

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Samuel Gruber
May 21, 1991
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PREFACE

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SAMUEL GRUBER

May 21, 1991

01:00:00

[Technical conversation]

01:00:22

Q: Okay, Mr. Gruber would you please tell us your name?

A: Yes, My name is Samuel Gruber.

Q: And what was the name that you used in Poland, during the time of the story that you are going to be sharing with us today?

A: In the story they called me Mietek, it was a Polish name, it was a first name from Mietek, but Gruber. Mietek Gruber. But before the war they called me Munyo. I was known – in my town I was called – named Munyo Gruber. They called me that.

Q: And which town was that, that you–?

A: My town is a small town in Galicia, named Podhajce, not far from Lemberg. I went to school public there. Had my family, five people in the family, with my mother and father was seven. We – one of my sisters in 1928 married an American – came from America – American, and she come over to America with him and she was here. And I remembered her – his number here, address and being in a – as a prisoner of war, I wrote to her and she wrote to me and we contacted each other. She was here in America. The rest of the family disappeared.

Q: Okay. Let's go back then to the period of time before the war. Tell us a little about what life was like in the town in which you were born.

A: Podhajce was a small town. It was maybe 4,000 Jews and around, around the town were Polish people, Ukrainians. There was a difference from the Pollacks. And I went to school there, to the public school, for seven years we went. And the town was a very, very nice town. It was Podhajce – that mean, they had a lot of trees and water and people came from all over Poland almost for like a recreation. It was a very nice place. And I don't remember poor people there because usually in the towns, in the shtetel you call, there was a lot of poor people. I don't remember poor people there. Everybody had some kind of store or a business, a small one. My father was a builder. He came from another town and he was building in Podhajce, and he met my mother. My mother was a farmer's daughter, they had land, and he married her and I'm – all my life I was till 26 years, the war start – I was with my mother's family. I hardly knew my father's family. They were

in another town, so it wasn't so easy to go from town to town like it is today. But still when I was 14 years old, I went away to Lemberg – Lwów, they called it – to a bigger town, and I went to high school there and I finished school.

01:03:38

Q: And after you finished high school?

A: Oh, I came back. Not directly. I came maybe one or two years later because I had a job in Lemberg. I got some – I helped out some with teaching little bit, I did odd jobs. And then I came back to Podhajce, to my family. And I had a job, was a bookkeeper, I worked in a big company from a farmer's equipment and bicycles, this kind of thing. I was a bookkeeper, there. I worked – till the war started, I worked there. I had a girlfriend. I went out with her for years before the war. And in 19– I was a soldier before, too.

Q: Tell us about that. In what way were you a soldier?

A: They took – they drafted. After 18 years – 19 years, they drafted, and you had to go. And I was physically fit and they took me. Usually they didn't took Jews. Very, few Jews they took to the army, but I was fitting and I had school, and they took me to the army. And I was one and a half years in Tarnopol in the army and I finished the army I came home again and I was working back again in the job. And in '39 before the war started, maybe a month, the town was small and we knew each other. A lot of friends. We were always talking politics on the streets and what will be, what will be, about Hitler came in '33 and we knew what was going on. The Pollacks were already showing their faces too. They didn't – so much the Pollacks like the Ukraine, there were very few Pollacks there. But the Ukrainians there, they showed us that we are Jews, and they are – we had fights with them. Not big ones, not killings, but fists fights and all kind of – I remember one Purim where we made some kind of a party and a Pollack came and he wanted to disturb this. And I had a big fight with him and he almost killed me because he was very big. I didn't give him an inch, I just gave him back. But he never forgot me this guy. He came after a few days after me. He almost killed me. Around the house he was waiting for me. At least, we had our share with this antisemitism. We did not feel so much in with Podhajce, like we felt in Lemberg. We felt it more in the bigger towns. They were they called it Endeks¹. There was a group of Pollacks, the right wing and they were completely against the Jews and they were even killing before the war break. We had a big fight with them on the streets in the gardens and whatever – it was a street like in Akademicka. That remind me today somebody. Jews couldn't walk there. And there was the biggest houses belonged to Jews and there was a guy – Stricher(ph) was his name – he had this biggest house like on Akademicka street. He couldn't even collect the rent there. He couldn't go over because the antisemitism was so big and they couldn't – they were almost sitting in the streets daring, waiting for Jews to come and to beat them up. The situation before the war was already ripe for this, but like a like – the churchman said

¹ National Democrats (Polish); abbreviated from "Endecja."

in Poland, "Boycotting is all right, the Jews. Beating them up, is alright. But not killing. Killing is not our aim," the Catholic church.

Q: When we get back to the story that you're telling us about your completing the army activity, returning to work, the war began, where were you when the war began? What were you doing?

01:07:44

A: That's right. Before the war, they called me over on the reserves. Maybe two or three weeks before the war started. They called me to Nowy Sacz, a town not far from the borders of Germany. It is not far from Przemysl and Tarnów. And they – I went to the army. They, they put us in uniforms and we started to exercise. And maybe two weeks after, nobody new about this. Nobody – the people around there was surrounded there. Zakopane was a place where people came there for a cure. And nobody knew that the war started and all of a sudden during the night they starting shooting and they left us behind, the Germans, and they moved in. It was a Blitzkrieg. They moved in before we even knew what happen. We were in the army. We were sitting in the mountains because there was a lot of mountains, the Carpathian Mountains. And we were sitting there and waiting for the Germans and they were around us already, deep in, in Poland and we didn't know they were around us. But after a time they started with us too because they did it in pockets like, and they start fighting with us and I was wounded in my right arm. I was shot and I fell, and but they didn't see me, and I walked over to a house there to a Polish woman and I begged her to let me in because I was bleeding and she saw me and she was crying. She was afraid, but she took me in and she start helping me and she bandaged my wound and I was laying – when I was laying there for five minutes the Germans came in. And screaming and looking, and the one with the pistol came over to me and I spoke fluently German. I told him, "I'm a soldier and I, I'm wounded." He said, "Okay, don't worry. We will take you back to the hospital." And they gave me something to eat even there because they took from the farm woman and gave it to me and they brought me back to the hospital.

Q: So you were a prisoner of war?

A: And I became a prisoner of war. But I was in the hospital. I didn't feel it so much because I was still a prisoner of war, a Polish prisoner of war. Nobody bothered me specially as a Jew. Nobody said nothing to me. But the Polish people and the woman that worked there, they knew about it that I am Jewish, but they didn't make a special–

01:10:49

Q: How did they know?

A: Face and the, the manners. They knew a Jew. They recognize. Pollacks recognize a Jew even we didn't look like one. They knew. And I was lying there maybe a month in the hospital until I could move my right hand. I couldn't move it, but they helped me out a

little bit and I'm, I'm moving it. I still till today is – I cannot pick my hand that's all. And after a month and a half, they took us, whoever was in the hospital left, and they took us to Germany. In a train, they brought me over to Germany. And they brought me into Stalag 13 – in the film you will see, Stalag 13 – as a prisoner of war. The second day I came in, they put us in a line up, all the Polish prisoners and they asked, “Juden raustreten².” “Jews report.” I was hesitating for a minute, I admit and two friends of mine, Pollacks, they were standing in my side both of them and they pushed me out and they said, “Here is a Jew.”

Q: Must have been nice friends.

A: Two friends of mine. A day before we, we shared bread because on the way we came, they throw bread to us to the, to the train. And I always – they always give me I should divide it and I was, I was always a leader between them. And all of a sudden, they decided, “here's a Jew.” Then I came out. I had no, no choice, and they put a separate barracks but to the same place they kept us. They took us to all kinds of work, heavy work during this. We were cleaning after even Hitler when he spoke in Nuremberg. That was – I was around Nur—Langwasser, Stalag 13 was there. Nuremberg, we were cleaning after Hitler. He spoke once. And I was a little bit more home in the barracks because I couldn't work so hard with my hand and they knew about it the Germans. They had their report. And in fact, the Red Cross came to us and my number's 30,189. I still remember. And they have the record of me when I was born, where I was born, and where I fell – the 8th of October I think, and when I was in prison.

01:13:34

Q: This is a good chance to go back for a moment to think about your family. You have told us about the war beginning, your involvement in the war. Where was your family?

A: That's a very interesting. My family was on the other side of the border. The Russians took over one side of Poland. The Germans took over the other. They had made pact, Ribbentrop³ and Molotov⁴, and they divided Poland. My family was in Galicia, and then belonged to Russian and I was on the other side by the Germans and they were by the Russians. So 1941 they were under the Russian. It wasn't too good, but still my father was working. He was a builder and he built houses for them, and he built this. And he – they made a living. Nobody killed him there. They knew what is going on the other side, because I was corresponding with them. As a prisoner of war, I had the right to write – to send letters and they were receiving the letters and they were answering me. And one was an interesting that I sent a letter that went from one camp to the other when they took me. I was in a few camps. But they cut my hair. I had very nice bushy hair and I didn't like it that they cut my hair. I looked like a muselman⁵. I looked very bad. Then I wrote to my

² Jews step out! (German)

³ Joachim von Ribbentrop

⁴ Vyacheslav Molotov

⁵ Muslim (German); camp term used to refer to prisoners who had lost the will to live and were near death.

parents that they cut my hair again and my sister answers me, "Watch that they shouldn't cut your head. The hair will grow back." And that was the truth. I had to watch my head.

Q: So during this time while you were prisoner of war, you did keep contact with your family?

A: I kept contact with my family and I kept contact even with my sister in America. I was sending her letters, and she even sent me a package – she was sending me a package. I had this sweater – I can never forget – a green sweater. She sent me and I put it on, and when I run away to the, to the woods, I had this sweater on. And after a time, there were so many insects in this that when I took it over, the sweater walked away by itself. That's a joke, that's the truth. That's the way it was. I mean I had contact with my sister and I had contact with my family.

01:16:07

Q: Okay. Now, let's get back to where you were. You were taken into Stalag and you were given a particular work assignment?

A: I was assigned to the kitchen more or less because in the beginning, they did some other works and later on they put me in the kitchen. In the kitchen, I was making coffee and I was making lunch. And I once I made coffee and I didn't know what sugar is. They gave me the salt and sugar was for me the same. I never saw it before. And you had to – sugar was in lumps not loose. And I put in ..instead of sugar, I put in salt in the coffee in the morning, the group went to work, was Pollacks also, they were eating from this kitchen. They wanted to kill me because the coffee was salted and they figured – they called me in the Germans right away and they said it's sabotage and usually when – if I would be under the SS, I wouldn't live. They would kill me. But this was Wehrmacht⁶ there. And some of them are still people today you could talk to. And I understand. told him this story that I didn't know what it is and I put in salt. And he let me go. But he gave me a lesson. I think he took me, he put me to work, but he was somehow lenient to me because I helped him out after a time in his office too. I write German fluently, and I was helping in the office to write it. And from – this was in Ludwigsburg, I think, yes. I was in Nuremberg, and then I was in Ludwigsburg and then I was in what the name? Münzinger. They were taking us from one place to the other. And then Münzinger, all of a sudden they decided or it's not – they, I mean, the headquarters – decided that all Jews have to be sent back to Poland. How? They said they don't want prisoners now. The Pollacks – the Polish war was finished. Why should they keep prisoners? "You are Jews, and no, no prisoners and we send you home." And they suppose to change, to change us over with the Russians. That was in '41, and after a time they took us – they put us in trains and they brought us to Gleiwitz and from Gleiwitz, they brought us to Lublin in a camp Lipowa Seven. There was from horses from a camp before. And this Lipowa, right away by the train, when they took us over, they showed us, right away, who they are. They

⁶ General title of German armed forces from 1935 to 1945.

were SS. They came with, with the dogs, peitsches⁷, sticks and all kinds of this, and they were beating us right all the way to the camp. And they told, "You are no more prisoners of war. You are Jews and we will be treated as Jews." But still they kept us separate. They didn't put us together with the ghetto. There was a ghetto. In Lublin there was a ghetto already then. And they did not put us in the ghetto.

