

Mr Goniva, would you briefly introduce yourself? Your name, date of birth and where you grew up?

My name, as you have already mentioned, is Goniva. My first name is Marcel. I was born in Goeblange because at that time children in the villages mostly came into the world at home. Goeblange is in the canton of Capellen, in the municipality of Koerich. My official name, according to my identity card, is Marcel. When the Germans came, I had to change it because it was a French name. It didn't occur to me at the time that I could have called myself Max. I had a good friend whose name was Jos, so I gave Josef as my name. That's why my German papers don't say Marcel, but Josef, Goniva. My father was a mechanic in the agricultural sector. He worked in Luxembourg City and came from Koerich. My mother was a housewife. In addition, I had a brother, Robert. He was born in 1922 and was four years older than me. He was, of course, drafted by the Germans.

Can you tell us something more about your brother Robert Goniva?

My brother Robert was born in 1922, I in 1926. That makes an age difference of four years. He was among the first to be forced by the Germans to join the Wehrmacht. Then in August, Gauleiter Simon proclaimed in Limpertsberg that all those born between 1920 to 1924 inclusive had to join the Wehrmacht. He was part of those age groups. That was on 30 August 1942. In 1941, the Germans had already introduced the Reich Labour Service. Although this measure was not entirely unnoticed, it was accepted by most without comment. Reich Labour Service, that sounded very harmless. At that time, being born in 1922, he was thus part of it. He was sent to Saarburg for 6 months - I only went for 3 months because the Germans needed cannon fodder more quickly at that time - for labour service. That was just over the Luxembourg border, so we could visit him on Sundays. Even by bicycle from Goeblange. I sometimes went there with my father by bicycle. After 6 months, when his labour service was over, he was discharged with his whole section, as they called it. After that he was one of the first to be drafted into the Wehrmacht. Those born between 1920 and 1924 were drafted, and later those of 1925 and 1926, which included me too. We had a lovely childhood. There was no television or radio in those days. Very few people had a radio before the war, but we did. People visited each other in the evenings. The villages were sometimes like one big family. Everyone knew who did what and who had what. As children, we played with marbles during breaks at primary school. Or we even played football in the street, as there were no cars. Only the post bus. The teacher played with us and was the referee. These memories are very pleasant. I have another memory of a friend of mine who was German. His parents were German citizens who lived in Goeblange. After the First World War, many Germans had come to Luxembourg. But he was born in Luxembourg. He had two brothers and a sister. We were good friends. In 1939 we were in the seventh grade. He was a year older, but because I was born in December, I was drafted with those from 1927. In 1939, there was already a lot of talk about the war here in Luxembourg. It had already begun, the Germans had already invaded Poland. We got into an argument and I said to my friend: "Tun, if there will be war with the French-", war had already been declared between Germany and France - "I will become a French solier". I always wanted to be a soldier. He said he would go to his people, though. So already we talked about this as children. I told him that, in this case, we would shoot at each other. I wouldn't go to the Germans. In the end, though, I did go to the Germans. When they came in 1940, Tun, who was registered as a German citizen, was drafted immediately. His brothers too. That's why I claim the following: it is said that there were around 15,000 registered forced conscripts here. Not all of them joined, many deserted. 1,000 to 1,500 of them are said to have been with the Germans voluntarily. That does not reflect well on Luxembourg. In my opinion, those were the ones of German descent. They had to go off

before we were drafted into the Wehrmacht. They were drafted immediately. In my opinion, many of them are counted among those 1,000 to 1,500 Luxembourg volunteers to the German Wehrmacht. Just as a comment on my part. So much for my good friend. It had nothing to do with the argument we had: I'm going into the French army and I'm going into the German army. But we had no quarrel about that. Then when the Germans came on 10 May 1940, he was suddenly gone. Drafted. Legally, according to German military law. For them it was legal at the time. Later we were forced to do the same thing.

How old were you when the German Wehrmacht marched into Luxembourg? Do you personally remember that day?

They call it the "German" Wehrmacht. For us it is not the German Wehrmacht, for us it is the Nazi Wehrmacht. The Germans came in 1940 on 10 May. I can remember like it was yesterday. I was in the seventh grade. At dawn we heard the planes. Incessantly. My father immediately said, "The Germans are coming." They always said they would come eventually. And they did. These planes were so-called Fieseler Storch, they looked a bit like the Piper today. There was room for the pilot and one other person. I think they were looking for Biff. Biff is a place on the route between Bascharage and Pétange, Rodange. The first Fieseler Storch landed there. A certain Lieutenant Hedderich had taken up position there because the Germans thought the French would invade Luxembourg, which was the case. In my opinion, they were looking for them, because they kept circling. That was the morning of 10 May. I then went to school, and it wasn't long before the first German troops came to our village from the direction of Nospelt, Capellen. We sat on the school wall and watched the spectacle. We had never seen anything like it. They came without end. I wondered how far they had come from. Later we experienced it ourselves. 40-50 kilometres on foot. When the column got bogged down, they simply dropped to the ground. The German soldiers of those days were very decent. I can't name any situation where they misbehaved. They were well equipped, they had money with them, so-called Rentenmarks. Later it was Reichsmarks, after the war D-Marks. There was a grocer's shop opposite the school. There had been ration cards for a long time. Everything had been rationed after they invaded Poland in 1939. They were short of various things they didn't even know they needed. They bought the shop empty in no time. Later they got nothing more from the grocer. Everything was gone.

What specifically changed in everyday life for you or your family as a result of the German occupation?

For me, the term "occupation" is synonymous with military occupation. They had a military administration headed by a certain Mr Wehrer. Our government had scarpereed. And I say scarpereed deliberately, because in my opinion they should have stayed here. Because they had been appointed by their Luxembourg people through democratic elections to carry out their respective functions, be it head of government or any other job. At that time there were only four ministers. And what did the gentlemen do? They got into a car and off they went to France. Ethically, I don't think that was right. They had taken an oath to lead the people who elected them and to stand by them in good times and bad. And what did they do? They ran away! That is my personal opinion, but I am not alone in that. It's not often said, it was all swept under the carpet. The gentlemen came back after the war in September 1945, sat down in the chairs they had left and carried on as if nothing had happened. New elections should have been held, but they were not. The Luxembourgers were so sick of the damned Germans that they were just glad to be rid of them. They would have even accepted Stalin, I always say.

And did anything change at school?

