

Transcript of the *Shoah* Interview with Mr. Bolkowiak  
Translation by Julia Miller - Volunteer – Visitor Services – May thru June 2008

Bobine No. 18A

Bolkowiac [sic] 7

L: Good, so tell us about the arms problem! I read a little everywhere, and I also read this in Ringelblum, who wrote a book on Polish-Jewish relations...so, during the war, the Crayovan army [Armia Krajowa] was completely hostile to the idea of giving arms to the Jews primarily because they thought that the Jews were incapable of helping themselves. They didn't have an actual relationship to the violence, and uh, all that, it was a bit disturbing to live in.

B: Yes, unfortunately it's true...unfortunately it's true. That is to say even that...the same exists with the document, the correspondence of General Gowadski (?).

L: Yes, yes!

B: In London, to which...he wrote with...uh...how...a way...uh

L: disdainful.

B: Disdainful of the idea of giving weapons to the ghetto; similarly, he said that he didn't know what they would do with the arms. It's unfortunately true.

L: They would be incapable of helping themselves...of these weapons...

B: Yes, it's true...it's true...it's true...it's the beginning...but the problem of...one should speak of the contact between two groups, that is to say on the one side, the Krayovan army [Armia Krajowa], but on the other side, the principal partners of the resistance of the anti-fascist blocs, that is to say the groups who after they converted themselves into Job (?), were the Polish Workers Party. It is true that in mid-September, the party was poor, even in arms.

-2-

B: But, in any case, even if symbolically, the first pistol that was sent to the ghetto was sent by representatives of the Kokliski Workers Party (?).

L: That is for sure?

B: Yes, because it is me who received the pistol...it is me who received, like head of...that is to say at the moment that...the first day, the first day at the beginning of the action, and we had... it is me, who gave to Kanak — he was a member of the organization — the pistol to make the "papaniski"

L: That is the head of the Jewish police

B: Yes, that is the head of the Jewish police, that is to say, it is without discussion because I myself...it is me who...

L: This was when? This was at the same time as the attack against Cherinski?

B: It was, it was made during the first days of July, no, first days in August.

L: August 1942?

B: Yes, yes, August 1942. That is to say the first...the first action of the active resistance was made by a resistance member in the anti-fascist block of the resistance organization... by a pistol that was sent by the Warsaw organization of the Workers Party, and the man that was living... it was Mr. Kokliwski who was Director General of the Army Corps in the Ministry of Finance. The others, who were also there, were Mr. Barski...I think that you know him...

L: Yes, yes.

B: And me who took the pistol and gave it to Kanal; that is to say three people of the four exist, that is to say are alive; it is the truth; one always writes

-3-

B: that the attempt was made by the Job. It is not true! It was made by the military organization of the anti-fascist block who changed itself after...

L: The Job.

B: Yes, the Job! That is to say "malitorik"

L: The Job, that is to say the Jewish organization of the Bund?

B: "Malitorik," it's the same thing.

L: Yes, yes.

B: ...because after, the Job, it changed itself, meaning that it expanded from the Bund because it had the same members as in the Bund, one could say that it had been done...

L: Good! So it's true that the arms were given...uh, really they trickled in. One didn't truly hold to giving arms to the ghetto.

B: That is to say that...it began, \_\_\_\_\_ first; but also at that moment one was making contacts because when the idea started, one had to know which things first... it was not necessary to arm the ghetto when the idea was to leave the ghetto and go with the partisans. The army, it was not the system no. 1. It was a problem only to have some copies.

L: No, no, but I understand, but I am speaking much later; go to the moment...

B: Much later! Oh, much later, that is to say Lariel Diner (??), Toshé Altman, and Niktakai Tellbaum were the three men who left the ghetto to make contact with the three men from the Popular Army - the Popular Guard - and the Krayovan Army [Armia Krajowa], and it was there...the popular guard sent a few pistols, whatever he had, and the discussions with the leadership of the AKA, they were... long...

-4-

L: Yes.

B: It is true that the leadership of the Krayovan Army [Armia Krajowa], concretely General Rowetski, was not happy with the idea of sending...

B: Arms to the ghetto. But, after all, he sent a few copies of arms under the pressure of the director. Not the director, but the head of the Jewish section in the Krayovan Army [Armia Krajowa], that is to say Mr. Bolinski.