01:19:35

But there was an interesting story. Before I came there was maybe a thousand prisoners. They were all Jews also, what came and they – the Germans brought them over to the Jews from the ghetto and they told them, "You feed them. That's your Jews. You feed them." And they, they didn't have what to eat themselves in Lublin. The people, the population was very bad for the ghetto. And they said, "We don't have food." They said, "Good." They took them out and they killed all the prisoners of war, the whole thousand. Maybe – maybe a tenth was left over by the end. They brought them on the way to Lubartów, a small town, and then to Parczew. Maybe there was left maybe 10, maybe 20. I don't – I cannot tell exactly and there the people – the population, the Jewish population put them in right away and gave them food and they kept. I came after this and they felt that the Jews – they felt they had to do something. They made a kitchen for us in the camp. They brought over and they was cooking for us meals, and they kept us there. The leadership there was from the SS. There was Riedel⁸ was the leader, and there was Dolp⁹ was a small officer. He was the terror of all Lublin and the terror from all over in Poland. Dolp was known all over. Dolp came in on a horse to the camp and if he saw somebody laying in the bed sick or somebody didn't get up so fast in the morning, he shot him right on the spot. And we had a lot of problems there in the camp. I was still on the, on the care of this hospital whatever because I was shot and I had always showed this paper I had from the Germans that I cannot work so hard. Others were working out and in the beginning also I went out to work and we built the known Majdanek camp, Majdanek concentration camp. They built from the prisoners of war. We built it. And after this was ready, we were still there. They brought in the first prisoners of war from Russia. The war with Russia started in 1941. I think in July, June. I don't remember exactly the date. And when the war started the first prisoners of war in Majdanek were Russians and they said – the Germans said that they are not Russians – just prisoners, but they are commissars. They are officers something like communists real, and they have to die. And they were dying like flies. I don't know if they gave them poison or whatever they gave them, they were dying. They had typhus there and they were dying. And we got – we caught from them typhus from the Russians. Me too. I got sick. I got the typhus. And they brought – they didn't want to give us any care because they were afraid that we will – they will get sick to the Germans, and they took us out and they put us in a synagogue. In the synagogue they put on the floor nothing to cover. Nothing. We just stayed there. We were about 400 sick people and I think 300 died. And the strongest one, somehow – I cannot believe it, but the stronger ones died. And I had some help from the town

⁷ Whips (German)

⁸ Unterscharf Horst Riedel

⁹ Sturmbannführer Hermann Dolp

somehow. A doctor came in once, and he knew me from before. And he gave me a needle and he ran out fast because he was afraid that everybody want and he didn't have the help for everybody. And he gave me a needle and somehow it helped me, and I lived too.

01:23:31

Q: Mr. Gruber?

A: Yeah.

Q: You mentioned before that you were taken into a synagogue? Could you describe what that synagogue looked like?

A: The synagogue was a very, very big building. It was the biggest synagogue in Lublin. Lublin was a very known town from Jews. The Jews lived there for hundreds of years, historical. The biggest Rabbi for the yeshiva there was in Lublin, and they had the biggest synagogue was there in Lublin, too. And they took out everything. It was bare walls there, and we were, were laying there 400 people on the floor. Plain on the floor. Nobody was taking care of us. Nobody talked to us. Nothing! But the people of Lublin once in awhile were daring. They came in and they brought us food a little bit. They helped us out a little bit in that synagogue.

Q: These people from Lublin they were in the ghetto?

A: In the ghetto.

Q: And they managed to get out of the ghetto?

A: No. No. The synagogue was in the ghetto. This was in the ghetto.

Q: Okay.

A: They didn't have to go out. They came there. They came women and the ladies. I had a girlfriend there what I knew and she came to help me out and had friends they came in to me to see me there.

Q: So you were actually able to see what was going on in the ghetto?

A: I was in the ghetto. Lots of times. Because I was working so hard in the outside, then I was inside working for self help. People when they went out they were getting some foods, some bread. They brought it into the camp and they were bringing it over to me and I concentrated and I was going over there. There was a hospital. I would bring over food for them. I was given out for people what ever was poor. They couldn't work. I was giving out bread. It was self help. I was working with another one. Goldberg(ph) was his name. We both worked in this in the camp.

Q: How did it come to pass that you were doing these activities?

A: I don't know. I was maybe brought up like this from home. I was always in the organizations. I was belonged to Shomer ha-Za'ir¹⁰ when I was a youngster for the – for the organization for Israel. In fact, before the war I went also to a Hachshara¹¹. I was preparing to go to Israel and I was maybe a year and a half in that Hachshara working. And I was always on the side of the poor. I don't know – .somehow I – that was my nature. And I liked to do it, and I – I was helping people.

01:26:31

Q: But you were more than helping? You were the leader of these activities?

A: I've always – somehow they – they gave me the leadership. Always as I remember there was a moment in the camp. There was a lot of doctors, intelligentsia was there. He came into the camp already when it was Jew. And one of the doctor, the Germans wanted him to be the leader of the camps, he came over to me and he said, "Gruber, you are the man for us. We want – I want you to do it." I said, "No. Not for the Germans I wouldn't do it." And I didn't want to take it. Another guy took it. But still they felt something from him that I was doing the right thing and they always gave me the leadership.

Q: How did you feel about taking the leadership?

A: I was brought up like that because when I was in the organizations I was always there. I was talking to people. I had speeches. But my main subject was antisemitism. I remember today that I was always digging in into this, why there is antisemitism all around. Why the church? Why this? Why they're doing this? And I was always working on this. And people were asking me always the questions about this. Why there is antisemitism? And I told once a story and I don't know why it came to me the story. I was reading it or something that men – a priest asked a man to come into his church. He didn't see him a long time in the church. He said, "Why should I go to the church. You always talk nonsense?" He said, "No, no. Come over. I will have a very nice sermon. Come over." The man came out. The churchman talks as a sermon about Jews. He said that the Jews killed Christ. The Jews need blood for matzos and all the bad things in the world comes from the Jews. He heard a sermon against the Jews. The Pollack walked out and he grabbed a Jew on the street. They start beating him up. Then the church man came out, the priest came out and said, "Why do you beat this Jew?" He said, "What do you mean why I am beating?" You just told me what the Jews did. They killed Christ and, and all kinds of things." He said, "Wait a second. That was 2000 years ago. That was a long time ago." He said, "No, " to the priest. "You told it to me today and while you talking about this, we are listening." And that's what it was. They were listening to the priest. The priest were always talking about this, that Jews are a menace. "The Jews killed Christ." But they never told them that Christ was a Jew himself. In Poland if you would tell a

¹⁰ Youth guard (Hebrew); Zionist youth organization.

¹¹ Training (Hebrew); Zionist program to prepare youth for emigration to Israel.

Pollack that Jesus was a Jew, he would kill you it. Because how can it be? He was God. And that came from the churches. It came this hate for the Jews. Next the economic situation in Poland was so that Jews were working for the big farmers. Jews were working for the kings. Jews were working, collecting taxes. That was their function. And by doing this they came in contact with the nation, with the people.

01:30:04

Q: You had a lot of this experience?

A: Experience. Built up in me.

Q: Let's come back then to where you were when you were put into the synagogue with these 400 people, sick people.

A: Yeah.

Q: These were all Jews, all workers.

A: Yes. All Jews. Workers.

Q: And this had been men who had been working on the Majdanek Camp?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. And you were lying there and the doctor gave you an injection?

A: Yes.

Q: And then he left?

A: Yes. And the others like I told you, 300 of them died. The rest of them was brought back to the camp, to the camp to.... When I came back also, and I was a little – felt a little better, I still sit down and didn't work. And I had a friend of mine, his name was Henryk Szengut. He was a very good friend of me, and he was always with me and he was watching me all the time. And after a time was the leader of the camp was a Jewish fellow was named Fiszer¹². We had the whole camp. There was 12 camps – like 12 camps – like 12, and I was in the sixth.

Q: Okay. Let's think about the camp itself. You say there are 12.

A: Twelve camps and there was barracks.

Q: Could you describe them? Twelve barracks?

¹² Roman Fiszer

A: Yes, that's what I want to tell. Barracks were there. And in every barrack were maybe 100 – 120 Jews there, and every barrack had his own leader there was watching, and he was reporting to the main leader, to the Jewish official. Official is the leader for the camp. And there was two Jews there, Germans, Kapos¹³. They were working for the Germans and one was Simon and the other one is – I don't remember his name. And they were German Jews, and they were doing whatever the Germans told them. And the Germans – they came to us.

Q: And all of the others were Polish Jews?

A: Polish Jews.

Q: And essentially all former prisoners?

A: Essentially former the prisoners, essentially from the side of the Russian side because the ones what were on the side where the Germans took over, they let them go home. They let them go home and they wind up in ghettos and camps and all this. But the group that remained there in this was from the Russian side because they don't – they didn't have where to go. We supposed to be changed for prisoner of wars from Russia to Germany, but the war broke out and it stopped it. They were changing some in the beginning, but then it stopped and we were stuck in Lublin in Lipowa Seven. Now, I saw what's going on there and –

01:32:59

Q: What was going on there that you saw?

A: I mean they were killing people for the – for the smallest thing. They were – a lot of those people went out to work. When they came back, they brought a piece of bread or they brought some shoes sometimes. Some a piece of clothing or something from the Pollacks. They were – they were dealing in – with them. They give money what they had – dealing with them. And when they caught them – the Germans, they were watching by the entrance –they caught them, they were hanging, killing. Just for a piece of bread.

Q: Who were they hanging and killing?

A: The prisoners – us. The prisoners. When they came from work and they had a piece of bread and they found it and they killed you for this. They just – they had a hanging place and they were hanging. Especially they were killing if somebody run away.

Q: What happened if somebody run away.

¹³ Forman (colloquial German); term used for inmates appointed by the SS to head a labor Kommando of prisoners.

A: If somebody run away, they caught him. Usually they caught. They caught two of them and they took out the whole camp there one night and they were hanging him publicly like everybody should see. They woke us up in the middle of the night and everybody came out naked almost and it wasn't even – they told them to take off. Everybody was half naked outside and was February, I think – the beginning of March cold. Terribly. And a lot of us got pneumonia. We caught cold. And on top of this when they told us to go back to the barrack, they was standing in the door and whoever walked in they beat them how much they could. Every one of us, we all got beating. I was just behind a man who start crying, "Don't hit me. I have – I have home children, a wife. Don't hit me." The Germans said, "Yes, I have a child – wife and children too, and I have to stay here with you and watch you, you stinking Jew." And he hit him more even. When he hit him the more, I jumped over and he didn't touch me. He came in and I went in first. But my luck was that they send me over to work in a special hospital. In a hospital, they had there a barrack from the prisoners of war, about 20 of us or 24 – I don't remember. And we were working for the Germans, not SS, for the Wehrmacht. And usually every night we went to the – back to the barracks normal but then they built for us barracks and we was sleeping there and getting food there and we were working there. And I worked in a magazine.

Q: Go back to a point you made. You said, "My luck."

A: My luck was I meant the Fisher remember me. He knew that I am – that I cannot work hard. And he sent me out there, there I was sitting like a office, and I was writing down – if somebody came from the front, Germans came from the front and they needed or they have to give back uniforms, rifles, pistols, everything – I was registering this. Everything! And I had maybe 10 of my prisoners of war prisoners. They took it away from me and they were sorting it and keeping it. When the people went back to the front, they gave it back. But most of them didn't. And while they had their pistols and rifles, I start stealing rifles and pistols there from them.

01:36:45

Q: How is it possible that you were able to steal rifles?

A: I was more or less left alone in the office. I don't know if he had some kind of confidences. German was the head of this. He was like a Volksdeutsche¹⁴. He spoke Polish and he spoke German, and I think he was doing – and now as I think, I'm sure he was dealing with my people, not with me. Me, he told I should write down that I gave out to the Germans more than they took. Let's say I gave them a pair of shoes. I put I gave the man shoes and pants and a jacket and all this. And he took away the difference what I wrote down. I gave out shoes. I put down the shoes, and the difference he took away the jacket and the pants and he was dealing with – with my people and they were selling them to the population somehow. Because being in the hospital the Pollacks had entrance

¹⁴ Ethnic German (German)

to us more. We were not in a ghetto no more. We had open doors there. We could go in and out. Then they were dealing.

Q: You could go in and out of the hospital?

A: Of the hospital. Yes. We were watched more or less, but it's – it was easier. In fact, every day I went back to the camp to collect food for the group because I was like the leader of the group there. I remained like a leader. I was, I was going for food. I went to the camp with a German with a wagon. He brought me over there. We collected food for the people. We didn't need it. In fact, once I gave it away. To the camp I left it. And one of the Germans saw it, and he called me over to the head of the camp there, was Mohwinkel He said, "What do you mean? You stealing bread from your comrades and you give it away to the others." And he beat me up over the head with peitsche. This guy Fisher saw – came just then, and he saw that he is beating me, and he said, "Leave him alone. I will take care of it. I will give him a beating. You leave him alone." And Fisher just kicked me and threw me away you know and he said, "Just go back to the camp." He did that special, you know, to this. And in the camp I had contact with Pollacks. I worked with Polish prisoners of war. I worked with the Germans there. I worked with women there. It was a big hospital there.

Q: What do you mean when you say you worked with these people?

