

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

My name is Liliane Duton, I was born on 8 October 1933, and I have lived in Wiltz since I was a child.

**Could you briefly tell us about your family situation. What did your parents do for work, do you have any siblings?**

My father worked at the Ideal leather factory and my mother was a housewife. We were four children. We grew our own vegetables in a large garden, as was usual at the time.

**Which one of the four children were you?**

The third. One brother was two years older than me, the other four. And then I had another brother who was six years younger.

**Can you remember the centenary celebrations in 1939, before the War, and what can you tell us about them?**

I remember only that there were many brass bands here in Wiltz. That stuck in my memory because I had an uncle who was in the Ettelbruck brass band. I liked him so much that I ran away to join him.

**And then there was a search for you?**

Yes. My mother knew where I was, she could guess.

**You just said that there were many flags and brass bands there. In the preliminary interview you mentioned that the Grand Duchess was also there.**

I remember that a grandstand had been erected at the boys' school - where the large monument now stands. The Grand Duchess was sitting there.

**Let's jump forward in time a little. On 10 May 1940, the German army marched into Luxembourg. Can you remember that day? What was it like here in Wiltz?**

Yes, I remember. We went to school, but the lessons were cancelled. We children played in the playground and were sent home at some point. I remember that, but nothing else.

**That in itself was the beginning of the occupation. What changed for you in your everyday life?**

It began at school, where we got different teachers. Suddenly we had a schoolmaster, which we were not used to at all, because before that we were always taught by nuns. Before the occupation, we stood up in school and prayed. When the Germans were there, we had to give the Hitler salute. There was no praying.

**You told me a story about one of your classmates.**

Yes. We had to learn German songs by heart and write them down. There was one that went: "Führer, we follow you". She had scribbled "nicht" [not] in small letters behind it. The family was relocated.

**Because of that?**

Yes.

**You said that you thought that the teacher himself hadn't noticed. So the girl was snitched on?**

Yes, the daughter of a Local Group Leader was also in our class. She noticed it and snitched on her.

**How do you remember the atmosphere during that time? Were people afraid? What was the mood like back then? In the houses, in the town?**

I can only tell you how we children experienced it. We were always reminded at home not to talk about anything. The parents spoke quietly so that we children wouldn't overhear, which was unusual. It was a very mistrustful time. Everyone was afraid. You could no longer trust anyone. We were also personally affected: a colleague of my father's at work accused him of saying something against the Germans. As a result, we had to leave the country. So, my father had to leave the country first because he was Belgian. My mother was then constantly afraid, because at that time many people were being relocated and she was afraid that the same would happen to us. We tried to go to Belgium too. My grandparents were still over there.

**What is it that your father is supposed to have said?**

That the Germans would not win the war.

**That was enough?**

Yes. And because he was Belgian. I don't know what was going on with the Belgians and the Germans, but it meant that we weren't relocated. If we had all been Luxembourgers, what would have happened? That's why my mother was afraid, because she was a Luxembourger. That's why we tried to be allowed to go to Belgium, too.

**What was it like for the family after your father went to Belgium?**

In the beginning, when my father was in Belgium, we would go to Schimpach on Sundays. That's where the border was. My mother would go there with us children and my father would come from Belgium to the border. Then we would sit there in a meadow and drink coffee together. My grandmother baked pies which my father brought with him. The work colleague who grassed on him didn't know for sure whether it was my father or his brother who said those things. Both worked there and both had to flee. We all went to this meadow together with my aunt and her three children. Then we all sat there and ate cake behind the hedge. We took a photo at that time of my aunt and my mother standing on the steps in front of the door with us children to give to my father and uncle.

**You said that your father worked at the Ideal leather factory. This name in connection with Wiltz immediately makes one think of the strike that started there in 1942. Did you hear anything about it?**

I know we went to school, but there were no classes. We had to stay in the playground with the teaching staff and do our rounds. That went on for a long time, it must have lasted all morning. I can still remember that well.

**In the days that followed, there was great turmoil: people were arrested, punished and shot.**

Yes, I think four teachers and a town clerk were arrested. A few days later, posters were put up all over the big lime trees that were everywhere at that time, saying that they had been shot. That was a disaster for Wiltz. It upset people a lot.