At school, the programme continued, we still had French. At my teacher's request, because I was quite gifted, I took the entrance exam for the crafts and arts school. Later I was a technician in the workshop in the military. I was responsible for the maintenance of everything that turned, engines and wheels. I also had the appropriate qualification, namely a master craftsman's certificate as a motor vehicle technician and a journeyman's examination as a machine fitter from the crafts and arts school. I didn't have a diploma from the crafts and arts school because at that time - I was there from 1940 to 1943 - we had decided together shortly before the final examination to refuse the Hitler salute. In 1943, that was already quite daring, because the Germans were at the zenith of their power at the time. They were standing outside Moscow, outside Leningrad. We were supposed to do sports in what is now the Josy Barthel Stadium. That always began in the morning with the Hitler salute. So we decided to refuse. We had a German headmaster, and someone must tipped him off. Before that it was a Luxembourgish headmaster. A very nice man, but very strict. He was very popular with us. The next day we came to school and the German headmaster called the whole class 3FB to him and sent us home. We were reported to the labour office and if we wouldn't show up there within 4 days, we would be visited by other people. And with that we were expelled from school. Many of my class were affected. I was one of the youngest because I was born so late in the year. When I was lucky enough to return from the inferno of the Russian front after the war, I was drafted into the Luxembourg army. That didn't bother me much. It was still a strong move by our government to introduce conscription. They didn't have to ask parliament; they were allowed to decide that themselves. They had already done that in England. It was a strong move. Those were the ones born in 1925, 1926 and 1927, to which I also belonged. When the compulsory army was formed after the war, I was drafted for the Luxembourgers. After a short time in Walferdange and Dudelange, where we had barracks, we went to Bitburg in November 1945, where I stayed for ten years. In Bitburg we didn't get to know everything that was possible here in Luxembourg. Those who did not have a school-leaving certificate because of the Germans, because they had been expelled from school or for other reasons, could catch up on their school-leaving certificate by taking simplified exams. But because I was in Bitburg, I didn't hear anything about it. When I heard about it, I went to the Luxembourgish headmaster of the crafts and arts school, who was reinstated again, and he made it possible for me to catch up on my diploma. The secretary, who at that time, as in most schools, had as much say as the headmaster, if not more, said it was a bit too late for that. That must have been in 1947 or 1948 when I heard about it. But I got a certificate that I had completed 3 years of crafts and arts school. This enabled me to take my journeyman's examination as a machinist and my master's examination as a motor vehicle technician - today they call it a mechanic. I was first in my year and received a diploma and an additional award. After that I made a career in the army, I became a workshop manager, had a lot of responsibility, and so on. I am not sorry that it happened that way. Well, today I am 96 years old and still here.

What was the food supply like here in Luxembourg during the occupation?

The food supply was not dramatic for us villagers. We had a large garden, and my father had a few cows, pigs and chickens in addition to his work as a mechanic in Luxembourg City. But all that was registered in the so-called herd book that the Germans had introduced. This still exists today. The farmers must register their livestock. They are not allowed to keep cows and pigs as they please. In those days, slaughtering also took place in the villages. But that also had to be registered. All the same, there were farmers in Luxembourg who slaughtered illegally. The Germans called this "black slaughtering". If the Germans found out about it, the people concerned were sent to the concentration camp. They were called "public nuisances"

because they were slaughtering illegally. That wasn't in the spirit of keeping the German food system going. Then there was something the Germans called hoarding. The inhabitants of the towns didn't have much and then went hoarding. That's why the German gendarmerie was always on the road. If you had a package on your bicycle, you had to stop and if there was food in it, you had to explain where it came from and where you wanted to go with it.

How did you feel about the atmosphere during the German occupation, and did it change over the course of the five years?

After 6 weeks, when the French had unfortunately been beaten, the military occupation here was gone. Then the so-called civil administration became active in Luxembourg, under the leadership of the Gauleiter Gustav Simon and his cronies. You were afraid of them just by seeing them. They would have fitted well on a *Wanted* poster. Their regulations created an atmosphere of fear. They banned everything French. Many Luxembourgers at that time wore a beret, a French *béret basque*. Not as big as the French, but we wore berets. And they were banned. You must imagine that. The signs - we had almost everything in French - our street names, the shop signs like "Épicerie". All that had to disappear and be replaced by German names. Then the so-called proclamations came, one after another. They put them up on the advertising pillars, these big concrete pillars. The French language was banned. When I went to crafts and arts school, we still learned French in the first year or the first semester. After that it was over. Then we didn't learn French anymore, everything was forbidden. "Bonjour", "Merci" and "Trottoir", you weren't allowed to say any more. We Luxembourgers used it among ourselves, of course, but you weren't allowed to speak it in public anymore. It created an atmosphere of fear. That was what they wanted. We not only had good Luxembourgers, but also some who sided with the Germans. Who supported the German cause. They were collaborators. Some had to leave the country later and were not allowed to come home. Those were the ones who had behaved extremely positively towards the Germans and had, so to speak, tormented the people in words and in deeds. The mother of my already mentioned good friend Tun, who was German and already in the Wehrmacht, became a real snake as soon as the Germans were here. There were three German women in the village, two of whom were married to Luxembourgish men. Only my friend's parents were both German. The husband worked as a carpenter in Koerich and didn't care about anything. But we had to watch out for her, especially when my brother deserted. For these three women, actually. They kept alerting the German gendarmerie that they had seen my brother at night. Then, when my brother was away, the Germans surrounded our house at night and banged on the door: "German police, open up!" At that time, I was still at home and attending the crafts and arts school. They would search our house. They always came in the middle of the night and to my bedside. I had a draft card because I had already been mustered. It looked like this one, only instead of paybook it said draft pass. I always kept it on the bedside table in case they came. They came up the stairs with their boots. They had surrounded the house because those German beasts had said they had seen my brother. My friend's mother, that witch. Once we broke their windows with stones at night. Because it was so dark, she couldn't see us. It was so dark; you can't imagine it today.

Then you joined the Reich Labour Service during your school years. Do you still have memories of that? When were you there and what did you have to do?

I had flown out of the crafts and arts school. And we had to report to the labour office within 4 days. The German headmaster had told us that there would be "other" visitors if we didn't report there. I would have had to go to a camp in Steinfort that the Germans had set up there. It may have been a Hitler Youth camp. I was only there for a few hours. I went there on

