

Transcript of the *Shoah* Interview in the Forest of Chelmno

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POLAND FILM SHOOT II - CHELMNO

Interview with two peasants in the forest of Chelmno.

Bobine No. 13

Chelmno – Forest 1

L. Barbara, ask the man to tell in order to explain to us what it is he did.

P.B. The guards; they had two...two guards. They had two guards each time; then they led them into the forest.

L. But how did they lead them?

P.B. Every four hours, he took his drawn cart with his.. with a horse.

L. Ah! He led them with a horse drawn cart? Why? Why?

P.B. Be....Because they had to save gas.

L. They had to save gas...but they passed their time, to...to use the gas to gas the Jews, no?

P.B. (The peasant speaks during the question) They said that perhaps that there was another policy. He assumes the gas was saved for the trucks.

L. Good, but...he led them...uh...he led them here...what kind...which SS led them here? What were they doing here, these SS there?

P.B. They guarded the camp where no one could enter...because the night...the...in the daytime, they worked here, that is to say they killed the Jews only during the night...it...it was necessary therefore for someone to guard the camp and it was the ones that they led here.

L. And he led them only during the night, or the day also?

P.B. No, in the day, he came by car.

L. And then how did he spend the night here, was there an activity?

P.B. Then when someone burned the...the bodies here, there was the fire, that burned day and night.

No one killed them...the ovens here did that work.

Then the bodies, one cremated them day and night.

L. Therefore there were men who worked here during the night? There were the commando units of Jews who...uh...burned the bodies during the night; is that right?

P.B. Someone put the bodies in the ovens in the evenings, and then they burned all night, but there were no Jews who worked here during the night.

L. Then, there were not ovens, there were big circular holes.

Chelmno – Forest 2

L. Does this man speak English?

P.B. I knew it, but now, I have forgotten it.

L. When he took the...the SS guards here...uh...the night, what does he remember of his conversations with them?

P.B. Now, that is very difficult to say, it has been many years...which have since passed.

L. What did he speak with them about?

P.B. They always had...uh...a bottle of vodka, which...that they brought with them.

L. And then?

P.B. Then we always had a little shot together.

L. And he did that, from the start of operations of extermination in...here at Chelmno?

P.B. I led them and my father led them also, because when it was very cold, it was necessary to lead them every two hours.

L. Ah, it was necessary to pick them up every two hours.

B. Yes, yes, yes, they were picked up.

L. And then...they led them...they led them up till where?

P.B. In general, one could not...go very far into the forest, they made a small bit of path here, in the forest, with them; one single time, they told me to go farther, and there, I saw the fires and the smoke.

L. But they knew what happened there?

P.B. Of course, of course!

L. And was, was there a fence around the ditches here?

P.B. There was one, there was a very big fence of about 3 meters.

L. The fence was made how? Was it of stones, of wood, of branches?

P.B. It was a wooden fence which was about the size of my thigh and further on...uh...uh...it had a height...it was about 3 meters high; it was torn down only after the war.

L. And could one see through?

P.B. Not really.

L. But tell me...lumberjacks worked in the woods during this whole time?

P.B. With the Jews, no one worked, without question. The Jews worked here with the Germans, but the Polish could not enter here, they might work...work not very far from here, but not together.

L. Where did he live, where does he live at this time?

P.B. Yonder is where I live now, but it was another house.

L. You mean to say...and all the people of Chelmno, knew absolutely all that happened?

P.B. All, all, even in the vicinity.

L. Yes...Is it true that there was a very strong odor around-the-clock?

P.B. Of course there was an odor; particularly when there was a...the wind...from the west, it smelled very strongly. Only we ourselves...we ourselves are accustomed.

L. One gets used to this odor?

P.B. Yes.
But the Germans got fed up with it also; they said how “Donnerwetter?”...etc.

L. Donnerwetter yes and then?

P.B. They said that it...that it stank...that they could not take the smell anymore.

L. And it...were there nervous crises, depressions?

P.B. The...the people stayed clear of...I...I know nothing; anyhow, the people avoided passing through there, because as soon as one saw...as soon as...as soon as the Germans saw someone pass by.

L. Excuse me.

cameramen: Ok

Chelmno – Forest 3

L. Why; is it that the man said a little while ago that if they wanted to make some money, they had the ability to acquire a lot of money.

P.B. He did not speak of money (very faint).
I do not understand.

L. No, that is you said that to me, he said, a little while ago, that if they themselves had wanted - that it did not interest them – they were able to have lots of money.

P.B. One might have a lot of gold, because when the young girls came and got flowers from our homes...they wanted to give us...gold; but, no one wanted it; if I had wanted, I could have had it.

L. I do not understand. What young girls came and got flowers?

P.B. The young girls who worked in the houses of the Germans, as housekeepers ...uh....housemaids, like housemaids to all...of the households. They came to get flowers, radishes, greens, etc...sometimes they came...they came to give us gold or well wishes, when they did not come, me I had uh...I brought the products to the Germans' houses and they...they wished to give us gold but no one wanted the money.

L. I do not understand. About which young girls does he speak? What was it? Who were these girls?

B. The girls were cleaning women in the German's houses.

L. What was it? Were they Polish? Were they German.

P.B. They were Polish.

