

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

~~I was b~~Born on 22/09/1933. ~~My name is~~ Johny Schmit. ~~I grew up in~~In Friedbusch.

**Can you briefly introduce your parents?**

My father was Néckel from Friedbusch. He was born in 1900. My mother was Héléne Spaus from Fischbach.

**Could you also briefly introduce your siblings?**

My brother was born in 1929 and married to Léonie Nilles from Consthum. My sister married a Mr Colles in Bettembourg.

**How old were you when the German Wehrmacht invaded Luxembourg?**

I went to school in Clervaux, in the first class. I remember well when the Germans came from the north with tanks and horses. They wanted to get into France.

**You went to school at that time. Did anything change at school?**

My teacher back then was Mr Thewes. When I came back, in class 3, there was a German teacher there. Because Mr Thewes didn't want to wear the uniform. So he was transferred to Germany. He should have done the Hitler salute, but he always looked down. He never said "Heil Hitler". That's why he was transferred.

**Has your name been changed?**

Yes, to Johannes. My brother Pierre became Peter. I don't remember whether my sister's name was changed.

**Did you have anything to do with the Hitler Youth?**

No.

**Your brother, though, right?**

Yes, a little.

**Can you tell us what he had to do in the Hitler Youth?**

He had to walk to the castle in Bourscheid, where he was then drilled with the other boys.

**What was the food supply like during the war?**

Very good. We were farmers and could slaughter what we needed. The weighmaster came unannounced and went into the cellar to weigh 2 pigs without looking at the scales. Afterwards they sat down in the living room with a schnapps. The weighmaster always took enough meat with him for his own consumption. One day he said he had already weighed many pigs, but none with 2 tails yet. He did not betray my father. He was a good Luxembourger.

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

No. I had only heard that the Luxembourg boys had to join the Wehrmacht, but that was all.

### **Didn't you have anyone in the family who was affected?**

Yes, my cousin from Ettelbruck. He would have had to go to war too. But he came to Goebelsmuhle by bicycle having hidden his rifle in a stovepipe, which he carried on his bicycle. He came to us afterwards and my father sent him upstairs to a room. But he didn't want to sit inside all the time, and then when the Germans were at the door, he went to the window. So my father said he couldn't stay and sent him to a bunker they built together in a oak coppice. He and two others hid there for a few weeks, but were then betrayed. My father then hid him in a bunker on the "Dosbaach". One of them had injured himself digging and got blood poisoning. What should they do? My father brought him to our house and rode his bicycle to Hosingen to see the doctor, saying that he had to come to us because my sister was ill. When the doctor arrived, the young man showed himself. But the doctor was not too surprised, because he was probably not the first he had to treat. He sent my father to the barn to milk the cow so he could give the injured man the milk to drink. That was supposed to help against blood poisoning. And it did. After 3-4 days he went back to the bunker with him. There he could help with the digging etc. again. When they didn't have any sheet metal for the roof of the bunker, they got some from the railway in Kautenbach. They then put it on top of the bunker so that they had a roof over their heads. In Consthum they found a cooker, which they dismantled together and brought to the bunker through a valley where they had to cut through fences. The next day the farmer was upset that his fences were broken.

**Your father first hid someone at home ~~and~~, then in one bunker and afterwards in another bunker. Can you tell us how he started hiding the young men and how they moved on?**

They came from all directions because word had spread that he would hide deserters.

**How many men were in this bunker at the end?**

17. That was a lot.

**How big was this bunker? You said there were 17 men hidden there.**

It was big enough, but many of them were on patrol ~~everywhere~~ to make sure the Germans didn't get too close. But none ever came. My father had ~~found-chose~~ a good spot. ~~It was by~~ Nearby was a stream and ~~for the meat they had put a galvanised pot in the stream to keep it cool~~ they filled a galvanised pot with meat and put it into the stream to keep it cold.