Sunday evening with my suitcase and when it got dark, I threw the suitcase over the fence and went home again. My father didn't know what to do. He took his bicycle and went to Koerich to see the mayor, who was a Luxembourger. A harmless one. Because of this visit, the whole thing had no repercussions for me. I was no longer registered in the camp in Steinfort. I then worked for a farmer in the neighbourhood. Until 1944, when I was mustered in Esch and got my draft card. When I received my orders to report for duty on 13 July 1944, I had to be at the railway station in Luxembourg City at around 9 or 10 a.m. From then on, I was caught up in the machinery. The order said I was in RAD camp number 1-33 in Pinne. Where is Pinne? Nobody knows where Pinne is. We found out when we were in Luxembourg City. My father carried my suitcase, and we took the train as if I was going to school. We had to go to the station in Luxembourg City. We then learned that Pinne is in Poland and that in Polish it is called Pniewy. When we arrived in Luxembourg City, there were many people who had accompanied their sons. The Germans had cordoned off everything. Suddenly the sirens started wailing. So we went to the air-raid shelter in the champagne cellar opposite the station. We were supposed to leave by train at 11 o'clock. When the all-clear was announced with sirens, we left the air-raid shelter and were supposed to leave. As we were about to get on the train, the sirens wailed again. And back to the champagne cellar again. Finally, we left Luxembourg City shortly after noon. The German labour service leaders from the camp in Poland had come to pick us up. The train went via Trier. I wrote down the route in my book here. I couldn't sleep and wrote everything down. First Igel, then Kartaus, etc. On the Luxembourg side, before we got to the German border, in Wasserbillig and everywhere at the level crossings, which were still raised and lowered by hand at that time, people stood because the level crossings were then closed. There were often Luxembourgish girls standing there, one with a red skirt, one with a white skirt and one with a blue skirt. In protest because they were still taking our men - we were indeed the last. That's what we saw. Finally, we arrived in Trier. On the way we had already tried to destroy everything in the train that wasn't nailed down. The German labour service leaders said nothing, they didn't dare. We were about 600 men. 600 men on a train, that's almost impossible. We were taken there on two days, 12 and 13 July. A total of 1,200 men were still drafted in 1944. In any case, it was a long train, and everything was so robust in the trains at that time. On the wooden benches, which were attached to each other with the backrests, you heard everything your neighbour said, because you sat back-to-back. At the time when I was still going to school, there was always an employee of the health insurance company on the train, who was dishing it out against the Germans. We all the time told him to be quiet because he didn't know who else was on the train. It wasn't long before they arrested him. He was sent to the concentration camp and never came back. That was the atmosphere at the time. The next day we arrived in Poland. On the way we had seen children, barefoot, with ragged clothes. They came running to the train when it stopped and begged for bread. We had our suitcases full, not with bread, but with cake! And we threw them the cake. Russian prisoners of war were working on the tracks. We threw them cigarettes. We had suitcases full of food. And when we arrived at the camp the next day, we were distributed around Poznan. About 100 of us went to the camp in Pinne. The others went to other camps. There were 600 of us, in two other camps. In the camp we had to hand in the food and share it with the Germans. What I still wanted to say: the Russian prisoners of war who had to work on the tracks were guarded by guys in dark Organisation Todt uniforms. When one of the prisoners picked up a cigarette, a German went at him and hit him in the eye with his revolver, giving him a severe laceration above the eye. We had a male nurse from the camp with us who had picked us up in Luxembourg. Also one of the harmless ones. We forced him to treat the Russian prisoner of war. There were a few hundred of us and they were just few men. So he had to treat him and he did. But what happened to the poor guy when we left? He was certainly shot on the spot. That was our first contact with the Germans in Poland and with the Polish population.

What kind of work did you then have to do in the RAD (Reich Labour Service)?

The Reich Labour Service was a paramilitary organisation. It had been introduced when the Nazis - Hitler and cronies - seized power in Germany. They also shovelled here at the Siegfried Line, at the bunkers, and built roads, but everything for the war. At the same time, we had a spade, which was held like a rifle depending on the command: "Spade!", "Shoulder!", "Present!", etc. But we also had a rifle. It was a French carbine from the First World War, a Lebel rifle. A rifle that was superior to the German Carbine 98k, because it already had 10 rounds at that time. The French were down after 6 weeks and the Germans had taken all their weapons, in huge quantities. We were equipped with these rifles. The rifle was always hanging by our beds, loaded. We also often practised shooting and rifle drill. And we went peat cutting. For three months we were near Warsaw at Grochowalsk. We had gone there by train. The Germans were only there for two months. They were born 1927. After two months they were drafted into the Wehrmacht, even then. They were still boys! We were still boys too. Since another detachment, which also consisted of 200 men - 100 Luxembourgers, 100 Germans, with whom we had no quarrel, but simply ignored them - was disbanded, they came to us. There we were 200 again, but only Luxembourgers, so the Germans didn't have much fun with us. So we came to Grochowalsk, not far from Warsaw, to work on a large estate, a farm, where there were still Germans, the farmers, and French prisoners of war. We were quartered there and had to dig trenches. The Russians were coming closer and closer, they were already in Warsaw behind the Vistula. Then there was this uprising in Warsaw, and we saw a fire at night. But the Russians were passive, so the Germans put down the uprising. You can read about that. And then the Russians started the march on Berlin. We saw the fire in Warsaw at night. We were lying there in the barn, on the straw. I lay in a sheep pen. At dawn the sheep were always screaming. We were already dead tired from working all day and at night we stood guard. We had orders - this was in the General government for Poland - to shoot at civilians immediately on the street where we were standing guard. But no shots were ever fired. Once I was standing guard near the mess and a drunken Pole came staggering up from below. No one would have given two hoots if I had shot him. But I wouldn't have dreamed of shooting this man. On Sundays we had the day off and hung up a picture of Hitler in the pigsty, which we then shot at with the bayonet. One of the German corporals, that was the lowest rank, shot with us. You have to imagine that. If that had come out, we would all have been sent to the concentration camp. This German foreman, our boss, would probably have been executed immediately. We could do that, no one was there on Sundays. Nobody cared about us. We were not allowed to leave the compound, that was forbidden. In the morning we were given this thin coffee outside on the carts that stood there - at that time there were no tractors - which we then drank and with the rest of it we soaped ourselves up and scrubbed off our beards. In October we went back to the camp. It was already quite cold there in October. But there was one more episode: I had black, rather thick hair. And there were the Germans with their racial mania. If you looked like me, you were not Aryan, not of the Aryan race. We had a German corporal or lance corporal who always said to me, "You black devil, you!" I always looked at him contemptuously, he was a real Nazi. Just the way they were back then. But we also knew that he went out to Pinne at night. At 10 o'clock it was curfew and everyone had to be in bed. That was checked. He was one of the superiors, but even he was not allowed to go out. Behind the camp was a lattice fence with access to the Pinne cemetery. We knew - at least I and some others knew - that he sometimes climbed over this fence at night. Maybe he had a girlfriend in Pinne, what the Germans called a meal ticket relationship. I always thought I would kill him if I ever stood guard at night and caught him. We had orders to shoot immediately at night. And as luck would have it, I was standing guard - we always stood guard in pairs, one making his rounds in one direction to the fence and back

again, the other in the other direction - when we saw someone coming towards the yard. It was pitch dark, but we knew it was him. I shouted to him to stop. A first shot was fired. Missed. He jumped over the fence and I fired another shot. Missed again. It was too dark. I would have liked to hit him. I would have blown the life out of him with his "black devil". Without remorse, not even today.

How did your path continue after the Reich Labour Service? Where did you end up afterwards?

