

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Archives

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

Interview with Zygmunt Gottlieb  
February 21, 1989  
RG-50.002\*0035

## **PREFACE**

On February 21, 1989, Zygmunt Gottlieb was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein and S. Krueger 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 Zygmunt Gottlieb**  
**February 21, 1989**

Zygmunt Gottlieb was born on December 9, 1923, in Kopychyntsy, Ukraine. He was raised in an orthodox environment. His father was prominent in town politics. Even before the war, conditions were not very good. The Russians occupied Kopychyntsy in 1939. In 1941, the Germans came and all the young men were taken to Ternopol, Ukraine, to work on the railroad. In the winter of 1942, he was transported to the Kamionka ghetto in Poland. Of the 5,000 to 6,000 Jews from Kopychyntsy, only 65 survived. He describes the Aktions, two of which he and his brother narrowly escaped, before running away to work in the fields. A former Polish officer hid him, his father, and other relatives in his barn. In March 1944, they were liberated by the Russians. Zygmunt joined the Russian Army. Claiming to have been a teacher before the war, Zygmunt was released from the army in March 1945. He traveled to Vienna, Austria, and München, Germany and then in May 1951, to the United States.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0035

1

**Time-coded notes of the  
Interview with Zygmunt Gottlieb  
February 21, 1989**

01:00:00

Born on December 9, 1923 in Kopychyntsy, Ukraine. In 1939, when the war broke out, he lived in the Russian occupied part of Poland. Living standards in his town were very poor. There were no sewers, no heat, and poor sanitary conditions. The Germans came in 1941. Young men were taken to Ternopol, Ukraine to work on the railroad. Came back in the summer of 1942. Then, during the winter they were taken to the Kamionka ghetto in Poland. Only 65 Jews from Kopychyntsy survived.

01:00:00

His father was prominent in town politics. Could not believe what was happening. Communications were poor. From 5,000 to 6,000 Jews, about 65 survived. After he returned from Kamionka, he was called into the German embassy and asked to identify a man named Pal, who had killed Jews randomly in Kopychyntsy.

01:07:00

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**2**

There were Aktions in which people were rounded up and taken away. A friend of his named Jack Berman tried to hide with twenty or thirty other boys. Once the graves were finished, they had to undress. He and his brother survived. All the captured women were killed first. In the second pogrom, he and others tried to escape. Non-Jews tried to block Jews from escaping. He managed to get away.

01:11:00

He ran away and worked in the fields. One man, a former Polish officer kept some of his relatives in his house, including his father and Zygmunt. This, over the wife's objections. They stayed in the barn until March 1944 when they were liberated by the Russians.

01:13:00

Zygmunt served in the army until March 1945. If you were a teacher before the war, the army would grant a release. He got a letter attesting to this fact even though he was not a teacher. He was released and went eventually to Vienna, Austria, then to Munich, Germany, where he stayed until 1951. Went to the United States and spent seven years there. Then on to Cuba where he met his wife. Now has two sons.

USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0035

3

01:16:00

In Kamionka, he thought he would be killed any day. The same was true while in the barn. The farmer who sheltered them told them he could kill them by just shutting off the air to their underground hideaway.

01:19:00

Zygmunt admires the farmer for doing what he did for them. Feels he did it more for humanitarian than mercenary reasons. They were afraid of anyone who crossed their path. Stayed with his father and uncle throughout the war.

01:22:00

The Poles hated Jews, nonetheless, some helped. The Ukrainians were much worse yet. The area where he lived was Ukrainian. Life was extremely poor before the war broke out. He finished public school and attended a gymnasium. A relative went to matura (pre-college exam) in preparation for university, but could not get in because he was a Jew.

01:25:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0035

4

In his community there was virtually no life expectancy beyond age 50. Went to public school and Hebrew school as a boy. Never had time off until Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Brought up in a highly orthodox environment.

01:28:00

Almost all Jewish kids went to school. This wasn't true for the Gentiles. He wanted to educate his sons (broke down and wept at this point) and his daughter. One son is a doctor, one is a lawyer. Wanted them to have the security he did not have.

01:31:00

In München, Germany, there was a registry of survivors. This is how the German embassy in New York located Zygmunt. He was asked to help identify an individual named Pal, who had randomly killed Jews in Kopychyntsy. He spent two days on the stand in Mannheim, Germany. The prosecutor praised him as a witness. Later he was told that Pal, the defendant had died.

01:34:00

USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0035

5

Found going to Mannheim an interesting experience. He was questioned by three judges. In the town where he grew up, everyone knew everything about everyone else. Found someone from his town in Santiago, Chile. Hadn't seen him for over four decades. He hasn't been in contact with all of the survivors.

01:37:00

(At the time of the interview) His father was still alive -- 96 years old. Zygmunt went back to Kamionka. There is nothing there now. The farmers left the graves open. Hundreds of people are buried in the same place where his mother is also buried.

01:40:00

When the Russians came in 1939, there was nothing in Kopychyntsy. People disappeared in one night. It was dangerous to be prominent. Punishments were tremendous.

01:43:00

Didn't believe democracy could work with the Russians. Some young people in Russia believed that Hitler was no aberration. The



**USHMM Archives RG-50.002\*0035**

**6**

Russians gave the Germans "An Eye For An Eye." They suffered a great deal. They paid back their enemies.

01:46:00

Zygmunt is not angry or bitter but can't forget the murderers. Remembers that only 65 survived amongst thousands. Never thought he'd survive. Couldn't tell how the war was going to end. The head of the camp was a German Jew, among the other Jewish prisoners.

01:49:00

His job was to report everything to the commandant. Zygmunt wonders how he could remember everything. Tried to help the people who helped him. He tried, but could not find the farmer who hid them in the barn.

01:52:00

Thought he'd reach them through newspaper advertisements, but not many were able to read. Remembers farmer's wife who asked him "Why should I have to die just because you died." Yet her husband kept hiding them.