L: Bolinski?

B: ..yes; it is the pressure...

L: Bratzlaf.

B: Yes; it is the pressure, if one could say it overtly, it is Bolinski who made it all possible to explain the necessity of sending arms to the ghetto. Also, one knows now that, in fact, the expropriation of the resistance in the ghetto...the expropriation of some rich fellow-countrymen, also of the... council of Jews to have money to buy...

L: To buy some...

B: Yes, because it was also funny because one could find the Germans, the Italians, and the other soldiers who...

L: bought the arms.

B: Yes, on the black market. And with it, their (??)... were made, to send weapons to the ghetto. And therefore, on the other side, also, one began making arms in the ghetto, besides the primitives. It is the same thing, outside of the ghetto with the primitive kind, one makes the...

L: The Molotov cocktails?

B: Molotov cocktail, the other things that one prepared; that

-5-

B: is to say... the weapons were - during the preparation for the insurrection in the ghetto - the weapons were the most important problem; and if one speaks of the action, that is to say of the insurrection, one must not forget that the insurrection did not start in April of 1943...the first actions

L: In January

B: were in January. It was in January and then after, it was in April. Between January and April actual preparations were being made...for the insurrection. The state officer directed the troops, gave the commands, organized. He did all of it. But, when the insurrection started, the state officer was isolated! That is to say the groups - if one speaks of the insurrection of Warsaw - the groups fought each other in seclusion... .

L: Yes, yes.

B: It's like that. In my opinion, one knows that one of the groups..

L: One of the combat groups.

B: ... combat groups that was organized also by the...It was the groups that were grouped by the members of one party, the same political group.

L: Yes, yes.

B: It is said that the communist groups - the Bund, the Achamara yad sahir, the Akiba, the leftist groups and the like - made their battles in the region in which they are located.

L: Yes, yes, I know that. So now, I would like to talk...it is a difficult question...so what do you think of it: the question of the Polish aid to the Jews. Was it weakening,

-6-

L: because there are a lot of people who say that the Poles didn't help.

B: Uh...it's always the same thing. Speaking of complicated problems: one does not actually think of the situation in Poland; because in France, people think that the situation elsewhere is the same as in France. In Denmark, one thinks: "It's the same thing"; in Holland, the same thing. One could say that this moment was a big risk and Poland, one could also say that Poland, all the (??) generals of the government because the Polish were divided into a lot of parts, you know...

L: Yes, yes.

B: One party was...

L: Annexed.

B: Annexed, that's it, but the General Government, it was in...

L: The General Government.

B: Yes, the General Government, it was a law also and the Jewish ghetto was a ghetto in the ghetto.

L: Mm, mm.

B: That is to say all the rights, all the laws that existed in the General Government didn't exist...the majority of the laws that existed in the

L: General Government.

B: Didn't exist!

Operator: Stop, Stop, Stop!

-7-

Bobine No. 19

Bolkoviac 8

B: That is to say that when one speaks of the possibility of assisting the Jews, one must always refer to actual situations in each country. When one speaks of the debt of the Polish, one forgets something that, in my opinion, is most important: the General Government was a ghetto, and the Job-ghetto. The Job-ghetto was a ghetto in the ghetto. All the laws that existed in the General Government...the majority were discriminatory laws for the Polish and also for the Jews, which were, in another way, also discriminatory laws. And I think the main problem when one speaks of the aid is the problem that in Poland, the Germans gave the order that botched each aid. The aid they gave them was also minimal. They also gave them some bread, uh... one pays for it with the head.

L: Yes

B: It is a beautiful thing, that. After it, there were also a few psychological elements. One also forgot that the Jewish population before the war - it was not the same population as in England, as in France, or as in Germany. The majority was assimilated and the majority lived in the *mixtesaint*. The majority of the Polish population was...

L: Jewish.

B: ...Jewish, here in Poland, was, in principle, isolated by the... by the customs, by the manners of life. That is to say that the majority of Jews didn't speak Polish well, and if they did speak Polish, they spoke with an accent very...

L: Very noticeable.

B: Very noticeable. If one wanted to help

-8-

B: a Jew by hiding him, it was very difficult because of the Jew's outward appearance and language. The Jewish intellectuals who were assimilated or who spoke Polish very well had many more possibilities; the Polish intellectuals, the others did a lot...what was possible to help...the men who, um...