A: Let say, I worked there and they – they worked – they – they and let's say something was ripped or something, they were sewing or they were in the kitchen working. They was an administration there from Polish people and the Germans. The Germans were on top and the Pollacks were working there. And I was talking to them. We were more free there. Inside we were talking. And then came over to me a man. His name was Paul. Paul. I don't remember the second name, and he said to me, "What are you doing here?," he said, "Why don't you run away?"

01:40:02

Q: What kind of a man was this Paul?

A: That's it. I didn't – I was afraid of the Pollacks altogether, you know, and especially a man comes over to me and tells me a story I should run away and he knew when I will run away that they will kill 20 people. The whole group will be killed because for that 1 man – they told the Germans that. "If one man runs away, we kill 20, we kill 50 whatever we feel like we will kill because one man runs away." And I told them the story. Said, "Listen, they will kill a lot of people if I run away." He said, "Try to get out how many you can because everyone of you will be killed. In the camp, in the ghettos they will kill everybody." I said, "How do you know it?" He said, "I am a partisan. I'm a fighter." "I sit here," he said, "to work, but I have connection with the woods. I know a lot of people already out in the woods and they're fighting the Germans and I know some Jews and even from your camps, they run away. And I knew that's two or three run away, and they are in the woods. They have horses already there. They have rifles." He said, "There is a

army," he said. I couldn't believe it in the beginning and I decided to stay, but still it was very important. And like I told you before, I was a believer. I believed that Hitler will kill everybody. I believed. I was reading before the war even what he was doing to people, and I believed that he will kill. And I went out. When I came every Saturday or Sunday – I can't remember when I went for the food – I connect myself with the people, the people whom I knew and I was talking to them, "People, Let's run away. They will kill us, all of us." A lot of them were listening to me. And a lot of them said, "Forget it. Who? The Germans? People like the Germans. They are cultural people. The biggest culture in the world. They will kill people – prisoners of war, especially. Forget it? Anyway, where will you go? In the woods there. The Pollacks are not so keen to see us, and here is at least they give us some food. They gave us some cover to sleep in the night. We will live through the war like this." And I was very sorry for one man specially. He was a very good friend. He was a lawyer and I was begging him, plain begging him, "Come with me. Run away." He said, "No, no, no. I can't." But I persuaded 22 people and told them that I am running away, and I came over to this Pollack and – after a few months. It wasn't right away. I was finding out if he tells the truth and how he behaves and all this. I was watching very carefully. And we made a meeting in town. I had a meeting with him and two real partisans. People from the woods came over and in a restaurant, a Jewish restaurant – it was still a Jewish restaurant in the ghetto, and he gave me a compass. He gave me a map, and he gave me directions and where to run and how to run and where to meet. And we run away on October the 28th, 1942. We decided to run away. We talked to these 22 people. Everyone of them knew their locations, where he was to go. In separate places there everybody had to go. The going was still good. That means we could get out somehow. We could persuade the Germans we have to go out because later on I know after this nobody could get out. But it was still a possibility to get out of at least to town you know, to–

01:44:12

Q: Well, let's take for example how you got out.

A: That's what I mean. I still – I went out. I said, "I'm going to camp for food." I told the German I am going to the camp. And I was the leader and I had the right to go. I had a white band, band there, I was *Kolonneführer*¹⁵ and I had the right to go out. And instead to go over there to the camp I – I started to go in the direction where he told me to the woods.

Q: That was walking where?

A: Walking through Lublin to the town and on the outskirts of Lublin, and one thing I didn't mention in my book that I – when I walked came in two gendarmes, two police on horses, and I saluted them and they didn't say nothing to me and I was shaking like a leaf. I was sure this is it. And somehow they let – they let me through and I – I went through

¹⁵ Column leader (German)

town and walked straight by myself to the woods where I knew my two people were waiting for me.

Q: Okay. Let's slow down again. I'd like to go back for a minute to something you said earlier. You said that while you were in the hospital, you were taking rifles and guns.

A: Right.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about what you were doing with these rifles and guns.

A: Right. We had there a man, today he is in Israel, his name is Weingarten¹⁶. He had some kind of connection outside with Jewish people, with Pollacks. He was selling. I don't know really. I was always giving him the rifles. I myself kept one pistol and ammunition. I kept myself.

Q: Where did you keep it?

A: I kept it behind my bed. I kept it – I didn't keep it a long time, but almost by the end. About three, four days before, and –

Q: What did you think was happening with all of these rifles?

A: They wind up in the hands of the Polish partisans. They came there. But I – I don't know. He told me he made some money on this too I think through this Weingarten. He gave away a few pistols and rifles. But I myself before I went away – came to me – I had one man, Jegier¹⁷. He was later the leader and he said to me, "We wanted to buy by the Pollacks some rifles and ammunition to buy and we had money for this." And the last minute they refused and we don't have. Not one rifle, not one pistol, nothing. And they took our money too. And he said, this Jegier said, "What shall we do now? I don't think I will run away now. Without nothing, what will we do now in the woods without." I said, "Jegier, you do whatever what you want. I am going. I decided and you please tell your people they should go because I am going." And somehow Jegier and 22 of them, they all came on time. Six o'clock, like a clock or was it seven o'clock because it was darkness already on October the 28th, and we met all of us we met by the two Pollacks and there start a new other odyssey, started new chapter in my life.

01:47:57

Q: Okay. Let's take a minute before we go onto the new chapter to think about another aspect of your life in the camp for you. You were maintaining your contact with your family all through this time?

A: Right.

¹⁶ David Weingarten

¹⁷ Shmuel Jegier

Q: Right up to that point?

A: Right.

Q: How – did you have any thoughts about where you're going to be a, a year from then, a month from then? Did you have any thoughts about your future?

A: Who could think about a future there? You lived day by day. We saw what is going on, and every one of us was feeling that after tomorrow he will not be there. Nobody could think. But I remember one thing what I did. It was not legal. I sent a letter through a girl there. All the mail what we sent home or wherever went through a censor and my letter I gave to a Polish girl and she took it with her, and somehow, they caught the Polish girl with my letter. In this letter – I remember like today – I said, "I'm running away," and I told my family, "Run away. Nobody will live. Run, because the Germans will kill everybody." And the Germans caught this letter and I'm lucky, lucky it was a Wehrmacht, not SS, and this guy beat me up and beat up this girl and didn't gave the letter to the SS. Otherwise I wouldn't live till then to run away. This was – that – and that's the circumstances we were living. Day by day we didn't know if today is one killed or another. But it was an interesting story there. When we were building the Majdanek, that this Dolp. I said, in the beginning, the officer, he was supervising the work there, and one of our Jewish boys – .he was from Tarnopol, I don't remember his name, and he didn't like his work. The – Dolp didn't like how he worked and they started beating him up. This Jewish boy threw himself on this Dolp and start fighting with him, fist fighting. He fought with him, but he had a pistol or something and he hit him, the Jewish boy. And he started bleeding and they took him, and interesting, they didn't kill him. They took him away to a hospital, and they kept him there. The Germans kept him there for a long time until he healed. When he was healed, they took him out and Dolp said, "He's mine." He told him, "Run away now in the field." He told him, "Run." He ran and, and he killed him. That was this, but he was a hero this guy. He fought with him. In the beginning, he was really fighting. I don't remember his name. I'm sorry I don't.

Q: It's not usual for prisoners –

A: It was impossible. Not prisoners – nobody, nobody dared to, to fight with the German because they were killing. Right away, before you even start – before – but somehow he was fighting him. He didn't kill him right away. But then he hit him. He didn't shoot him. He hit him hard. That was interesting. But then he shot him when he told him to run away.

01:51:37

Q: You mentioned partisans before. How did you learn about partisan activities?

A: Partisan activities I told you this man – this Pole told me what is going on. They're running away. Pollacks and Jews are running away and they form an army. I didn't know.

In, in my mind, it was a army again because I was in the army before I was in Hachshara. I was always like in a scout and this was in my mind, it will be like the army. It is not a partisans, I have no idea what it is. And when we came these two guys start leading us, starting showing us what to do, how to do. And the first thing we went through a water. We had to _____, a small river and we had to take off the shoes and they showed us how to cross and by one by one we crossed the water and we came on the other side. And then they brought us over to a place in the woods, deep in the woods and he said – there was not far a river – and he said, "Here we will make a camp. In the night – we will go every night," we were 22 people, "On – 11 under your leadership and the other 11 going with..." Kaganowicz was the other guy – he was a leader too. "We will go – 11 people we will go into the farmers in the night." I had the map, I had the compass and every night we went to another village there around the woods. Not far. And we walked in, and the Pollack went with us, one of them and one went with the other. And they knocked on the window in the night and they said, "We are fighters for Poland," into the windows because people were scared. They woke up in the middle of the night and there's people with – with rifles or whatever. Nobody had a rifle. Nobody nothing. You know what we did. We took some wood and we put it on, on a string and I had a pistol. And I speak very good Polish and I was always the speaker for them and I came over and I said – because most of our Jews, they didn't speak a good Polish. They spoke Yiddish most of them and half Russian because their guys were the other side, but I spoke Polish, I went to school. And I came over and I said, "I'm fighting for Poland for, for your freedom. We don't want nothing from you. Just give us some food and we will go away. Some milk, bread." We were always taking some bread for the people for another 11 people back. And that was happening every night we were going to another village and until we exhausted already around this, we said, "Let's go somewhere else." And we start moving. And then Pollacks then too said, "Listen, you cannot walk around like this, rifles without on you. They will kill us. Any day the – the farmers will tell the Nazis or somebody and they will kill us all." "Give us – you have some money. You have some money or something? Give it to me and we will go out back to Lublin and we will buy some rifles or get some pistols or whatever." And they walked – they took everything what we had and they walked away from us. And I don't see them till today. I don't know what really happened. If they were caught or something like that, but we never heard from them. And then we were on our own. And then we start moving.

01:55:29

Q: Okay, before we start moving on again, we're going to take a minute now and relax and change the tape and start up again. So you've done beautifully.

A: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

A: So far, alright?

Q: So far, better than alright. My camera man is just fascinated.

A: What does he say? Interesting or not?

01:55:53

End of Tape #2

Tape #2

01:59:53

Q: Okay, Mr. Gruber, you brought us to the point where there were 22 of you, who had gone into the forest with the two Polish partisans. You told us that the partisans then took your money, your belongings, left, went back into the city and – never to be seen again. This left you with 21 other men. Could you tell us about what your thoughts were when you saw yourself there with 22 – 21 other men, facing an unknown situation?

A: It was a very, very hard situation, we – also we were already on the last few days in the woods. But still we relied more or less on the Polish two guys, when they came over to the farmers, they helped with this. Because the farmers, we knew, didn't like Jews specifically. That's why I changed my name to Mietek, this is a real Polish – Mieczyslaw and short is Mietek. And almost every one of our group took a Polish name, that they shouldn't – also we talked Yiddish between ourselves and we, we were a Jewish group, almost everybody knew, but we didn't want to be so obvious in dealings with the farmers to say that Jews. And they always had that imagination that a Jew is not a soldier, a Jew doesn't know what a rifle is, a Jew doesn't – he's different than all of them. The difference what meant a lot, that they, they – some of them they didn't see a Jew, but they told them the story about this. Then, this reminds me when I was in Germany. One day they took me to a farmer to work in the farm and when they came time to lunch they took me home and I was sitting by the table and there was a young girl, a German girl. And I was talking fluently German, I spoke to her, and she spoke to me, and I saw she likes me, she's talks to me. Then she starts talking about Jews, "Because of the Jews the war broke out. Because of the Jews the – this, this, this." I asked her a plain question, "Did you ever saw a Jew?" She said, "No, I never saw." I said, "How you know what it is?" She said "Hitler said that they are killer, that they are this, this, this. And they have horns," she said, "they have horns. Jews have horns." I said, "Listen darling, I am a Jew and I have no horns." She almost died. I couldn't believe it, what kind of faces she made then and she – she ran out from the house and she was so excited and so this – and she came back and said, "You are lying to me. That's impossible," she said. "You couldn't be it." I was a good looking young fellow in a uniform and she couldn't believe it. And that was the, the image of the Jews. It was only – they didn't know even, who a Jew is. But the image of a Jew was, for them, something that – terrific, was with horns or some devil or something a Jew is not a normal person. That is what they –

02:03:54

Q: That's a interesting story. We will get to that later.

A: That's why I came to the farmers when we came. The Pollacks helped us out and they, they were the front, and now we had to be the front and I was the front always because I spoke very good Polish and I always came in and like I told before, I was introducing myself and I told them why I was here. Then, when we exhausted the neighborhood, we started moving away from there. But before we moved, we had a problem. We had a boy

with us from Majdanek, and this boy run away from Majdanek in a special way. He jumped in – they took out the, the – I don't know how to tell it in English, from the, from the horses, the, the–

Q: Manure.

