Washington, (film slating)

Yes, it is a most--

you are a unique witness because nobody was ever able to enter an extermination camp like Belzec and to come back alive.

I understand there's some.

There are no survivors of Belzec.

There are or there are not?

There are not

There are a lot of them.

No, there are not.
Oh, there are not.

There are no survivors of the Belzec extermination camp.

600,000 Jews perished in Belzec in about eight months.

And there are no survivors.

It's not true what they say.

There was one two years ago.

He lived in Canada.

He was 95 years old.

And he was in Belzec for four months.

At the time he went to Belzec, he was--

he escaped in November.

Well, a few days later, the contact
was arranged with some Jews whom I didn't know, of course.

We took a train to Belzec.

We took a train to Belzec.

It was a long trip.

As far as I remember, four hours.

Because Belzec is 150 kilometers south from Lublin.

Yes, yes.

Sobibor was north of Belzec.

Yes.

Which, by the way, will enter the picture.

We come to Belzec.
Of course, I didn't know what to expect.

We went out of the station.

First of all, over there I went disguised a little, name.

They were using--

Excuse me, you had no idea of what you would see.

No.

Well, I knew-- I heard about the Belzec.

And you knew--

Wait a second.

What I heard, by the way, at that time, even from some Jewish people, that this
is what was called at that time a transitional camp.

What I understood after the war, at that time they were liquidating the camp as such.

By November, there was no longer a camp.

And now, whatever were the reasons, of course I don't know.

Apparently, their last shipment, or the last--

the remnants of the Jews were taken out of Belzec and either

shipped to Sobibor, which became extermination camp,

or Jews who were taken from the Warsaw or other ghettos,

again for some reason, they would
be shifted to Belzec
for a short time

and again go somewhere else.

Yes, but you know
at the beginning,

Belzec was set to
destroy, to kill

the Jews who were living
around Belzec, the Jews of--

Yes.

Yes.

--of all this area.

Only, my point--

Not from the Warsaw ghetto.

The Warsaw ghetto, that
people were sent in Treblinka.

Belzec was meant for
the people of Kraków.
The people of Kraków were sent to Belzec.

I was not even aware of those details at that time.

But do you know too that they called all these camps transitional camps, Sobibor too, Treblinka too.

It was the name they gave.

And even-- this is not specific, as a matter of fact.

Well, over there I went--

And Belzec started to be operational as a death camp in March 1942.

Yes, yes, yes.
Only at the moment I visited it, it became apparently truly transitional, which means the Jews were shifted somewhere.

Now, the Germans announced that they are going to forced labor, that they are going to have good conditions.

They said this to the Jews.

To the Jews, yes, to the Jews.

They wanted-- the Germans always-- if they could avoid open trouble,

they wanted to avoid it.

So they wanted everything in as much order as,
of course, humanly possible.

Well, so then from the station we walked to the camp.

No difficulty whatsoever.

I had documentation.

My guide had documentation.

Tell me now, can you explain this precisely?

You were disguised?

Yes.

I was an Estonian militiaman.

Because the guns camps were guarded by Ukrainian--

Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians, Polish policemen,

and the regular German, Gestapo, SS men, et cetera.
So those were mercenaries of the Germans.

Yes.

Of course, at that time, which is understandable, the Germans, even for this kind of work,

they wanted to spare as much of their own men, to send them,

I imagine, to fight or to work, not for this business.

So they were using the others.

What was the color of your uniform?

Yellow with some sort of a belt, with boots, black cap,

I remember.

Indistinguishable otherwise.

No sign that it was Estonian whatsoever.
Documentation was that I was Estonian militiaman.

Excuse me, the trip had been arranged by the Jewish underground?

Yes, apparently.

Or by the Polish underground?

No, by the Jewish underground.

All this part-- all this part--

as a matter of fact, I didn't talk too much

to the Poles who are still in Poland.

But they knew that I established contact with them.

They might want to stop me, not to endanger me.
The Poles learned about it I -- only from the --

[INAUDIBLE] this specifically on behalf of the Jews.

Yes, yes.

This was my Jewish chapter for this.

So I followed their instructions.

So by whom was it organized?

I imagine by a Bund leader, because he

initiated this matter.

