

-TITLE-SOPHIA KORBONSKI  
-I\_DATE-February 26, 1988  
-SOURCE-CHRISTIAN RESCUERS PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-  
-DURATION-  
-LANGUAGES-  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
0: Tape begins

25:00 Klymowsky wishes to divide the tape into two parts: (1 The personal help that he gave to the Jews and 2) his general preoccupation with the Jewish problem. He was one of the founders of the Polish underground. He was later appointed director of civil resistance. Korbonski was commander-in-chief of an organization which instructed Polish populations on what to do and what not to do. He organized courts which were instructed to sentence to death people who had committed heavy crimes.

53:00 He regularly issued instructions on how to help and what to do in terms of feeding the Jews, preparing Aryan documents for them, and giving them shelter. Korbonski states two instances of providing people with Aryan documents.

74:00 In one case, he met an engineer named Siegfried Jung. In return for supplying this man with documents, he helped Korbonski provide electricity to his areas of radio communication. Each knew the others' secrets.

1:03:00 Korbonski was wandering all over Europe with his wife. It was hard for people to reach him. When people were able to contact him, he supplied them with money, documents, hiding places, and transportation. As director of civil resistance, he managed to organize personal radio communication with London. He began to inform members of the Polish underground who were in exile about happenings in Poland, especially with Jews.

1:28:00 He makes a comparison with Mr. Karsky's activities. Karsky, as an underground emissary, went to London and the U.S. and informed all the top leaders about the Holocaust. Korbonski, on the other hand, used to inform about the fate of the Jewish people through the telegraph. He called dispatches to London concerning the Jews. (He tells about this in his book).

He published instructions to the Polish people about what they were supposed to do and what they were forbidden to do. At the same time, he published two proclamations directed to the Polish people (the first on September 18, 1943 and the second in March 1943) in which he condemned Hitler and the Nazis.

1:53:00 At the same time, he informed London about what was going on by sending the publication that was published in the underground to London. It was repeated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Korbonski turned to criminal Polish elements and warned them that, if they continued to blackmail Jews and the Poles who kept them in hiding, they would be sentenced to death.

1:74:00 At the same time, he instructed ten Polish underground courts that, according to the law, some traitors had to be sentenced to death. The courts then published eleven death sentences for Poles who were blackmailing Jews.

2:05:00 Korbonski sent a telegram concerning the beginning of the Holocaust (July 22, 1942) when the Nazis loaded 7,000 Jews on the train for the Warsaw ghetto and sent them to Treblinka where they were cremated. Then Korbonski sent the first director a telegram about the outbreak of the ghetto uprising on April 19, 1942. London made it known that they knew what was going on.

2:34:00 London did not believe it at first. They thought that Korbonski was exaggerating anti-German propaganda. Korbonski used to control whether his dispatches were repeated by the BBC. He sent a dispatch about the transport on July 22 and then there was silence so he sent a second dispatch. Nothing happened so Korbonski told his technicians that, when they contacted London, they must repeat his dispatch.

2:61:00 Finally, after several months, he got a weak reply. Suddenly, British intelligence, which operated parallel to the underground, published the Polish underground text. Korbonski was irritated by the lack of answers because his dispatches were supposed to be decoded and repeated by the BBC.

2:95:00 The British simply did not believe it until the British intelligence repeated the news. (The dispatches were put in code).

3:21:00 Korbonski was born on March 22, 1901 in Prascki, a small city. He had one brother and three younger sisters. His older brother was killed in a bunker in London during the War. His father was a court secretary.

3:47:00 His father died of pneumonia at the age of 36.

3 52:00 Technical conversation

3:72:00 Korbonski's mother had to earn the living. Stephan separated from his family at the age of 15. He tried to teach younger children. In December 1918, at the age of 17, after Poland had regained independence, he escaped from his school and volunteered for the Polish army. Korbonski fought in December 1918 with the Ukrainians, in 1920 with the Bolsheviks, and in 1921 with the Salisha (PH) uprising against the Germans.

3:93:00 His mother died in 1921 at the age of 50 so he was all alone. His mother was a very religious woman. Religion was important to Korbonski, too. Every Sunday, his family went to Yasnagora (PH) to pray in front of the Black Madonna.