L: Were saved, yes.

B: One also forgets that Poland was also a country that didn't have its government; the only country! ; because in each country...in France, it was Pétain, in Norway, it was Quisling, in Hungary... each country had a government...

L: With an appearance of autonomy, yes.

B: Yes, with a little autonomy, yes. In Poland, it didn't exist! All of it was made by the Germans. Also, one must not forget and one must not hide that there existed a social margin in each country that "sang" the Jews want to flee; there are even the gangs where - there are some records that exist - where the resistance organizations fought...one avoided, one avoided. Also, one must not hide that in Poland, there also existed a group, not a large group, but in any case, a group with anti-Semitic ideology. That is to say, the \_\_\_\_\_, a group of Christian democrats...radicals...now, one can say...before the war, it was a fascist group, their ideology was anti-Jewish, anti-democratic, and anti-communist. But this partisan group did a lot of things. They killed a lot of Jews, a lot of communists,

-9-

B: a lot of democrats...

L: Was the peasant population anti-Semitic?

B: That is very interesting; the majority of the population...that is very interesting to note. Me, I observed that the peasants were generally very connected...very, how do you say...very connected.

L: Yes.

B: ...with the Jews who lived with them. There were a lot of records that showed that they hid their Jews. One can't say, generally, that the Polish population was anti-Semitic. It is true that anti-Semitism existed in Poland, as I think it existed in other countries, but it's also a very psychological thing for me, with great interest, that the clergy...

L: yes, the clergy...

B: Before the war were...

L: anti-Semitic.

B: ...were anti-Semitic. But during the war, the clergy played a large role in saving Jewish children, Jewish intellectuals, and a lot of Jews should give thanks for their life to the clergy who before the war were anti-Semitic; also, it is very interesting: here in Warsaw was a priest Godlewski who was one of the chief anti-Semites before the war, who was an anti-Semite, how do you say?

L: consumed.

B: consumed, during the war, it was he who organized and helped a lot of Jews to save their lives. There is another very interesting thing; it is Mr. Bozdoff (??) who was one of the heads of the radical anti-Semitic organizations before the war; during the war, he found himself

-10-

B: in Auschwitz; the Germans killed him because he helped the Jews in Auschwitz. That is to say that one finds a lot of men who had an anti-Semitic ideology that played a role in helping. It is a symbol, and Madame Kotaskoutchka - a great Catholic Polish writer who was tied to (??) - was not anti-Semitic in principal, but she did not like the Jews during the war, one knows that; during the war, it was the inspiration of the organizer of aid... an aid organization for Jews and she inspired that organization after, the Jegotha [Zegota]. That is to say taking part...

L: Jegotha [Zegota], that is the council of aid to the Jews?

B: ...the council of aid to the Jews, who were organized after, it is also the only organization in all of Europe like an institution. But it was she who was the inspiration, that is

to say that when one speaks of anti-Semitism, in general, it is very difficult to say that a nation is anti-Semitic. It is true that before the war, economic propaganda existed under an anti-Semitic slogan. But during the war, it was like men who were anti-Semitic, they changed themselves to be like those men that were not anti-Semitic, and the majority of the Poles looked with their heart... with...

L: Yes, with heart.

B: But one cannot say that the Polish people, like other people, have 100% of errors. It is sufficient that according to documentation that exists today, there were 600 Poles that were killed by the Germans, but according to the information we have, it was more than 3000 Poles.

-11-

L: It is the majority.

B: Yes, it is the majority.

L: Yes.

B: Good. That is, the tendency to say: Why did the Poles not save the Jews? Because it was impossible to save all...most of the Jews, possibly, and I can say, it was possible to save the lives...of young men, if the politics of...the weapons... Krayova's [Krajowa] weapons were enough to organize the...the...the partisan organizations. Because this possibility to assist and to save young men, was to send them in... But in 1942, unfortunately, the partisan detachment was very, very small. The only, the only partisan detachment in principle, was the only...it was the popular guard and it was true that a lot of Jews found themselves in...in that detachment.

L: Very good... Of all ways, myself...I watch in the movie...if there is a culpability it is that of the western democracies.

B: What?

L: If there is one culpability, it is that of the western democrats.

B: Ah, yes, ah yes. There are the documents.