But he was not there.

Some unknown Jewish fellows, whatsoever.

So now, we walked and then we entered the camp.
Now this camp now, totally different from the Warsaw ghetto.

Mainly total confusion.

Everything in movement.

Excuse me, you say we walked-- who?

You and who?

A Jewish guide, but a guide whom I didn't know who established contact with me.

Yes, but you didn't walk in the camp with this Jew, no?

What did you say?

You didn't walk inside the camp with this Jew?

Oh, yes.
Oh, yes.

You write that it was an Estonian.

He had some sort of identification papers.

And then I followed him.

And he goes his way.

I go his way, only I was following him.

And he led me to some official.

And I just showed this.

Of course, counting I am an Estonian,

I don't speak German whatsoever.

And he went on some identification papers,

whatever it was.

This is a verbatim transcript of spoken word generated with 3Play Media. It is not the primary source, and it may contain errors in spelling or accuracy.
I don't know, Judenrat, whatever it is.

He entered as a civilian, only I was disguised.

And then I entered the camp, both of us.

And then I--

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[INAUDIBLE]

(film slating)

Professor Karski, I must tell you

that I understand very well how impossible what

I am asking from you now.

Because I ask you to describe the indescribable,

and this mean to describe what was at this camp.
And just-- I just want you to know that I know how difficult it is.

I understand.

We enter the camp.

As a matter of fact, that camp, at that point I entered it had no wall.

Wire was around it.

Barbed wires.

Barbed wires.

Were there walls in other parts, of course I don't know.
I spent in that camp probably no more than 20, 25 minutes.

Again, I couldn't take it, frankly.

Now, the difference between this camp and the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw was that here some sort of total confusion,

mainly that Jews, the population of it,

they were going somewhere.

Now, from-- as I saw it at that time,

from the station railroad, as I understood it,

there was some rail leading to the camp,

rather primitively built--

I could recognize it--

with some sort of a platform.
And then the train, which consisted of 40--

some 40 cattle trucks.

Cattle cars.

Yes.

The train facing the camp would move two or three cars and stop again.

And at that time, from that gate I was standing and observing,

now militiamen, Gestapo, Germans, [GERMAN],

directing them to the trucks.

Excuse me, but before you had to cross the camp, before arriving to this place where you--

Yes, I saw it from the camp.
where you were able to see the loading of the train.

The loading-- the loading of that primitive rail.

Yes, but before this, you crossed the camp.

Can you describe how you crossed it?

What you saw at the time when you crossed through this--

I didn't go very deep in the camp.

--through this crowd.

Because the guide apparently, and the Estonian,

they apparently wanted to show me this scene.

Yes.

And the train was facing at that particular gate.
So we entered the gate.

And then we stayed there observing what is happening.

How long was it before--

between the moment you entered the camp--

you entered from another gate--

and the moment you arrived at this point?

It was a big camp or it was a--

I entered through the same gate.

Oh, you entered through the same gate.

Through the same gate.

I did not wander in the camp.

I did not go deep into the camp.

From the Belzec camp, my recollection
241
00:13:40,720 --> 00:13:47,200
was the shipment of
the Jews from the camp

242
00:13:47,200 --> 00:13:51,040
to the trucks in the train.

243
00:13:51,040 --> 00:13:51,790
OK, describe this.

244
00:13:51,790 --> 00:14:00,303
And then the second thing,
again I couldn't take it.

245
00:14:00,303 --> 00:14:01,095
You couldn't take--

246
00:14:01,095 --> 00:14:05,020
With that, I went
physically sick.

247
00:14:05,020 --> 00:14:08,500
Why could you-- can you see why
it was impossible to take it?

248
00:14:08,500 --> 00:14:14,420

249
00:14:14,420 --> 00:14:16,280
The people were
working here since--

250
00:14:16,280 --> 00:14:24,500
In this confusion, those
shouts, [GERMAN],, pushing them

251
00:14:24,500 --> 00:14:27,170
through the platform
to the tracks.

252
00:14:27,170 --> 00:14:30,290
Then the train would move two tracks away, putting them there.

Now the room in the one track, I know it was for horses, something, 16 horses.

And 40 men?

Yes, yes, military truck.

