

-TITLE-JAY, MARKOFF
-I_DATE-June 18, 1984
-SOURCE- UCLA HOLOCAUST DOCUMENTATION ARCHIVES
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Great. Markoff is steady and smooth, accurate and descriptive. As a member of the Jewish partisan forces in the woods his experiences include eating the skin of a horse, diving into a river near a German garrison in search of arms supposedly hurled by the Russians into the water upon their retreat from Poland in 1941, constructing mines, and creating schemes to destroy the engines of German railcars. The story is extraordinary and his tone is strong (though not particularly lively).

In capsule form, Markoff was born and raised in Bialystok, Poland (he does not give his date of birth) and witnessed the September 1939 German occupation of Poland and the arrival of the so-called 'liberating' Russian forces. He went to school but insists that things were far from ideal under Russian occupation - many people were sent to Siberia, businesses were shut down and merchandise was confiscated . The Germans returned in June of 1941 around the same time as they entered Minsk (Markoff is well-versed on dates and facts) and immediately the atrocities started -2,000 Jewish men were rounded up and burned alive in a temple; the ghetto; the roundups - and he himself was ' rounded up' on several occasions only to escape. He describes the German 'Action" and how approximately 10,000 were killed during that first action. Markoff cites various facts and short tales (how in '41 when the Germans came they were looking for Russian soldiers and it was dangerous to have short hair in the style of the Russian soldier; how he worked for the SS photography department in the ghetto which took pictures for files in addition to shooting pornographic shots; how during a shooting spree a German foot came inches from his nose as he lay hiding under a bed, for example). Markoff spent two and a half months, from August 17 to November 3, 1943 hiding in the attic of a building - the attic was a tiny spot to house the 12-14 people it managed to shelter. The ceiling was low and no one could stand up in the attic.

Short anecdotes abound in this hour and a half long interview (which is mainly Markoff telling his story as opposed to answering questions - the interviewer plays a small role) and, in short, Marcus flees to the woods where he joins Jewish partisan forces, attempts to impede the German war machine, joins the Russian army, becomes a Russian artillery commander, and eventually is allowed to return to Poland where he finds his old mother and sister (survivors of both Stutthof and Auschwitz) in Bavaria. Markoff's is an excellent account: a powerful, moving story full of interesting details (he goes in depth into how the partisan forces constructed certain types of bombs, for example).

MINUTE BY MINUTE

1:00 - Born in Bialystok, Poland - (He does not mention the year). He lived in a Jewish neighborhood and attended school before the War.

2:00 - War broke out 9/1/39, occupied Poland for a week, then the Russian forces moved in, 'liberating' the area commencing two years of Russian occupation.

3:00 - his condition not affected too much materially, his schooling was good, then in June of 1941 the Germans invaded again.

3:30 - Markoff describes how things were not all good under Russian occupation, many people sent to Siberia; business/merchandise confiscated.

4:20 - family business goods confiscated.

4:50 - Germans returned June 1941, around the same time they entered Minsk, they entered the city from the East.

5:40 - immediately the atrocities started, burning; 2,000 Jewish men herded up and burned alive in a temple.

6:20 - He witnessed a portion of the burning from a three-story building; a powerful anecdote about the horror of this event.

7:10 - Flames spreading rapidly, Markoff thought to the future - how to save himself, how to save others.

7:30 - the family survived the first part of the 'onslaught' by moving to a quiet, though still predominantly Jewish, part of the city.

8:15 - Markoff describes how the Germans came looking for Russian soldiers, having short hair in the style of a Russian soldier was a risk.

9:00 - moved back to the house for a spell until the 'Judenrat' insisted on the establishment of a ghetto; Markoff mentions how living space in the ghetto was three square meters per person and that ten to fifteen people would live in a house designed for three.

9:50 - 12:00 - the Germans would round up men hundred at a time, without letting people know what they did with them. The Germans would then request gold and silver as ransom for these people. A lot of people gave up their goods, especially those whose relatives were taken. The Germans then increased the amount of gold and silver as ransom, a second and maybe even a third collection occurred, Markoff recalls, but none of these rounded up returned alive.

12:00 - at times he himself was rounded up but he would escape during the march.

12:30 - this period went on for approximately 6-7 weeks, until all had moved to the ghetto, describes the tough ghetto conditions - lack of jobs, lack of rations.

13:40 - soon jobs became available- the 'Arbeitsand' (sp.), requests for workers from outside the ghetto - Jewish or Polish firms - Jews would daily march out to the workplaces, then gather together and march back.

14:50 - he himself worked outside the ghetto - which gave him more food than if he had worked within the ghetto. He would bring some food back with him.

15:40 - 6-8 months into the ghetto, Germans had an 'Action,' came in with the aim to shoot and kill because the ghetto was extremely overcrowded, Markoff heard estimates that 10,000 people were killed in that first 'Action.'

16:15 - some people were killed in their beds

16:30 - They had prepared a hiding place in their attic, the Nazis entered at one point but did not find them. The 'Action' lasted about a week.

17:00 - Collecting the dead, there was a cemetery within the ghetto. It was winter and Markoff describes how the dead were frozen in the position that they had died in.