L: That, that's true, that's true.

B: Yes, I am not going to...we asked...but what is it...excuse me! It isn't said in these camps one can do more than die, it was a German idea; but it was I who was hidden by...at one time fourteen men, I was...when I was hurt, I passed by fourteen men who cared for me...one



Jew and fourteen men risked their lives to save me. It is true that I was not hurt like a Jew, but hurt like one

-12-

B: who had been killed because they were taking care of the Jews. I know many villages in the region where I was that were burned by the Germans because there were 2 or 3 Jews...in...who hid themselves. That is to say, in my opinion, the Poles did wonderfully...the spontaneity of the Polish activities were sufficiently grand. And similarly we now also have...in Poland, you could say...that is, that according to the material, more than 100,000 Jews were saved. That is, 600,000 Jews in Poland were saved and hidden by Polish people, and that is what can be said for the act of hiding people...one Polish person...one must have a minimum of 5 or 6 people. Because one person...

L: To save one Jew!

B: To save one Jew, because...one family, that is the husband, the children, each of them risk their lives. In other words, in each case, if one takes the minimum, we have 500,000 of the population...Poles who risked their lives to save the \_\_\_\_\_. That is to say...the general thesis, that the Polish were...umm...how does one say... the thesis that I especially heard in several countries - that the Germans had their...their extermination camps in Poland, because the Polish were anti-Semites, it does not make sense. They had their concentration camps because here was where the Jews were. They did not have their concentration camps in Denmark where there are 8,000, but in Poland where there are 3 million, which is half of the population. That is, for...

L: Go on, go on...

B: For each problem, for each problem you should be very, very objective. You should analyze each case. And if now Yad Vashem gave more than 500 Poles, the medals...in other words...

-13-

B: partisan, but in any case there were double...of partisans of Jews.

L: Very good, very important.

Operator: Can I cut?

L: Yes, you can cut.

-1-

SON SEUL BOLKOVIAK 6

Bobine 18B

Q: Good, then, let's talk of the birth of the resistance movement. I would like to say that in front of a similar community of destiny, for all of these young men are the political oppositions and the political divergences, the political fights, does all of this blur itself or are these political fights again very, very, very strong just as they always were?

R: You know, the problem of the political life in the ghetto is also very complicated, but it is also very interesting...that...in the ghetto all of the political organizations existed before the war...the same organizations of, of the ancient \_\_\_\_\_, which were associated with the Polish government, fascist government, we know that, yes, but that existed, it is true, that isolation existed and it is also true, unfortunately, to say that many of them, of those like, who were members of...those who were associated with militarism, who were associated with the.. before the war, who were members of a paramilitary organism.

Q: Yes, yes.

R: Many of them took part in the police, also, I am not saying that all of them were bad, dishonest, but,

Q: They were dishonest

R: Yes, but many of them were also part, took part in the police and the...also a part of the resistance, of the former revisionists, it is also many former police, not many but some, but I want to say that the only organization that did not exist, up until 1942, was the communist organization, like one organization, because it, as you know, the communist party also did not exist outside of the ghettos.

Q: So the communist party did not exist,

-2-

R: The party did not exist, in 1941, that is, it existed only where the communist groups, the same groups that existed on the outside of the ghettos, that is the Spartacus group, the group of friends of the Soviet Union, the others, but isolated. In 1942...the first month, when the

communist party or labor party started to get organized, the Polish labor party, the same thing began...in the ghetto...all the groups, the small groups, how do I say this, the small groups are...they are

Q: joining together

R: joining together, together they were forming the party of...the party, the Polish labor party. In this time, in sending to the ghetto, en who always had an important role for the entire resistance, not only for communism, it was Lévarovski who was the *plénipotentiaire* ... of the central committee of the party and Andrei Schmidt who had parachuted with the initial group of the party of the Soviet Union and who came, also, to the ghetto. It was a former Spanish Republican army captain who went to the ghetto to form the national front. It is very interesting that the communists organized in the ghetto to form the national anti-fascist front, in other words the idea, I speak of this moment, the first day that Lévarovski had contacted me, he told me the idea, he had said at the time, there were not any problems...of differences of parties, it was a problem for us: to fight against the Germans. In other words, one must utilize all the possibilities of mustering all of the men who want to fight against the Germans and...to take part in the Polish resistance.