Well, at least 100-130.

Excuse me, the people who were loaded in the freight cars, according to you they were waiting inside that camp since a long time?

No, in the camp.

From the camp--

No, no, no.
Please, I ask you one precise question.

These people, these Jews, they were waiting inside the camp since a long time?

How many days?

How many hours?

What only I saw, total confusion, which means they did not look like inhabitants.

They looked, and I interpret it as some sort of transitional camp.

They brought the Jews from somewhere and they are taking them somewhere.
It did not look to me as inhabitable, regular--

at this point I was standing--

camp.

It was total confusion.

Shipment of the Jews to the trains.

And now, what I understood at that time--

well, what are they taking them?

Again, they were apparently telling the Jews they take them for forced labor.

And now, this horrible, horrible scene.

Those shouts, despair, mother dragging their children.

They enter the truck.
They cannot reach them.

They are too weak.

They were pushed?

Gestapo, militia.

They were forced.

They were beating them, pushing them like pigs, like they're not human, into this--

more and more through the camp.

And they were shooting with guns?

Yeah.

Yes, to terrorize them, but in the air mostly.

The total hell, total hell.
And now comes the story.

The train moved a little, by two trucks, three trucks.

On the floor there is a whitish powder.

And now, I asked the Estonian militiamen, what is it?

He says that's all right, that's all right,

this is for their hygiene.

This is quicklime.

So when they die, there is no problem.

They will not contaminate the [INAUDIBLE]
that's the [INAUDIBLE],, whatsoever.

Then, well, they are getting what they are getting.

They are getting what? They are getting what they are--

they are receiving, so to say--they are getting their share.

And then, well, Himmler delivers his goods.

He said publicly the Jews will die and they will die in agony.

They will die.

So where are they taking them?

He says don't you worry, they will die.

What I understood, then the train went somewhere.

And they actually died in those trucks.
Some of them were taken later, I learned, to Sobibor.

And in Sobibor, they were finished.

They were gassed?

Yes.

Why they didn't do it at that time in Belzec I don't know.

Because they were doing this before in Belzec for months.

They actually were gassing the Jews before.

There were six gas chambers in Belzec.

Yes.

At that moment, and this is--the date now is important.

When later on, trying to investigate how it was, yes,
apparently the end of October or November,

the camp liquidated completely, with the last remnants

of the Jews shifted to Sobibor.

And secondly, at that last stage, Jews from other ghettos

passed through Belzec being shifted somewhere else.

Yes, but the quicklime in the wagons, it was to kill them?

Yes, apparently.

Hygienic purposes— they were dirty, they were smelling.

If they died, decomposition.

And secondly, what I understand, to die in agony.

They had to urinate.
Then it would burn their feet, of course, if they were barefoot.

But at the same time, yes, from the Nazi standpoint, it was to purify.

Yes, but it was to kill them too.

And to kill them.

And make them die in agony, some sort of--

well, indescribable.

Washington, (film slating)

Well, Professor Karski, I know that the Jewish underground organized for you, and it is a rather unbelievable visit
inside the extermination camp of Belzec in November '42.

I would like you to try to recall and to describe what you saw in this death camp.

And as a matter of fact, this never happened. We have no testimonies whatsoever and no evidence of anybody being able to enter the extermination camp of Belzec, and the other camps too, Sobibor or Treblinka, and coming out alive.

And this-- so this is something absolutely extraordinary and probably very difficult for you.
to remember and to describe, but please try.

Well, evidently, the whole visit to Belzec was organized by the Jewish underground. Evidently they had the many means to organize this kind of a trip-- evidently. I didn't know the details, how they did it. I entered the camp in company of an Estonian militiaman wearing a uniform of an Estonian militiaman and having some sort of ausweis that I was allowed
to enter the camp and leave the camp, having shown the ausweis.

383
00:23:12,800 --> 00:23:19,720
Now, I approached the camp from Belzec

384
00:23:19,720 --> 00:23:32,210
where I got the uniform, guided by another genuine militiaman,

385
00:23:32,210 --> 00:23:39,170
who evidently was a scoundrel.