A: Manure. And he jumped in into this. And the farmer didn't see him and he was almost choked to death there but he – he came out from there with a horse manure from Majdanek. It was almost impossible to get out from that. He came out from there. And somehow the Pollacks from the Underground, they brought him over to me. And he got typhus. He became sick in the woods. We put him in, in our – in a hole somewhere. They covered him up because it was cold already in October. And we kept him like this and from himself, he got better and we were waiting for him to get better. In meantime, we were 22 people, and three of our people said, "That's enough." They don't want to go run like this. "It is no use. They will kill all of us, and it's very hard life. I'd rather go in a camp where I have a soup and they gave me some work to do. The Germans will not kill." And three of our people went back to the camp.

02:05:56

Q: How do you feel about their leaving?

A: It was a terrible shock to me. I couldn't believe it because we went through so much by running away, and they jeopardized other people and all this, and they, they knew about this, but you can't judge people. You don't know. Everybody has his own mind, and it was very hard. The beginning was so hard it's unbelievable. I was really scared. I didn't know where I am. When I came in, I saw the woods. It, it was a special wind blowing from the woods with a noise, the Pollack said, "Here, this will be your home now." To walk in into this, and it was dark when we walked in into the woods and in the woods, it was – the animals were making a lot of noise and it – and I came from a, from a town, nothing – a village and it was scary. And one of them trees was something broken. It made so much noise that we didn't know that it was a wounded animal or something like that or a human being or something and one of our people jumped up to the tree and he cut it off and he showed that was only a tree making the noise. But we were really scared. We didn't know what, what to expect there. You don't know where you are. In fact, we really didn't know where we were because not far from us maybe a mile or two, were Germans living. There they had a garrison. They lived there, and they were watching their mill. There was there a big one. But we didn't know. We didn't know for nothing. We were just came in there and, and we were doing our job, going every night and back and forth. And it's good that we decided to go away because the farmers start talking and the Germans would find out fast, and they would kill us.

02:08:03

Then we went away and after a night, or two nights– I don't remember exactly how it was – by walking from one place to the other, only by map. Only by a compass and a map.

We didn't ask nobody. In the night all of a sudden we hear noises in the woods and we stopped, and start looking, what kind of noises, voices. We heard something like Yiddish, spoken and I said, "This is something." And we over near one or two of us, the rest was standing on the side, and we start screaming, "amkha"¹⁸. Means "your people." And right away from the other side answered voice, "amkha." And to our amazing we found a whole group of people who had run away from a village. This was maybe – they called a town Markuszow, what they called it, a village Markuszow. The whole town of there was maybe 100 people or whatever run away from this camp. And they all came to the woods. And there were ladies and men and children, a camp. And between them were two Russian prisoners of war who had run away also from a camp, from a prisoners of war camp. They run away from a Russian camp. They run away. One was Kolka – one was Mikoi – Tolka, Tolka, and Mikoi, was the two men there. One was a officer and the other was a sergeant or something from the Russian army. And when they saw us– we came in uniforms, we were all in uniforms from the prisoner of war – oh, he got so excited and he – they took us over and he start talking and we looked around and we saw they were building bunkers. You know what a bunker is? They were building in the land – they were building some hiding places there, and they put up trees or grass. They covered everything and they were living down in this hiding place.

02:10:18

Q: Why don't you take a minute and tell us about what these bunkers really did look like?

A: They are bunker, bunker was interesting this. I, I can't shake it from me because I hated the bunkers, as to me it looked like a grave. You go in a graveyard right there, cause they had a door in the front where you walked in from the side, and the top it was like grass. You didn't see nothing on top. It was woods there around and trees and everything and dug. They dig into the, into the earth.

Q: How far down did they go?

A: Far. There was for a 20 people here. And one, one bunker was for 40 people. Far, big and it was two entrances. One for them to walk in and one to walk out. Far away to walk out. Took a long, long time and when they built, they built it open you know. Then they take woods. They put on top and they covered it. And when it was raining, rain came in – still not all the way, but it came in still someway. When I saw this, I said, "No, not for me. I didn't come in here to, to, to lay in – then the Germans will come in, and it's very easy to get all of us." And I said, "No. I will not stay here." And I told this Tolka and said, "It's not for me." He said, "If you want to stay." He said, "I have children and I have women. I have people. Where will – what will I do with them?" They have to be placed somewhere and hidden. They said, "Okay, we will be around you and we will work with you." But then he says, "Please, give me somebody what is a soldier and discipline he knows because all of them come from towns and they're children and they don't know what army is, what soldiers is, what it is. Give me a few people of yours." And they will

¹⁸ Your people (Hebrew)

teach, start learning them the skill of the army. And I said, "Okay." And I left Jegier, Cygan, I remember the name, and the woman Gottlieb(ph) her name, three or four I left with Tolka. And they were, they were starting working with him. I went away. But we kept contact all the time. We – through other farmers – how it happened, Tolka had already connections.

02:12:57

He came to a town, Garbów and in this town was a man. His name was Kaminski, Genek Kaminski. This was a known and this Genek was something what we have to thank a lot. He was – I think he was a communist before he war or at least a socialist, I don't know what – and he belonged to a group of people and he had some people there working against the Germans. And this Tolka brought me over to him. He introduced me to him. And we start working from this, this was our like headquarters. This Tolka had connections with the real partisans – not partisans special, but with the heads of the partisans. He had connections with the A.L.¹⁹. This was army in Armia Ludowa. There was a Gomulka²⁰ and there was a Moczar²¹, and there was Zymierski²² and there were all the heads of Poland which were later on the Polish government, and he had some connections with these people. And little by little he almost gave his orders, instead of them, too. But we lost – we became appointed with Genek. In the nights we came to him, and he was taking care of us now. He was sending us out for special work. He told us which farmers have rifles or ammunition or something and he said, "Go to this farmer and tell him he should give you a rifle. If he doesn't, you do whatever you feel like because he has it." And we did. And with the help –

02:15:00

Q: When you say, you did – could you describe one such action?

A: We came, we came – first of all, we needed always help now from this Markuszow people. We were in touch with them. They had Jegier with them and he was teaching. And we were taking out some of them people like Sever Rubinstein and others, and they were going with us also. First of all, they knew the terrain. They know where to go. And we were strangers. We were not from this neighborhood, and this was very, very important. They knew every piece, every house, every farmer, every – they, they knew everything around there, and it was very, very helpful for us. Especially was one of them guys a young fellow was Franek Bleichman. He came from another town. We met also. He wasn't from this town from– what's name – Markuszow. He was from Kamionka, a small town. And he came out with a small group of his people, of Jewish people– young, youngsters. He was maybe 18, 19 years. He wasn't a army man too, but he was very shrewd and he was – he knew the neighborhood. His father, I think, was dealing with farmers or something and he was taking him with him, and he knew around the

¹⁹ Armia Ludowa

²⁰ Wladyslaw Gomulka

²¹ Mieczyslaw "Mietek" Moczar

²² Michal "Rola" Zymierski

neighborhood. And this Bleichman became very handy to us and he was always helping us, going when we needed in the night for a – certain things. Because this Tolka – no, Genek Kaminski, he gave us orders now already. He told us, "Go in this and this place and there is – a train going through." And we took axes and very primitive things, shovels and all this, and take away a piece of rail, of rail. A train will come. It will fell off from this. And the first action was – the train was right in the beginning. And we came off – I remember I had a very strong man. Zelazny²³ was his name, zelazny²⁴ means iron. And we called him "Zelazny," because he was so strong, and he, he ripped out with those – almost with his hand, he ripped out a piece of the rail and but we still – he ripped it out but it was staying still. He didn't – he didn't take it away. And with axes, we were working there for hours until we heard a train coming. A train coming, and we stay away and the train stopped. It stopped there because when the train saw that something was missing or something later, the train stopped. But it disrupt already maybe a whole night and a whole day the communication because they, they were dragging who knows what – some ammunition to the front. It was on the way from Lublin to Warsaw. This, this was the spot. And we disrupted already this. Its – but we couldn't stay there too long, because we were afraid and we came back and we told this Tolka, reported to him that we did this and this. He was very happy, and this gave us some kind of a lift. "Oh, we can do things!"

02:18:32

Then he sent us out on the highways. We put up a metal string to the highways. When a car came, it had to stop. We stopped them and we were on the sides waiting for them. We had a few rifles already from the farmers what we took. But interesting was this. One of our man – his name was Finkel²⁵ – went back to the camp where I was working and there was another hospital too, and there were rifles and there were pistols and they were – what's the name – other things, what do you need? Coats, because when I ran out I couldn't take nothing with me. It was still warm. Nobody has a – nobody had a coat with him. It was cold. It start to be cold, so we were shivering cold. And we sent out this Finkel. He did – didn't look like a Jew completely. He was looking like a Pollack. And he went back to the camp and he organized there another 20 people. But this time they took a German and they told him – they were dealing with him, like I told you, the Jews were help – dealing with them Germans there. They told him, "You see and look. Don't say nothing." And they put on the rifles and uniforms and what's the name – covers and bed spreads and all kinds of things, a full truck, and he was dealing with them before – robbing them to sell things, but he didn't know what is going on and we had – Finkel knew where we will be there in the woods. He made an appointment with him, and he brought over the whole truck with maybe about 20 rifles. New ones, German ones. Completely new ones! And he brought it over to us on the spot. The German, that was one of the guy who was the leader from the Dworecki was his name. He said to the German, "You go back and shut up. Don't say one word, you know us. You saw nothing,

²³ "Zelazny" Eisenberg

²⁴ Iron (Polish)

²⁵ Stefan Finkel

because they will kill you, or we will kill you. Then just don't say nothing." "No, I will not say nothing," and let him go.

02:20:54

Q: That's an incredible story. How, in fact, did Finkel arrange to—

A: Finkel went back too, because he knew the place. He was living there before, and he knew how to get in. And he walked into the people there in the hospital there and he contacted himself with this group, and the people Dworecki was there like a Mikoi the whole group, about 20 people. And he talked to them. He was there two, three days. We knew what is it – we will be like this two, three days and we had a appointment with him to come back on this and this spot. And he – they knew – he knew that they are dealing with this German too. He knew always, of course, because he was dealing with this German, too. And they took out whatever they wanted.

Q: But to deal, you needed money?

A: No. You needed money if you would buy it, but they didn't. They told them – they took out a pistol from the – and they said to this German, "You go back. No money for you. You just thank God for your life and get back and don't say nothing to nobody." And he went back and we had the rifles. I received – I remember a German coat I put on and a hat – the German I put on.

Q: How did you feel?

A: And I felt, I felt in two ways. First of all, I got warmer because it was very, very cold, but I felt very bad that I have to wear a uniform from a German. That was always inconceivable. This was something what – goodness! But we felt proud for the whole situation what we did because this was nobody could accomplish a thing like this. This was a big accomplishment to bring 20 rifles, new ones, on the spot.

02:22:46

Q: Now, you had a small army.

A: We had a small army. We had already this and we told this Tolka all of them. We told them what we have now and what is. Everybody was happy. We start doing real work. We start going out for the Germans on the highways. Then we start the towns. Every town had a town house, and in this town house they were registering everybody and when you were registering the people, the Germans were using it. One second, I have to drink. The Germans registered almost every young Pollack. They registered even the Jews, whatever the registration in the – in the town house. We got our order to recover this, to fight and to burn it out, ruin it that they shouldn't have the registrations from the people there because they took it away to Germany. They took it away to work. They have a register. They came up home, and they took up the kids and we start burning up

the towns. Every town house there, and Markuszow was the first we knew where to go. We always used the people what were from there from this town, say from Markuszow say from ” • and other towns where they have – we had the people what run away from them villages. And they were together with us then.

Q: But now, how was it possible for you and your small army to burn down a building.

A: It was, it was very easy. We took some straw and we threw in straw and made a fire.

Q: Nobody saw you enter?

A: They saw, and they didn't say. Some people – the Pollacks they saw, they were afraid of us because we came with rifles and then they – it was night. Always in the night we were doing it. And we were burning. It was very, very easy for us. We would – except once we had in Markuszow we had some going over. The Germans were there, and – but before, before we came in the Germans were there. And by accident, they saw our people and we had to fight with them. And we still burned down. It was a whole story. Is a very long story. And we still burned down the village. But we had losses there. One was killed, and one was Zelazny the strongest guy what we had had still today, still today had a piece of iron from the bullet was in him, staying there. Didn't come out.

02:25:41

Q: During this action as you described, what was your responsibility?

