

-TITLE-BORIS TASLITZKY
-I_DATE-FEBRUARY 9, 1991
-SOURCE-JEHOVAH WITNESS
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-GOOD
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-1 HOUR 30
-LANGUAGES-FRENCH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

1:02:40 The camera tours the art studio of Boris Taslitzsky.

1:06:00 Boris's father, an engineer student, was from the Russian town of Ekaterinoslaw, now called Dnepropetrask. After participating in the 1905 Revolution, he was forced to take refuge in France. Boris's mother, Anna Reebock (ph), was from the Russian town of Krimay (ph), now called Tanoy (ph.) In 1905, at the age of fourteen, she was forced to flee to France after participating in a demonstration. Boris's maternal great grandfather was a rabbi.

1:08:15 Boris's mother worked as an apprentice in the fur business as soon as she arrived in France. Boris's parents met a little later. And Boris was born in Paris on September 30, 1911. Boris' mother spoke very little French, and as the result of a misunderstanding agreed to have Boris baptized. The certificate of baptism helped Boris later on.

1:10:20 Boris's mother left the fur business and became a seamstress. In 1914, Boris's father entered the army. Boris was raised alone by his mother after his father was killed on July 30, 1915.

1:11:04 While she worked in the fur business, Boris's mother went on strike every First of May. Boris grew up knowing about friction between different social classes. He suggests that this may have struck, in part, his political interest. Boris's family was very poor. Later, Boris's mother remarried a mathematician from a very cultivated, bourgeois family. It was through his step-family that Boris, by age twelve, became cultivated in the arts by visiting the Louvre and Luxembourg museums.

1:13:00 In 1929, at age seventeen, Boris entered the "Ecole Nationale Superieur des Beaux Arts." (prestigious school) It is at this time that Boris began to take interest in politics. Boris and his friend, Amblar (ph), were both from lower class families and felt they were treated differently.

1:14:57 Boris's classmates knew he was Jewish (from his profile) but he didn't feel that he suffered from anti-Semitism. Boris wasn't involved in any Jewish Organizations. However, he was often surrounded by his mother's Jewish friends. Boris liked them but was bothered that they didn't integrate into French society.

1:17:12 From 1928-1932 there was the great economic crisis. In 1931 Boris did his one year military service. Boris remembers being handed a gun and told that it was to be used on protesters.

Boris was angry as he thought that he'd have to shoot his own mother. It was things like that, Boris says, that made him become politically active. When Boris returned home, his mother was unemployed. He had no home and therefore slept on his mother's floor. On Easter, there was a big demonstration, in the North, which Boris and Amblar participated in. Boris describes carrying around a big sign saying, "Artist; with the people." They were desperately looking for some movement to join.

1:19:17 Boris joined the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists which was started in 1933. When he was in the military, Boris learned that Hitler wanted to take power legally. He immediately felt, as a Jew and a Frenchman, that this affected him personally. Fascism, the economic crisis, and his mother's material situation prompted Boris to action. Boris had a very romantic vision of revolution.

1:21:24 On February 6, 1944 there was a huge demonstration on the Place de la Concorde. Boris went out of curiosity. The guards had just fired on the demonstrators. Boris was mistaken for a journalist by the guards and so they struck at him. Boris missed the huge demonstration which occurred a few days later. He went to the demonstration on February 12th where he really felt the revolutionary spirit.

1:23:35 Boris met Paul Vuyon Couteurier (ph) for the first time at the meeting for the Association of Revolutionary Writers and Artists in a huge apartment on Montmartre Street. Couteurier changed the name of the Organization to "La Maison de la Culture" and announced that Aragon (ph) would be in charge.

1:25:05 Boris describes the lack of organization of the Maison de la Culture: People argued about the definition of "Revolutionary Art." When Boris was asked to give his opinion, as a graduate from the "Beaux Arts," he was embarrassed to tell them that he didn't know what they were talking about. Boris didn't return for three or four months. When he returned, Boris learned that they had moved to "Rue de Navarin." There was a Constitutive Meeting for the new Organization. Aragon (ph) presided with Edouard Pignon (ph) and Jacques Lipiche (ph) next to him. Boris was selected by Aragon to serve on the newly created Committee of Directors. Boris didn't know how it functioned or what the goals of the Organization were.

1:28:33 The goals of the Organization were 1) anti war 2) anti-fascism 3) for the defense of culture. In 1936 there were 40,000 members of the Organization in all France. There were Organization members in Toulouse, Marseille, Le Havre, Bordeaux, Lyon, etc. Boris explains that the fact that the Organization stood against war brought together both those who were older and had fought in WWI and the younger generation who had fathers who had been hurt or killed in the War.