**Let's go back to everyday life or rather how it changed. What can you tell us about the food situation back then? There were ration coupons for everything. Were there the same things as before the war, were some things no longer available?**

Many things were no longer available and everything was rationed: bread, meat, butter, ... Even fruit was rationed. Only at Christmas were there oranges, I remember that well.

**You told me that you bred rabbits?**

Yes, we had a lot of rabbits. We had to cut the grass by the wayside to feed them, because we didn't have enough ourselves. Every now and then we sold a rabbit to earn a little money, since my father had had to leave the country.

**Do you remember noticing resistance or collaboration in your everyday life, that is, people who supported the Germans?**

Yes, I remember those who supported the Germans. They were clearly visible. All our teachers had to leave, they shot them. They were replaced by German teachers. The many nuns we had also had to leave. The municipal administration also consisted only of Germans.

**Did you also notice people who resisted?**

There were a lot of young men who ran away when they were to be drafted into the war. They hid in Belgium and worked for a farmer there. Then there were very many - I don't remember what they were called - who hid in the forests.

**Let's talk about the Battle of the Bulge. Can you just tell a little bit about how you remember it? How did it start?**

I can remember. It must have been on a Monday because my mother was doing the laundry. You probably know how the laundry used to be done at the time. The whole house was upside down. Suddenly there was a bang and a shell hit somewhere. Then my parents said we had to leave, the Germans were coming back. We went with my aunt and her children to Baschleiden, where my uncle's parents lived. We went there first because we wanted to take grandmother with us. But grandmother didn't want to come. So we spent the night there and in the night we saw that the Germans were coming up through the valley to Baschleiden, that they were occupying the country again. We then went back to Wiltz and there the shooting began immediately, the offensive. The Americans fired across and we heard them throwing grenades. They couldn't have been far away. We covered our ears because we knew that grenades would hit somewhere again. We then sat like that in a cellar for six weeks.

**When you went to Baschleiden at the beginning, did you take things with you?**

We had a small wagon with the bare necessities. But the worst thing was the dead and wounded soldiers we came upon on the way back. By then there had already been a lot of shooting.

**You returned from Baschleiden to Wiltz. What did you do there to protect yourself from the fighting?**

During the day it was quiet, the shooting always took place at night. They had started very early to build a bunker behind the neighbours' house. But when the firing started at night, the bunker was not ready. The hole had been dug and there were thick wooden sticks, like they had in those days, lying over it. My father always said that no shrapnel would go through there, that they would keep it out. We sat down in this mud the first night. There was a lot of shooting, a lot of things were destroyed. We spent countless nights in this bunker. Later, when it became quieter, we spent the nights in the neighbour's cellar, because it was made of concrete. It was the neighbours, their

daughter with her infant and we four children. We had mattresses laid over the potatoes, kindling and firewood to sleep on. We put a cast iron stove in the cellar to make a fire.

**How do you remember the firing at night? As a child, you must not have slept a wink?**

We all huddled together and listened. We heard when they fired. My mother would tell us to cover our ears. Then we stuck our fingers in our ears. When there was a whistling noise, it hit further away. But if there was no whistling and it hit right away, we knew it was close by. I don't know how many nights we spent in the neighbour's cellar. During the day we could go into our house. But one day the German soldiers came and said we had to leave. We went to the Gruber brewery, where the youth hostel is now. We all had to go there. They had sent almost all the people from Wiltz there. We lay there in a big cellar like the breweries had at that time. We had brought our mattresses with us and had to stay there.

**When you were in this big cellar, you and other people went outside during the day. How did you provide for yourself? What did you eat? Where did your water come from?**

Water itself was easy. The brewery is in the Burrebeerig, where there used to be a big washhouse. The water was always running there, even when the temperature was below zero. We could get water there. My brother used to do that. Since we were living in the street above it and there was a path leading down, one day my brother went to fetch two buckets of water for us. Just before he got back home, a grenade exploded. There were grenades at that time that exploded in the air. You couldn't see or hear anything until suddenly splinters flew everywhere from a black spot. Such a splinter had hit one of his buckets. We prayed a rosary because it could just as easily have hit him. And there was a baker in Wiltz, near the church. He baked bread for the people who were lying everywhere in the cellars. We got a lot of bread from him. When the Germans had moved on, three of them came to us in the cellar. We made room for them at the front entrance and we lay further back in the cellar. They just had their rifles leaning against the wall next to the door. When the soldiers were sleeping at night, two men, my father and someone else, took the rifles away from them. In my opinion, they willingly allowed this to happen. They had more or less surrendered. Because when the Americans came into the cellar later, they immediately stood up and raised their hands.

