

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **Archives**

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

**Interview with Samuel Halpern  
January 1982  
RG-50.002\*0009**

## **PREFACE**

In 1982, Samuel Halpern was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein and Daniel Gover 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 Samuel Halpern**  
**1982**

Samuel Halpern was born in Khorostkov, Ukraine on July 20, 1920. His family lived in the center of town. Of the 6,000 residents of the town: 2,000 were Jews, 2,000 were Poles, and 2,000 were Ukrainians. His father was a grocer and Samuel worked in his father's business. According to Samuel, his town was like a ghetto. The only contact he had with Gentiles was in public schools and business. He had three brothers; one died in 1929, another was killed by the Nazis. His brother Ari and himself survived.

In 1939, when Hitler attacked, his father liquidated the family business and went to work for the government. He was able to live at home until July 1941, when the Germans started to bomb and then arrived a week later. They heard Hitler's Antisemitic speeches, but many thought them simply propaganda. When the Germans came and killed 34 Jews on the spot, everyone realized the reality of the danger. Jews were forbidden to do business with Gentiles. The ghetto was liquidated in October 1942. His father was sent to Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland. His mother and Ari were sent to the Terebovlya, Ukraine ghetto. His mother died there. Ari was sent to Kamenka, Ukraine where Samuel was. They escaped and made their way to hiding in Ivanovka, Ukraine. They were liberated by the Russians on March 22, 1944. They were permitted to leave Russia and settled in Germany.

Samuel moved to the United States and started in the grocery business. He switched to the construction business in 1958. He feels obligated to tell the story of those who died.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**1**

**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Samuel Halpern  
1982**

01:00:00

Born in Khorostkov, Ukraine, 15-16 km. from Russian border, population 6,000. 2,000 Jews lived in the center of town. They had businesses, worked in factories, and a few farmed. 2,000 Poles and 2,000 Ukrainians, most farmers, lived around the city. Birthdate: July 20, 1920. The war came in 1939.

01:05:00

Went to Chedar, had bar mitzvah, secular education, all in town. Helped father in businesses in town--grocery plus bought wheat, corn, rye from farmers, warehoused the grain, shipped by railroad to larger cities. Jewish community was like a ghetto. Only contact with Gentiles was in public schools or business. Orthodox men prayed in synagogue three times a day. Most kept kosher, all stores closed for Shabbat--until 1939. Father, a Hasid, beard and payas; mother very orthodox. 4 boys in family, 1 died in 1929, middle one, Avram Chaim, killed by the Germans, Ari lives in New Jersey. He and Ari are the only survivors. Samuel was the youngest.

01:10:00

Friendly with Gentiles in business, but 99 percent did not mix socially. Gentile friends later helped him escape from concentration camp. Vibrant Jewish community had 11 synagogues and 10 Zionist

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**2**

organizations. His organization was middle of the road: Avora Chelee. This was the peak of Zionism in Poland, in the 1930s. His group met daily to discuss topics related to Palestine, its political status, how to get there, etc. Until 1939 his family was comfortable enough in business to help others. Like them, most made a living, few being very rich or very poor. In 1939, Hitler attacked Poland following Molotov-Van Ribbentrop Pact and took over 60 percent leaving 40 percent for Russian control, including Samuel's area.

01:15:00

Most businessmen gave up their businesses--owners of the largest ones were taken to Siberia. His family liquidated its business and his father went to work for the government: his older brother an accountant in a spirits factory; 2nd brother an accountant in a flour mill, Samuel was the assistant manager and then managed the spirits factory, 90 percent of the product being sent to a factory near Moscow, Russia for making rubber. For one and half years, he was able to live at home with his family until July, 1941, when Hitler bombed Russian cities, including the railroad station of their town. German soldiers arrived seven to ten days later. In the period just mentioned, small contact with other parts of Poland. They heard Hitler's Antisemitic speeches, but many thought them only propaganda. Out of 2,000 Jews, a few joined the Russian army, perhaps 20-25 went to Russia. Neither he nor his partners wanted to be communists.

01:20:00

His community had great Rabbis who became leaders in Israel, such as Moishe Epshein, Mischa Enratm Rappaport, Abram Offa, and Building Minister who was a schoolmate of his. War started on June 22; by August 1 or 2, Nazis came to his town. Soldiers, probably storm troopers, asked

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**3**

where the Jews lived. The soldiers killed 34 people without preliminaries, including his friends. Yitzak Foldfuss lost his father, mother, wife, son and daughter. Samuel ran away at the first minute, later came to Elizabeth, New Jersey and died only recently, he was Sam's brother's brother-in-law. Now everyone realized the reality of the danger,

01:25:00

Army left town and Bukharin took over the government under Germans' direction. On the following Saturday while they were going to synagogue, every Jewish man was summoned to town hall. His mother suggested he and his brother hide. They watched for five or six hours while soldiers on horseback made the men run through town for several kilometers while they were beaten over the head and body until they fell into the mud, but no killings. Next day Germans organized the ghetto, bringing Jews from villages and streets outside of city. Jews were forbidden to do business with Gentiles. Jews had to wear white arm bands with blue star under the threat of being shot if found outside the ghetto without it, and threat of arrest and being shot if found without it inside the ghetto. Population of ghetto: 2,500.