1:30:48 There were many German and Austrian intellectuals who had moved to France. People were unified by this sentiment of anti-fascism and the fear of war. The Organization was not always focused on politics. There were expositions, Demonstrations for Political Refugees, etc.

1:31:30 Boris headed a magazine called the Journal of painters and Sculptors of the Maison de la Culture. Boris explains that many artists, who eventually became well-known, gave their work free of charge to the Magazine. These artists included such people as: Amblar, Pignon, Francisco Eubert, Andre Marchant, Andre Fuchand, Boucher, Roumette, Lorguison, etc (ph).

1:31:58 Upon the Victory of the Front Populaire, the Organization became huge. In 1935 Boris joined the Communist party under the influence of Aragon. He says that he still adheres to the Communist Party.

1:33:58 Boris was asked by Aragon to make a reproduction of "The Massacre of Translorla (ph) Streel-" of Rouiller (ph.) In the painting, Boris also added, of his own will, the representation of the death of a young fifteen year old Communist named Henri Vilmain who had been killed by a policeman on the demonstrations of February 25-26, 1934.

1:37:30 In 1935 Aragon put out the book, For a Socialist Reality. This was a collection of four conferences by Aragon. One conference was dedicated to a German Communist named John Artfield (ph.) The title was "Today John Artfield Hails Beauty."

1:38:27 Boris was deeply affected by an idea which Artfield had presented on the five parts of the world being united above thought. This new idea was like a revelation for Boris. Before he had approached his art as a job without much passion. Now, Boris realized that he could link what he believed socially with what he saw artistically.

1:39:05 Boris asked for a permit from the CGT for the May strikes. During this time Boris spent time in Renault factories, Department stores, and at the Crion (ph), hotel which was on strike, painting. In 1936, Boris finished two big paintings, Greves de Mai (May Strikes) and Defile au Pere Lachaise (Military March at the Pere LaChaise Cemetery)(ph).

1:40:18 In September, 1938 Boris was mobilized by the Communist Party. Boris was excited that they were finally going to pursue Hitler. They were demobilized the week after. Boris's friends were relieved whereas he was furious when he came home.

1:41:23 Boris's mother was ashamed that her son was involved in the Communist Party. Boris describes his mother as more patriotic than the whole of the french people. At this time, Boris completely broke away from his step-family; they were a conservative catholic family and could not understand Boris's participation in the Communist Party.

1:42:40 Boris wanted to go to Spain to fight in the War. But Aragon made him stay. Boris worked at the journal office but sketching designs as opposed to writing. He worked for Paul Nise (ph.) Aragon gave Boris a job ,:reating propaganda for Spain. Aragon's philosophy was that art should be used, whatever kind of art, to talk about Spain.

1:44:45 The Workers Municipalily put together a photography exhibit on Spain. For Paris, Vogue (ph), who was one of the first three of the Resistance to be eKecuted, was the photographer. Boris and the other Organization members were convinced that the Front Populaire in Spain would win. As the mobilization in 1938, the contrary occurred. The Spanish War became a very symbolic event; there was even a book publ:Lshed, L'Espaane au Coeur (S~ain in the Heart.)

1:45:40 The CGT gave an order for a strike against Munich which was supposed to take place November 30, 1938. On the 30th Boris got a paper under his door saying that the strike had failed. The government headed by Danadier (ph) mobilized all the strikers. The 1938 failed strike, Boris explains, was a check. He understood, at this time, that the war would not occur since all the movement against the war and fascism, including the Maison de la Culture, was crumbling.

1:48:10 In August 1938, Boris was remobilized. On August 25th, the Germano-Soviet Pact was signed. Boris said that he had studied the Pact very carefully and did not believe that it was a Pact of "Alliance." The Communist Party saw it more as a Pact that would slow down or delay the battle between the Soviet Union and Germany.

1:51:15 During the eight months of mobilization at L'armot Pied (ph.), Boris says, they were bored out of their minds with nothing to do, not even exercise. Boris did many sketches at this time, many of which can be found at the ~[useum of Contemporary History at the Invalides. On May 10th, Bori:: and his commando were in front of L'Imagineau (ph.) at the int:ersection of L'anuille (ph)/ L'Anuillon (ph.) At this point, Boris explains, they had contact with the Germans. Boris's "troop" kept having to retreat and

retreat until they arrived at the American cemetery of 1918 at Chateaudier (ph.) There, Boris was given the duty of setting up a trap for the Germans. They came upon the trap and many were killed.