A: I was the leader. As I was going with them, people, first of all, this not like in other armies. A partisan, the leader had to go front. That was our – I don't know why, but we took over the – a leader was in the front, and the soldiers were behind. Here I think is the other way around. I remember in the army it was the other, other way. The officer was in the back and the soldiers were going in the front. I remember in the war, the old officers were in the back and the soldiers were in the front. Then here we changed it. I was always in the lead. I had to go in the front. Wherever you went, I had always with me let's say a Bleichman or another one, what knew the terrain and I was in the front, going and they were after me. That's what we was scared stiff. Every night when you go, you don't know what will happen. Who will shoot or who will do something to you, you understand? You didn't know if you will meet Pollacks what are against you – I'm sorry. One second. I don't know what happen. All of a sudden, some food or whatever. But you had to do it. You cannot tell the people that you are afraid. You had to go. You had to lead. And it was like a army. We got orders, you know, to burn down this and this village. And we did it. Next, we had this group of our people went out for food one night, a separate group, small, and on the way back some Polish people called over two of them what they knew them by name. Morel, and the other one I don't remember. Morel and the Pollacks, young boys from the same town where this Jew was, called him over, said, “Morel, come over here.” And he had a machine gun this guy and they called him over. It didn't took long and they killed them, both of them. The Pollacks. And the rest of this group, was maybe four or five came running to us in the middle of the night. Running,

and they left everything because they had some food something, and they left everything and said, "You know, they killed Morel, and the killed the other one. Two guys." We made a meeting from a few people there and we could talk to this Genek Kaminski came over to him because we wanted to find out exactly who did it because we didn't know who killed him. We knew the village where it happened. Then after meeting is an end, we decided to burn down the, the whole village. And we burned down the whole village. Came over at night from one corner to the other. But one thing we didn't, we didn't kill the people. We told them to run out before we went from one place to the other. We had straw and as we had other, I think gasoline a little, I think, we took, too, petroleum or something we had. We pour a little bit match and burned the whole village. It was a very – one of the, one of the richest villages there around.

02:29:29

Q: How did that make you feel?

A: This was – it didn't feel good altogether because we had to live with them Pollacks. We didn't come to fight with the Pollacks, and we left them and I remember I wrote myself a piece of paper in Polish. I was – by the way, I was writing almost everything what I went through by the day. I had a paper, a book with me, paper and a pencil and I was writing down almost everything what happened. But I will tell you later what happened to it. And I wrote them a leaflet like that said, "You see what you're doing. You kill our people. We have to kill you. We didn't come to fight with you. We want to fight the Germans, and I think you supposed to help us and not going against us and on top of this to kill our people." I left notes and left this. Then we had a case like this. We were in a farm house. And a Polish man there which lived there went to the Germans, and he told them. The Germans came and somehow we, we were always soldiers. That's what's good for us because we were watching. We had a watch outside, a watch inside. If we were sleeping, was still was a watch. One or two was watching. I was on the watch there outside and I see a lineup of Germans coming. It was on a hill. We were in a house and downstairs, down below the Germans are coming. I woke up everyone of us, put on – we had to – we start running out from the house because when they came to a house near that's it. Nobody could get out because they threw like we did. Straw or something and they start shooting with fire, ammunition, and they burned down the houses and they burned down the people there. We ran out and we run away a whole day, we had to fight with the Germans. We ran, shoot back, run and shoot back. No one of our people was killed there in this skirmish. In the night, the Germans disappeared. They left us alone. We went back to this village, and we went to the house where this happened where we left, left the house and we said, "What's going on?" The man wasn't there already and the son wasn't there and we start asking people. They said, "The son went to the Germans and he told them that we are there." So, "Good. We will stay there and watching." And all of a sudden I see there a young, a youngster walks and I called him over, say, "Who are you?" He said, "Oh, I didn't want to. I – They – My father told me to go." It was the guy what we slept there, and he said his father told him to go to report to the Germans, you know, this. "I will work with you. I will be with you and please don't kill me. Don't." We took him away. We really didn't want to kill him. Just want to beat him there, you know, a

good beating, but I saw him. Of course, a man like this if he goes report the Germans, he's a spy already against us. This is nothing. Then we took him out in the outskirts and start beating him up. He was screaming there. Then one of our people saw that he screams too loud, took out the rifle and they killed him. I was sorry that they killed him, but still it was coming to him. When he killed him – he shot him it made a noise. The shot and the Germans were not far, and they start shooting at us and they started, but it was night and we just got away. The next day they buried this boy, the Pollacks or two days in the churchman. What is the name? The Pope. What is the name?

02:33:45

Q: Priest.

A: The priest said to the congregation, "Listen, people, you see what's going on. When a group of people come in..."

Q: It's okay. Take your time.

A: This will come out there too.

Q: Why don't you pick it up then when you were talking about how the priest.

A: Yes, exactly. That's what I'm going to bring out, because it was very important. And the priest came over and said, "Listen people. You see what's going on. We have the Germans on one side. We have the partisans on the other side – the Jews, the Pollacks or whatever it is. The Jew – the Germans are our – is our enemy number one. This group is coming to you. They want some food in the night and they're going away. They don't stay with you. Don't report them. Don't tell nothing because you will be squeezed in both sides. They will kill you. See here is a boy killed for nothing," he said, "because he, he went to the Germans and he told." He said, "Don't do it any more." The priest said that. This helped a lot. Like I say, the priest –

Q: How did you know that the priest gave this sermon?

A: Oh, the Pollack, they told me. The farmer's group. When I went to the farmers, I came in. I was home because I repeat the places. When I went over to a farmer and he was nice to us. You know, the farmer. Because some of them, they were not too nice. They just gave us what we wanted and get out. Some of them were really nice. They kept us. They told us to stay with them. Then we came to them back, and they told us what is going on. They told me the priests spoke like this, and the priest told them and knew he told them also. He said, "Why do you have to go to call the Germans? The Germans are far away. They don't know what is going – coming in the, in the woods. If you told them, they know." And this made a big difference. Big, because people stop, stopped bothering us. They stopped, except they let us go. We came in. We did our work. We did never, never abuse them people because there were groups like robbers or something people came in they run away. They were on the German's hands or whatever, and they formed also, not

partisans groups – bandits from this, and they came in usually and they took away whatever the farmer had. But we came in like gentlemen you know. We came in with a speech. I said – I told them, “We're fighting for freedom. We don't want nothing from you. We just want to eat something and we want to relax or to sleep a few hours.” And this one farmer told the other, and they knew what's going on. Now –

Q: Were your – did your group have it's own identify?

A: “The Mietek,” “the Mietek Grupa²⁶,” “Group of Mietek,” “the Group of Mietek.” The group – lots of things later on: “The Group of Jegier,” names the people knew.

Q: This was your group.

A: My group, “Mietek.” Everybody knew about it and they knew – the farmers knew about me, and they knew about this recommend. In fact, there was a, a landowner, very rich one, and he always gave us money when we came. And he gave us a cow or whatever, whatever we wanted. Horses we needed to go from one place to another. He always gave us. Then he gave it when I was there. If the group came in without me, he wouldn't give. He wouldn't give. Nothing.

Q: Why was that?

A: I don't know. He had a mind something, and I think he was right after this. After the war, this landowner was arrested for helping the Germans like because he had Germans there also in the landowners house. And he called me as a witness that I should tell the court how he helped, how he gave money you know. And he said, said “I didn't gave no money to nobody, only you. You should be the witness. You should know about it.” And he used it after the war. He gave money only to me. We used the money for all kinds of things we gave the farmers.

02:38:19

Q: How, how much time had you spent in the woods with your group of men before you reached the point where you were confident about your leadership?

A: It took time to be 100 percent confident in this. It was very, very hard. I will tell you straight. With Jewish people, it is very, very hard to be a leader. Every one of our Jewish people were a leader himself. They knew a lot you know. They are not dummies. Everyone of them, and to be a leader by Jews, you really have to have guts and you have to have patience and you have to have – I don't know what – to be a leader, but this is no jokes. This is I tell you at this – what's the Ben-Gurion²⁷ said it was, “I am a president of million presidents.” And that was very, very hard for Jewish people this. But there was a necessity. I have the upper hand because I spoke fluent Polish. When I came to a farm or

²⁶ Group (Yiddish)

²⁷ David Ben-Gurion

something I had – I had to speak because most of them spoke Yiddish and the language was difficult. Only Szengut was the guy what – but he looked so Jewish and so Yiddish he couldn't, he couldn't represent us you know. It was – we had to push him a little bit on the side. Now, we established our presence in the neighborhood, but we felt we couldn't stay too long in the neighborhood. They told us not to stay, and we didn't. We felt – because we exhausted – I came twice – three times to the same farmer. He didn't have what to eat himself to watch this, and we had to go farther. Then I decided to go with the group of 10 people to find out – because they were talking about other groups on the other side of the Bug. We were – there was – when you see the map, there was a, a – this river, Wieprz, is the name – Wieprz and the next was the Bug. The Bug was the border from Poland and Russia already later. But we were between the Wieprz and the Bug later. In the beginning, we were on the other side of the Wieprz. We had to cross. And we crossed over the Wieprz and we knew that between the Wieprz and Bug is a group – is groups, partisans there that we heard about. You know they told us, the farmers. There was no telephones, but we heard that.

02:41:10

We had connections all the time. This Genek, his connections was saving us always. We knew when the Germans going out from Lublin with a expedition of something, we knew about it. They told us. The farmers, one told the other and they told us. We had the connections. We had this. And only with connections we could live through. We were laughing already there when I was going sometimes in the night. I laughed and said what group is going again that meetings to get a connection then. I felt that is the way to be because when you are a group, you live by yourself, and you don't know – no telephones, nothing. You don't know what's going to come next, and they were spying. You have to have this. You have to know what your neighbor's doing. You have to know what's going on, and you have to know the other groups. You have to know what's in the, what's going on in the country or in Russia. We knew about politics. We knew everything was in the front. This in the front. This we knew everything what's going on. I was reading papers. I was seeing everything clearly. Otherwise, we couldn't live. It was impossible. Of course, a lot of groups were – a lot of Jews run away, and they didn't have the organization. They didn't have the connections and they disappeared. They disappeared. The Pollacks killed them themselves or somehow the Germans – they told the Germans. They disappeared. Disappeared group by group disappeared. And I went through this Wieprz. There was a whole story how we went through that. And we came over on the other side, and I was so tired. Unbelievably tired. And I was sorry that I brought them people on the other side because we were walking two days and two nights. We didn't know where we are going. Completely! We were – like I say, I didn't have the connection. I didn't have the people around me. The neighborhood there I knew already. I knew where I'm going. And here I didn't know nothing. And we walked over to a farm, and we woke up a woman there and she start screaming and crying, "Please don't do this." I said, "Don't worry. We will not do nothing to you. Just let us in." She said, "No, I can't because I have a child is sick. Very sick. He had typhus or something and you will catch it too. Don't go in." Said, "Okay, we will go in the barn." We went in the barn. We were dead. We were so tired of walking. I think it will start snowing or something later and there was a real night, I felt

half, half dying. And I lay down in the, the barn and all our people. We always kept one man to watch and all of a sudden maybe it was day already. I wake up and I see nobody's watching. Nobody! I woke up, and I was a very sleeper – I, I could hear everything always when sleep. I don't know why. This was nature or something. I could hear everything. Whatever happened in sleep always, I could hear it. Then I walked over – I woked up, I went over to the door to the barn and I see, all of a sudden, I see Germans, Polish uniforms, the police, and farmers and the whole posse but still forming, still going.

02:44:37

And I woke up my people very fast. And we walked out with the front and shooting at them. They were not still organized. They were still starting something then, and we start shooting at them. And walked around the barn, and we start running away. Because they were an army there. Who knows how many? I didn't know. And we start running, running and we – I see very bad. There's no trees, nothing. We are only a few houses there, and it is a field. They have a good field for us to shoot us when we running. They can shoot everybody. And little by little we start moving away, moving away and all of a sudden, I see one guy fall beside and then I see another one fall. They were not dead. Just one was shot in the foot, and one was somewhere else shot and he said, "Please take my rifle. I am dead. They will kill me anyway." I said, "I don't need your rifle. I have mine." I couldn't do nothing. Then all of a sudden I feel a shot. It was my finger here. I have still the finger here like this, shot here right here. I squeezed my hand. I see blood. Yes, I took out, I don't know, a handkerchief or something. I put it on. I didn't make a big deal of it. I was walking, walking. All of a sudden I feel a shot in my foot, in my leg. Yeah, right here. Through. And I cannot walk no more. I cannot walk. I was trying you know. Szengut right behind me, and he start pulling me. He said, "You have to walk." In the meantime, the rest of the people – we were about 10 or 12 – start moving. You know, they cannot wait for me. They see this one is laying, another is laying, and he, he didn't leave me alone. He starts pulling me, and I start walking and walking. I see I still can walk. The bone wasn't touched. And this was luck. It was just the meat here that was shot here. And I could walk. It was bleeding a little bit, but I still walked.