When the three months were up - it was a little more than three months, it was mid-October then - we suddenly stopped getting mail from home. The Americans were in Luxembourg then! And we were in Poland, with hundreds or maybe thousands who had been in the Wehrmacht before us. My parents didn't know where I was. They knew that perhaps I was still in Poland. Or not anymore. My brother was in the Auvergne. They didn't know where he was either. And neither of us knew what had happened to them. You must imagine that. That's why my mother used to say that she felt she was locking her sons out when she locked the door at night. It's hard to imagine the feelings our parents had. We were young, we took it a little easier. But we missed them and our homeland too. When the Americans came, the Germans said to us, later, in the Wehrmacht, when the Rundstedt Offensive had begun: "Now you Luxembourgers can go on holiday to your homeland again. We have liberated your homeland again." All we could think then was that those scumbags were back in Luxembourg. A little later the camp was dissolved and there were all kinds of rumours. We would go to Sweden; we would be exchanged for German prisoners of war. All just "shithouse slogans", as the Germans used to say. You know how rumours start, it's still the same today. There's always just something else being added. Nobody knew anything real. As was to be expected, we were taken over by the Wehrmacht. The camp was then disbanded and some went to Berlin, others to Schwedt, and I went to Frankfurt an der Oder. To the barracks. There we received this, the "German soldier's dress of honour". I was sworn in as a German soldier: "I swear by God Almighty..." etc. These scumbags invoked God to have power wherever they went. Where they left, they left a trail of blood. Especially in Russia. They had killed 50 million Russians on Russian territory from 1941 to 1944, soldiers and civilians. You must imagine that. In Frankfurt, there were 18 Luxembourgers and 100 Alsatians. The Alsatians were with us in the barracks in Frankfurt and together with them we were transferred to Denmark with German soldiers. For training. A Wehrmacht training course usually lasted 3 months. Tough, intense training. The only positive thing in Denmark was that we still got good food. Denmark was an agricultural country, and perhaps that's still the case today. We didn't suffer from hunger there. While later at the front... The Germans called it "Kohldampf schieben" (to be starving). No one knows how bad it is when you're so hungry that all you think about is eating and you don't get anything. That's very bad. You can't convey that to someone, how it makes you feel. In Denmark that wasn't the case, I even sometimes didn't go to the Wehrmacht mess to eat. Then I had bought pastries and whipped cream, for a crown. A whole bowl full of whipped cream. I got intense training on an SMG, a machine gun, an MG42. With two Luxembourgers from Roodt sur Syr. We were gunner 1, gunner 2 and gunner 3. The three of us were eligible to operate the machine gun if we went to the front. There were a number of German soldiers behind us carrying the ammunition boxes. This machine gun could theoretically fire 1,500 rounds a minute. There were three barrels with it, which were changed while firing. We had an asbestos glove because you couldn't touch the barrels afterwards because it glowed from heat. When the training was over, it was Christmas. We had a little party and drank aquavit, I think that was the name of the schnapps. And little things from the Wehrmacht. The Germans celebrate Christmas so big. And a non-commissioned officer warned us. Wassenberg was his name, a very nice man, who didn't push

us around. There were also some who were always chasing us around, mostly with the gas mask. When Wassenberg relieved them - we saw him coming in the field - he shouted from a distance: "Gas over!" So we took off the gas masks. You can't breathe well with a gas mask. At Christmas, three of us were in a cell in a prison. The Germans used it as barracks. He went from cell to cell, telling us not to drink this stuff, that there was something in the air. That was his way of saying that we would probably soon be sent to the front. It was about the middle of January when there was an alarm at night. One of the three of us was on guard duty. We often stood guard there. I usually stood in the middle of town at a petrol station when it was my turn. We stood at the petrol pumps and had our cartridge pouches and rifles with the bayonet, the safety catch up and our finger on the trigger. There was a line on the ground and the civilian passers-by had to walk on the other side. Nothing ever happened. I just describe to you how we stood guard. When the alarm went off, my colleague stood guard. We packed everything together and got new uniforms. I still had civilian clothes with me, we had taken our suitcases with us from Poland. We were supposed to keep our civilian clothes so that we could go home in civilian clothes if we were released. But since the Americans were here, we couldn't go home, but were immediately put into the Wehrmacht. Normally we would have been entitled to 14 days' leave before we were drafted into the Wehrmacht. Only we didn't have any leave, we went straight into the Wehrmacht. We had thick camouflage jackets with a hood, what we would call a parka today. It was white on one side and camouflage on the other. When snow fell, we could turn it around and then we were camouflaged. I had put on my civilian clothes, trousers and shirt, under my uniform when the alarm for the front came. Nobody saw that. I wasn't that broad; I still am not today. I could still put them on well. Later I tore them off piece by piece, trousers and underwear, because we were full of lice at the front. The lice were the most horrible thing there was. You didn't notice them during the day, but at night, when you could sit down or lie down, you couldn't sleep. It was a terrible infestation. If you meet someone again who was at the front, ask them. Every soldier had lice. We were clothed and given new weapons, at least some of us. And since the three of us were at the machine gun, we didn't get a rifle, we got a pistol. What now? We had to go to the front. The three of us concluded that as long as we were still in Denmark, the train would stop from time to time. To pee, "to step out" as the Germans put it. Then we would ask the sergeant, there was one in each wagon - always cattle cars - who was in charge. When you got into the train, there was a small stove. Under the ceiling of the wagon were racks where you could lay your weapons. We could also hang our clothes there. Then we would ask the sergeant if we could go to pee, one at a time. Or just two and one would follow. We had worked it out so that we put our pistols in the pocket of our thick jackets, which we also wore in the wagon because it was winter. Loaded. The belt on which the whole thing hung was in the wagon. You couldn't see whether the pistol was inside or not. We wanted to desert. I and one of the other two Luxembourgers was to ask first. That wouldn't be a problem. And then the third one was supposed to ask so that it wouldn't be obvious that it was the three Luxembourgers. It happened just as we had imagined. We were in Denmark, the train stopped in an open field, we went out to "pee" and the train whistled when it was time after five minutes and everyone was to get back into a carriage. But the third of us did not come. What should we do? Should we two desert alone? We couldn't do that; we couldn't abandon him. He was our friend, our comrade. So, we went back into the wagon and it was the three of us again. Towards Poland, to the front. We asked him why he hadn't come. I can still hear him saying today that he couldn't. So, we decided to go along with it. I still remember his words today. He died; he didn't come back. The other one was captured by the Russians during a battle. I escaped at that time. He was in a prison camp in Tambov near Moscow. The one who didn't make it got a volley in the stomach, he died immediately.

What was your everyday life like at the front?

It's hard to describe. When we arrived there, we heard the artillery from far off. It got louder and louder. It sounded like a thunderstorm. As if it were thundering, but continuously. We were unloaded from the train in the middle of the field and the three of us were stationed by the machine gun. There was a sergeant called the gun commander. That was our boss. A very nice young fellow. He had a travelling stick, a pistol and a red scarf around his neck. I see that image still today. Everything was more relaxed at the front. No one was pushed around. Because that's where the real shooting was. We came to the front on a Wednesday, I remember that clearly. We went to a big farm where we got three hard-boiled eggs. And other things I can't remember. We were told not to eat too much in case we got shot in the stomach. So we marched off in the direction from which the artillery was rumbling. But we did not come under fire immediately. We still had a wood in front of us and saw that behind it dive-bombers were swooping down. Probably on Russian tanks, we couldn't see exactly, in any case the Russians were there. There was a large straw cart where I had barricaded myself for the night. There were no beds. We couldn't go to sleep at night, we were at the front all the time. We were at the front for four months without being relieved because the Germans had no more reserves. From there we went in another direction, to a village where the Russians were. We were ordered to attack the Russians. We had two tanks. There was a small wood in front of it and it was quiet, there was no shooting. The Russians saw what we were up to. They let us come. We had set up the machine gun. There was an open field to my right, the German infantry went forward from there and the sergeant said to me it would be my turn to shoot- later I never shot again, I always let the others shoot - that I should fire at the church tower, because there were surely observers sitting inside. That was certainly the case. I aimed at the church tower and saw the roof tiles flying away. But I didn't see anyone. The Russians still didn't respond. Then the sergeant said, "Get your pistols ready for the house-to-house fight." He had just said it when two German tanks on my left started firing. There were telephone wires above us. Every time the tanks fired, sparks flew down my neck from the muzzle flash back here under my helmet. I had to keep brushing them away. We were supposed to attack the village. When the sergeant had said to ready our pistols for the house-to-house fight, the Russians responded. Boy, oh boy. What firing! Everywhere they shouted, "Father!" "Mother!" "Medic!" "Help!" The telephone pole was hit by a grenade or something. The wires fell down on us and we were caught up in them. We had a hard time getting out of it. That was the so-called baptism of fire. There was also a guy from Esch with me. I saw him get hit in the knee. But he came home. We never were in touch again, but I saw him in the obituaries in the newspaper a few years ago. We retreated and took the wounded with us as best we could. So there we were at the front. That's how it continued. We went to another position because they saw that we were outnumbered by the Russians. We retreated, none of the three of us and the whole machine gun crew had been hit. But it wasn't long before one of us was killed and we were separated. At that time, when one was killed and the other was taken prisoner, I was not exactly at the same position as they were. I was lying in a hole further back with a German. The Russians broke through with a tank and we were supposed to hold back the infantry, the Russian soldiers. A tank was coming towards us. I was lying in the hole with the German and had further retreated. It was about a metre away from us. I saw it coming and thought that if it had seen us, it would have turned on the hole, as they did at that time, and then we would both have been crushed. But the tank hadn't seen us. The tanks in those days were not equipped with the instruments they have today. They were pretty much blind. Only the driver looked through the little slit. The commander stood at the top in the turret and had the cover in front of him for protection. He saw everything and gave the commands. The tank drove past us a metre away. When it had passed, the German - who was a Berliner and had been given leave, even had gone home, but when he arrived in Berlin, the German Wehrmacht police already waited to immediately sent him back to the front on the

