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

Alexandre Paul Roth. In Luxembourg, an “Alexandre” is usually called “Alex” or “Lex”, in my case it's “Lex”. Oddly enough, I was never “Lex” at home, but “Ali”. I still don’t know why, but that’s the way it is. In the house in Wiltz where I was born, in June 1933 - at the wrong time when I look at Germany - as the tenth of eleven children of a railwayman and his wife Ketti Wilmes from Heiderscheid. We were six girls and five boys. My parents did not always live in Wiltz. My father came from Diekirch, my mother from Heiderscheid, so linguistically we are close to the Oesling. Which – notoriously - is one of my hobbyhorses. We didn’t speak the Wiltz dialect at home because my father came from Diekirch and my mother from Heiderscheid. No Wiltz dialect is spoken in Heiderscheid either, that’s for sure. My six oldest brothers and sisters did not all live in Wiltz. They did not even spend their first years of school there, but in Pétange, Echternach, Diekirch. Those were usually the stations of a railwayman. My father worked for the railway. If you wanted to work your way up there, you had to allow yourself to be transferred. In that sense, my father was - I wouldn’t say - a “striver” but he had started at the rear of the train in the brakeman’s cab and later worked as a ticket inspector all over the country. I say that to honour my father, who was a very hard-working man. To this day I don’t understand how it worked out with 11 children when nothing had been inherited from either side. There was never any complaining, only sometimes grumbling, which was normal. But the last five children were born in Wiltz. They all went to pre-school in Wiltz. I’ll say it again: I’m deliberately not speaking Wiltz dialect here now. When I do something that is not just for people from Wiltz, I find it normal to speak a standard language. Not a dialect from Vianden, Clervaux, Heinerscheid or Wiltz. Just like I wouldn’t speak the dialect from the Moselle region in Luxembourg City. Or if you practically only deal with people who are from that area. It’s a matter of reason. All my work, agitating and toiling for the language for 50 years, is aimed at understanding. Not stubbornly saying that you have to do this or that, but also sometimes being able to ask why someone says something the way they do. Why is a German or French expression used when we have one ourselves? That is a matter of reason. That’s how you can strangle, not to say destroy, any language, and especially a tiny language like ours. So much for that. In 1939 I entered the first class at school. It was in the building where the strike monument in Wiltz stands today. I had a kind-hearted and capable teacher. Unfortunately, it wasn’t long before our “friends from the other side” visited us on 10 May 1940.

What was your experience of 10 May in Wiltz?

Of course, it’s hard to say what you experienced when you were 6 years old. But I remember something very clearly: In Wiltz there was a nice stairway going up to the post office. I wasn’t often at home at the time and was out and about a lot. I remember exactly sitting on the stairway of the post office in Wiltz - right in the middle between the upper and lower town - and the Germans coming up the street from Kautenbach. I also remember that they then set up camp at the old Gruber brewery and pitched their tents. And that they had bread that tasted particularly good to me, the so-called *Kommissbrot* or army bread. It was slightly sour. I even remember the name of a very nice chap, a German, a simple soldier, who gave me this bread. His name was Albert. Why I remember it so well, I don’t know. But the memory is very clear.

Did anything change in your everyday life afterwards?

Actually, I don’t remember that much changed. But it was very strange that some people who were anything but important suddenly put on airs. Some of them were even empty headed. Suddenly they too appeared in uniforms, which were the yellow uniforms of the SA. That’s

why they were called *Gielemännercher* or yellow men. The others wore black uniforms, they were even worse. That was the SS. In Wiltz we had to deal with the SA. All those who suddenly joined up there were pretty stupid and had been among the bad scholars at school. It was almost only those who thought they could now accomplish something. Because Wiltz was a workers' town, we must not forget that. In Wiltz there were at most 30 civil servants. That was the post office, the taxes, the registration office and the teachers. Wiltz was a workers' town, an industrial town. Wiltz, by the way, was an industrial town before there was industry in the Minette. Wiltz was particularly known for its two leather factories. One was privately owned by the Lambert family, the other was the Ideal leather factory. This was owned by a joint stock company whose big boss was Dr Adler. Dr Adler was not a doctor, but a lawyer. This leather factory was prospering with well over a thousand people working there, from all over the region. That's why Wiltz was a centre where almost the entire Oesling met up. We also had two well-known breweries. That was the Gruber brewery, on the hill where the cinema is today. And the Simon brewery, which still exists today and is known throughout the country for its quality. So Wiltz was already a town at the beginning of the 19th century. Long before anyone spoke of Pétange. Pétange was created by the railway, before that it was a village like any other. What was Esch-sur-Alzette? Esch was not called *Esch-La-Mauvaise* for nothing, compared to Esch-sur-Sûre. Esch-sur-Sûre was more important than Esch-sur-Alzette before the whole Minette story started. And then Differdange, Dudelange, and so forth. Wiltz was officially and legally a town much earlier.