18:00 - he found out that people who worked in industries within the ghetto were protected from the 'Action,' and he hooked on with one of them - woodworking, constructing wagons for the Germans.

18:50 - Markoff was protected from the second 'Action' because he, along with his mother and sister, were allowed to stay in the factory - 'a break.'

19:30 - Markoff describes how his life was in danger and that while in the ghetto he worked for the SS, the SD, and the police headquarters. He worked in the photography department of the SS. He helped to build the darkroom, the lights etc. where they used to photograph Jews, White Russians, Poles, keeping files on people.

20:30 - Markoff mentions how the SS would take pornographic shots, forcing detainees to pose in sexual positions

21:14 - "All of that lasted until August 16, 1943" when it was announced that the Jews would be moved west because of the military situation on the Eastern Front.

21:40 - most people were scared.

21:55 - packed a few things, went over to the house of his aunt and uncle. They were already gone, never saw them, immediately thereafter, shooting started. The house was riddled with bullets. It was a four-unit complex and they would run from unit to unit, met by a hail of gunfire in each unit.

21:23 - outside everybody was falling like "little wooden soldiers," he thought he saw his grandmother fall but there was no time - he heard the steps of a soldier coming into the room. Markoff told his sister to hide under the bed; his mother in the closet. He also hid under the bed. The soldier entered the room, as Markoff recalls, 'his boot' at one point, 'inches from my nose.

24:35 - firetrucks outside, homes on fire, they heard some noises under the floor, a 'strum' - a hiding place which Markoff's uncle had built - 12-14 people came out.

25:30 - no ventilation in the hole, Markoff could tell that it would be 'committing suicide' to stay there.

25:50 - a guy suggested that he knew a better place. They ventured over to a tall building, went into the 6th or 7th floor.

27:00 - they found another hiding place, their home from 8/17 - 11/3/43 - the only food was leftovers - dried out bread, wilted things, grain - the water was shut off.

28:00 - the toilet tanks soon ran out of water. Eventually they found a bathtub full of water - left from awhile ago and not filled with soap and grime etc., maybe even some algae. They used all of it.

29:00 - the roof, a pitched roof with red terra cotta tile, a setup so they could gain access to another portion of the attic. It was very low and not one of the 14-16 people in hiding there could stand up fully.

31:00 - the other side of the building had a similar place where two boys and three girls were hiding. One of the boys went out get something to eat. He was shot in the leg. Gangrene set in and he passed away. They buried him at night digging a whole usually used for chopping meat and fish.

32:20 - Markoff then moved over to the other part of the hideout and began planning an escape. The other fellow had heard of partisans in the woods and thought he had directions. They waited until they looked outside and saw lots of activity in an abandoned textile house - thought they would be found out - time to take the chance.

34:00 - prepared a ladder made of rope; had a homemade knife. They made the escape the following night. Markoff recalls how it would have been better if they had a weapon. They had wanted one and had planned to kill a German soldier, the daily patrolman, to get his weapon. They hid to wait out for him, but that afternoon two of them showed up, so they decided against it.

35:40 - without any firearms, three of them set out.

36:00 - reflections on his time in the hiding place. At one point a few of the girls cooked a meal after going down from the attic to the top floor. A few of them went out to roam for food in abandoned houses, returned, saw lights on on the bottom floor, they ran off and the Germans were startled and ran off as well. Later they returned and brought a whole company of Germans screaming at the Jews to get out. Markoff and a girl were in the attic. Two of the girls and a guy remained on the top floor. The two girls hid under a bed and the boy hid in the closet. The two girls were found but, even though the Germans opened the door of the closet, the boy was not found. The two girls said that they were alone, they cooked a lot of food so that it would last awhile. They were taken away and Markoff never heard of them again.

40:00 - November 3, they escaped from the ghetto, knew they had to walk north to the highway, then east on the highway to reach the woods. They went northwest, covering more territory than necessary. It became light out.

41:00 - they decided to rest in a bush. Unfortunately, they were in a place where Poles and germans were cutting wood. At times during the day, workers were within feet of them. They spent a whole day there, at times not even breathing, at night they got up to go.

42:00 - describes how hard it was to stand up straight after all the time in the ghetto.

42:30 - they walked for four nights, rested by the day, and on the fourth night they met partisans. Snow fell.

43:00 - five partisans joined with the three, becoming the group of eight. The five had been part of a group of thirteen but had lost their eight buddies that day as they ambushed around the camp fire.

44:20 - began to gather food for the winter. They would steal farmers' potatoes and return to the bunker.

44:55 - stole flour. The flour became moldy in the wetness but they used it anyway.

45:30 - made 'Marmeluga (sp.?)' - Rumanian food but they did not have any seasoning.

45:50 - they moved around several times when they heard that Germans had heard about them.

46:30 - one of the groups in the same area was found by the partians, some were killed, some joined Markoff's group. A partisan rule: share all food. Soon the remains of another group hooked up with them. Soon their food supply ran out. Their common goal of sharing food was the 'only rational way. Once they went five days without food. Many stretches of one or two days without food.