**How was it possible to feed the 17 men? You needed a lot of food.**

My mother baked three times a week. For that, the oven had to be fired up, and then the bread was pushed in with a baker's peel. When it was ready, my father took it to the men in the bunker. It was the same with the milk. He always took it to them, and once, on the way back, he saw the Germans and hid behind a rock. The Germans walked past him at a distance of half a metre. One of them said, "Now let's get out of here, we'll come back again. Because this is where he has to pass." By that they meant my father. An hour later he came home. My mother didn't know all this. So she was afraid he had been caught by the Gestapo. Another time he came out of the bunker and met two Germans from the Eifel who were standing there with their rifles. He invited them to come home with him to give them dry clothes because they were completely soaked. They did so and stayed with us for a while. During the day they slept in the hayloft. One day they said they would leave now. They gave us our clothes back ~~and~~,

put their uniforms back on. ~~A~~ and they ~~were gone~~ left. ~~But~~ they had ~~nevertheless~~ also tried to ~~go~~ get into a bunker. But my father could not allow ~~that~~ this because you could not know what their ~~attitude~~ ~~was~~ intentions were. ~~If~~ Maybe if he had taken them with him to the bunker, he might have been taken prisoner.

**You yourself once spent a night in the bunker. Why?**

We wanted to go to Bettendorf the next day.

**So you were in danger?**

Yes. I remember that two other boys accompanied us with their revolvers almost as far as Kautenbach. From there we drove to Bettendorf to hide. When things quietened down, I went out into the meadow with my godfather to help him bring in the hay bales.

**Why were you in danger? What had happened?**

The Gestapo wanted to catch us.

**Did they know your father was hiding men?**

Yes, indeed. But everything remained quiet. No more Germans came to the area. The young men always lay around our house at night, because my father and brother always spent the night in the bunker. In the early morning they would come back to milk the cows.

**Why did the Germans know that your father was hiding the men?**

~~That's what was said everywhere~~ Everyone talked about it. Those from the south of the country always said they would go to Friedbusch, nothing would happen to them there. But my father couldn't keep them in the house. So he went with them to the bunker.

**So it was known everywhere that your father was hiding the men?**

Yes, too many people knew.

**And where did the water come from?**

A small stream ran next to the bunker. It was all well thought out. My father had found a good spot. A stream still runs there today.

**What was the situation like with hygiene? Were the men often sick because they couldn't wash often?**

They could wash in the stream after all.

**And your father cut their hair every Sunday?**

He went to the bunker every Sunday to cut their hair. Once he came there and found my cousin alone. He was peeling potatoes. When he asked where the others were, he replied that they had gone to Dirbach to swim. So these idiots went swimming where ~~there were~~ Germans were in the hotel. In the evening, after their clothes had dried in the sun, they returned to the bunker. My father scolded them and said that if it happened again, they wouldn't get anything to eat anymore. So from then on they ~~didn't do it anymore~~ behaved different.

**Was there ever a seriously dangerous situation in the bunker?**

Yes, danger was always lurking. That's why they stood guard around the bunker and even further out. They also had an escape route they could have taken.

**Did the men in the bunker also have weapons with them?**

Yes, all of them. They were in the Wehrmacht before. They also had carbide lamps in the bunker. So someone had to supply carbide too. But I don't know who it was. Without carbide, the lamps wouldn't work. And there was no electricity.

**What else was in the bunker?**

A long table where they ate.

**The bunker was first dug and then covered with sheet metal. Can you describe what it looked like afterwards?**

When you stood on it, you almost couldn't tell that it was a bunker. It was covered with branches, so that in the worst case you would have fallen in with the sheet metal when you stepped on it. We had to go with the cows into the oak coppice. The men from the bunker then came to us and took everything we had in our backpacks.

**So as a child you helped to provide for the men?**

Yes.

**Was it immediately clear to your father that he would help hide the men?**

Yes. My mother's brother had been caught in Troine. He was betrayed by a German who was staying with him while he waited to cross the Belgian border. There, deserters were brought into Belgium every day. He helped with this. This German denounced him. Early one morning they came for him and he was executed with a guillotine. The next day the newspaper reported that his blood had been collected for the wounded soldiers. My mother then demanded my father to stop. But he replied that he wanted to continue what he'd started.

**How did you experience the liberation in September 1944? Your father certainly told the men in the bunker. Can you tell us a little more about that?**

There is not much to tell. One of them walked through the village and took the accordion of a local woman to play on the way to Schlindermanderscheid. Everyone went to Schlindermanderscheid, no one stayed in the bunker. That wasn't necessary any more, they had been liberated.