Q: That, that was a common front

R: A common front, in other words to make first, a common front in the ghetto which had been isolated and to secure this common front with the...

Q: with the general resistance

-3-

R: With the general resistance, that was the principal idea. But, like always, you know, in...among the Jews, some Jews, 3 parties, that is to say, it was the same situation in the ghetto. It was many... all of the parties existed, also the groups of parties, the sections of the parties and one began to have contact with the...with those with the leaders. The first thing that Lévarovski did was to contact those with the most ties for the communists, in other words the socialist coalition with Bronto. But Bronto, that was also very interesting; it was the organization that was associated during this time with London's government in exile, and for that reason, he said that he was not able to have any contact with the communists. It is a problem...another response was that he did not want to prepare the men for the, the, the...

Q: For the flight

R: For the immediate flight, but they are for the passive resistance, and to prepare for the flight like her, but at the end of the war. And in this time, Lévarovski made contact with Bermann, who was of the Leftist coalition and who had many contacts with the Zionist organizations, especially of the left and especially with \_\_\_\_\_ and with \_\_\_\_\_, and they made contact. It was Bermann who contacted Lévarovski with the, the...

Q: They were in contact

R: they were in contact with the leaders of the Zionist organizations of the left, in other words with \_\_\_\_\_, with \_\_\_\_\_, with Josic Kaplan, with the others and they accepted, with \_\_\_\_\_ coalition. They agreed to organize a political anti-fascist block...

-4-

R: ...do not talk of the differences but talk today of the day of the communist fight. It also formed a...a military organization where each organization would have its military group and only the leaders...the major state would be shared

Q: Yes

R: The major state will be shared, it was accepted that the Captain...Schmidt is like a man who knew...

Q: The techniques

R: The techniques will be the ordering of all...of all of the groups

Q: In sum, all of the first contacts were started in February 1942.

R: In February, yes, all of the, all the, at the end of February and the anti-fascist front and the organization, the...military organization had been formed during the first couple days of March 1942. In this time, it was the communist groups, the groups of \_\_\_\_\_, the group of \_\_\_\_\_ and the other groups, five groups, five organizations, self-government under each. Under its order it was the only major state that... that was... was of five commanders under the order of the boss who was, the order of the boss who was...who was... Schmidt. I, myself, at this time, was leader of the popular guard, that is to say, of the communist group. We had at this time ten sections, that is to say

Q: Were you armed?

R: No, no, no, unfortunately not. At the time when we began our work, we had no arms. What was the idea? The idea was, first of all, to prepare ourselves for action, for the partisan activity, because we didn't think, at that time, in March of 42, we had not thought of, of performing the insurrection in the ghetto because the whole world accepted that the Jews must take part in the,

-5-

R: in the town's resistance with the others. That is, take part in the fight, if like Jewish groups, like mixed groups, but in any case they should become a partisan organization.

Q: That is, they should leave the ghetto

R: leave the ghetto and go to fight, it is like that, that was the principal idea and for that reason we had been prepared, that is we had received, outside of the ghetto, some, some...the order of...the major state of popular guards, we had instructions. We had received some model arms also because the poor, the nearby poor organization had not received many arms and we had started to gather... the...clothing to go, we had started to gather the doctors, the things, and we start to perform the instructions like one should vie for in the ghetto. That is what was started in March.

Q: In other words, the general idea was to organize the people?

R: to organize the people

Q: to the interior of the ghetto because they could leave the ghetto and rejoin in the forests.

R: Yes, and it is also, it was also very interesting, one speaks, very rarely does one speak of this when beginning action, the first action on July 22. The same day, we had prepared before a group of 20 people, some communists, some men from \_\_\_\_\_, some of other groups who had to leave the ghettos to go into the forests, and this group had been sent, but unfortunately the future of this group for their contacts with \_\_\_\_\_. He came there, in September, the Germans performed a large action and unfortunately this group did not return, return to Warsaw, and it is thought that they disappeared. Death was the common idea, these were the first days of action, at the same time, but when the big action started,

-6-

R: the big action, our entire military organization and the entire anti-fascist common block, started to engage in activity against...Chemenia... against...

I: Against the deportation

R: Against the deportation, we did all that was possible to tell the population that it was not

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$

Q: Mr. LANZMANN

R:

I: Translator