Did nothing else change in your and your family's everyday life?

Of course, something changed. Two of my oldest brothers were in secondary school at the time. There was no secondary school in Wiltz, that all came in the 50s and 60s. There was an upper primary school, but never anything like a secondary school. There were no secondary school teachers living in Wiltz either. When the Germans came, some things changed in the schools. Firstly, we learned a script that was not at all the normal script that was written everywhere here. This angular script, which practically no one can read today, Sütterlin. We learned it in the first grade. Funnily enough, Sütterlin was dropped in the third term of the first grade and the normal handwriting, the so-called Script, was started. Secondly, you normally learned French in the second term of the second grade in Luxembourg primary school. But French was now banned. So my year did not learn its first word of French until grade 6 because the Rundstedt offensive took place subsequently, which we might talk about later. When we returned to Wiltz, the boys' and girls' schools were in ruins. What was good was that from grade 5 onwards, the somewhat better scholars attended a separate school, which they called the *Hauptschule*. Funnily enough, English was also taught there. As a result, I had already learned quite a bit of English when the Americans came in 1944 and as a 10- or 11-year-old boy I could chat with them, as well as I could of course, unlike my sisters or my father, who had not been in secondary school and didn't know any English. What was also interesting was that the neighbours across the street, none of whom knew a word of English, invited the Americans to dinner in the evenings, from September 1944 to December 1944. They were more than happy to do that, of course, because they didn't have to eat out of tin cans anymore. Then they invited me along because "Ali knows English." Ali didn't really know English, but he could communicate with them quite well. And I was always a very good eater too. Not so much anymore. And the good eater became a decent cook. But that's also because my mother was an excellent cook. My mother died in 1943 when she was 48. So, in the middle of the war, my father sat there alone with us. You have to imagine that. One of my sisters had learnt almost everything from my mother. She should have gone to school in Ettelbruck to become a midwife. But she had to stay at home when our mother died. She was 20 years old then. Until she got married 7 years later, she ran the whole household together

with another sister who was never really interested in the house or housework. True, they were all out of secondary school. Wiltz had a very interesting school in the castle, where, first of all, the pupils were taught well and, secondly, housework was also taught. Ironing, sewing, etc. It was called a domestic science school. That was the girls' boarding school in Wiltz, where there were not only girls from Wiltz. They also had so-called external girls. Girls from Mersch, etc. Even from Pétange. It is too often forgotten that Wiltz was very well positioned.

Did the food supply also change during the war?

With the Germans it was like this: it was rationed. That meant that you were entitled to a certain amount of bread, meat, butter, etc. There were these stamps which they would tear off and when they were used up you would no longer get the food in question. You were able to get the food you had stamps for. But that also meant that people hoarded. There were many villages around Wiltz, whether they were part of the canton of Clervaux, Heiderscheid, Eschdorf, Neunhausen, etc. That's where the hoarding took place. Not everyone was well received by every farmer. Of course, there were some who profited from it. They demanded horrendous sums for a dozen eggs. But that's how it was. The bread we had was whole grain bread. Although we did not know it then, it was healthier than white bread. The food in general during war cannot be compared to that after 1945 which got better and better with time . I was at boarding school in Diekirch from 1946. I still can remember what we had to eat there at the beginning, you wouldn't call it food today. When you're hungry, you don't havecravings. Hunger is different to appetite.

So you were hungry during the war?

There were many housewives who had developed cooking into a real art with what little there was. For example, there was this delicious leek sauce. It didn't cost anything because we had leeks in the garden. My sister, who I was talking about earlier, cooked this. And she did the same with potatoes. Potatoes with leeks. We loved that. We were sometimes lucky to get a bit more eggs because the oldest of my sisters was a teacher in Buederscheid. And my oldest brother was a teacher in Liefrange. Obviously, we got a bit of bacon or half a dozen eggs from time to time. The neighbours didn't get anything because they didn't know anyone from the villages. That's how people got by. Some were a bit more creative in the kitchen. For example, there was a spread for bread that is somewhat frowned upon today. I still like the taste very much today - not every day and not always. Nowadays, almost no one knows the name anymore. Or do you know *Jips*?

No.