4:28:00 They were a close-knit family. His family was poor. In Swoopsa (PH), where his family moved after World War I, they rented an apartment from a Jewish family. The two families were on friendly terms.

470:00 Social relations between Jews and Poles were generally alright before the war except for the National Democratic Party in Poland who were anti-Semites (about 20% of Poles). Central and left-wing Poles were not. Stephan was in the peasant party which was made up of many of the workers.

4:98:00 Of 20 million Poles, 3.5 million were Jews who had lived for centuries in Poland. There were some Polish Jews who were Polish national heroes.

5:36:00 There were Polish generals in the army who were Jews. In 1921, Korbonski was part of the uprising. He was a lawyer before the war.

5:58:00 Stephan and his wife, Sophia, realized what was happening with the Jews before the war because of the spread of fascism all over Europe, which reached Poland before the war. Stephan married in 1938.

5:78:00 He was very close to Jewish people even before the war because his partner was married to a Jewish girl. Among lawyers, he had many Jewish friends who voted in his favor when he ran for the Lawyers' Council (the appellate court of Warsaw) because he was pro-Jewish.

5:98:00 Korbonski was pro-Jewish simply because he lived amongst the Jews. He and his wife decided to aid the underground because their country was being invaded by enemies. They did not want to go abroad. They wanted to start fighting inside Poland. From the beginning, Stephan and several other political and military leaders decided to create the underground.

6:50:00 Technical conversation

6:62:00 Jews made up only 10% of the population and there was a terrible penalty in Poland for helping Jews. Siegfried Jung (mentioned earlier) was born in Austria and spoke very good German so the German dignitary in charge of electricity in Warsaw appointed him his personal aid. The dignitary proposed that Jung become a citizen of the Reich, not knowing that Jung was Jewish.

6:90:00 Jung met Stephen and told him that he had overheard a telephone conversation between his Fuhrer and his superior in which his superior was to go to headquarters and must borrow a car because his car was in bad order. Stephan immediately sent a telegram to London, repeating exactly what the two had said over the phone informing where the hideout was. Two months later, London responded.

7:17:00 The hideout was the same place where the attempted assassination of Hitler took place. Stephan was captured twice. The first incident occurred when Governor Franc (PH) arrived in Warsaw. Stephan and his wife lived in the neighborhood where he was staying. They took all men as hostages, among them Stephan, even though they did not know that he was involved in the underground.

7:38:00 The second time he was captured, they took all the men from one district. They encircled the street and took all of the men from their houses.

7:60:00 Stephan and his wife managed to hide everything. Stephan pretended to be German by being well-dressed. When the Germans stopped to check documents, they passed right over him. He was never arrested as an underground agent.

7:80:00 Stephan found that there was a special officer in charge of finding and arresting members of the civil resistance. The resistance, therefore, had their own intelligence. Some Germans living in Poland were unsure of what was going to happen so they worked for the resistance. When Stephan left his wife in the morning, he was never sure if he was going to see her later because there were many hiding places that they could go to. You could not stay in one place for too long.

8:03:00 The wives of the radio operators, including Stephan's wife, carried the equipment. They travelled by streetcar or by cab.

8:40:00 There was a Jewish woman whose husband was minister in the Polish government in exile in London. She managed to reach Stephan, and he supplied her with money and documents. Stephan told her to stay out of the streets because of the danger of the Germans. It was easy to help because, when somebody reached him, he could simply order the technician to supply them with whatever they needed. There were seven Jewish children on their street. One morning, Stephan and his wife heard childrens' voices.

8:64:00 His wife went to the balcony and saw that the noise was coming from Jewish children asking for food. Sophia (Stephans'wife) took them food. The children wanted her to take them inside. She found them a place on the veranda, amongst the equipment, and gave them food. Stephan and Sophia continued giving the children food for months afterward. The children had been left alone by their families. Stephan and Sophia moved around from time to time because they were constantly in danger so, for a while, a neighbor took care of the children. Stephan and Sophia do not know what happened to these children.