L. They were Polish, they were not Jewish.

P.B. And concerning the matter of the money, it paid very very well, one did not even know what to do with the money.

L. And from where did this money and gold come? What was that?

P.B. The money and gold of course belonged to the Jews; at the end of each day after...the action, there was always a German who had a pushchair full of rings..uh...of diamond rings...uh...rings or wedding rings, he transported them.

Bobine No. 15

Chelmno – Forest 4

L. Continue to tell me that which you were saying about the rings, the jewelry, the diamonds because we were cut off at that moment.

P.B. One time, when I went over there to bring the...the lettuce, the tomatoes, the cucumbers...

L. To the mansion?

P.B. No, it was not to the mansion, it was to where the parish is now located.

L. Ah yes; ah yes.

P.B. And...

L. At the parsonage, where the parish priest lives was the Commander

P.B. ...and over there, one of the girls who worked in the German's house, opened a door and told me: look, look at what they have here, and I saw a lot of gold, rings, diamonds, jewelry, but I did not touch; I did not take even a single one.

L. That's good. Were there dollars?

P.B. There was everything...everything, absolutely. But now I cannot remember, there were different things, gold watches for example.

L. What age was he at the time

P.B. About 15 or 16 years old.

L. 15 or 16 years!

P.B. Maybe 17.

L. Why, after him, was there so much money?

P.B. When the Jews undressed to be gassed...they were required to undress – then they put their money, gold, precious objects on the tables.

L. They...they had lots...lots of money?

P.B. Enormously.

L. Why did they have so much money?

P.B. The Jews were rich.

L. Not all, not all.

P.B. But in general, they had some.

L. Did he see columns of Jews, pass by?

P.B. Yes, he saw them.

L. And, where did he see them?

P.B. When he walked towards church, from a narrow gauge railway.

L. Yes and they were how, how were they in columns? Could he describe the columns? How were the people?

P.B. There were about two or three thousand men which walked towards the church, and...

L. Of humans, not only men.

P.B. The Jews...yes, walking towards the church, close by there were Germans and sometimes they were even helping the Jews carrying their luggage.

L. And how were they, they were sad, these people, they were happy, they had an air uh...they appeared to be afraid?

P.B. One could not say...that they were sad or happy; they

P.B. ...they walked and each had only a little luggage with them, because there were always 4 wagons loaded with their luggage and afterwards they carried their bags.

L. According to him, they knew they were going to die?

P.B. No, one could not guess it by looking like that. They did not demonstrate it – even if they had known, they did not show it.

L. And he, he knew they were going to die?

P.B. And how! Of course!

L. He did not want to warn them.

P.B. But how could they warn them? One could not! In any case, I myself could not go near them, because I had to let them go by; but how to warn them?

L. Yes.; and when...when the Germans left in January 1945, when they quit Chelmno...in what state was the forest glade? Was it like it is now?

P.B. The first day, I was not there; only after.

L. And then, how was it?

P.B. There were ashes above all, barriers, burned things...it was like that.

L. Did the glade...have the dimensions that it has today?

P.B. That is very difficult to say because here, as a rule the Earth was bare...and at this time there are...trees which were not here and which one sees now; the terrain was not equal...it had holes...it was like that.

L. Was it the same trees, nevertheless, on the whole?

- P.B. The large yes, but the little trees of course, they grew since.
- L. During the war was there hunting in the forests?
- P.B. No, one did not hunt here.
- L. But...Mr. Falborski said to me this morning, that he saw Goering coming to hunt.
- P.B. Yes, but that was not here...that was near to Wro...
- L. But that is very far from here.
- P.B. It is 20 kilometers from here.
- L. How was Goering?
- P.B. He was not prominent...fat, rather fat, a round face.
- L. Was he a good hunter?
- P.B. He shot well, one could say he shot well.
- L. What did...what did he shoot?
- P.B. He shot the wild boar...wild boars...hares...
- L. Hares! There are animals in this forest?
- P.B. Yes, there are deer, wild boars, pheasants, young partridges.
- L. Yes and the Germans hunted lots.
- P.B. They hunted lots...but here, they did not hunt...not in this forest.
- L. Did they drink lots, the Germans?
- P.B. They drank...they had huge amounts of vodka...in very large quantities.
- L. And they drank that, they drank that vodka?
- P.B. Once a week, they gave a bottle, when they came here, then it was one time a week.
- L. And in Chelmno, for example, there were Polish peasants; were there Germans peasants also

P.B. No, there were not.

-10-

Chelmno – Forest 4

L. There were not. And why, sir told me this morning, that there were German peasants at Chelmno, he said that.

P.B. No, at Chelmno, there were not German peasants.

L. Ah, good!

P.B. The Gestapo men, who could not work here... - quite simply, they were not made for that – then, they sent back and they got help from others who could work there.

L. What did he think...he, who was 15 years old...16 years...or a little more; what did he think of this affair, of this whole story, at the time...? To him did it seem normal, natural?

P.B. The beginning, it was something awful, and then one became accustomed to it, it...it became normal.

L. What was dreadful in the beginning?

P.B. You could see how they dealt with the Jews...how...they mistreated them, how they beat them.

L. How they killed them also!!

P.B. The third day, we knew absolutely everything (low: the third day, they all knew).