**They went to church there, didn't they?**

Yes, my mother had cooked lunch and after lunch they all went to Schlindermanderscheid. There was a fair ~~there~~. It is still held there today on 10 September. So they wanted to go to Schlindermanderscheid for the church service. Then two tanks came up the road ~~there~~, and the two men who were standing outside blew their horns to warn, so that their colleagues all who rushed out of the church and to hide behind the church and in the bushes. The tanks continued on to Consthum, Holzthum and then Rodershausen. So they everyone were lucky. If they the tanks had come 10 minutes earlier, we still would have been on our way to Schlindermanderscheid. The 17 men from the bunker, my father, my brother and me. If we

had made it into the bushes in time, at least they wouldn't have been able to shoot at us. But who knows what would have happened.

### **How did you experience the Battle of the Bulge or where were you at that time?**

We heard shots from Hoscheid the day before. And from the direction of Consthum, a bullet flew through the wood and the sheet metal covering in our rearmost room. My mother had just left the room when it rattled inside there was a crash. But we thought nothing of it. The next day we were sent to the church service, and when we arrived at Schlindermanderscheid, the priest met us and sent us home. Down at the cemetery, he said, were ~~all the~~ Germans everywhere. So we ran home and the fighter-bombers flew over our heads but didn't shoot. They probably saw that we were children. Some American tanks came too, they had lost four hand grenades. When we found them, we were standing around these grenades with the neighbouring children. It's unthinkable what could have happened. If one of us had pulled out the safety pin, we would all have been dead. When we got home, my father threw them under a bed. They were still there after the Battle of the Bulge. No German had touched them. But they had all taken the bedsteads with them to their bunkers. They had a good life there. They had slaughtered all our cows. The skins were lying around the door. They had also slaughtered the pigs. My father had tried to hide an iron among the potatoes. Then he followed us in the direction of Kautenbach. That was the only way we could still escape. From Kautenbach we then went to Wiltz.

### **So you and your family fled?**

We had taken all the inhabitants of Friedbusch with us on our horse-drawn wagon. We had loaded up everything we could. In Kautenbach, one of the men from the bunker had prepared something to eat for us. In Wiltz we found shelter with my father's cousin. Some found shelter in the brewery. The next day my father said we had to leave. He was afraid we would be shot if we were caught. The mayor paraded through the streets with a bell, warning people not to leave Wiltz. My father said we would go anyway. And so we did. The german shells and the planes flew over our heads. But we all stayed alive.

### **Your father had hidden something else besides the iron. What was that? Can you tell us this story?**

Yes, a piece of ham. He had wrapped it up and hidden it in the dung heap. Later we needed it badly, because we had nothing to eat.

### **So it was still there when you came back?**

Yes. Nothing had happened to it. When we were home for a few days, my parents looked over to Hoscheid. Before, you couldn't see anything because of the fog. They could see some cattle in Hoscheid. They caught one of the cows and brought it home, where they then slaughtered it so that we had something to eat. There wasn't much at that time.

### **So when Luxembourg was liberated, you went back to Oesling?**

Yes, a few days later. I don't remember who we sent ahead to see if everything was clear. He came back on his bicycle and said everything was quiet. So we came back via Pratz and Heiderscheid. The next day we continued via Goebelsmuhle and Bourscheid, where the

Americans had fortunately erected a wooden bridge. Our horse didn't want to cross this bridge because it made such a frightening noise. My father had to drive it forward with a rod.

**What did your home look like?**

The living room was clean. They had taken the cooker from the kitchen and put it in there. The windows were still intact. But the stove pipes were no longer there. My father found pipes in the forest and fired up the cooker. Since the frost was not completely gone, the enamel cracked.

**Was your house badly damaged?**

Yes. Grenades everywhere. He repaired most of it himself. He then learned that there were workers in Schlindermanderscheid, including plasterers, whom he then asked to plaster a ceiling. When we got to the attic, the two workers were lying on the bed. But he could not say anything. Then they got up and finally started working. We didn't have electricity any more either. The Germans had destroyed ~~everything~~ every electricity pylon as far as Schlindermanderscheid.

**Did people support each other in the reconstruction process?**

Not in our case. My father did everything on his own.

**What thoughts do you have when you think back on the war from today's perspective?**

Very peculiar. It was bad. War is war. If you didn't stand by the Germans, you were in for it. They often sat with us in the living room. It was always very noisy. ~~And then another~~ Even one came with a typewriter. And they would bang their fists on the table. "Tell me the truth or I'll put a bullet through your head." They meant my father. But it never came to that.