

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

Edouard Kneip. I was born on 02/10/1925 in Kautenbach.

Could you briefly introduce your parents?

My father was called Jean-Pierre Kneip and my mother Catherine Meres. She came from Kiischpelt.

Can you briefly introduce your siblings? How many did you have and how many were you?

I had only one sister, she had the Cardinal Hotel in Spa.

What was your experience of the centenary celebrations in 1939?

At the time, they wrote to everyone in the canton of Wiltz, and my father received the letter as Mayor to the effect that something had to be organised. Plays used to be put on in the big square in Wiltz. It was very well-known. That's where it took place at that time. So what should we do? We had four horses. The postman from Kautenbach - his family name was Hatz - and I and one of our farmhands and someone else from the village sat on these horses with clean clothes. Behind us were about 8 women who had been provided with red, white and blue clothing by the municipality. When we arrived on the square, the people applauded. We were the best thing to see there.

How old were you when the German Wehrmacht invaded Luxembourg on 10 May 1940? Can you remember that day?

Very well. The first troops to enter came on horses. There were about 50 horses. Then they came on motorbikes. The infantry did not come until later.

What changes did the German occupation bring about for you and your family? In terms of school, Hitler Youth?

I was not a member of anything. I didn't follow the call to join the Hitler Youth. At that time in primary school, that didn't cause me any problems. There were six of us in the class, and I was the only one who wasn't in the Hitler Youth. A friend of mine, the son of the stationmaster from Kautenbach, had to join. I didn't.

Did anything change at school during the German occupation?

Not much changed at school, but we no longer had French lessons. Only German lessons. Not a word of French was spoken any more. Not even in the secondary schools.

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

Plenty. We had a big farm. We even gave some to the others. We could afford to because we had a large farmstead. The whole farm came to more than 100 hectares.

Were there also new laws and rules?

We had to give the Hitler salute. I always kept my hands in my trouser pockets on purpose. I didn't raise my hand even once in the Hitler salute. But that was never a problem.

What was the mood like among the people during the German occupation?

In Kautenbach it was pretty good. We only had one family, which was relatively poor, from which one of 4 sons volunteered for labour service. And that was with the TODT company, which worked on the

English Channel. He always worked in Calais, where they tried to hold back the English. He was the one who earned the most money in Kautenbach.

How did people feel at war?

It was only them who stood by the Germans out of conviction. The rest not. Especially the railway workers, they didn't dare, otherwise they would have been sent home. And there were many railwaymen in Kautenbach, because the line to Wiltz and the one to Troisvierges as well as the one to Ettelbruck passed by there.

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

Yes. No one went straight into the army. First came the labour service. In 1942, I joined the labour service.

But you never went, did you?

No, I didn't go anywhere. I was assigned to Rothenburg an der Tauber. I remember that. After the war I took my car and went there once. As long as I didn't have my call-up order, I was always afraid that someone might shoot at me. There were always Germans riding around on motorbikes. You were always a bit afraid. Most of those who were called up for labour service went. Sometimes they had eight days' leave and came home. And during that time they looked for a job at home so they wouldn't have to join the Wehrmacht. They used those 8 days with their parents to leave for Belgium. Most of the people here from the Oesling crossed the border into Belgium at Troisvierges.

How did you react when you got the order to go into labour service?

My uncle, who lived right next door to us, was a chief engineer in the steelworks. He came from Dudelange. He was married to my godmother. He had heart problems. When he had holidays, they always came here to the house over there. He always made sure I had something to eat when I was hiding.

Did you know right away that you were going into hiding, or did you toy with the idea of going after all?

No, I never thought about going. Never.

Can you remember the day you went into hiding?

That was on a Friday. My uncle, the engineer, was there. He told me to go in there. It was a hollow space in one of the upstairs rooms. When I was inside, I had to sit down. I could also lie down, but I couldn't stand upright. The room was about 5 x 5 metres. There was an old bed in it. The hollow space was maybe 70 centimetres. I had to get in there and slide the latch. I couldn't be heard. If they had had a dog, they would have found me. But they didn't have one.

What did you do all day in your hiding place to pass the time?

I would read. My uncle, who provided me with everything, used to bring me books. I would constantly read. My eyes even hurt sometimes. And my uncle went to the eye doctor, even though there was nothing wrong with him, to get pills that were for me.

Who provided you with food?

My uncle's wife. My godmother. And we had a maid in the house. The houses were connected by corridors. In the evening, when everyone was gone, she would lock up one side and come over to me to bring me food. I had a small lamp. I used that to eat, but I couldn't read with it. I had to read during the day.