same train - was so bitter and angry, he wanted to shoot the Russian commander on the tank from behind. I snatched the rifle from him and shouted, "Are you crazy? They didn't see us! Idiot!" That's how we escaped. Another time, it must have been in March, I was sitting on the ditch with a German soldier because the sun was shining. I probably wasn't at the machine gun at that point. I wasn't always there, we had to leave it standing from time to time. The Germans were treating their wounds, the Russians on the other side too. No shots were fired, this was also sometimes the case. We had found a jar of cherries or plums in a house. We were sitting on the ditch, it was quiet as I said, and we were spooning the jar. Suddenly a shot fell and the glass shattered into a hundred thousand pieces. A Russian sharpshooter - a sniper, as the Americans call them, the Germans had many of them too - had probably taken a joke. He could just as well have been aiming at me or the man next to me. He had probably made a joke of shooting at the jar. They never missed. Where they aimed, the bullet went. We jumped down immediately, of course.

Was there a difference between the Luxembourgers and the Germans in the Wehrmacht?

Clothes make the man in that case. We wore the German uniform, we all lay in the same dirt, exposed to the same dangers. There was no difference. I had a man from Frankfurt with me for a while, and he could see my desperation – after all, I was still a young chap – on my face. You can even see it in the picture here, but then I wasn't at the front yet. He said, "Luxembourger, don't worry. If anything happens to you, I'll carry you out of the firing line." Fair enough, but no one could know if he wouldn't end up in the field hospital before me. I didn't see him again later. As I said, we were all in the same boat. Those are my experiences. But that didn't make us feel like German soldiers. We saw ourselves as victims who had no business being there, with all the worries and fears that went with it. We had nothing to do with the German army and the war of aggression. But we were there. Many were not there either. Over 3,000 deserted, mostly after they had been to the front. Because anyone who was once at the front and got leave - as a non-German soldier - and then went back, had to really want to, otherwise he wouldn't have gone back. The reason was probably that he didn't want to hurt his parents. Otherwise, once you've been to the front, you didn't go back voluntarily. It's an inferno. It is death, smoke, gun smoke, explosion flames, whirring splinters, whistling bullets, the Katyusha alias Stalin's organ. That is the front. And then the wounded calling for medics, their mother and father. That's the front, only suffering. Very bad. We were pulled back again and again, the Russians pressed vehemently. Until we were in Kolberg on the Baltic Sea. There was a fortress, still from the time of Frederick the Great's Prussian wars, which we were supposed to defend. But it didn't come to that because we were surrounded. We had the sea in front of us and we were in the dunes. The German planes dropped food on us from time to time. Sometimes it fell on the Russian side. One day in this cauldron - there was a village in front of Kolberg - we had retreated to a cemetery and sought shelter behind the crosses, which was also very dangerous. This book here is called "Opfer in Feldgrau" or victims in field grey. I once came home from Bitburg and my mother told me that a certain Mr Schuller - he was blind and had a dog with him - had come by and she had bought a book from him. She got into a conversation with him and then the name Goniva came up. He said that he had attended the crafts and arts school with someone called Goniva. My mother said that it could only have been me. And so it was. And about the village, there in the cemetery, he writes in his book: "When the firing died down a bit - I turned around - I saw a Luxembourger who had sore feet and who had attended the crafts and arts school with me." I was there alone as a Luxembourger at first, and from then on I had another Luxembourger with me, Leo Schuller. When we got to the dunes, he said to me that he wanted to be captured, that he couldn't take it any longer. I replied that I wouldn't do it, because we had seen how

they dealt with the German escapees. We had seen those treks. The Russians retreated from time to time, and of course we pushed forward again. It was then that we saw what the Russians were like and what they did to the women and so on. But he wanted to be captured. We were supposed to go into the cauldron. Here was the sea, and the Russians had divided the cauldron into several small cauldrons. The Russians were on one side and we were on the other. To get out of one cauldron in the direction of Berlin, Swinoujscie, you had to break through the Russian lines. But he was not in my section. We had agreed that if nothing happened to us, we would meet at the dunes after we got through. I didn't see him again. Not at home either. He had taken a bullet or a splinter in the eye at that time and was blinded. I found that out later, it's all in his book. I think it also says that he was taken prisoner by the Russians and that they must have taken care of him. But it was highly unusual for a Russian soldier to take care of a German soldier. Most of the time they were shot immediately. Mostly, not always. With a larger group, that didn't happen. After the war, I then tried to reach him. By telephone. I had done some research, and at that time he was working as a telephone receptionist at the home for the blind in Berschbach. We always talked on the phone, but never met up with each other. One day, when we were both already retired, he called me and suggested we go out for dinner together. I agreed and we arranged something. A few days later I opened the newspaper and found his name in the obituary column. He was dead. The same thing happened to me with someone else who was also in the crafts and arts school with me. One from the Moselle, I won't mention his name. I was workshop manager in the army and we often had open days when parents could visit their sons at work. I was always there to show the visitors the workshop. Suddenly someone came up to me and asked if I was Mr Goniva. I replied in the affirmative and he asked if I did not recognise him. He had been to the same school as me and so we got into a conversation. He had also been drafted into the Wehrmacht but was not with me. I asked him how he had fared. He told me that he had defected to the Russians. I replied that I had never had the courage to do so. To do so he had to shoot a sergeant with whom he once found himself alone. He shot him and defected. That's why I won't mention the name, I'm sure the relatives are still alive. They had a car dealership somewhere on the Moselle.

Your last station was then Berlin. Can you tell us about that?