02:47:17

And we run over to a house there and we told the farmer, "Fast put on a horse and wagon," Szengut said, "and we will put on – I will put you down on this on the wagon and we will start running away with this." Then all of a sudden I see the Germans right by the border there when I was, I was there. They came out. And one starts talking Polish to me. And he says in Polish, "You're a Jew, bastard?" or something, this. And he aimed with a rifle this, and he didn't, I don't know, he didn't hit me. I got up and Szengut grabbed me and left the horse with the wagon, and I start screaming with my people. I start screaming with my people, they rest, "Stop and start shooting back. Start shooting back because otherwise nobody will live." And I remember like today this one of them guys, it was Andrejew. He was the first one. He turned around, took out the rifle, he was aiming at the Germans. The Germans stopped. They stopped. Right away they fell through the floor. And when he took out a few of our people. There was a Finkel there

was a few four or five. They took out the rifles and they start shooting back. When they stopped the Germans, I had time to with Szengut to run away to come over and we went over to a woods somewhere there around not far, and the Germans stopped a little bit behind and they had three of our people and I think they, they killed there because I know – don't know what happened to them again. And between them was this Majdanek, this guy what run away from Majdanek. He was killed there right away in this skirmish. And I run away to the woods. In the meantime, Szengut and another one, Finkel, they both went back to look. Maybe they can help somebody to – they came to a farmhouse and they opened the door there, and when they opened the door Germans was sitting there. A whole bunch of them was sitting there, and they were singing or eating something. You know they, they had that trophy. They took away – I think they took away some money from these three guys too. They had maybe a few – I don't know what kind money. And Finkel closed the door and Szengut had hand grenade and they threw in there the hand grenade into this, and they don't know what happened there. Then they run away, and they found me. I was still waiting.

02:50:12

And we took a farmer, stopped with a horse and wagon on this – put me on this and they sat down and I was with Szengut and another one and they had another – they stopped other farmers when they – on the way and we start moving. And on the way I asked the farmer, "Maybe you will take me home because I am shot and I cannot – my finger start bothering me very much, more than the foot." I said, "I cannot walk and I cannot, I cannot function." He said, "You have to be helped." I said, "Oh no, my wife is sick and there's a – I'm afraid, but I will bring you over. I have a farm and I have a man what works for me, and he will keep you. He will keep you there." I said, "Alright, whatever he wanted to do." And he brought me over to another farmer and the farmer was very nice to me. They, they took a Band-Aid and they, they took some water. I don't know what kind of water. They washed it and they cleaned it very, very nice. They, they helped me out. It took almost a half a day, something, I was there sitting. All of a sudden, shooting again. I was with Szengut, and another Piasecki was another guy. We were there in the partition there. The rest of the group was in another house. Start shooting in the house. Like a thunder. Shoot directly in the house. And the farmer showed me the way out in the back and me and Piasecki. I got up and I said, "Where is Henryk?" I said, "Where is Finkel?" And I start looking back and I don't see him. And the farmer said, "You cannot wait a second. Run. Run." And from the back of the farm it was already start to be a little darkish and I run away with Piasecki, this guy. We run away both of us. And with my wounded foot then I had to walk a whole night. I was walking in the woods. Walking, walking, walking. It was day almost. I went over. I had no, no choice already. I didn't know what to do myself. I walked over to a farmer. "You should help me something or give me a piece of bread or something." And I came over to the farm. The farmer boy standing there came out and said, "God, what are you doing here?" He said, "The Germans were here last night here. And they killed one of your people," he said. And I figure out that that was Szengut. "One of you people was killed. And they took off even his boots they took off because he wore new boots. He said, "They took off his boots and they took him away. And you are here! How does it happen?" I walked a

whole night in the woods and I came back to the same spot. You know in the night, you don't know where you're going and there's a woods. You don't know it that way.

02:53:16

I came back to this house. Then in the day time, what I found out, the Germans are still there. They said, "No. No. They went away. But they still come back or whatever." They said, "They knew that the partisans here, the group is here." I said, "I have no choice. In the daytime with this Piasecki, we were both of us we start moving back from where I came. I came back and I came over to the Wieprz, to the river. There's a big river and you stay here a night. Cannot walk. Then all of a sudden came in a bunch, a bunch of Polish kids from school. They went there and they start screaming, "Jew. Jew." I was so disgusted. At least I had something in my hand like glass. I will throw this as a bomb I said, "if you don't go away, if you don't stop this screaming. "They shut up and then came in a man. I don't know, it looked like a school teacher. He was dressed up nice. He said, "What happened? You are – you have a problem here?" I said – I said, "Yes. I want to go through the Wieprz." I said, "How can I go?" He said, "Don't worry. I will show you where." He brought me over to a small house there, and there it was a guy with his – he had this – a boat, a small boat, and he was bringing over people on other side. That was his – he said, "You have money?" Said, "No, I don't have no money, but I have a lighter." I remember a very nice lighter. I had it from Kaganowicz, I forgot to tell the story. Kaganowicz was killed. And I took away a watch and some lighter and I think he had some money, and I took it away from him, and I had it with me. And this lighter I took out. "Show me it works." I showed him it works. "Okay." For this lighter, he took me over on the other side with Piasecki. We came over to the other side. The other side I knew already where farmers are and this I came over and I see a light, some a farmer. I see a light. I say I was afraid. You know this? I start looking near this and I came over and see the rest of my people are there. And they went – the Wieprz, then they came back to this farmer. They knew also the farmer from before because we knew when we left. We met and they said, "Oh, you still alive. Somebody said that you are killed." They didn't know. Szengut was killed because they said somebody was wounded and he was killed. They knew already. Oh, they was so happy that I am alive, that – and I went back with this group. I remained maybe a day or something like a whole day without them too. They went for food or something and I was staying with them. It was also very, very bad. I was feeling very bad, but they left me and they went. But they came for me, and we went together. We went back to the place that we knew before. And they came over to a place where there was a bunker where I told them bunkers, and this Tolka had a bunker there before, before with his Markuszow people and Jegier and all those people.

02:56:32

And I came over. There's nobody there. They disappeared. And all of a sudden came over a – a father and daughter. Said, "No, Tolka is no more here. He's somewhere else. They built another bunker because he was afraid to stay here. He built for 40 people, he built a bunker somewhere else. I said, "Can I meet him." The guy said, "Wait, maybe he has to come in here. Tolka has to come in here." I said, "Alright." And it didn't take long. This

Tolka came over with Nam— with somebody else. They said, "Look. Look here, I am wounded," and they said, "I haven't got where to take you. It's full there." "It's 40 people," he said, "We have no food there. It's impossible that we should take you. No." What can I do? Then I remind myself I met a guy, Drop was his name, like a farmer, a Pollack, what was nice to us. And I went back to him. I came back to him and he was, he was so fond of me. He start kissing me. He was so, so happy to see me, and he saw me in this condition and he kept me maybe a few weeks, a few weeks and all 10 of our people were there. Ten – two or three was killed – about nine people. We were there in his home by this Drop. He went to a drug store. He bought for me some, something to cover with and he helped me a lot. This finger gave me a lot of trouble. I got gangrene in this finger, and the whole hand was so we will have to cut this hand, but I had a very strong constitution and I felt good or whatever and it helped and it went away, but I have this till today. It's crooked. I can do nothing about it. I don't want to do nothing. The foot didn't gave me too much trouble. It was a time until it healed and I could walk and I was staying there. till February 14, 1943, I was by farm – Drop's farm.

Q: We're going to stop at this point and allow for another change of the tape and give you a chance to have another drink of water.

A: Yes.

02:58:48

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: As you were telling us, you were able to work your way through the first difficult encounter. You were wounded and you got some help. Now, we are at the point where you going to tell us about some of the experiences you had with some of the other partisan leaders, heroes, who had – whose names you had mentioned earlier.

A: Like I said before, that in February '43, Drop, the farmer, came over to our place in the barn and we were there a few weeks already. And he says, "Listen, boys, I cannot keep you no – any longer. There is a problem." I said, "What happened." He said, "The bunker, from 40 people in the bunker with Jegier, they were all killed. And I am afraid now. It's not far from here," he said, "It was Amelin, was the name of the town there, village, and it's not far from my place and I am afraid the Germans will kill me and kill you. Just tonight start walking." And we went out. We start going to farmers in the night. We came over to one place, they kept us very nicely and we had a very good experience with her in the night a farm woman there with a family, and they were very nice to us. And she told us that she heard also what was going on there and that they killed 40 people there in the bunker what Jegier and Tolka had the Russia. This was a lot of my friends. I felt very, very bad and it was upsetting and we were afraid too because now the Germans will go after us, because we see the end. It's no way out. But we come to a farm like this and we got in touch back again with Genek Kaminski and we start telling him the story what happened. Then he knew too. He knew what's going on. After maybe two days, we walked around. All of a sudden in the night, we see a group is walking. Who knows? During the night we had our things. We called "amkha," we called out. That was our – what do you call it?

03:03:33

Q: Code.

A: Code. And we called out "Amkha," and they answered "Amkha." We said, "Who is this?" "Jegier." Jegier with a group of people. Of course, it was Rubinstein, there – Sever – and other people. "Oh, my God, What happened?" They said, "They killed you." Said, "Happened that we went out – 14 people – we went out to forage there, to bring some food for the whole group and just at this night, when we walked out the Germans came in. Somebody told them. The farmers told them where we are located, and they killed every – they threw in hand grenades and they killed everybody in this." Tolka and Mikoi and these friends of mine from Markuszow – all killed. But 14 of them somehow got out. We were very happy to see them and we start moving together with. But still to go around with a bigger group was very dangerous and not practical. When we come to a farm, "We can give you food for 10, eight people." But to feed a group for 30, 40 was already a big deal. They didn't have even food for themselves. Then we divided, and Jegier took his group, the Markuszow and others, whatever was left, and I had the prisoners of war I was with, but we kept very close touch. We was almost two, three nights we had some spots where we met. We made in advance, "you will be there and there," or we knew what's going always a few days.

Q: I'd like to interrupt a moment because you mentioned again you had the prisoners of war with you. At any time, did you find that it was appropriate to involve women in any of your activities?

03:05:41

A: We didn't think about then about women or not women. It was very, very hard for a man and if a woman, it was almost impossible, but if a woman would come along, we would not send her away.

Q: That was our way. But after a time, we had this experience and a woman came along. Still we didn't take her with us, but she was near us. She went – whenever we went, she was walking with us all night, and then when we stayed in a place so we had to do something. They were staying in another place. There was a woman with three men. Where they came? They came from Warsaw, she and another one. Her name was, her name was Hanka. Her friend was Halpern, the name Halpern. They both jumped from a train what went from Warsaw to Treblinka. After the Warsaw, they had the, the fight there. They run. They caught them, and they were bringing them to Treblinka. They jumped out through the train. And when they came from the train, the farmers told them that we are out. She just jumped out – this luck – she jumped on the spot but where we were. But after a few days, it was just some time when we knew we had a big job with a lot of people there. Came in some Polish – a group of Polish people were there, and they and us went for a big train, and we stopped the train and we burned down ammunition and oil and gas and – and we took away a few Germans there. And we were not used to shoot people there but there was some of them, officers from the Polish group said, "What are you waiting, you Jews? You are afraid to kill?" They killed right away the Germans there. But we little by little we got used to this blood, but still it wasn't my, my genes to kill people. I, I couldn't do it, but I want to talk to you now about helping them. When I met this Hanka, she was completely out. She was hungry and barefoot. It was unbelievable. One thing she has, she has a big hat. She covered her hair that they shouldn't see that she is a girl. She was afraid because girls was a problem. They didn't want that, so she put on a hat and covered her hair. She had short hair, covered. And she was in a blouse something, very, very bad shape. and I started talking to her. She told me the story about Warsaw ghetto. I didn't know what happened there.