I figured! In German it's called *Zuckerrübenkraut* (beet syrup). It's such a delicious thing, *Jips* or *Jitz* was also called *Strullaks.* It was cheap. And that which was cheap was good. You could even eat *Jips* without butter because it ran into the bread. There were several things like that. I don't remember anyone complaining in that sense in our house, or being beastly to the neighbours, where the father was a postman and the mother a housewife, and they had one or two girls. They ate "better" than we did, of course. But I can say with a clear conscience that my mother and my sister, who later stayed at home, were talented in the kitchen. We also liked to eat milk soup, which was simply milk with bread and a little salt in it. That was a delicious dinner too.

Your brothers had to join the Hitler Jugend? Your sisters too?

The Germans were Nazis and scumbags and whatever else you might call them. But of course they weren't all totally stupid. They knew exactly how to win the youth over across the border in Germany. Youth organisations were very quickly founded in Germany, but in reality only to prepare them militarily and to give them a taste for discipline. "Our Führer" etc. For the girls there was the BDM, the "*Bund Deutscher Mädels*". This was the counterpart of the Hitler Youth. Even in the Hitler Youth, people who would never have been anyone otherwise, to put it crudely, made themselves at home. Funnily enough, 90 per cent of them came from small or poor families. They suddenly appeared in black trousers and yellow Hitler Jugend shirts. And if they could, they also wore the armband with the swastika. None of us 11 children was in the Hitler Youth or the BDM. But that didn't prevent my brothers from being conscripted when the strike took place. Whether they were in the Hitler Youth or not. There would be material for a whole programme about the Luxembourg Resistance. We - we is saying a lot as I was only a 10-year-old boy - were up to our necks in it as a family. Luckily, no Germans were even aware of it, they didn't have the slightest glimmer. You can make resistance, take someone by the collar in the evening while drunk and say, "You damn German, you scumbag!" And you end up in prison. In my eyes, however, that doesn't make you a resistance fighter, but a stupid drunkard. The real resistance is done behind closed doors. And not by walking around the village with a flag. Take the strike, for example. If you come to Wiltz today, you can hardly miss the national strike monument. Question: Why is it called the national strike monument? 98% of young people today don't know. Nor what the strike was and why there was a strike. Alas. But they weren't taught properly. Or it wasn't told to them clearly: "Imagine ...". But that's what happened. The dead do not lie.

Can you tell us how the strike came about?

The Germans had already tried on 10 October 1941 to get the Luxembourgers to sign in their own hand that they were Germans. In particular, that their language was German. But that did not work. By what means? There were also Luxembourgers in the administrations who were not on the side of the Germans, but whose job was simply that. Municipal officials, state officials. But they also needed something to eat, they had families. And so it leaked what would happen. Then the resistance built up, among young people. These were not 58- or 75-year-olds, they were 17-, 18-, 19-, 20-, 21-year-olds. In particular, pupils and students from the school in Diekirch, the *Normalschule*, which was then called the teacher training college, the LBA in Ettelbruck, the secondary school in the capital and the secondary school in Echternach. The leader, who even then founded an organisation, was Raymond Petit. Raymond Petit was the best friend of my brother Henri, who also did not return home. You can't unscrew the strike itself from the so-called *Volksbefragung*, which was a referendum. You cannot. The Germans realised then that there was nothing they could do, because they cancelled the referendum, knowing what a humiliation it would be. There was this scumbag – there's no other way to put it - here from the Eifel, who was the Gauleiter, Mr Simon. You can imagine how furious they were and tried everything to pull something around, because the Gauleiter wanted to look good in front of the Führer. That's why Simon decided to declare the Luxembourgers *Volksdeutsche*. But even there the information leaked about what he was going to say. Also through officials, Luxembourg officials who were good Luxembourgers. The preparation of the Gauleiter's speech was practically known. Namely, already a few days before. He announced on Sunday that the Luxembourgers were *Volksdeutsche* and now had the honour of serving in the Wehrmacht. Since this had already leaked, the young men, who would be drafted, said: "We have to do something and there is only one possibility. We have no weapons, we cannot defend ourselves with weapons or in any other way. We lay everything down, we go on strike." No one knew the word strike before. Most of them didn't know as much English to know that "to strike" meant to hit. That's what they did, and of