We were pushed back again and again by the Russians. The cauldron was blown open and one morning there were huge ships in the sea. If it had been the Russians, no one would have been able to get out. But they were German warships. And they started firing. The clouds were red because of the muzzle flash. You can't imagine what's going on when ships' guns are firing. They blew up the cauldron and that's how we got out. In Swinoujscie we were taken to the other side by ferry. I think that's where the Oder flows into the sea. We then went to Eberswalde, which is below Köpenick. In Eberswalde we were given new clothes and could also take a shower and delouse. We could never change, we always wore the same clothes, full of lice and scabies. Unshaven, our faces sunken. We were in Eberswalde for 10-14 days and got almost nothing to eat. But new weapons. I had a German with me. You always had someone to talk to. The two of us had gloriously decided to get rations in the evening. The rations for the company consisted of black pudding and things like that, for breakfast the day after and coffee. I told him to steal a loaf of bread and I would steal a tin of cheese. No sooner said than done. Only someone had seen us. So we returned with the food to our quarters upstairs in an attic with a fold-out staircase. We had just started to eat our tiny little pieces when there was a thump at the bottom of the stairs and two military policemen came up. The bayonet was visible first, then the rifle, then the men. "Grenadiers Goneifa or Gonifa and..." I can't remember the name of the other one. "Here." "Come along!" Someone had grassed us up. You could be court-martialled for something like that. That was comrade theft for them.

But because it was the end of the war, they needed soldiers. And that was probably our luck. We were taken to the commander-in-chief, a lieutenant colonel. He asked us why we had done it. I replied that it was because I was hungry. "What do you think? Our women, our children are also hungry! We are all hungry! I hereby sentence you to four days' confinement!" The same for the other one. He actually still meant well with us. This can of cheese was quite small. The two of us were locked up in a pigsty for four days. On bread and water. On the fourth day, several trucks suddenly stopped in front of the door and we had to get in. But we didn't go to the front immediately. We drove to the centre of Berlin. There we set up roadblocks. The bigwigs who were with Hitler - we didn't know who exactly - were on the run. Car after car. They left Berlin because the Russians were already at Köpenick. When the episode was over, we marched on foot to Köpenick. Via Friedrichsstraße, I still remember the name today. There the Russians were at the train station. Everywhere people were shouting names from the windows. These were the parents of German soldiers who hoped that their sons were with us and that they would find them again. While we marched along, they called names after us and asked if we knew them. We arrived in Köpenick and had a Panther tank with us and two armoured cars. I was a machine gunner again on the second car. We were supposed to storm the railway station where the Russians were. We succeeded in doing so. The sergeant of the first infantry fighting vehicle was killed immediately. We ducked, of course. We got the station back and the Russians retreated. According to the script, of course, i.e. with shelling, hand grenades, etc. In front of the station on the steps we set up the machine guns. When you entered the station in Köpenick, there was the station restaurant on the right and a counter with goods on the left. On the right were the steps going up where we set up the machine gun. I was there, but I didn't shoot. It was a German, I just handed him the ammunition. I didn't want to shoot any more. I avoided it if I could. I only shot very rarely. When evening came, of course, we were expecting the Russians, who wanted to take back the station. On the other side were several houses. The station was on a road. There were two garages where the residents parked their cars. But the residents were gone and we had taken shelter in one of them. With our weapons and all our stuff. A tank was parked a little further back. It was a Russian tank, on the other side of the station. You could enter the station from the front and then leave it at the back. There was a house where the "Captain of Köpenick" was pasted on the wall, life-sized. You probably know the story of the Captain of Köpenick, who was buried in the Cemetery of Our Lady here in Luxembourg. The Russian tank must have looted a factory that made biscuits, because it was full of them. We had nothing to eat, no rations. We emptied our ammunition boxes and took turns to go get biscuits. When evening came, we were still in the station. But we had seen behind the track that the Russians were gathering. They weren't far away, maybe 200 metres. They were gathering to retake the station. Our armoured cars were in front of the station and then the order came to retreat. One of the vehicles didn't start, the battery must have been flat. I and another soldier stretched a rope from the working tank to the other one that wasn't running and which I was on, to take that one along or pull it so that the engine would start up again. This was at dawn. Suddenly there was a crash, I looked up and saw a Russian soldier with his rifle flying away. He turned around and fell down. A German must have hit him. And he must have thrown a hand grenade at the two of us who were tying the rope. I said to the other one, "They got me." At my back, the jacket with the hood had blown off. I felt that I had got something in my back. I had got a splinter in my back, it's still in there today. So I was wounded. I went to see one of the officers and I don't remember exactly how I got to Berlin-Tempelhof. But I have the certificate here that I was put on the hospital train in Berlin-Tempelhof that was supposed to go to a hospital in Nauen. That's west of Berlin. When we arrived there, the Russian artillery was already firing into it. So we went on to Denmark to a military hospital. When we entered the station in Lübeck - which is a long way from Berlin - the British had just taken Lübeck with their tanks. We ran into the station and at the top of the bridge there was a British tank

firing a shot at the locomotive. I was standing by the door, I wasn't badly wounded. From then on we were prisoners of the British. On 23 April I was wounded in Berlin in the morning and this was on 24 April, when we were on our way to Denmark. The Germans were organised right up to the last day. On the way, we got something to eat from the Red Cross nurses – "carbolic mice" the Germans called them, because the Germans disinfected everything with carbolic (my father too, he disinfected the cowshed at home with it) - in the stations between Berlin and Lübeck. The German soldiers who were mobile and could get out - me too, my legs were all right - fought to get to the field kitchen. There was one who spoke such strange German that I decided to ask him if he wasn't a Luxembourger when things calmed down a bit. He spoke this schoolboy German, you could hear it. When a Luxembourger and a German speak German, it's like night and day. I went up to him and asked, "Comrade, where are you from?" He looked at me, "I come from Luxembourg." He came from Binsfeld in the north of Luxembourg. By then we were already two Luxembourgers, only I was in a different wagon. It turned out that we had already been in the labour service together in Poland. But neither of us recognised the other, even after such a short time. He had got a splinter in his nose, that's why he was on this train. He was also lucky, like me. I had the splinter in my back. I don't know if anyone had even looked at it. When we were prisoners of the British in Lübeck, the two of us naturally sat down together. The British led us out of Lübeck. They had spun barbed wire around a large meadow. They had made an entrance and two MPs stood to the left and right. The meadow was already full of Germans. The British had put up tents. So we went into this camp with the other Germans. British trucks were continually driving past, with German prisoners of war sitting on them. On the left and right were British tanks with commanders on the turret, armed with submachine guns. A truck with Germans and British soldiers on the back drove up and the British soldier shouted something at us that we didn't understand. We were sitting there alone, just the two of us, not hanging out with the Germans. I only saw him reach to his side, pull out his pistol and shoot. I had seen it in time and pulled my comrade down with me and into a hedge, where we dropped. Then the truck was gone. I saw the British commander, who was sitting in the tank, immediately point his submachine gun at the truck. To show that he should not shoot. When we arrived at the camp, two MPs were standing there with two rubber truncheons. From time to time, they beat the Germans with them. I said to my companion that we would be blown to pieces if they caught one of us. We were completely emaciated. But we got in without a scratch. I had a red, white, and blue ribbon in my wallet. Many Luxembourgers had one. In the camp full of Germans, no, it was already in the train, two Germans, whom I didn't know at all because we weren't in the same unit, had already said to me that as a Luxembourger I was now with the victors. The damned Germans knew that we really had no business with them. I said, "Yes, we are with the victors now. That's how it goes." Another told me that he had been in the Villa Pauly in Luxembourg during the war and had beaten up the Luxembourgers there. I just thought, if he had told me that at the front, he would have died a hero's death. It would have been doable then and that's why they were always nice to us at the front. I had the red-white-and-blue ribbon here attached to my German uniform somehow, probably on my pocket. One of the British sentries who was patrolling with a rifle had seen it. He came over to me. Before that, a German soldier had also seen the ribbon. It turned out that he was also a Luxembourger. He had his shoulder in a plaster cast because he had received a shot or a splinter. Now there were three of us. The British guard told us to follow him. He took us into a tent, it must have been the commander of the camp. We had our papers, us three Luxembourgers. Each had his pay book. He looked at it and looked whether we had any tattoos, that is, if we hadn't been in the SS. We were wearing a Wehrmacht uniform, but SS could have tried to get a Wehrmacht uniform in order to escape. Because if the Russians saw someone in an SS uniform, they shot him immediately. So the commander looked at our three books and said that the British Army knew what had