386
00:23:39,170 --> 00:23:43,170
In our conversation, as a matter of fact,

387
00:23:43,170 --> 00:23:47,930
he took me for a man who, as it was called

388
00:23:47,930 --> 00:23:52,700
at that time in Poland, that dealt with the Jews, which

389
00:23:52,700 --> 00:23:59,960
means through bribery, money, trying to save some--

390
00:23:59,960 --> 00:24:02,100
This was a usual traffic in Poland,

391
00:24:02,100 --> 00:24:05,300
this dealing with the Jews?

392
00:24:05,300 --> 00:24:06,530
Very well known.

393
00:24:06,530 --> 00:24:09,920
Of course, I had no dealings with this kind of people.
So I don't know was it in many cases?

Was it occasional?

But the term dealing with the Jews meant, yes, they were trying to make some money.

Blackmail in some cases, blackmailing the Jew in some cases.

Denouncing the Jew in some cases.

Helping a Jew to escape wherever he want in some cases.

Selling him false passports, Arbeits, cards, whatever it is.

It generally was called dealing with the Jews.

Now, approaching the camp, half a mile, 1 kilometer,
whatsoever, already I heard
wild shouts, tumultuousness.

I already realized
I was approaching

some unusual situation.

Of course, I had experience.

I was twice in
the Warsaw ghetto.

But excuse me, did you
know when you went there

that Belzec was a death camp?

Yes, Bund leader
told me that I will

see something which I never saw,
that I will never forget it.

I'm going to see a death
camp, actually a death camp.

A Jewish ghetto was
It was only degradation.

It was the way to death.

I am going to see a death camp now.

And they say, I want you to see it

and you will tell them later on.

They will believe you.

You saw it.

Assuring me we would do everything possible,

you will be safe.

You will be safe.

You will get over it.

And we will get you out.
Now, approaching that camp now, hearing those inhuman groans,

shouts, shots, I approached a railroad,

which seemed to me rather primitively built.

It was not one of the main railroads.

It was on my left.

Now, the camp was on my right.

The camp, there was no wall like in Warsaw,

especially barbed wire.

I don't think it was electrified, but generally

barbed wire.

Now, the Estonian militiaman leads me.

So on my right, I have the camp.
On my left side I see the truck.

Now, there were several so to say exits.

Some of them primitive.

Mainly barbed wire between two poles,

it was it could be open, outside.

But there was some main, apparently, entrance.

The gate was solid gate, of course, posts solidly built.

And then, of course, the continuation

of the barbed wire.

I enter the ghetto--

the camp, not through the main gate,
through one of those primitive entrances.

And now, the militiaman, apparently he had instructions that I-

for one reason or another,

I want to see as much as possible

what is going to happen.

So then already within the camp, he directs me what he called good spot, which was--

called good spot, which was--

Did you ask him what was the meaning of these screamings,

of these shoutings that you heard on the way?

Oh, yes, on my way.

Well, his answer was the Jews are hot.
You will see it.

Today, the Jews are hot.

As a matter of fact, I remember he said something.

There is a new batch which is going to be processed today.

So now, he leads me to the area of the main gate.

As a matter of fact, now he whispered to me, listen,

I am going a little that away.

If something happens, remember you don't know me,

I don't know you.

So at this point, I am alone.

Now, from the main gate there was--

the main gate at this point was open, again outside.
I remember the gate consisted of two parts, open, outside.

From the gate-- in front of that gate there was a train,

cattle train.

Now, I counted.

46 trucks were there.

46 wagons.

Wagons, yes.

I had no difficulty counting them because the train was moving.

Now, there was this ramp, a platform from the gate leading to the train,
almost directly to the train.

Now, as you know, cattle train does not have steps, only on the high level.

So it is not easy to enter the train.

If you want to leave it, you have to jump, of course, down.

And now, in that part of the camp, and I don't know how many, it must have been 5,000, 4,000, 6,000, but this cannot be described.

Not humanity.

Crowd moving, some collective moving body.
The Jews—women, children, men, shouting,
quarreling with each other, fighting against each other.
Evidently hungry, evidently not knowing probably
what is happening here.
I specifically remember some Jew totally, completely naked.
And somehow, again, standing.
Why he was naked, I don't know.
Perhaps, he threw his clothes.
Perhaps the people took his clothes.
Now, in this agony--