03:08:58

That's why I say through communication we find out what's going on, we found out what, what's going on, and happened she was her family or something from this leader Anielewicz²⁸, and she knew what's going on there. She told us the whole story how the fight was going on. A lot of people run away, and they are looking for partisans to fight, to go somewhere. And I kept her around me. She was officially like my girl, you know, because I took care of her and I watched her, but she couldn't be with us to do some work

²⁸ Mordechai Anielewicz

or to live together in the quarters. They lived separately. And walking around there, I came to a farmer and there's like a small child three, four years, a girl, laying there dirty. She had – full of rats, she was – terrible situation she looked. And I took – I told – I said, "Who is this child." He doesn't know, the farmer. He doesn't know. He found her on the street. I figured right away, it's a Jewish girl. And I cleaned her up and I brushed her and I stayed already and they special for her and I told the farmer, in no two ways, "This girl has to live and this girl you will feed and you will watch her." He said, "I am afraid the other farmers will tell on me." I said, "Good." I went out. The whole village was not too big. It was a small one. And I knocked on the doors and the windows at night and I said, "Listen, there will be in two weeks a young girl coming to you to live with you. You keep her. And this girl, if something will happen to her, you will all be burned down." "You remember we burned down a place, I said to them. That will happen to you people." "No. No. I will take care of it." Thank God, they took care of this kid. It did live through the war. She's today a teacher in Israel in the high school and I met her there when I was on '81, I met her, and she's healthy. She's married, and she has a nice family and I was very, very happy. She was happy to see me too. And she, she thanked me very well for this.

Q: I'm sure. If we think back to the actual experience of having a woman join – Hanka join the group, you continued on in your military activities for some time.

A: Absolutely. It had nothing to do with her. She was on the side, but I want to bring out, if you talk about women, we will talk about this later. We got a order that we cannot stay in this neighborhood no more. It was very dangerous there. A lot of Germans came in there. In the neighborhood

03:12:24

Q: Where did your orders come from?

A: Through this Kaminski, everything goes there. We had a – name by the name: Mietek Moczar, he came to us. He looked a little bit like you. Tall and yes, handsome man. He was, he was in a uniform for a major in the Polish army. Eloquent. The man could speak nice and also he came to us to pep us up, to talk to us, and he was a few weeks with us. Maybe two weeks, he was working with us. He took part in our actions, whatever that's supposed to be done. And he was very close with me. Somehow we got friendly, and we kept this friendship until he died now. Later, he died in Poland. And there was another one with the name "Bolek Alef," Bolkowiak²⁹. He was after the war a general in Poland. He stayed in Poland. This man was also from Warsaw. He was in action in Warsaw, in the ghetto and he ran away from the ghetto and he came to the woods. But he was like an activist. He went, he didn't stay in one place. He was going from one group to the other, from one place to the other Polish groups and other groups. Whatever it was group he was talking to as a speaker, a good one, and he was a – I think he was a lawyer for the war too. Bolek Alef, he's now – he died also two years ago in Poland. And they were all – others they came to us. You say, "Who?" The people, they had the connections through

²⁹ Gustaw "Bolek Alef" Bolkowiak

this Genek, he was arranging this and they came. They knew where we are, and in the night we were in this and this village. We met, and this one thing when Moczar – when he came, we ordered the whole village – a few villages together, and he spoke to them. And he spoke to them, he made a political – told them, "Listen. Those partisans, they are fighters. They are Jews. They are doing their job and we are working together and help them and work with them." It was very, very important for us because, you know, we were not alone. That's what I said all the time. We were with an organization. We worked with them. And this helped. All the time came in, there was a Polish group there what they were fighting as partisans but they were home more. When they are needed, they came out. When we did something – there's a train or something, they came with us and they helped us. Was a Franek – was a guy, Przybyszówka was a village. It was a very important group because they helped us a lot. And they had some connections with Russia, too, and Moczar had a connection with Russia. And an order came that we should go away from this.

03:15:36

Q: Again, I'm interested in the fact that you had an order that you were following.

A: Yes.

Q: Your organization. How would you describe it to us?

A: We were a very loose organization. We did whatever we had to do. When it came – the Germans came in the middle of night. When they caught us by surprise or something, we didn't have to ask somebody what to do. We were on our – on our – on our own. And when Jegier said – let's say he was working with this group, he was on his own. And I with my group I was on my own. And then we met and we talked together you know. And we said what we will do, where we will go, how we will do things everything because the connections what they gave us was a big help to us. First, of course, before they said, they have to wait for the Russians, and this was a big thing already because Russia start sending material, ammunitions and this, and food even they was end people. They were ending up to the back – front they came, they was partisans and they came to us. Everybody came to us. But we, as Jews, didn't have the, the force but together we were a big group and we had a paper. We gave out a paper. It was – every action we was taken is still today written down. Maybe we will be in Poland, check. If they have the actions of their group from Emilia Plater was the name of my group, Emilia Plater.

Q: What does the name Emilia Plater stand for?

A: Emilia Plater was the leader from the freedom of Poland before Poland was under Russia, under Germany and Austria, years ago in the 17s. And this Emilia Plater was a fighter like Kosciuszko³⁰, Pulaski³¹. She was one of them fighters against tyranny of the Czar

³⁰ Tadeusz Bonawentura Kosciuszko

³¹ Kazimierz Pulaski

and we took the name, Emilia Plater. She was a woman fighter then. I had another goes – the first time was Koziatulski³² but not too long. She was also a fighter for freedom.

03:17:51

Q: You had mentioned earlier the relationship with the A.L..

A: Yeah. That was the relationship with A.L.. The other group was the A.K., Armia Krajowa. Then people were – it was like here, the Republicans and the Democrats. The democrat was more to the left, they was more to the right. The A.K. wasn't – wasn't 100 percent antisemitic, but they didn't like Jews. But they didn't let's say kill directly. They were not friendly to us. But we met once in while because we caught – a guy came from London. He was thrown down by a parachute, to help the partisans, whatever. And he was from the A.K. He told us right away. We caught him. He fell into our hands. And he start talking to us, and he showed us how to make hand grenades, a big one he was making. And he was with us a few days. Then we brought him over. He said he wants to go. He has contacts and he wants to go immediately. And you shouldn't bring him. We were very careful, but we brought him over there, and they made a party for us. They gave us food because they knew the guy. Nothing happened to us and we were very careful. We were standing outside. The whole group. We were two or three people only working. Jegier and me worked, and the rest were standing outside to watch. But we didn't feel comfortable with them let's say put it this way. If they – they caught a Jew separately on his own, they will kill. You know, as a group, they couldn't start with us. They, they – they knew that what could happen to them. They didn't want to start with us. But individuals, if they caught somebody, they – they caught the Morel, I told. That was also from the A.K. We burned down the whole village because of this, that's why.

03:19:58

Q: Let's bring you toward the conclusion.

A: Yeah. Then the order came we should go the other side. And when we came to the Wieprz, then they divided us. Jegier with a group, and my group was divided Jegier went away with – some parachutes came down. Some Russian groups came down and he had to bring him over to some – kind of place. He was to stay with them. And I went over to the other side of the Wieprz, between Wieprz and Bug. There were other groups there, and we have to unite because we cannot stay there. First of all, the terrain – the place where we were, were very antisemitic. They, they were known. We lived there from day to day because we had pistols, we had rifles. When we came to a farmer, he couldn't say nothing because he was afraid of us. But we didn't have the work with them you know. You couldn't work with them. The other side were, were the White Russians. They – I don't know – somehow they were better to us and they were nicer people. And then they helped us and they told us to go there on the other side. And on the way, there a very big fight by the Wieprz, by crossing the Wieprz. The Germans were there and waiting for us

³² Jan Leon Hipolit Koziatulski

and we almost didn't make it to Wieprz. They, they, they made a ring around us, and they were shooting and somehow somehow we run through this one guy helped us with a boat, from our people other side and no one was killed. Nobody. And we came out on the other side, and the other side, they were shoot – the Pollacks, the A.K. were shooting on us. They didn't know who this was, was all mixed up there. And the Germans pinned down a group of very, very important men from Russia that came to Janowski³³, he was a writer from a main paper in Poland after the war. And they pinned them down. They couldn't – they couldn't move. They couldn't walk through the Wieprz, they couldn't. They stayed on the other side. We went through again. Then again an order came back say, "Go and rescue him." We went back. About four, or five people, was Bleichman, Finkel, and other Zelazny. We went back and we took a boat, some wires, something – I don't remember exactly what it was. We brought over the whole group – 20 people. We brought those whole – oh, he said this Janowski came from Russia. He was a big shot from there already. And he said, "You will get medals for this. You, you did a job like." He was wounded, too. We was carrying on our hands. I remember, Zelazny, he was very strong man, we carried with his hands.

03:23:02

We carried him over. And we came to another place, another group, and after a few days, we met Chiel Grynszpan³⁴. Chiel Grynszpan had a group already from 40, 50 people there. And then people were from the neighborhood people. He himself was a soldier. He was a – whatever it is – cavalry men, on horses. He always liked to be on a horse and he felt good with this. And he, he was a very plain man, a good man, and a good soldier. He had a discipline with them people. We needed it because nobody knew how to keep a rifle, nothing. He was the only one there that knew something. There was another one later on. But he – he managed. He was there immediately. When we came down, he was happy. They really loved us, because we became soldiers. We became some kind of a army and together right away, we started on trains. This is how highways, trains, communications lines cut and we together. Big train, but river and it was a bridge. Thunder. We broke down the whole bridge, you know. It was on the border, the train. And the same time I was with another group, maybe a hundred people. There was children and women and all kinds of this there, and I found there. And I had to carry them too. And on the way, like I say, we were the first one always to go. I walked straight on a German with a rifle. And I walked them into the rifle. Imagine how that – how I felt. I stand still like a, like a dummy. I didn't know what to do. And all my people – was maybe a 100 of them – all disappeared. In a second, I didn't see nobody. Myself I stand on the highway.

Q: Let's just make sure we understand. You came upon this large group of people.

A: This was Chiel's people.

³³ Leon "Janowski" Kasman

³⁴ Jechiel Grynszpan

Q: Chiel's people. And then you were walking with them.

A: Walking with them.

Q: You're in the lead.

A: In the lead.

Q: And then again as you were walking the lead, what happened?

03:25:48

A: A German was standing with a rifle and I stopped. It was dark, pitch dark. A moment ago I was on a horse, a white horse I remember, and I had enough of the horse and I gave it to another one and I was walking. In from right there. He saw us and he heard us because we were talking. In Yiddish we talked, and everything was loud. Then he was by himself there standing. And I came over and I saw a German. I said – I start talking German to him – I said, "Was machen Sie hier?"³⁵ "What are you doing here in the night?" He said, "Look behind me." I looked. There's a dark like this, there's a truck, a whole truck. I said, "There's more Germans?" He said, "Yes. There's in the truck sleeping people, and two of them walked out for help." "What happened?" "We are stuck. We was – a whole column went through here, and I am stuck with a few people stuck here on a truck." So, "you are ours," we took him down.

Q: Let's slow down. You were standing there.

A: Yeah. Rifle – I start talk to him – he gave me the rifle. He gave me the rifle, just like that. I couldn't believe it. He just handed over to me. And then all my people came up – get up, took over the women, and he walked up. I said, "There's somebody in." He said, "Yes." "Wake him up." We woke up two guys. One was a black uniform from SS like, and the other one was in a plain uniform. And he said, "Two went away, but I don't know where they are, but two are here." And all three we took away and the, the truck we destroyed completely, and we took out a lot of rifles there, ammunition, and some communications they had, wire, some radio something. We destroyed everything completely. It took us almost a whole night to work on this and it was daylight almost in the morning, and in the summer it gets six – five o'clock was there, and said, "Let's disappear from there," and we went.

Q: It must have been an incredible experience to find three—

A: Oh, yes.

Q: German who so easily allowed themselves to be—

³⁵ What are you doing here? (German)

A: Easily.

Q: How do you explain that?

A: They were regular army. They weren't in a column there. They didn't know what partisans is. They didn't know what's going on here altogether. They didn't have an idea. Here comes over a man talks to him in German, and he didn't know what happened to him. You know, he didn't realize that, that I am the enemy. You know?

Q: You were in a German uniform at that time?

A: I had a coat. I had a German coat, and I spoke German, and he didn't realize what happened, and the others simply got up. And the other two simply got up. They had no choice. The others had no choice because we saw them waking up. They were sleeping. They were told to come out, and we were start dragging them around with me.

03:39:01

Q: Then what happened to them.