48:00 - 50:00 - swelling from hunger, they were determined to get food. They sent two volunteers to go as far as possible. steal a horse and ride it back. They returned on a horse. They killed a horse and had a feast that first day, 'the best delicacy I have had in years'.

50:00 - 52:00 - food became scarce again. They remembered that they had buried the head, skin and intestines of the horse. They dug up the hole - the meat was already decomposing. They ate it, including the skin - burnt and scraped the hair off the skin. The skin was very tough.

52:30 - in the bunker they would talk about their fantasies about all the good food they hoped to enjoy. One friend had a sense of humor and one time while they ate their potatoes he talked of how good this would be with butter butter and herring ar,d on and on until someone said 'with all of those who needs the potatoes.'

53:45 - when winter ended, they knew they knew they needed to get weapons. They met up with other partisans. One of them knew how Russians had dumped weapons in a river when they left in 1941 but the Germans happened to have a garrison near the river. On a moonless night, they went to the river. It was late March or early April. they broke the little crust of ice that sat on the surface, dove in naked and found some weapons - semi-automatics, bayonets, etc.). they dreid out their stock.

56:15 - got ammunition from some of the farmers who had whole containers from machine guns.

56:40 - set out on demolition work, mines to rail trains etc.. shells.

57:20 - little shepherd boys knew the woods like no one else and knew where artillery shells were hidden. The partisans would sometime threaten these boys to show them the place where the shells were hidden.

58:20 - artillery shells, take them away.

59:00 - usual size of a bomb - 30-40 kilo, put it in a sack.

1:00 - Markoff describes the construct of the bomb in detail.

2:20 - Markoff discusses how the group would bomb German trains by putting a bomb under the rail with a pressure ty]?e switch. It would explode under the weight of the train - the engine would go first, the most valuable thing to destroy.

3:20 - the Germans dealt with this dilemma by switching cars around, putting the freight car first. The partisans in turn met this change by changing the type of switch they used. they set up a manual trigger so they could pull it from the woods.

4:20 - the Germans adapted to this threat by cutting down the woods within 100 meters of the track and placing guards at assorted intervals. This development left the partisans few options - they had to make a charge for it, they would run in quick, a group of them with flankers and someone behind with a semi-automatic, if they had one, to pick off guards.

5:30 - these missions would have to be extremely well-organized and timed out, the partisans would have to determine the time a train would approach a certain area (Markoff suggested that the partisans tried to choose places where the track was veering downhill, near a turn, to make it easier for the train to derail after the explosion. These missions would have to match the fire of German guards with fire.

7:00 - the mission would have to be a quick one. Markoff describes the type of bomb and trigger

8:00 - with a branch and string the partisans set up the trigger so that only the engine with its low axel would instigate the bomb.

8:30 - was he afraid? Markoff replies that he was 'too ignorant'to be afraid; that 'life didn't mean much'; that we had to 'do what we could.'

9:00 - the partisans also burned bridges and felled trees to block movements, shoot at Germans.

9:40 - this lasted until the summer of 1944 when the Russians were close enough.

10:00 - wanted to join the Russians, forced to undergo basic training near Gorky, basic training in an infantry division. Markoff also dealt with communications, working with big walkie talkies.

11:15 - Markoff was transferred to an artillery division and he worked with 120 mm Howitzers. After a short course, he was sent to officers' school and he graduated as an officer in artillery. Markoff was asked to stay on and teach others until the war ended.

12:10 - in regard to anti-Semitism in the Russian army Markoff suggests that it was widespread. He observed that a general hatred was prevalent but exceptions were made for individuals. Markoff suggests that they somehow viewed him as 'different', from the average Jew. Markoff calls this type of belief 'cliche.'

13:00 - Markoff did what was expected of him in the Russian army and, in his view, that was probably what made him 'different.'

13:25 - Markoff discusses some of the maneuvers they did in the Russian army; how they would march for hours and dig into the frozen ground in the winter to bury their howitzers which required a hole, in Markhoff's opinion, 3 1/2 meters in diameter and 1-1 1/2 meters deep every 30-50 meters. They also had to create trenches nearby.

15:00 - When the war ended, for a while he had not intention of returning to Poland. - his father lived in the United States before the war and, in fact, Markhoff planned to emigrate to the United States before the War interrupted his plans.

16:30 - Markoff discusses how the Russians had a bad view of people with relatives abroad. Markoff discusses notions of never leaving Russia but he found out that his mother and sister had survived the camps and he asked to be repatriated to Poland. He had great difficulties in this endeavor and was interrogated often.

18:20 - one commander, a Jew of Greek origins, lashed out at him for wanting to leave Russia where Jew are given protection.

19:40 - until early 1946 this went on, but the Supreme Soviet (?) demobilized things and Markoff was free to leave the army but he could not get a visa to get out. Markoff got advice from a man who said Markoff should stay on in the army and eventually he got his exit visa - December of 1946.

22:00 - within two days he was on a train and on December 25
.END.

<http://collections.ushmm.org>
Contact reference@ushmm.org for further information about this collection