

My name is Eve Milbert. When I got married, I took the name Heusbourg.

When and where were you born?

On 12 April 1933 in Noertrange. We had a small farm with 2 cows, 2 pigs, two dozen chickens. And we had our own vegetable garden. We didn't have to buy vegetables. We always had enough to eat.

When the war started, I had just received my first communion. First came the people from the south of the country. They thought they had experienced terrible things because they could no longer buy food in the shops. There was a couple with us who had taken in a girl of about 20. The girl had been operated on and came straight from the hospital to us in the north. She was still very weak and sick. That was before the offensive.

How do you remember your everyday life back then? What was it like at school?

At first, I was still in the second grade. Then came the war. During the war we had half a day of lessons and the next day we went into the woods to do sports. And we had to join the Hitler Youth. Then we got one of these passes. In the morning, all the young people from the municipality of Brachtenbach had to go to the clubhouse in Niederwampach, whatever the weather. There they showed us films of the war. In them we saw how people were shot or hung. Afterwards we had to do sports again on the hill behind the clubhouse. Until 6 p.m. Then we had to march home again.

What was the situation in the village like during the war? Did you have enough to eat?

We got these ration cards at some point. It said how much of everything we could get. It was strange, we didn't have chocolate before. But now, every month we got two pieces of chocolate.

Was that when the Germans were there?

Yes, during the war.

How should one imagine everyday life in the village? You went to school, you could play?

Yes, we could play. In the evenings, SS officers patrolled the streets with their big dog. You didn't need to lock the doors.

Were you better off than people who did not have a farm?

Yes, those from the south came to us. Before, it was always said that they wouldn't come to the Oesling because it would stink there. Suddenly they were happy to come to us. Apparently, the farmers didn't stink any more. Here they got things to eat.

When they said the Germans were coming back, we went to the house where my mother was born. That was around 1 p.m. My father and the other adults said that if there wasn't a bang that afternoon, there would never be a bang. And at 1 p.m. sharp, the fighter bombers came. Five or six of them, and they started firing. Afterwards, half the village was in ruins. The church had survived the attack. Only the windows were broken. In our street, not even one window was broken. Only the house opposite was destroyed. My future parents-in-law's house too. The family from the house at the entrance to the village, a big farm, which was a

little further up, had come down to the village because they were afraid that their house would be hit first. If only they had stayed there. They didn't even have a window shattered, but down at their family's house, the father was killed. When the Americans came, one of his sons and two other young men from the village found a small ball on a path. A man from the village who was passing by told them to throw it away, that it was a hand grenade. They did not listen to him and played with it. The man later said that he had not even walked half a metre when it went off. They had pulled the safety pin. All three were dead. So this family from the house at the entrance to the village had already lost a son, then the father, and then another son was killed. Then one of the daughters also died. And the youngest daughter had polio. From the last house in our street, the mother had died, so the two daughters, aged 12 and 13 years old, had to carry on the business with their father. A few houses further on lived a family with many children. The mother wanted to take her daughters to live with a family member because it was quieter there. That was before the fighter bombers came. They left and suddenly the woman came back. She did not cry and said that the Lord God had shared with her again. The younger daughter, who was holding the woman's hand, had been literally decapitated. She did not cry. She had another son, he had been lost in the war. One of her daughters had not wanted to go with her and her mother had scolded her for that. I guess it wasn't her turn yet. And the innkeeper and his sister-in-law and the eldest daughter, whose fiancé was also killed in the same place as the little girl who was decapitated, were thrown into the stable by the pressure wave. They were also dead. The innkeeper's wife and the other women who came up were all red from all the blood. And in the bar - my later husband told me - there were hundreds of young men leaning against each other, all dead. They hadn't fallen over because they were standing so close to each other. All this lasted barely an hour. In the house opposite the church, a man and his son were standing at the door of the cow shed. The man was thrown into the lime trees next to the church because of the pressure wave. He was not dead, but he had hit his head badly. You noticed that afterwards. You could talk to him, for example about wine - he came from the Moselle. He remembered everything from the past, but he couldn't remember more recent events.

How many people died in the attack in Brachtenbach at that time?