01:30:00

Because of the shortage of food, Jews would break out of the ghetto to deal with the Gentiles, trading money, clothes, and other possessions. Basic ration was 20 decagrams of bread (1/2 lb.) a day, sometimes replaced by beans, flour or wheat. One kg of flour for a family of five was two days' rations. His father and others organized Jewish food kitchen, giving soup and bread for sick and poor, in one of the Shuls, all of which had been closed when Hitler came. These recipients could not get regular ration. Jews continued sneaking to minyan very early and later. If caught by Ukrainian

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**4**

police, they were beaten or taken away. This ghetto was liquidated in October of 1942, without ever having had an organized uprising. There were Jewish police in the ghetto in civilian clothes, wearing arm bands and special hats. Some good, some bad. Used at first only to get Jewish boys to work, later to get people to concentration camps.

01:35:00

March 19, 1942. A heavy snowstorm blocked road from railroad. He was among 84 boys taken from farm work to shovel snow to clear the road, three km from town to the station. After a half hour, they were surrounded by SS and additional Ukrainian police, forced to run 10 km. from Chorostikoff to Capistian. Joined by others they were pushed on to Chortkov, Ukraine, a larger city. They ran in heavy snow from 11am to 5-6 pm, already dark. Those who tried to run away were immediately shot. There were several thousand, gathered from Closter, Yegulnitza, Chortkov, Sechatstoff, Probizhne. Counted between two lines of police and SS by forceful blows on the heads with heavy sticks. After several hours they were taken bleeding to jail. A room for 20-30 had 120 people squeezed erect. They received no food. They were counted the next morning by the same method. They spent three days without food, water, or room to sit or lie down. They were expected to die from starvation. In the middle of the third day, they were taken into a larger room, given bread and water in common container without utensils.

01:40:00

In retrospect, hardship of ghetto life was accepted as wartime necessity but Hitler's threats to Jews were not taken seriously. Continuing narrative: group taken to railroad, led into wagons used for transported animals, 125-130 in each, without food, water, toilet facilities, guarded by Ukrainian

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**5**

police and SS with fixed bayonets, taken to Tarnopol, Ukraine, where some water was thrown over them.

01:45:00

After several hours at the railroad station, they were taken to Kamionka, Ukraine, and unloaded. Marched four abreast, beaten to keep four abreast erect in a straight line, to concentration camp. Group included 84 from his town, many of his friends and an older fellow, Mr. Goldfuss. Had to give up jewelry and money, wear yellow star front and back. Prisoners from Capitchintza who picked up snow to drink were immediately shot, the prisoner's body was left there for three days, as an example. Camp life was severe, no water in camp for three months. Hard work, little food.

01:50:00

He was only 40 or 50 km from home. Parents located him with help of Judenrat and began to send food packages weekly or biweekly -- he shared. October 1942-- Chorostikoff ghetto liquidated in one day: 100 killed on the spot; over 1,000 taken to Belzec, a concentration camp in Poland, where over 600,000 Jews were killed. About 1,000 survived and went to other ghettos, being given only one day's notice to leave. Floor of wagons in which people were taken to Belsitz was covered with lime so many already dead when they arrived.

01:55:00

People hiding in cellars were flushed out by grenades and fire. His father, mother, brother, and Ari were in three separate places. Father was discovered and sent with group to Belsitz. Mother and Ari



**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

**6**

went to Trembowla, Ukraine, 15km away, living in that ghetto for five to six months with little food and severe conditions. Mother perished with 1100 or 1200 people from Trembowla in Action March 1943. They were taken to Plebanovka, Ukraine, a nearby small village, assembled in the market place, undressed and march naked through town to already dug ditches. All, men, women, and children were shot once and buried immediately dead or not. Brother Ari escaped and voluntarily joined Sam in camp at the end of March 1943. One brother's whereabouts were unknown (Avram Chaim). He had been mobilized into the army in 1941, caught by the Germans and killed in December 1943 in Chelm, Poland.

02:00:00

Sam and Ari worked hard in the camp while constantly plotting to escape but gave up the idea after an attempt caused the death of four young boys, in retaliation. July 9, 1943--Attempt to break out of Kamionka, Ukraine, by a large group including Sam and Ari, taking advantage of tall grasses in nearby fields. All separated, many caught and shot. Whole barracks shot, bodies burned.

02:05:00

Having escaped recaptured, Sam made his way back toward his home town. July 13th, he arrived in Ivanovka, Poland, in a village 8 km from his home at the farm of Polish family headed by John and Tatyana Gorniak. Ari was already there. Both were sheltered in barn and fed well for eight and a half months until his town was liberated by the Russians on March 22, 1944. He returned to work in the factory where they worked in Poland before the Russians occupied the area.

**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0009**

7

02:10:00

1945. At the end of the war, they were permitted to leave "Russia", they went to Germany, established a comfortable life, started a family, came to United States in 1949 (invited by uncle). In the United States his family grew and was educated, married, and had children. Sam first came to New York City and took a job in a supermarket, learned the business and ended up owning four markets. He switched to construction and in 1958 they moved to New Jersey. He became a builder and developer. Still has interest in Israel. As a survivor, he feels an obligation to tell the story of those who died. Expressed some bitterness at failure of Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin to address the plight of the Jews, and respond to their pleas to bomb the camps. Thinks Jews must be alert to threat and resist attacks of their freedom.

02:15:00

Lessons must be learned. The importance of Jewish education, survival of a strong Israel. He is active in an organization of Holocaust survivors, has revisited the entire area of the events described above, and noted the conditions of the towns and cemeteries, especially Chorostikov, Tarnow.

02:20:00

Describes Closter, Komionka, Lemberg, Ternopol, including present Jewish population. Today he is in friendly contact with 70 or 80 people from his hometown in the United States.