1:53:30 From Boris's combat group there were only three survivors. When they were returning to Paris, Boris's Regiment was caught and taken prisoner on the Loire. They were seen as "Franc-Tireurs" (deserters) As the Corporal, Joseph Moine (ph) had not returned, Boris and the two others were brought before the German Colonel who said that if they carried any ammunition they would be shot. Luckily, they didn't have any left. On May 10th they were brought to the camp at Molin (ph) by truck. Boris was sent with other prisoners to make "moissons" before being deported to Germany. In this village there were twelve prisoners and the three "Franc-tireurs." Boris and the two others decided to leave the camp before getting deported. Boris explains that they just walked off, changed clothes, and bought a ticket at the local train station for Paris.

1:57:15 The day that Boris returned to Paris the Gestapo came to his apartment, not because he had evade the army but, because they were visiting all people who had press cards from Leftist magazines. Luckily, the concierge was there and signalled for Boris to leave before they arrived at his door. Later they came by and didn't destroy any of the sketches, only the paintings such as the Greves de Mai.

Tape 2

2:00:00 Boris asked the Communist Party what he should do. They sent him down South to Aubusson (ph) where Boris remobilized with people such as Jean Lussa (ph), with whom Boris had worked on a tapestry. Boris stayed here for 10 months. He went to the police station in the city and they OK'd his papers. Boris decided that it wasn't safe to stay in this city for too long since he had reestablished contact. In crowds, Boris explained, he would see heads that he recognized. They would look at each other to find out if either had contact. Boris moved to Gregalesh (ph) which was near Cahors and St. Circle La Po~pi (ph) Boris made contacts in Montpellier and was waiting for fake papers which weren't easy to obtain. Boris was turned in to the police.

2:02:15 Boris went in front of the Court at Clermont Ferand (ph). with 29 others. He was taken by the Rotaloire Commission of Creuse in the Southwest of France and not by way of Lotte. They were all sent to prison, at the central office of Royan (ph).

2:02:50 At Royan there were the 29 communists mixed with 9 common criminals. Boris says that the communists were in much better physical condition than the others who were dying of hunger and no longer had any goals. The communists were still fairly strong.

2:03:30 Boris stayed at this prison for 17 months. During this time the administration realized that the communists, military prisoners, had no reason to be in a Civil prison. Boris explains that it was a very hard prison where they were required to be silent at all times. Boris was able to do some painting. There are six of his works at the National Museum of Resistance at Champigny.

2:04:25 Boris and the other communists were sent to the military prison at Bauzac (ph) in the Dordogne Region. The prison was heaven compared to the Civil prison. Boris was able to do around 200 sketches in this prison. He didn't sign the works for safety reasons and he claims that the poli_cemen signed their own names to his art work. Boris was disappointed that these works completely disappeared.

2:07:20 Boris was sent to a new camp at St Sulpice (ph). He stayed there for eight months until deportation. Boris says that it didn't feel much like a prison. They were only prohibited from leaving the camp. In the camp, they created a University with a library and courses. In the camp there were Communists, Black Marketeers, etc. The courses included all subjects except for those such as, philosophy and hi,tory, which were not allowed. They even studied these subjects lmdr other names. History was under the pretext of Geography and philosophy was called "cours des ratures."

2:08:~5 They considered making an escape on Easter of 1944. They made a tunnel but it was discovered by the administration.

2:09:20 In this camp, Boris was dubbed the decorator of the five Communist barracks. During the night Boris created paintings, choosing his own themes. Boris w~s asked, by the Communists, to paint the chapel. He told them that he needed colors in order to be able to do the chapel. Somebody provided him with the colors. He made a painting of Christ at th~e foot of the Cross with Joseph and Mary in three colors.

2 ~ 10 Boris explains that relations were very good between the Communists and Rural people. He describes his own friendship with a miller who was convinced that the Communists would eventually take power over the nation.

2~ 40 On July 31, 1944 about 1,000 prisoners were taken towards Germany. There was a five day ancl five night journey by train in terrible heat towards Bouceauval (ph). Along the way Boris saw train cars which he says he learned later what was going on (deportation) The transport took such a long time because 5 times the Resistance attempted bombing the tracks. They finally arrived at Bronlaval (ph).

2:12:45 Boris can't explain why the Resistance would bomb the trains when they knew that Jews were inside. He was in the wagon

and unable to see what was happening. Boris explains that the Resistance was not bombing the trains that left from Roi a Dieu (ph) to Campionne (ph). This was the period of the Liberation of France and not the period when the Resistance was coming out openly armed against the Germans.