course it was danger. In Echternach, the LPL, the *Lëtzebuerger Patriote-Liga,* then the same LPL in the teacher training college in Ettelbruck, drew up a text that was printed in Brussels. A young teacher, Jos Fellens from Wilwerdange went to Brussels and brought the leaflets back in a trunk. He had not yet arrived home when he began to tremble and got scared. The others came to pick up the leaflets. That was near Troisvierges, where the leaflets were then put on the train, and on the train itself they knew exactly whom they could trust, because there were also scumbags among the railway officials. You had to watch out like hell. My father took the leaflets for Wiltz in Kautenbach, because he was the train driver on the line between Kautenbach and Bastogne at the time. They were hidden in the organ pipes in Wiltz and generally everywhere where no one could find them. Others rolled up the leaflets and put them in the frames of their bicycles and rode through the villages with them. On Sunday the Hitler Youth had organised a sports festival. My brothers said, "We're going to the Hitler Youth festival now so that we have an alibi for the following days." And that's what they did. I could also tell you about Luxembourgers who played the main role there, the Hitler Youth leaders. I could even give you names, but I will refrain from doing so. On Sunday after Vespers in the church in Oberwiltz - the organist was a good patriot - then extracted the leaflets and distributed them. You have to think about that, Sunday Vespers, that was a must, that was sacred, no matter how it is today, that was the way it was then. Two or three teachers who sat at the front with the children during Vespers to keep an eye on them stood in front of the door and the oldest of them, Mr Lommel, said: "If it comes to it, our boys will pay the price. We cannot and must not let that happen. We will take part in the strike." With that they had pronounced their own death warrant. The next day - I can remember exactly, because I was 10 years old after all, so you remember a bit - we came to school in the morning and they sent us home.We didn't understand. We didn't go to school, but we didn't go home either. I remember a Luxembourgish scumbag who had volunteered for the German police, in the green uniform with the funny helmet, coming along: "Where are you going, snotty nose? Aren't you at school?" – "I'm not going to school. The teacher said there was no class!" He called me names and left. I saw the man again much later. He sometimes sat in a place where one had to go for the main inspection of the car. So he still had a job later. We were walking around in front of the school when the workers from the leather factory came up from the cemetery below. They passed the school and the teachers went with them. in a few words, that's how the strike started.

How would you describe the mood when the workers came?

The teachers applauded and went up with the workers. After all, most of them were still their former pupils. What happened next? The strike spread all over the country, but it had started in Wiltz. There were also strikes in Ettelbruck, Echternach, Schifflange, etc. Hans Adam, who operated the siren in the steelworks, was beheaded for it. But the next day they said they would pick up Mr Lommel. It was clear they arrested those who had a function in society. In Wiltz that was clearly the teachers. In Wiltz it was the man who was the head of the municipality office, where you got the food stamps, Mr Müller. Mr Worré, the boss of the only bank in Wiltz at that time. They took them away with their truck. They were never seen again. Two days later red posters were put up. "Summarily shot". Hundreds were arrested and sent to the concentration camps. Their families were relocated to Leubus. My little girlfriend was also sent away. 10 years old! These are real love stories. We never saw these children again. They were all good friends of my siblings. No one even thought of prosecuting my family. Why? "Where were you on Sunday?" "Us? We were at the Hitler Youth sports festival." My eldest brother, who was a teacher in Liefrange at the time, was at the fair in Heiderscheid with a friend. He could even prove that. And my father? He was in Kautenbach, working as a train driver. The strike saved tens of thousands of lives. Why? Because they

didn’t have the courage to conscript one, two, three, four more age groups into the Wehrmacht. Because otherwise they would have taken the classes of 1919, 1918, 1917, 1916 and those after that. They did that later anyway. That would have meant tens of thousands of deaths. This was not a strike for striking’s sake. This strike had a purpose. It’s like Mr Lommel said, “It’s about our children.” He had three sons of that age. The biggest American and English newspapers said “*Luxembourg resists the Germans*”. That meant that Luxembourg had an excellent reputation with the Allies. Because who knows how quickly we would have disappeared. Parts to Belgium, parts to France and it would have been sorted.

Your father and brothers were in the resistance. Can you tell us something about that?