9:02:00 Up until July 22, 1942, the Jews had confidence that they could somehow survive as prisoners. On July 22, when they began daily transports to Treblinka, Maidanek, and Belzec, the Jews realized that they would not survive, and they began to think about fighting even though they did not have hope of winning. The Jewish Fighting Organization kept in touch with the military underground.

9:30:00 The Polish uprising took place on August 1, 1944.

9:50:00 Technical conversation

10:04:00 They killed children on the spot. Stephan thinks that it was right of Israel to take the money Germany offered them for reparations (even though they would not take it at first).

10:16:00 Technical conversation

10:22:00 After the War, Stephan was arrested by the Russians. Later on, the Amnesty Law was passed, and Stephan and his wife were released from prison. A coalition government was organized in Poland. When Stephan left prison, he rejoined his prewar Polish peasant party. On January 19, 1947, he was elected as a member of Parliament from the city of Warsaw, but the elections were falsified so they only got a minority in Parliament including Stephan. He felt a responsibility to the underground because they were decimated and arrested by Communists.

10:42:00 On February 26 of that same year, Stephan delivered his speech in Parliament demanding amnesty for all underground fighters who had been imprisoned. He strongly condemned Communism. Stephan accused Communists of falsifying elections as well as committing other crimes. Stephan and Sophia escaped to Sweden because they were afraid that he would be arrested for refusing to join the Communist party. They took a ferryboat to Sweden (with the help of a Swedish officer). The voyage was very dangerous because three Polish military officers stopped them at the entrance. The officers asked for passports. They managed to get by.

10:67:00 Stephan and Sophia were in Stockholm, and they were with their Polish translator when they discovered that their escape had been leaked by one of the soldiers on the ship which took them to Sweden.

10:76:00 Technical conversation

10:80:00 When Stephan and Sophia returned to their hotel, T.V. and newspaper men were waiting for them because it was known that their escape had been discovered. The Swede involved in their escape was arrested.

11:11:00 The towns occupied by Jews for so many years before the war are now empty. Two generations of Poles have not seen Jews in their towns. Poland was a cultural, scientific, and religious Jewish center. There were famous Jewish rabbis in Poland.

11:36:00 Children managed to escape from the Ghetto. Often, the Germans still ended up killing them. The children asked for bread. Stephan thinks that children need to learn about the Holocaust. The U.S.S.R. is an evil system as well because, there, they annihilate people by starving them. The Germans managed to capture 15,000 Polish officers and then shoot them in the back of the head.

11:59:00 When Stephan was captured by Soviets during the war, he managed to escape from the train that they put him on. There were two sets of train tracks: one set for the train carrying Polish commissioned officers to Russia and the other for carrying soldiers. Stephan managed to switch from the train carrying officers to the one carrying soldiers when the two passed each other. In 1941, when war broke out between Germany and Russia, the Polish soldiers were released, and they organized an army under the command of General Anders. Anders began to wonder what had happened to the Polish officers. He did not know that they had been shot.

11:86:00 Twenty-six million Poles are waiting for Gorbachev to admit that Polish people were killed by Stalin. Stephan and Sophia came to the U.S. in November 1947 from London after having just been in Sweden.

11:99:00 Stephan joined the Free Europe Committee and met some Jewish people, including Vlatka (PH) Meed, the wife of the president of the Jewish Fighters' Organization in New York. Stephan was invited by the Labor Organization in New York to talk about his efforts to save as many Jews as possible. He met two Jewish leaders who told Karsky that only the Allies could save the Jews by reprisal.

12:22:00 Stephan sent a dispatch to London to tell them to bomb German cities so that the Nazis would stop killing German Jews. The British responded that Korbonsky's proposal did not agree with their ethics. The first goal of the West was to win the war.

12:36:00 Technical conversation

1:251:00 Sophia worked for the Voice of America and Stephan worked for Radio Free Europe to Poland.

12:59:00 Technical conversation

12:66:00 Stephan got a medal from Yad Vashem in 1980. Some Polish lawyers from Warsaw had their own organization in New York and proposed him for the medal because they knew about his work.

12:75:00 Technical conversation

14:08:00 The underground government had daily radio contact with the government in exile in France. Couriers were parachuted from planes to Poland. They brought money, letters, correspondence, and instructions.

14:15:00 Technical conversation

14:64:00 Tape ends.

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