In one house, the mother, further down three, then another, that's already five. Then in a cellar the son of the house, that's six. Then in another house another four. That makes ten. And in the bar there were three. So thirteen. I think, there were seventeen in total. The bar and the stables were completely destroyed. The house opposite my cousin's was also destroyed. And above the other bar was in ruins as well. And our school. In the stable where we were, the windows were shattered. Prayers were always said in the stable. When the planes came, there were soldiers lying in the long corridor. My mother went to one of them and took his hand. He let her and she told him to pray with us. So that it would end well. He replied that they could not pray with us, they had their own prayer for their comrades if they should be killed. I told my husband this later. He confirmed it. They also had a prayer during the war. He was in the war for three years. He still knew it. It was a beautiful prayer that included everything. They prayed it for their fallen comrades. If they were badly wounded, the others had to take them away. They were not allowed to leave them lying. When the offensive was over, we stayed for another week in the house where my mother was born. That's when the quarrels began among us. One of us was not lying down well, we were in each other's way, etc. Our grandmother stayed at home. She was afraid they would take everything away from her. She was afraid for her beautiful sheets and furniture. But then she became ill. An SS officer was

billeted in a room next to her, and she called him over and told him she was in terrible pain and needed a doctor. The military hospital was in the house next door. A doctor came from there and gave her something for the pain. The SS officer told her he would be there for another week - they were lying all over the house, in the two living rooms, also wounded soldiers. He said he had to leave in a week and after that no more SS officers would come, but others. She should see to it that she was out of the house by then. Otherwise, she wouldn't be so lucky. He meant well for her.

How did you experience the end of the war?

I can't say much about that, I was still young.

Was there no celebration?

After the offensive, when everything was over, the dead were all put on milk carts and taken to a mass grave in the cemetery. The priest was there and told the men who dug the grave - two of my uncles were also there - that when they were done, they should come to him in the sacristy, he had a bottle of schnapps there. They had earned that. And the priest is also said to have told everyone that the Germans warned him that all the inhabitants of Brachtenbach would be shot, and if that didn't suit him, he would be shot too. He told them that he had nothing to lose, that he had no children and was not married. They should shoot him. I think they spared him because he said it so seriously.

How long did it take to rebuild the village?

That took a long time. There was a lot of cheating. There was money because of the Rundstedt offensive. There was this family in Koerich, the wife came from Brachtenbach, they had the bar there. They were on the side of the Germans. When everything was back in order in Luxembourg, her husband was put in prison. Because he had been a collaborator. The boys from Brachtenbach who had fled to Koerich begged in all the houses for food for the woman and her three children.

How do you remember this reconstruction?

Many workers came and cleaned up first. All the rubble had to be removed. Then the houses were rebuilt one by one. Some had to wait longer than others. Then they had to buy new furniture. There was a lot of old furniture you could get for free. My future husband's house was the nicest in the village. They were carpenters and could make the floors, doors, etc. themselves. They had really beautiful doors.

You have to process that. There were also soldiers in our bakehouse. They had filled water into the cow troughs and made fires. My grandmother always said they had to get something to eat. She brought them coffee. One of them was lying next to the trough and the others said she didn't need to give him anything anymore. She said she could see that he was sick, but she still wanted to give him something. When she came closer, she saw that he was already in heaven. And we also had one sitting with us in the kitchen. He was sitting hunched up on a chair with a distorted face. When my grandmother asked what was wrong with him, he said he had a shot to the stomach. It was only a small hole. But he also died later.

What would you say today after all this time?

That something like this must never happen again. That's what everyone would say.

What experience marked you the most?

The worst was the time when the fighter bombers came. We prayed in the stable every day and had resolved to build a chapel opposite the stable if everyone sitting in the stable survived. And that was done. We didn't have a statue of Our Lady, but the priest still had one in the attic. We would dress it up and every time a woman got married, the bride's bouquet was laid by this statue. And when you gave birth to a child, you were blessed by the priest in front of the statue. Today people laugh about that. But that was how it was back then. I still remember that my grandmother went there with me. The priest prayed at the statue of Our Lady and you had to give him something.

Was it still talked about after the war? How was the whole thing dealt with?

There was a celebration at this mass grave. These people were only temporarily buried there. Later, the cemetery was moved. All the graves - not those of the dead of the offensive - were opened and the dead were taken out. And when you're dead, your hair keeps growing, really. They had made beautiful coffins out of plywood in the workshop, and the dead were put into them. Then another mass grave was dug and those who had not fallen but were already in the graves were put on the other side, where my mother was already lying. At that time, when there was still the church service and vespers and in the evening the prayer service, we visited our grave and then the mass grave. They died for us. There was also a beautiful service for them with several priests.