I spoke earlier about the strike and told you how and where it began organisationally. It was clearly in Echternach, in the boarding house of the secondary school. Someone there was certainly Luxembourg’s greatest resistance fighter: Raymond Petit. As chance would have it, he was one of my brother Henri’s best friends, if not his best friend. My brother didn’t come home from the war. My brother and godfather - he was born in 1921, I in 1933 - had already been implied before 1940. But even then you had to be careful, because also at that time there were people whose hearts were more on the German side than on this side. And there, an alliance of six to ten students formed. They began to question, the LPL was founded long before the strike, in 1940. This had to do with the census of 10 October 1941 and of course with the strike. Raymond Petit’s brother was also in the teacher training college in Ettelbruck and there was Jos Fellens who brought the strike leaflets from Brussels. You can see how the whole thing was connected. My father was a notorious German-hater. He always spoke French and to this day I wonder how that was possible. After 8th grade he had to go to work, even though he lived in Diekirch. He was always sad later that others who were far behind him at school could become lawyers and doctors. He had to go to work, that was the way it was then. It was considered normal. “You go to work now!” And that was that. In Wiltz they said, “You take the tucker bag now and go to work.” A neighbour once said to my father, “Send one of your sons to work!” My father said, “If even one of yours makes it to the entrance exam, I’ll send all mine to work.” They were as thick as two short planks. These are funny comparisons, but they help make my point. It was clear that my father, my eldest brother and my sister were implied automatically through Echternach. That was clear. During the strike itself, as I just said, one had the strike leaflets in his bicycle and so on. My father was an active resistance fighter because, together with a friend, he derailed the train downhill at Schimpach. With the approval of the Belgian resistance. That was agreed with the colleagues from Bastogne. The cues were broadcasted on the radio: when they should do it, when they would unscrew the tracks. Like, for example, one of the most beautiful poems in French: “*Chanson d’automne*”. That came as a cue on the radio. It was forbidden to listen to the radio but they knew exactly where they could listen. Together with his friend Jang Sabus, who was on the train with him, they jumped off the train. They knew exactly where it would derail. They jumped out a hundred metres before. That was actually open resistance. More the Luxembourgers could not do. They could have shot one or two Germans or Luxembourg collaborators - there were some in Wiltz, too. But then you would also be put up against the wall. But what does that have to do with resistance? That is a question like any other. But it’s better not to talk about it too loudly and not to everyone. It doesn’t make any sense. In Luxembourg City my father stole the plans of one of the biggest goods stations in Weser. They were forwarded and so on. He had a lot of connections with resistance fighters from Luxembourg City. I got to know all that as a child, but I didn’t understand any of it. Luckily! I never noticed anything. I did notice that my brother had been conscripted. And when he came back from labour service we stole his uniform and put on his trousers and peaked cap. But that was it. That was just as well as I couldn’t keep my mouth shut. My brother, who was one

and a half years older than me, he didn't talk to anyone anyway. But I was always outside the door, at the neighbours', in the garage and so on. I don't have many memories of that. Only one. There was a woman to whom my father said, "Do you have your puppy with you?" I looked around but couldn't see a puppy. The puppy meant a revolver. Through his relations with the Zinnen family, that is, Mrs Zinnen, my father had contact with the Belgian Resistance. And from there, things that my brother delivered about V1 Peenemünde came to London. That's not just a story, it's in Churchill's memoirs.

Nevertheless, can you tell us briefly about your brother?

Yes. My brother was first barracked in Lindau on Lake Constance. Then they sent a number of Luxembourgers to Pomerania on the Usedom peninsula. On the island of Usedom were the factories where they worked on the V1. V1 stands for "*Vergeltungswaffe*" or vengeance weapon, the first rockets. That's where they did their labour service. With that, the Germans made a huge mistake. They actually saw the Luxembourgers as Germans. They could not have known that. What should people on the island of Usedom know about the Luxembourg strike? They were about 20 Luxembourgers, two of whom were nobody's fools. One was Mr Ginter, who later became mayor of Larochette, and the other was my brother. The two of them got a pretty quick idea what was going on there. But how were they supposed to get this information out? When they had free time - they sometimes had a few hours off to go to Zinnowitz - they bought a map of Zinnowitz and drew on it exactly how, where, what was going on. On the back they wrote the information down in German. But how should they get the map out? Not via the army mail, the Wehrmacht mail, of course. The cheeky fellow put it in an envelope and went privately, as a soldier, with friends to Zinnowitz, where he put the envelope in a private letterbox and sent it not to Luxembourg, but to my eldest brother, who had been transferred to the Rhineland on disciplinary grounds. And the brother took it home on Saturday, whereupon my father sent word to Bastogne. Then two men came to us from there and wanted to see the map and take it with them. 'Make a drawing of it. Nothing else. You don't get the map." They took the drawing along. Three weeks later, there was havok up there. Today, even in a book by the specialist of the last war, Irving, it is clearly written: "Leon Roth". My brother's name was Henri Leon Roth. His full name is written in Irving's, there's no doubt about it. I don't know what others did there, they don't know themselves. Later, many claimed they had done something, but could never prove it. What is important is that something was done. And that Luxemburg has some merit in the fact that the V1 factories were destroyed. Eisenhower writes in his memoirs that the war was shortened by six to eight months as a result of the destruction of the first factories - they later built others underground. Convert that into deaths. After the labour service, they were conscripted into the Wehrmacht, the real army. My brother too. First he was sent with the Wehrmacht to Ukraine, to Kiev. But my brother had studied higher mathematics, Latin and ancient Greek. And because that gave him a notion of higher mathematics, they took him out and put him in the navy. He was put on a ship as a "rangefinder". The ship was the Panzerkreuzer Scheer. The Panzerkreuzer Scheer shuttled between Latvia, Estonia and Kiel in 1945 to get people out. That's where he was. When the Panzerkreuzer Scheer was sunk, my brother wasn't on it. He had been given permission at the time to go home from Baden-Württemberg with a "like-minded German" - as he wrote. We were already occupied, that was in 1945, so he was supposed to go home with him, Antlauer was his name. They were on the main motorway around Darmstadt. If there was still a train, they took it, but otherwise they hitchhiked. They sat in the back of a so-called Kübelwagen, they were open at the back. My brother sat on the left, his friend on the right and then the driver. Suddenly there was a rumble. The Americans had been flying over them all the time in their planes. The driver braked and he and Antlauer jumped into the ditch. My brother wanted to jump as well, but it had already happened. By then it had already hit