2:14:16 They arrived at Bouconval (ph) where they spent the night and took real showers (not gas showers) In the morning they arrived at the big camp (the Little camp which was the c-quarantine camp.) Boris was in awe by the scene. He felt as if he were in the Middle Ages. It was frightening yet aesthetically striking. Boris thinks in terms of being able to paint what he observed. Boris's paintings were saved because his wife visited them and brought them away.

2:16:07 There was a secretary of ??? who spoke German well and therefore served as an interpreter. He lived in the same house as Boris. This man provided Boris with pencil and paper so that he could do his art work. He began to sketch while he was in Quarantine. Then he moved to the big camp. There he continued to sketch on little bits of paper.

2:17:35 Boris was visited by Marcel Paul (ph) who had heard that Boris was an artist. Paul told Boris that he was putting all the French Community in danger by continuing with his art. Boris didn't want to cause trouble for the rest of the people and offered to stop. Paul insisted that Boris not stop; he would organize things so that Boris could continue working. Boris was able to do his sketches on random bits of paper used by the SS to take note of deaths in the night, escapes, etc.

2:19:05 Boris received orders from the Clandestine organization within the camp as to what he should draw on these scraps of paper the size of his hand. A French man who worked with the SS administration of Industrial companies outside the camp. All the camp belonged to this division of the SS. These organizations made guns (Guslavorth (ph)). The SS was paid for providing these factories with a labor force, the deported. The french man brought Boris four pieces of paper which he cut into four pieces in order to economize. He made portraits. Another time this french man brought Boris little bottles of ink from China and a fountain pen.

2:21:40 When he was in the camp Boris had asked Marcel Paul for a box containing his art materials which he had when he entered the camp. Three months later an old man who Boris never saw again came and left the box. Boris says that this was typical of the Clandestine Organization. The box Boris later donated to the National Museum of the Resistance at Champigny.

2:22:33 Boris says that they worked twelve hours a day plus an extra four or five hours when it rained or snowed. It was the SS way of breaking morale.

2:23:08 The Clandestine Organization made Boris the head of a Commando which was called the "LagerCommando." It was supposed to be for "cleaning up the camp." The Commando only existed on paper. Boris says that this Clandestine Commando made him very nervous because if they were found out, they could have been put to death.

2:24:30 Sometimes, in the camp, they received a rest permit which allowed them to stay in the barracks for up to three days. Boris says that if it was discovered that he was doing sketches in the camp he would have been hanged. The Clandestine Organization protected him. Everyone knew that he was sketching but people didn't tell. Boris was careful to disperse his art work so that it would not be discovered by the SS. Boris gave his art work to Christian Pinot (ph) who was part of the Political elite and therefore received priority upon liberation. The sketches were brought by Pinot to Aragon. Boris thought they may be useful to the Press.

2:26:25 Boris went to see Aragon when he returned. Aragon didn't use them for the Press. Instead he edited them into a book which first came out in 1945. There have been twelve other editions since.

2:27:00 Because the Clandestine Organization became so involved in making Boris's art work possible, his motivation became political. There were other artists in the camp such as a Soviet named Vilbof (ph), two Belgians named Salme (ph) and Fostille (ph), french named Favier and Manard (ph), etc. But Boris says that he did the most art work. And Boris was the only one who was helped by the Clandestine Organization. The other artists also helped Boris by bringing him little scraps of paper.

2:28:25 Boris explains that he was helped by the Clandestine Organization because he was well-known in the Militant resistance Movement.

2:28:50 Boris explains that his art work was primarily everyday life in the camp; the history of the camp when nothing really bad happened. Boris explains that he couldn't stand in front of an event such as a hanging with his paper and pen. And he wasn't exposed to the gas chambers or other places where torturous events were taking place. His painting focused on death in the camps only when it occurred for natural reasons such as heart failure as the result of hunger, disease, fatigue.

2:30:40 The camp where Boris was held did not imprison people for being Jewish. There were a few Jews but ones which were taken for other (political) reasons. Nobody ever looked to see if Boris was or wasn't Jewish. Nobody in the camp asked because they knew that knowing was too dangerous.

2:32:05 Boris's mother was taken to Auschwitz where she died during the huge deportation of July 1942. Boris says that she was very naive and had displayed in her apartment obvious signs that she was Jewish.

2:32:50 People didn't see Boris's work until after he was released from the camp. He didn't sign them in the camp for obvious safety reasons.
.END.