happened to Luxembourg during the bloody war. We would get a paper from him and could leave the camp as free men. He issued us a pass and the three of us ran out of the camp in German uniforms. The Germans made big eyes and wanted to know where we were going. The MPs standing in the entrance looked at the passes and let us go. And then the three of us stood in front of the camp, in German uniform. Without anything to eat. But we had a blanket. And now? We orientated ourselves by the sun to find the west. We didn't know what time it was, my watch had been taken from me by a British soldier at the railway station in Lübeck. It wasn't only the Russians who did that. So we ran cross-country in German uniforms from one heap of turnips to another to find something to eat. I don't remember whether one of us had a knife or we had a stone. We ate turnips. That's something very nutritious, we could keep ourselves afloat with it. We found water in streams. It wasn't long before we caught the eye of a British patrol. They picked us up immediately. But we had a pass. They took us to a village where they asked for civilian clothes for us. We got them from the Germans there - they had to give them to us. I got a blue overall, the others a jacket or something. We still wore our German boots, but that didn't matter. From then on we were civilians and no longer German soldiers. We had already thrown away our caps. We marched endlessly, always towards the west. Or so we thought. After a few days we arrived in Lauenburg on the Elbe. We were still feeding on turnips. Suddenly we saw Frenchmen on a bridge. That was the French military, soldiers, officers. They were collecting their prisoners of war who were in the main camps in Germany in 1940 to bring them home. I said to my two companions that we would pretend to be Alsatians if they asked. After all, we could identify ourselves. The Alsatians didn't know much better French than we did. There were always some with us. They bought it immediately and we were allowed on the French transport. The French also had volunteers with the Germans. At first we saw that they killed a few of them on the bridge. They wanted to smuggle themselves in to get home. But they must have found out that they were volunteers with the Germans. The British put together a convoy with trucks and took us to the Netherlands with the French - we were French at that point. When we arrived in the Netherlands, we saw that it must not have been nice there either. One shell hole next to the other. And it really hadn't been nice there when the Americans and the British landed. When we arrived in Brussels, we had already been given rations by the French, and from there we went to Lille. And from Lille to Roubaix, and from Roubaix to Paris. And in Paris in the Trocadero, we were sorted. We were behind the Eiffel Tower in the Palais de Chaillot. The French came to us and always asked for their people. We couldn't say much, we didn't know anyone. The army was sorting in the Palais de Chaillot and when it was our turn, we were first given a piece of paper to hang around our necks on which everyone had to state where they were going. Some came from Lille, Marseille, Tours, from all over France. They were then taken to the stations and put on the trains going in that direction. We said we were Luxembourgers and that was no problem. We got 5,000 francs, 2,500 in cash and 2,500 drawn on the Banque de France. Years ago, I got a letter from the Banque de France saying they had closed my account. I don't know how they got my address. Maybe I had given it at the time. They didn't pay any interest, nothing. I declared the 2,500 francs when I got back to Luxembourg. I also still had Deutschmarks. We hadn't been searched by anyone; we weren't prisoners of the Russians. If we had been, we would have nothing left, they threw everything away immediately or confiscated it. Then I wouldn't have been able to identify myself and there would have been no proof that I was who I said I was. If someone had asked me who I was, I could have just said I was Marcel Goniva. I could have known that from someone and pretended to be that person. But for me, that was not the case. So the French took us to the Gare de l'Est and we took the train to Luxembourg. We arrived in Kleinbettingen. Before that, when we were in the Longwy area, men in plain clothes came into the carriage and asked for our papers. They were Luxembourg police officers. We said we had no papers because we were from the Wehrmacht. We didn't want to give anything away. So they took us away. They

were not very friendly. They took us to the customs in Pétange. They probably called the repatriation authorities in Luxembourg City. We didn't know what they were told, but they were nicer afterwards. They probably asked if we had been in the Wehrmacht voluntarily. If we had, they would have arrested us right away. We went with the customs officers to a bar where we drank 1-2 beers. We didn't have to pay anything; we didn't have any Luxembourg money. The woman and the customs officers were nice. One customs officer even gave us 20 francs. We then travelled from Kleinbettingen to Hagen. There one of my companions met his neighbour from Beckerich, who worked for the Luxembourg railway. He stayed there and drove home with him. Then there were only the two of us left. We drove on and walked from Hagen to Goebange. From Hagen to Goebange you come to the Route d'Arlon between Steinfort and Windhof. On the left, you go through a wood to Goebange. When we came out of the wood, I could already see the lights of Goebange. That was in the evening around eleven o'clock. Between eleven and twelve. I was overcome by a feeling of happiness that I haven't had since. When I saw the lights of my home village. We had arrived at home at my parents'. Before that, we went to a bar where I used to go bowling. There were still people, they asked us questions and were all happy since they were all people from Goebange. We talked a little. Suddenly the door opened and my brother, who had deserted to France, came in, wearing a uniform. He was in the auxiliary gendarmerie at the time. But he didn't stay there. We knew then that we were both still alive. All three of us went home together. The next day I went to the neighbour's house. Their son was about the same age as my brother. We had been good friends and had always played together. He had been killed in Yugoslavia. He hadn't come back. He had another brother who had only been in the labour service. He was exempted from the Wehrmacht because they had a farm. I wanted to greet his mother. When she saw me, she cried because she was thinking of her son, with whom I had always played and who had not return. She went back inside and I went home. The same had already happened to my brother. He came home before me. When the Americans arrived, he came back from France. I was home again. The next day, my friend accompanied my father, who was going to work as usual, to Luxembourg City. From there he drove home to Binsfeld. We saw each other again in Bitburg at the barracks. We had the same birth year, and he had also been drafted. I had signed up there for three years. After my compulsory year in Bitburg, I would have had to go home. So I thought about what I wanted to do. I had the certificate from the crafts and arts school. With it I would have ended up with some employer in a workshop or a locksmith's shop. Since I had already finished the crafts and arts school, I was already in the technical workshop in Bitburg. But I wasn't a workshop manager yet, that came later. I was a mechanic in the workshop as a soldier. So, I signed up for three years. My friend wanted to do that too, but they didn't take him. He had only finished primary school. They didn't need anyone; they already had enough workers. He finished his year and went home. He got married and later ran a bar in the south. He died early. He used to say he drank himself to death. Of course, he was still alive when he said that. But he saw that his health was at an end. That's what he told me on the phone. When we came back, we who were at the front were all traumatised. For those who weren't at the front, it was just an episode. Being in the German army was certainly not a pleasant thing, but some had never seen the front. But it didn't directly harm everyone either. We were very hard done by over there. It was only when we returned home from the front that it really hit home. The trauma that we had caught. At that time, no one went to a psychiatrist or psychologist, there was no such thing. We all should have had to see one. I woke up in the night in a cold sweat. I wanted to run away because of the nightmares. We all felt that way. There were many of us who were at the front, who drank to forget. Most of them perished.

