were gone. Then we were here in the cellar. I can still remember that there was a sign in the village saying “Schade”. I had already seen it from below, but didn’t understand it. And the sign was pointing to our house. I thought nothing of it until I realised that the officer who had taken up residence in our house was called “Schade”. He had set himself up in the living room at the back. In the hallway they had set up blocks in a zig-zag so that the shrapnel wouldn’t hit them. They had secured themselves well. We lay on the potatoes in the cellar during the Rundstedt offensive. The stove was in the washroom, so we lived only in the cellar and the washroom. My father went to the officer in the living room at some point. When he opened the cupboard, he saw his hams lying there. He took one and the officer protested that they were confiscated. He said it was for his children and took it to us in the washroom. Then the offensive really began. The Germans wanted to build a bunker at the entrance to the village behind the second house from the direction of Grummelscheid. It was to be a command post. They had dug a deep hole. Everything was to be covered with fir trees, sheet metal and earth. But what happened? 5-6 grenades flew over the house into the hole at the same time. Everyone standing around there died. Then they said there was treason in Noertrange. They came and threw us all out of the cellar. I remember that we ran across *d’Louh* - where the airfield is nowadays - with a sledge like a flock of sheep across the open field. The Germans had taken bed sheets with a hole cut in them. They used them to camouflage themselves in the deep snow. So the Americans couldn’t see them. We walked there in the clothes - or rather rags - that we were wearing. There was shooting all around us, but we were unharmed. We went to Erpeldange to a cellar. At that time the cattle was still here. My father came up through the valley once a day to feed and water the cattle. One day there were no more cattle. He went to the officer and asked where his cattle were. He replied, “We have taken them to safety.” My father said that the fat bull was still there, however, and asked why they hadn’t taken him along since he couldn’t imagine how two bulls could get along. He shouldn’t have said that. The officer called his squaddies and my father realised he was in trouble. He ran into the stall and then into the cellar. There the small potatoes - they were called pig potatoes because they were used to feed the pigs - were stacked up in a pyramid. He jumped into the pile of potatoes and the potatoes rolled over him until they covered him completely. Among the Germans, however, there were also good people. The squaddies came running and one said, “Oh dear, he’s long gone.” Although he was 5 metres deeper in the potatoes. When he came back to us in Erpeldange, he said he didn’t have to go back because there were no cattle left. They had slaughtered all of them.

Can you tell us a bit about what your life was like in the cellar? Whether here in Noertrange or in Erpeldange. What was your everyday life like?

We prayed. There was nothing to do. From time to time, the squaddies came to our oven to dry off their socks - they weren’t really socks, they were rags. They had sore feet.

What role did faith play during the war?

When we sat in the cellar and the shells made the houses shake, many reached for the rosary. That was people’s only hope. They prayed that it would be over quickly. When the shells hit, my father used to pull the blanket over my head. So that I would sleep and not hear it. But it got so warm under the blanket! And then I would wriggle out again. Next to the barn there was suddenly a German radio car. On the small road to the barn the Germans had put up a big aerial. For a few days it just stood there, until the Germans started transmitting at some point.

It wasn't long before the Americans identified it and fired. We had three big cherry trees behind the house, they looked like clothes racks afterwards. And then the barn, the aerial, the car. When they started to produce electricity and transmit, they were quickly discovered by the Americans. When things really got going in Bastogne, and up here at Schumann, a convoy came with horses, carts, ammunition, all sorts of things. Suddenly the Americans discovered it too. So they brought in heavy artillery. I can tell you, it was bad. And after that... The horses were dragged off the road onto a dirt track so that the traffic could pass. Because we had no more horses, my father and another farmer had free land on the other side of the road. The road was impassable because of the many dead horses. On the other side were broken-down cars and carts. They dragged the horses into this hole. And then they found a soldier among the horses. He was buried next to the hole. These are things you take to your grave.

How did you experience the final liberation of Luxembourg in 1945?

We had the feeling that the first ones who came were jail bait. They were half savages. Clack, clack, clack, they were just shooting away. They were from Sing Sing. The nice thing was that we got chocolate for the first time then. It was this dark chocolate wrapped in wax paper. And chewing gum. We thought that was great.

What memories do you have from the immediate post-war period?

My father rode his bicycle south to find cattle and horses. Who else would have put the land here back in order? We had to make the roof weathertight quickly. There were scuffles because everyone wanted to be first. Nevertheless, there was more unity back then than now. People helped each other.

How would you describe your home after the war? What was Noertrange like?

The central part of the village did not look good. There was one nice house, that of the Winandy family, that hadn't suffered much. But in the village centre and here, the houses were no longer habitable. Workers from the steelworks were sent to us, including carpenters and stonemasons. Some welded metal sheets onto the roofs. The people were happy to have a weathertight roof. We were wild to shoot. We wore these baggy trousers in which we concealed carbines. Then you couldn't bend your knee. One woman said, "If one of them has a stiff knee, you have to watch out. Then something will happen somewhere." We then went shooting. It's hard to believe that nothing ever happened to us. We didn't understand any of it. We took the grenades that were still lying about everywhere. The fir trees had been cut off knee-high so that no cars could get through. Then one of us took the grenade, the other the shellcase. We put them on the tree stump and turned until we had the powder. We made a hole in the bottom edge of the shellcase with a small nail and filled it with powder. We attached small bags of powder to the top and hammered the shellcase shut again. Then we put the sticks into the hole at the bottom and stepped on them with our foot. It was not allowed to burn, only to hiss. Then the grenade spun in a circle until it lifted and turned red. And then: "Bang". In Schleif there was a bridge over the Wiltz river. The Germans called it the "Devil's Bridge". They called it that because every time they repaired it and the horses and wagons could cross again, the Americans shot it to pieces. When the war was over and the Americans were here, we didn't have any school yet. We had a small handcart with which we constantly dragged up tracers from Schleif. The older ones had flare guns and we organised fireworks. We would bring them the ammunition and they would shoot. Suddenly we saw something light up down in the village and went to look. There was barley next to a barn where such a flare had fallen and caught fire. We ran to the owner. I won't tell you his name. "It's on fire!" "Let it burn," he replied. "But it's your place!" and then suddenly we were told to get his wife and children out.

How can one come to terms with having seen so many cruel things in war as a child?

You can't get over it. I can't get the image out of my head of five home-made coffins where our cattle used to stand. Made of wooden planks, because there was nothing else left. And my father's brother, torn apart by grenades, lying in a sack. Of course I looked at it. Head, arm and shoulder in a sack. Those were terrible images. There were two elderly people living in the house opposite. The woman came to us and asked my mother if she had anything, her husband was bleeding to death. He had got a piece of shrapnel in his head. My mother gave her pillows, this and that. But she did not manage to stop the bleeding. The man died and we took his wife in to live with us. My mother sent me to her bedside. "Go upstairs and check on grandma." I was sitting with the granny when suddenly she stopped breathing. I ran to my mother, "Come upstairs, grandma has stopped breathing!" She followed me and told me that the granny was dead. These pictures ... I can still show you today exactly where the bed was where the woman died. You take that to your grave, you can't get it out of your head.

What thoughts go through your mind when you think back to the war from today's perspective?

I feel sorry for the people who are affected. Mothers with their children who cannot help themselves. It is indescribable. Something like this should never have happened again. If you had asked me some time ago, I would not have believed that something like this would happen again in Europe. Mothers and children...