Your parents were relocated...

because I deserted. Otherwise they wouldn't have been relocated. Those who didn't go into the labour service were relocated.

How did it feel to have your parents relocated because of that?

You can imagine. But what could I do? I couldn't do anything about it. It was a difficult time.

Can you tell us what it was like when your parents were relocated? When they were taken away?

That was very hard for me. They were taken away in a car. They already had their suitcases packed. They knew they were coming. They were taken by military bus to Bonnevoie to the railway station. There they were put in the wagons and taken away. No one was taken directly to Germany. Everyone was loaded onto the train. From Bonnevoie they were then taken to Germany. They never knew where to. My parents were in Dierdorf-Wienau. My father was with a farmer there to help. My father was not a farmer. He couldn't even lead a horse. This man was alone, his wife was dead. He had a horse. My father helped him a little, but I don't know how, I wasn't there. My mother and sister were in another house. In the same place. They helped with the cooking and so on. The district of Dierdorf didn't have a church, so everyone had to go to Wienau to attend the service. They did that every Sunday. My parents gave the priest there my address in case anything happened to them. They said they didn't know where I was. In fact, they couldn't say where I was. The priest was supposed to inform me if anything happened to my parents. He wrote down my name, and when the war was over, I picked up the priest and brought him to Kautenbach. Afterwards I took him home again.

I was very lucky, otherwise I wouldn't still be here. We had a factory where we made bricks for the blast furnaces. My uncle, who looked after me, was the chief engineer in Dudelange. When the director of Arbed died, he was supposed to be his successor. But he didn't want this because he had heart problems. That was my good fortune, because he came to Kautenbach with my godmother. They themselves had only one son, who was a dentist. They didn't have to take care of anyone. And my godmother, my father's sister, was at home. So that was good for me. I was enormously lucky.

At the preliminary interview you had told us that you went to church after leaving your hideout.

That was because of my godmother. My uncle was not a churchgoer. My godmother told me that an altar boy had told her that there was to be a High Mass the next day to give thanks that we were free of the Germans. My uncle said he would give me an old revolver with which I should then attend this church service after it had already begun. He said I should keep the revolver in my pocket and play the organ at the end. I hesitated a little, but I did not like to contradict my uncle. Then when I got to the church, people were already standing on the path in front of the church because there was no more room inside. Everyone patted me on the back because they knew me. When I looked through the keyhole, I saw that the priest was giving the blessing during the Tantum Ergo and was heading towards the altar. So I quickly went inside and immediately up to the gallery. The church was fuller than ever. So I sat down directly at the organ, and as the priest knelt in front at the altar, I played "D'Uelzecht", the national anthem. It was noticeable that only a fraction of those present sang along, everyone else had to cry. Almost everyone in the church was crying. I have never seen anything like

that in my life. It was good that I had a good voice, I could pretty much hold my own. Afterwards I quickly made a run for it because I was afraid there might still be a German somewhere about.

How did you experience the Battle of the Bulge after the first liberation?

Before the offensive, a doctor was operating in the neighbouring house, a pub. This doctor spoke perfect French. I didn't know English, but I knew French. This doctor would dine with me in the evening and I could talk to him well, because we both spoke French. When the Rundstedt offensive came, there was crashing and banging coming from all directions. We went outside and the doctor was standing on the bridge with a big ambulance. When I went up to him, he squeezed my hand and said, "Prenez la poudre d'escampette!" ("Scarper") That's a real French expression. They use it in the South of France. And he pointed towards Nocher. So we went towards Nocher. We went on to Grosbous and then to Luxembourg City. There I stayed with my neighbour Huberty, because his wife was from the city. Our farmhand was there with the horse-drawn carts. He had loaded things from the house.

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

Happy. Overjoyed. When I think back to that beautiful day... I came back by bicycle. I rode through the city, to Redange, via Grosbous and Heiderscheid down towards Dahl and Kautenbach.

Had a lot been destroyed on the way?

Oh yes, very much. Especially in Roullingen. That was just before Bastogne. Everything around Bastogne was smashed to smithereens.

How would you describe your home town after the war? What were the material conditions like there?

After the war, the State did the following: someone sent 30 workers from the steelworks, Arbed, to Kautenbach to help people repair their roofs. After all, everything had been destroyed. This Mr Frising, or something like that, stayed overnight with us. A lot of work was done in Kautenbach. I even have a photo of when the Grand Duchess was here.

How was the solidarity among the people during the reconstruction?

Good. Very good in Kautenbach.

What do you think of when you think back to the War from today's perspective?

It's good that I normally sleep well. If I don't sleep well, the whole thing preys on my mind. I went through too much. I was always lucky. Otherwise I wouldn't still be here. I took too big a risk.