him. Days later, a German went down to see what had happened. He picked up my brother, but we didn't know that. Antlauer went there later from the south of Germany with his wife and son to show them where it had happened, where he had crashed with his friend, etc., the latter had died, but he himself had saved himself. He told this in a pub where an elderly gentleman was sitting who said: "What are you talking about? I picked him up!" – "What was his name?" – "He wasn't German, he was a Luxembourger! His name was Roth. Heinrich Roth!" They had seen that on his identity tag. During the war, everyone had a dog tag, also the French and such. He was wearing almost nothing anymore when he was found, just his underwear. The driver of the crashed car was from the SS. So what did he do? He took his clothes. Antlauer immediately said that my brother had to be brought to Luxembourg. "But no, he's buried here!" He lies there as an "unknown soldier, known only to God". Finally, I went to Darmstadt with my youngest brother, because we couldn't burden my father to do that. When we got to the cemetery, someone came up that looked like our Uncle Bernie. That was the man who had picked him up. So I asked, "What's your name?" "Rot." That's a bit uncanny, a bit Kafkaesque. He then told me what had happened.

Did the mood change over the course of the five years of war?

From what has been told so far, it is clear that there were not only resistance fighters in Wiltz. Not only those who took part in the strike but also, those who ducked down until it was over. You can catalogue them all. But of course, there were also collaborators. The mayor of Wiltz, the local group leader, came from Wiltz. He worked at the leather factory as a driver. He was what they call "an insignificant figure" there. But he immediately sensed that he could play a role in the SA, with the Germans and in the NSDAP. And so it was, all at once he became mayorof Wiltz. He was convicted after the war. Of course, he immediately defected to Germany with his family, even before the Americans came. He had two sons, very nice sons and intelligent too. It was a typical family. They had in their heads what others had in theirs, but never got the opportunity to do anything with it or from it. You must look at it psychologically and psycho-pedagogically as far as these sons are concerned. They were back here later, but he stayed in Germany with his wife. Oddly enough, he always showed up in Wiltz on All Saints' Day and then he was gone again. As if he had disappeared off the face of the earth. That was the main figure of the Luxembourg collaborators, I would say. But there were many more who wore the SA uniform or otherwise participated or helped in Nazi organisations. In any case, there were some of one kind and some of the other. Clearly this changed society in a certain sense. Then there is the fact that later, when the families of those who had been shot returned from resettlement - they had all been resettled - the relationship between these people and those who had not been resettled was no longer the same. That's putting it nicely. It was even very strange at times. Oddly enough, not even one of those families stayed in Wiltz after the war.

How did you experience the liberation in September 1944 in Wiltz?

That was so beautiful! It was on Sunday and we knew from the radio how far the Americans had already come. The day before, they were in Pétange. On 10 September 1944, my sister was still finishing the American flag they had made from red and blue pieces. Suddenly we saw the first Jeeps. We had never seen anything like it. They had a pole in front of the radiator grille. We found out later why. The Germans had stretched steel wires over the roads and a lot of those who drove through were decapitated. That's why they had this iron pole in front of the cars. The Americans came and of course everybody was on the street. We had baked pies because we knew they were coming. They came from Buederscheid, from Bastogne, from the direction of Esch-sur-Sûre. They immediately got a piece of pie. One of my sisters, who

