

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **Archives**

### **Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center**

**Interview with Arie Halpern  
1983  
RG-50.002\*0007**

## **PREFACE**

In 1983, Arie Halpern was interviewed on videotape by Sidney Langer on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

**Summary of the  
Interview with Arie Halpern  
1983**

Arie Halpern was born in 1918 in Chorostkow, a small town in Galicia, Poland. His father was a Hasidic Jew. At age 9, Arie started attending public school for general studies in the mornings and cheder from 1-8 pm. Chorostkow was in Russian-occupied Poland from 1939-1941. The Germans took over Chorostkow on October 4 or 5, 1941.

Arie and his brother Sam joined the labor force for hard manual labor. In October 1942, in Chod Hamoet Succot, Germans surrounded Arie's town and caught 850 people, including Arie's father. On Aktion Night many Jews went into hiding. However, the Germans used bombs, killing many of those in hiding. The Germans took 900 people to Lemberg, Poland (Lviv, Ukraine) and Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. In November 1942, Arie was warned of an Aktion planned for that night. Arie escaped to Tremovlo (Terebovlya), Ukraine, where he joined his mother. Two thousand Jews from different towns were in the Trembavla ghetto. During an Aktion in April 1943, Arie's mother, father, and many relatives were shot and killed. In April 1943, after the Aktion, Arie joined his brother Sam in a concentration labor camp outside Trembavla. Five weeks later, Germans liquidated the ghetto.

The German situation became more dangerous and, during the summer of 1943, Arie and Sam ran away to the home of a Polish-Ukrainian farmer named John. They only intended to stay in John's barn for one night, but remained for eight and a half months. John was killed, but his wife and their son Michael continued to care for the two brothers from July 8, 1943 until March 22, 1944 when they were liberated.

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**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Arie Halpern  
1983**

01:00:00

Born in 1918 in Chorostkow, a small town in Galicia, eastern Poland of over 2,000 (3,000?) Jews and an equal number of Poles and Ukrainians. "Wealthy" Jews moved away, mainly to Vienna, Austria, because they did not want to live under the Russians.

01:03:00

Father not mobilized under Russians. At end of 1920, Polish army occupied the area. Father was a Hasidic Jew, like 80% of Jews at the time.

01:06:00

Discusses Hasidism and Zionism and the attitude of young people. How did people "make a living"? Majority were poor.

01:09:00

Describes education system in the Polish "cheder."

01:12:00

Financial commitment to "cheder" tuition was most important to Jewish parents.

01:15:00

At age 9, started public school for general studies in mornings, attended "cheder" from 1-8 pm.

01:18:00

Continues.

01:21:00

Confronting "compromise" as Hasidic cheder boys in public school on Saturdays.

01:24:00

An additional difficulty involved young people from Hasidic backgrounds joining Zionist youth organizations.

01:27:00

When Arie was 16, his father noted modern garb and physical appearance as well as involvements beyond Talmud study with the town's rabbi and encouraged Arie to come into family business full-time.

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01:30:00

More on the aspirations of the young people to live in the land of Israel.

01:33:00

Continues.

01:36:00

Discussion of Polish effort to ban "shechita" (ritual slaughter for kashruth purpose).

01:39:00

Helping the poor in the Polish Shtetl...Tarnopol (Ternopol), Ukraine was 50 kilometers distance.

01:42:00

In 1934, oldest brother went to Lemberg, Poland (Lviv, Ukraine) to work in a Zionist organization, Arie joined younger brother Sam in family business.

01:45:00

Heard that older brother was killed in a German "Aktion" in 1941 or 1942.

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01:48:00

Zionist aspirations of youth once again.

01:51:00

In 1933-1934, they did not believe that Hitler would come to Poland.

01:54:00

Concern and rumors when Hitler invaded Poland.

01:57:00

Meets a Russian soldier in his town at beginning of war and is relieved not to be in German area of influence.

02:00:00

As a bookkeeper, he was now compelled to work on Saturdays.

02:03:00

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In 1941, Russians conscripted Arie into army to a construction battalion to build airfields, etc. Because of his skill, he was transferred to office work.

02:06:00

June 22—Beginning of Russian-German War...Begins disastrously for Russia.

02:09:00

Germans came into their town on October 4 or 5, 1941, a Saturday morning.