**What did Wiltz look like after the Battle of the Bulge? What did your house look like? What were the circumstances like?**

There was a lot of destruction. The roof of our house was full of holes. Most houses looked like that. There were holes in the facades from the shrapnel, the roofs were broken.

**What do you remember from the time when everything was rebuilt? It certainly took a while, but then work was going on everywhere.**

Everyone had to do it themselves, everyone had to help themselves. We did it as well as we could and with the tools and materials we had. Houses were repaired everywhere, but it all took a long time.

**Do you remember the mood in Wiltz at that time? Did people help each other? Was there solidarity or was everyone preoccupied with themselves?**

As far as I can remember, since I was still a child, everyone was busy rebuilding their own house. There was no help from outside. It took a very long time before help could have come from anywhere at all.

### **How did things go for you personally after the offensive, after the war?**

After the offensive, everything was slowly rebuilt here. Everyone tried to repair their house so that they could live in it again. Then the Red Cross came to help. I also remember that we all had to be vaccinated. We were given injections, which of course we didn't like. We were asked if we wanted to go to Switzerland with them. My mother registered me and my brother who was two years older than me. He went to Küsnacht for a month and I was taken to Basel in a convoy for three months. I came to live with very nice people, where I was very well looked after. Shortly before the planned return trip, I became ill, so I ended up spending four months there.

### **Why was this organised?**

The Red Cross organised it for the children who had experienced the offensive. A lot of children from Wiltz went along.

### **Was that good for you? Did you have good memories of it?**

Yes, very good. They were such nice people who later visited us regularly. At some point it became a good friendship.

### **What did you do during your time in Switzerland? What did your everyday life look like?**

The people I stayed with lived in an apartment above a bakery. The baker's family was also very nice. I was always allowed to go down to them. I used to purloin nuts from them, I'll never forget that. They had big sacks of hazelnuts there and I always took a handful from them. They would then just pretend to scold me for it. They were such nice people. We were glad that they often visited us in Luxembourg later on.

### **Did you also attend school there?**

I didn't go to school there, but I don't remember why. I had a friend who went to school in Basel. Perhaps we lived too far from a school, I don't know. But then I was lucky that my cousin from Wiltz had come with me on the same convoy. He lived with an old widow who could hardly take care of him. He was almost on his own. The family I was living with found out where he was and then took him in, so my cousin was with me for more than half of my stay. Two children together is always better than one alone. We had a great time there, I am very grateful to those people.

### **Just before the Battle of the Bulge, the American Father Christmas came to Wiltz. Do you remember that, were you perhaps even there?**

I don't think there was a child in Wiltz at the time who wasn't there. One of the American soldiers stationed here was dressed up as Father Christmas. The soldiers had collected chocolate and biscuits from their rations. The whole thing took place in the castle, where nuns still lived at the time. They had organised it and given him the costume. All the children could go there to get a small bag filled with sweets from Father Christmas. The American Father Christmas still came to Wiltz years later.

### **Did you also get a bag?**

Yes, of course. That was an event. We hadn't eaten anything sweet, chocolate or sweets for years.

My mother washed and ironed for the Americans to earn a little money. The Americans gave us food in return for the work. You can imagine that with four children you have a lot of work. So my mother taught me early on to do small jobs. We had a big pair of scissors. Sometimes the clothes that were washed and ironed needed a button sewn on, so I did that. So I had these big scissors and I didn't yet

have the manual dexterity to handle them. When the American soldier came to pick up his shirt the next day, he had a small pair of scissors with him, which he gave to me. I was better able to cut the thread with them.

**And you still have them?**

Yes, I still have them. That's my best piece.

**When you think back to the wartime today, what goes through your mind?**

We were lucky to have survived everything well and that many people helped us. Back then you could still count on people.