couldn't speak English, asked, "You like apple tree?" But he couldn't eat a whole apple tree. The guy understood immediately, they were all very nice. They knew they were with friends when they came to Luxembourg. But there was still a problem. There were some Germans who were hiding. Where the old cinema was in Wiltz, one of them started to shoot. Two of my brothers immediately got on the Americans' Jeeps to show them the way out of Wiltz. When he started shooting they shot him in return. In Erpeldange they were caught in a hail of bullets. Some of the fanatical German soldiers, probably Waffen-SS, didn't want to surrender. But that was over quickly. You can probably imagine that us children were happy. We got chocolate, corned beef, they didn't like that anymore because they hardly got anything else to eat. But this corned beef, it tasted very good. They also had their kitchen. In our street, for example, they had a kitchen in the Rasquin restaurant. They had bread that was white like snow. The white bread, that was heaven, heaven on earth. For us as children, of course. We couldn't go to school because the Americans had occupied it. So we had no lessons. The whole thing took a while. In the evening, the Americans were invited to dinner, it was great. Until suddenly they said that the Germans were going to attack.

You just mentioned the Battle of the Bulge. What can you tell us about it?

On 16, 17 or 18 December in Wiltz, about 14 days after the Americans had celebrated St. Nicholas Day on 6 December in the castle, great pictures of the American St. Nicholas still exist today, it was then that havoc broke loose. They had started the Rundstedt offensive. That's when they came from the other side into the Oesling. Near the church in Oberwiltz was an old hospital where the Americans had set up a military hospital. That's where they took the first ones. I saw some who had their whole stomach opened, and you could see all their intestines. We children had already seen so much, we were half wild, it didn't bother us anymore, we weren't disgusted by it. It was anything but normal. This went on until the Germans came closer and closer. Then it was time to leave. Either stay and go to the cellar or leave. Our house didn't have a proper cellar, which you can see over there. We loaded up what we could fit on a small cart the size of one of those carts on which the laundry baskets were pulled to the well. I remember taking something important with me, the alarm clock. I was 11 years old. We also wore clothes that we had received from the Americans in November. They had come from America where clothes had been donated because we had nothing left. So we went up the hill, past the old brewery, and from there towards Nothum and over to Liefrange. There we spent the night with acquaintances of my brother, who was a teacher in Liefrange, the Feider family. From there, the next day, we went down to the water where the reservoir is today. Then back up the hill to Rambrouch. From Rambrouch to Noerdange. From Noerdange we got a train because my father knew the railway people. That was the Prince Henri railway. From there we went to Pétange, where we got the empty apartment of a German engineer who had fled. We stayed there until the end of January. Then we came back to Wiltz. It was terrible. Wiltz was badly destroyed. But for us children it couldn't have been more delightful. We found things to play with everywhere, and very dangerous things at that. Especially grenades, hand grenades. Bullets don't explode anymore, hand grenades do. Down by our house was a pond that had become an air-raid pond in case water was needed. We snotty-nosed 11-year-olds threw hand grenades into the pond and then threw ourselves onto the ground. The splinters flew up to the Grand-Rue. When we came home in the evening, we were reprimanded. But it was wonderful. In front of Wiltz stood tanks that the Americans had left standing there. They had put sugar in the fuel tanks so they wouldn't work. We found great things there. That was a part of our childhood which also thrilled our children and grandchildren. They always had big eyes when I told them about it: "Tell us a bit more about the war! What was it like when you were with the altar boys in Buederscheid and one of them was killed?" That was Gusty, who shone a match into a petrol canister to see if there was

anything left in it. You can imagine what happened. He was literally torn apart. But once again we didn't dwell on it. You can't really imagine that. But that's how it was. There was no school anymore. The Swiss helped a lot with the reconstruction. They supplied wooden barracks. The barracks stood where the boys' school had been and later down by the cemetery. Also, some of the Swiss craftsmen who met local girls stayed in the country. Slowly but surely, everything came together again. In 1946, it was time to go to secondary school as a boarder. By then Wiltz was just vacation for me. After getting my school certificate, I went into the military and then became a teacher. Me personally I was done with Wiltz after that. Two of my sisters still lived with my father and the house was still there, but Wiltz as my birthplace, the house as my birthplace, was out of sight, out of my mind.

Did your house also suffer damage after the Battle of the Bulge, or did it remain whole?

The house itself remained whole. But the house was built with red bricks, like in neighbouring Belgium. Of course, there were bullet holes everywhere, so the old façade had to be removed and replaced by a normal façade. But the house itself was not damaged. The house opposite was completely in ruins. Afterwards I often thought about it - and didn't tell my father - that I would have preferred it if our house had collapsed. Then we would have got another one. And then my father would have gone to Luxembourg City as a railwayman. Then we would have gone to the Athenaeum or the teacher training college. That would not have cost him quite so much. But - and I give him credit for this - my mother had died in 1943 and he wanted to stay in Wiltz because she was buried in Wiltz. When she was no longer there, he was only 49 years old. He was still young and took care of us. I take my hat off to him as long as I live.