02:12:00

Germans gathered together 200 Jewish people. Halpern family ran to hide...in an attic, etc. Unlike other towns, these 200 were not killed. Arie understands this action as a psychological ploy to overcome chaos by organizing a Judenrat.

02:15:00

He and brother refuse to appear for interview to join Jewish Police. Instead, they join labor force to do hard manual labor.

02:18:00

Report to work at 5 am...Father organized a public kitchen for the very poor.



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02:21:00

After a while, Germans asked for 100 Jews via Judenrat, a high proportion of this small town.

02:24:00

Sees his survival as divine desire for the story to be told...Discussion of his perception of the role of the Judenrat.

02:27:00

Judenrat stopped bothering men, took girls instead for gardening nearby. "Not so bad." Then, in March 1942, the order went out to take everybody. This meant 300-350 people, including his younger brother. "Luckily, he ran away."

02:30:00

Brother worked very hard. With God's help and with luck, he was one of three selected for relatively easy valet work—shining officer's shoes, etc.

02:33:00

In Chortkov, Poland, nearby, they surrounded the city...rounded up 1,000 and took them away for execution. In "Chol Hamoed Succot" (October 1942) they surrounded Arie's town, caught 850 people including his father.

02:36:00

After Chortkov Aktion, his town started building bunkers. Arie went to a neighbor, the parents of Mary Schwartz (a local survivor) and proposed a deal.

02:39:00

To build a tunnel from one house to another to a hiding place. On Aktion Night, many people were in hiding places. Germans used bombs and killed many in hiding.

02:42:00

Germans took out 900 people, 60-70% of population. Took them to Lemberg, Poland (Lviv, Ukraine) or Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. A witness, a Turk, wrote *A Secret State* in which he describes the manner of death of these people.

02:45:00

Arie and his brother have seen the Polish monument which says: "Here have died 600,000 Jews and 1500 non-Jews who helped Jews." This is the only place in Poland to mention Jews rather than Poles.

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02:48:00

Helped by a Pole, a professional thief, in November 1942, in a nearby town, who warned Arie to escape in order to avoid Aktion planned for that night. Escaped to Tremovlo (Terebovlya), Ukraine...His mother was already there.

02:51:00

Finally caught by police with 125 others. Mother and girlfriend gave him aspirin, he had symptoms of high fever, was placed in a hospital instead of a concentration camp. He was slated for another divine intervention.

02:54:00

Describes ghetto of Trembavla (Terebovlya)...2,000 Jews from different towns in this ghetto.

02:57:00

Description of hiding place for himself, for his mother and for some others. He was on watch duty one night to monitor movement of Germans.

03:00:00

Ghetto was one street, with maximum of 20 apartments, 1,500 people. Very tight for everyone. At 5 am, Arie saw a bus entering town with German soldiers. This meant trouble, all must hide.

03:03:00

He warned Jews of German bus. Judenrat entertained and feasted the Germans! His mother was caught as well as 80% of the ghetto.

03:06:00

They shot his mother, father, relatives and most of the ghetto. Remaining Jews were now packed into five apartments. His brother, who was working in concentration labor camp outside town, suggested Arie come and work with him. Arie agreed.

03:09:00

This was April 1943. Five weeks later, another Aktion liquidated those remaining in the ghetto.

03:12:00

Introduces John, the Polish-Ukrainian farmer, to the story. He writes to John.

03:15:00

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On July 8, they had indications that the situation was becoming worse. He and brother Sam prepared for contingencies.

03:18:00

In the temporary hiding place they had organized that night, they heard and saw Germans shooting all around them. Remained in hiding for the time being.

03:21:00

Ran for a mile to John's barn. Figured to remain one night and remained eight and a half months.

03:24:00

A priest helped him pass the police...

03:27:00

John's wife came into the barn and told Arie that she had a dream last night in which Arie's mother asked her to care for Arie and Sam.

03:30:00

July 8, 1943-March 22, 1944...Arie and Sam in barn...Michael, 14-year old son, slept with them...brought them food and saved them when his father wanted them to leave in January.

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03:33:00

John was killed.

03:36:00

Mrs. John, with Michael, continued to care for them. That's how they survived.

03:39:00

Arie became sick with typhus, went to hospital...Sam started to set up factory dismantled by Germans. Arie became main bookkeeper.

03:42:00

Arie went to Chortkov, got another job. Understands Michael and his mother as angels.