Were you aware in 1945, when you were wounded, that the war would now be over for you?

When I saw that I was going on the hospital train, when I got on the train in Tempelhof, I knew that this was what the Germans called a “Heimatschuss”, a million-dollar round. But I didn't know whether I would ever reach home. I was only supposed to go to a military hospital. They would probably have removed the splinter – it's still in there. They wanted to remove it here too, but a surgeon told me not to let anyone touch it. It was so close to the spine, anything could happen. If it didn't cause me any problems, I should leave it in. The Germans might have removed it and then I would have been sent back to some unit and back to the front. When we arrived in Lübeck, I knew that the war was over for me. And it didn't last much longer, only until 8 May. That was in April, on 24 April, when I was on the train. It only took a few more days and then the war was over. But we weren't home yet.

Was it an option for you to run away, or was it clear from the start that you would join the Wehrmacht?

For me it was clear from the beginning that I would not desert. My brother had already deserted, and I knew about this Luxembourg Nazi - I may not have told you this yet - a few houses away from us, who was a Luxembourg Nazi, as we called them. He was spoiled and they were also well off, but he didn't want to go to work. When the Germans came, they didn't tolerate or feed anyone who didn't work. To escape this, he sided with the Germans. He even became a party member. He did no harm to anyone and worked for the municipality in Koerich as a municipal official, wearing the German uniform and carrying a pistol. They were given a pistol. A certain gentleman from Goetzingen - I won't mention his name either - was the municipal secretary in Koerich. He also sided with the Germans. The two Luxembourg Nazis, the party comrades of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, worked for the municipality in Koerich. He had warned my mother that if I didn't join, the family would be relocated. Another episode makes this even clearer. One day the German mayor from Steinfort came to us in his official car. Fourteen days after my brother had deserted. Because the Wehrmacht in Russia reported that he had not arrived, the mayor was informed immediately. He understood right away that he had deserted. My mother and I were just outside. He jumped out of the car and asked where her son was. She pointed to me. He asked about the other son. She explained that he had gone back to Russia a fortnight ago. He interrupted her and said he had not arrived there and that he knew he had deserted to France. She should be ashamed of such a son and if the second son - by which he meant me - took the same path as his brother, the family would be immediately relocated to Poland. That was our second warning. Was I supposed to desert as well? Although my father told me to run away too, I did not. I didn't want them to be relocated to Poland and have to leave their house and farm to the Germans. You asked if I intended to do the same. I did not think about it. I didn't want to put myself in supposed safety and hand them over to the Germans. No way. I'm not saying - I want to emphasise this - that I would ever blame anyone who ran away. Even if he knew that his parents would be relocated if he didn't go back. I understand that. Someone who came from the front and had to go back, he tried everything not to have to go back there again.

Do you feel that the victims of forced recruitment in Luxembourg were appreciated after the war?

I don't have that feeling. I didn't have the feeling that we were appreciated. We just had the bad luck of being born in the wrong year. We were victims, a bit all along the line. That is my opinion. There was no unity either. Everyone was happy to be back. Our government didn't really care about bringing us back. Although they knew that thousands of Luxembourgers were in the camp in Tambov. When the French had already taken out their Alsatian comrades,

ours stood there with their fingers in their mouths and watched them leave the camp. When another 160 died there after the war and our Luxembourg government at the time - these were the same people who had scarpered - simply abandoned them.

Did you hear anything about the Battle of the Bulge?

No. Although, yes! We got a front newspaper, I don't remember what it was called. It said, "Luxembourger" Oh, what did they call them? "Terrorists in connection with Americans..." terrorised Wallendorf. They would be killing people. Which apparently wasn't true. The first crossing of the Sûre by the Americans was in Wallendorf. Luxembourg citizens were also there. That's what I was told because I wasn't here. The Germans made it sound as if Luxembourg terrorists had crossed over with them and terrorised and even killed Germans. We heard about that in the Wehrmacht. We didn't hear anything about it in the labour service. We only experienced that we no longer received any mail and could no longer write home. We were probably told about it at some point, but it wasn't talked about much. It went on as if there was nothing. We just sang, "Unshaven and far from home, far from home and unshaven." Without a break, we were young after all.

What memories do you have of the immediate post-war period?

I came back and was at home for a few weeks. Then I was immediately drafted again, to Walferdange, then to Dudelange. On 11 November 1945, the French holiday commemorating the end of World War I, I went to the barracks in Bitburg and stayed there for ten years. I sometimes came home on Sundays. Holidays were not regulated in the beginning, not like today. We were given permission, not leave. If the company commander allowed it, we could go home for a weekend. A few years later, the soldiers were sent home by turns to visit their parents and families on Sundays. But in the first years, there was no leave. That didn't bother us either since we hadn't been spoiled by the Germans. We wore the Luxembourg uniform proudly. We were in favour of the military. At least I was. All of us, we were volunteers. I mean those from the leadership. The Luxembourgers who did mandatory service were not all happy to be there. They earned nothing. But being drafted into an army is not dramatic if it is your country's and there is no war. You can't say it's dramatic, it's service for the fatherland. I say that perhaps as someone in the military, but I might say otherwise if I were not. There is nothing wrong with someone having to do military service in peacetime. There is almost no such thing anymore, perhaps with the Russians, where everyone has to go. With the Germans, the French, the British, with us it's all on a voluntary basis.

What thoughts go through your mind when you think back to the war from today's perspective?

I think about it every day. When I was just back from war, we had a circle of friends in Diekirch, in our regular bar. I experienced the whole thing with my friends. On Sundays we had an aperitif there. After a few beers, it burst out of us. But otherwise, we didn't talk about it. Our parents asked us about it, but we didn't tell them anything. Later they didn't ask us anymore. At some point they saw that we were no longer the same as we were before. We tried to suppress it. That worked in the beginning. But we also had to try to build up an existence. My parents had made sure that I could go to the municipality, to an office somewhere. What would I have done in an office? I was not a penpusher. I wanted to join the army. That is, I didn't mind having to go. If I hadn't had to, I still would have enlisted. We didn't talk about the time in the Wehrmacht. When we got older, it came back. We can't get rid of it either. I think about it every day. I don't despair about it, it's not like that. But right

after the war, the nightmares at home, that was bad. I remember the second day I was home, I went into the woods. I had always liked to walk in the woods. I wanted to go to the place where I used to go. I was sitting at the edge of the woods and had fallen asleep. I was still weak, not yet properly nursed back to health. Then a thunderstorm broke. I remember dreaming that I was back at the front. I was woken up by a bang, as if a shell had hit next to me. I was so happy when I realised I was sitting in Goebblange at the edge of the woods. I remember this from time to time.