When you came back from Pétange, did you also learn something about Schumannseck? What had happened there?

Of course. Those who had stayed in Wiltz, in the cellars or the vaults in the brewery, told us about it. It sounded like a fairy tale. But we saw, for example, the Grand-Rue in Wiltz, where the shoe shop is and the bakery. There was not a stone left standing! The façade stood there like an empty set of teeth. Wiltz was destroyed. Of course, those who stayed there told us things that were probably not quite true. But one of these stories is very interesting. I won't tell you who told it. He was a real priest hater. When people came out of High Mass on Sundays, he would make fun of them. But during the offensive he sat in the cellar shivering and praying. When it was over, he was the same stupid, drunken priest-hater as before. That had nothing to do with the Germans anymore, but you could see how some people changed completely. You could shake your head and let people do what they wanted. Everyone was free to believe in God or not. You don't have to make fun of people. You don't do that. Everyone should be able to do what they want.

There is also a story about the Fatima Monument?

In the cellar, the dean at the time made a vow together with people who worked at the municipality but also helped out a lot in the parish in Niederwiltz, the deanery church. If Wiltz would be liberated and not everything would be destroyed, then they would erect a monument to Our Lady of Fatima. That's how it came about, that was a promise. At that time, the original statue from Fatima was also here in Luxembourg, that was in 1948. I was still an altar server. It was here in Luxembourg and was also carried through Wiltz. Of course, this promise became very topical and that's how it came about.

That means that this promise was also supported by the entire population of Wiltz?

That was accepted, but not only that. The two patron saints, Roch and Sebastian also played a role. The dean was a very intelligent man, I would almost say too good for Wiltz. A churchman closer to the people would have been needed there because he carried his nose a bit high and saw the people of Wiltz for what they were: anything but intellectuals. That is not meant to be negative, it was a fact. They made the promise in the cellar, I think it was also written down, but I don't know the details. And they kept it. Today, 20 January is still a day of celebration in Wiltz.

This is the day of the liberation, isn't it?

Yes, that is a day of remembrance.

What was the solidarity like among the people of Wiltz after the war?

As I said, solidarity is a big word. What does solidarity mean? Does solidarity only mean being reasonable with each other? It is already a lot when people respect each other. In Wiltz there has always been envy on the part of the workers towards those who either belonged to the civil servants, where the children already vied against each other at school, where it was a matter of course that the children of family X did not go to secondary school, but became tradesmen or went to the leather factory, and so on. Although there were some who were just as clever as those who went to secondary school. The good thing was that more and more children from Wiltz went to secondary school. Before the war there were at most half a dozen families in Wiltz of which someone would go to secondary school. By the way, there was never any talk of a "Lycée" before. This was the term only used for the secondary school in Limpertsberg. The school in Diekirch was called "*Kolléisch*". The one in Echternach too. The main secondary school was the Athenaeum in the capital. Attending secondary school was also very expensive. In Wiltz there was no such possibility, so you had to go to boarding school. For three years I got on the train at 06:04 in the morning to come to Luxembourg City to the teacher training college. Apart from me, there was only one fellow pupil, who came from a working-class family, but where the wife had inherited quite a lot. Fortunately, that slowly changed. So that we were 25 pupils from Wiltz at the boarding school in Diekirch. That was not the case before the war. So I think the war – the whole shebang - brought about what in Greek is termed a "metanoia", that is, a change of mind. It was now more normal for other boys and girls to attend a secondary school.

One last question then: What thoughts go through your mind when you look back on the war from today's perspective?

Fortunately, I almost never think about it. That's called repression. I'll give you a dramatic example: I was eight years old when my mother died. I cannot remember my mother. There you can see that repression is a fact. Partly it is bad. Partly it must be like that. Because those who always look back will never be happy in life. They always regret that they were happy at some point. And then "happy". The word always reminds me of a fish you hold in your hand that slips away because it's so slippery. Both words start with the same consonants in Luxembourgish. All that matters yesterday, today, and tomorrow is whether you have contentment. Here the beautiful word "content" is found. And this content has several levels. Whether in the family, with the neighbours, in general, among acquaintances or on a higher scale. If it is not present, then things are as they are in many places in the world right now. Many did indeed achieve certain merits because they were dissatisfied. Because they wanted to create satisfaction. This also exists, which is again positive. But "happiness" is a good word

for a poem. In life, only contentment counts. “This implies happiness, that is clear” but that’s not it.