A: Then we were maybe a week maybe. Somehow we couldn't get nobody. The line of communication was very, very bad. It was times that the Germans were all over. Wherever we moved, the Germans were there. And we had to stay still, to wait, to go later. He was, was with, with his people, and I was with my people there. And I, I had women and children and everybody. This wasn't the regular group. It was just a put together. Just for one day suddenly. 'Cause – I will tell you how it happened. We had the children with us, and we start dragging them around and the Pollacks start screaming at us, "The Germans will look for them," and you have to do something. I didn't want to kill them. I had pity special on this one what gave me the rifle. I, I didn't feel like killing him. Till today, I am sorry because the man was decent you know. He, he was a soldier and he gave me the rifle and didn't nothing. He could shoot me like nothing. He was in – he saw me and he gave it, and I didn't know. And we kept him maybe a week or two until we met with Chiel back again and there's another group come over there, Russians and all this, and we made a meeting with three or four officers. And we talked it over and said, "They have to be killed. What they doing with us, they caught – they catch us? They – not only they kill us, but they torture us. They cut pieces from us." In fact, they cut one of my people. They caught once. They cut pieces from him. They put to a tree and they cut – with a knife they cut pieces from him. Lapides(ph) was his name. And that's what they were doing with the partisans when they catch them. And they said, "What shall we do with them?" I said, "Maybe you should wait." I wanted – and there was already headquarters there. We had in one place headquarters already from Moczar there, and one with Zymierski there and all the big shots were there sitting – Bolek Alef and Zemsta³⁶ came also, the guy. And I said, "Maybe we should." And they said, "No, we will not drag them out. We don't know how to get there. It's very hard now to go and communicate."

³⁶ Major Aleksander "Zemsta" Skotnicki

But that time week or two, we got to – to the headquarters. We came there. First thing I reported to him – to Moczar, that I caught three Germans and I had all the documents from there. I took away all the documents. I had their names and everything. Then one of the Polish guys was, was something. I don't know what it was mad at me, jealous or what it is because he didn't want to give a rifle, something from there that we took away. And he went over to, to Moczar and he told them that we killed innocent people, three guys, Germans. And Moczar said to me, "What do you mean you killed three Germans? You have no right to kill nobody." And he start screaming at me and all this, and I had already – I was a officer already. I took off my – I was a lieutenant – he took off. He said, "you're dismissed," and all this. And in a day after Chiel came back and all this, he start talking and he said, "I have everything what I wanted to know." He gave me go back. He said to me not to do it no more because they have to have some kind of an army. It's not – you cannot do whatever you want.

03:32:40

Q: So in fact the three soldiers were killed.

A: Killed.

Q: Who killed them?

A: Our people. Three people. I know even exactly. I don't want to tell the names. Our friends, they are today – one of them is in Florida, one is in Israel. Out right, yeah.

Q: During the experiences that you describe – and we'll pick that up – but you raised the point, other people killing Germans, can you recall your own experiences killing Germans?

A: We had a lot of fights with Germans. We were shooting to them and they shot at them. I don't know if they were killed. I assumed that they were killed also. When they were shooting the rifle the bullet goes to, to them like they go to us. And they were all going from us open, they were not afraid Jews, they're not afraid. They go. And they were shooting back. I'm sure they were killed, but directly to shoot. You had only three guys when you shot – went into a train, but we didn't shot. The Pollacks shot them. But it's different. It was our group that shot them, and then three were shot directly from us. We had later on more, but this was till then. And we – I told you straight, us Jews we had once affect, we had a guy what was a Pollack and he was with us, and he denounced us. He was with us, fighting with us, going with us and he had a chance. He just disappeared for a few minutes and he told somebody. He had contact where we were going and what we are doing. And we, we found out very fast that he's doing this. When we find out that, the man cannot live with us. Then who will kill him? Nobody wants to kill him. And they came the Polish guys what I told you, they helped us out they were kids. They were kids, that one Franek, he said, "Here, you shoot the man like this." And he took out a pistol and he shot him. We didn't have the guts to shoot somehow. I was a military man, but still directly to shoot in a fight it's different. Directly to shoot wasn't to easy. Okay now,

we went in a, in a village. The name was Bojki, and in Bojki we were staying two and a half months, in one spot. And there we formed a real army. We formed groups. You know we made groups, small ones. Every one group had a leader and we made a military establishment. And people were going out, out just to big farms we went out. We collected cows and food, swine, whatever it is, whatever we needed for food, and we brought it over, and we had a base. We was staying there. The Germans knew that we are there. The Pollacks knew we are there. Nobody bothered us. We are staying there. We went out every night, for trains or whatever you had to do. We walked away from there. And they were not doing nothing. In fact, they had on the woods – we were – not too far was woods – was a sign, "Here Partisans," and they shouldn't go in – individual Germans, or something like that.

03:36:06

Q: You have to explain to us. Why do you think or why is it in fact that the Germans did not come?

A: It was in '44 already. This was '44. The Germans had full hands on the fronts all over. We knew what's going on. We had the leaders, from the group. You had – what's his name? Moczar. And what's their name? Bolek Alef and Zemsta came from all over Russia was helping – started to help already. And we were an army already. We knew that we are not – we will not just give up and they knew that need a lot of military men to cope with us. They need airplanes. They need artillery. They cannot just come in just to fight with us right then. They knew that.

Q: What size force did you have?

A: We had a few hundred people. And then was a group of Russians there. Chorny³⁷, Biely(ph), a lot of Partisans were there in these woods there. A lot! Thousands already. And they – the Russians knew – the Germans knew that they are there, and they didn't come. For a long, for a long time they didn't touch us. Then the front start coming near, and May First, came Rola Zymierski, to us. He was the leader of the whole army. He was a general before the war, a very fine man, a older man. And he spoke to the whole population. He called over everybody and he spoke to them and he talked to them about the partisans. It wasn't only Jews then. It was Pollacks, Russians, everybody. And he said, "The Russian front is very near, and these days we will be taken over by the Russians and we will take over Poland back again." Talked openly. He already was sure of himself. And then he came over to me and to Chiel Grynszpan, because Chiel and I worked together then. Jegier, by the way, before when we divided, was killed. In a skirmish with Germans, he was killed. And there was no more Jegier and I was with Chiel. I had my group. He had his group but we kept together. And what I want to say is–

03:38:32

³⁷ Lieutenant Colonel Ivan "Chorny" Banov

A: The Germans?

Q: The Germans, yeah. They were all, all over already. They were – the Russians were – the contact with the Russians was so near. In fact they had a whole delegation came to us in the woods, and they came to me and said, "Listen, we have confidence in you, your group. Give me 10 people, whatever, to bring over the government, the future government of Poland to Russia. We have them right here. And I want you to give us some people." And I gave Morel, Bleichman, a nice group of 10 people. I gave them to them and they carried over the main delegation from the Polish government to Russia, to Moscow. And they made it. They brought them over to airplane. They had a skirmish there with some Hungarians that were fighting for – with the Germans. Hungarians were fighting with the Germans – Rumanians were fighting with the Germans, there, on their side. And somehow they brought them over. They brought them over. They brought them and they went to Russia, and they formed a government. But it was our group that carried them through there. And they remembered this. Moczar – when I was there latest with Moczar he remembered this, the we took over – the group that took over the government.

Q: The front was quickly moving to your area.

A: The front was moving very rapidly. It was almost we could hear, already, the katyúshas³⁸ this, this, the–

Q: Rockets?

03:40:32

A: Rockets. And we hear artillery. We can hear airplanes too. And almost every few days the Russians came down to us and threw down ammunition, rifles, people. They came in – one group came in 70 people. We called them "skoczki³⁹." That means they jump – jumpers. They came in 70 people. Most of them were Jews, officers, trained in Russia or somewhere, and they came to us. And women came over and now the story about ladies, women. Hanka was the only one women what I knew that she is around like this. And I didn't know. When I came to Chiel, I find there a whole group of people, old, young, children. There were a few hundred hidden in a wood, in a very, very strange pieces of land there. It was water and you couldn't get there. No German, nobody could get there. And they pushed them there on this land, and they put them there. And then they were bring to them food, something once in awhile. Not too much. They were hungry. And when I came, she said to me, "This is people what I know. They are almost from my villages there. I know most of them people." Pollacks came over to me and they said they will kill all of them if they wouldn't stop grabbing the chickens and the food in the night. And they didn't have what to eat, and they ran out in the night. They were going to the farmer. And the farmers were ours, because we were standing – they knew us. We had a base, and they came to Chiel and they told him – they said they will kill all the children

³⁸ Lorry mounted multiple rocket launcher (Russian)

³⁹ Jumpers (Polish)

and women. Then he call over, "Mietek," he said, "I cannot go to them people because we have to do something. To kill somebody there or to do something." He said, "Otherwise, they will kill all of us too. Not only them, but they will – Farmers you cannot stop because they are our bread and butter. We have to work with them." Then I went there with three people. I remember Rabinowitz(ph), from Warsaw, guy on horse, otherwise, you couldn't walk through there, water was there. You know, the horses went through everything. And I came to the place.

03:43:02

I came to the place. I couldn't believe it. When I remind myself, I want to cry now. It was my job. People naked, half naked. Ladies! Men! Children! Everybody, they had some kind of covers they had. They made. They built. Not on the ground. On top. And they were cooking, making food, something for the family.. When I saw this group, I couldn't – I couldn't believe. I see people. It's like from the old times. You see in the – from the history books. You see people like this. And in between I looked down and I see a woman. She looks like my mother. Imagine! And here I came in this in to kill them. I have to kill somebody or I have to do something. I see my mother there. I went over to her and I talked to her and I said, "Where you come from?" And I talked to others. And then I put them together, and lined up and I said, "Listen people. You want to live. You have to behave. You have to do something else. You cannot just go to the farmers, rob them. Wait for us. Organize something. There should be some organization because otherwise, they will – you will perish and we will perish altogether. And they told me that a few youngsters there what were really no good. They were robbing. I said, "You three will come with me." They, they had some mothers there. They had two sisters, and they thought I'm going to kill them. And that was the, the, the order to kill them. And I said, "Oh no, I will not kill nobody here. They depend on me absolutely. I'm not killing nobody." After going through a thing like this, and I took them away and I brought them over to the group, them three and they were very, very good soldiers there. One is still today my best friend. Whenever he sees me, he doesn't know what to do with me. All three left with me and they are – they were with me. But the group – the women, it was at a time the Pollacks still didn't give up. They have to be feeded. I said, "This is no good. We have to take them away." And we brought the whole group, little by little, not in one shot, into the group, into the village there nobody should know. Not even the headquarters didn't know, nobody didn't know. And we brought over – and every group – we had maybe a 100, 120 people there, and every group we took in one or two women and they were cooking for us because we were standing in one place. They were cooking, they were washing. We had shirts to wash or something. Then the women start working for us and they were doing group – some of them were very brave, and they said, "What do you mean washing this? We want to have a rifle too." And have a Dora and another one there, Roska, and this, and they, they picked up rifles. They put on rifles and they went out to work with us, the women you know, after a time that everything calmed down.

03:46:30

Q: How did they function?

A: They did – were very, very, very good because they have a group had to – then they had – they had to behave. You know they were soldiers. Everybody was a soldier. Hanka had the worse time she had than everybody else. She came from Warsaw. She came – she was a very, very delicate women – she was from a good home. She had maids home, and she didn't know what to do with herself. Others were from farms, from villages. They, they, they coped. They knew how to cook. They knew how to do something for us, and some of them baked for us. We had a good time. But she, she was lost. Completely lost! She couldn't – she was – it was so dirty here. She, she couldn't – she didn't keep herself good. I had a very, very hard time with her really to keep her alive and to keep her around there. Also, she was very small and beautiful. She was a beautiful women, with dark hair. She was very, very nice. I liked her very much, and she liked me. But I couldn't even come near her. She was so – I knew she was dirty, and after a time she was assigned to watch for a guy what was wounded in a fight. She, she went away from me, and she was staying with this guy until the war ended. I didn't see her no more. But before we divided two the groups divided to. What happened. When Rola Zymierski came First of May, and told us that near – the front is near. He said, "You have to disappear from this terrain, from this land. We have to go deeper and fight other Germans, deeper, deeper to the Weichsel to go deeper into the country, to the west. The Bug was east, and we have to go to the west. Then I remember I went, "Chiel," I said, "Listen, what shall we do?" I was afraid of these Pollacks there on the other side. They were not too friendly to us, and here we had no freedom. We were staying in one place for so many months. We knew the people already, and they knew us. We lived. Then I said, "Maybe we shouldn't go." And Chiel said the same thing, "I know the people here, they knew me." They know Chiel. Big shot he came with his horse. They all – they, they respect. And he liked to drink, he liked women. He was a good leader, you know, a real one, a partisan. I was more the intelligent type you know. It was – when they needed something, they came to me, and I have – I took care of everything. But he was a soldier. And I said, "We will not go." And I went over to Rola Zymierski and I said, "You're going away, and this piece of land stays empty. Nobody from, from the partisans, nobody will be here. Let us be the guard. When the Russian front come near, we will go come – we will go back. But in the meantime, we will need 100 people here just to cover your retreat when you go back to them."

03:49:53

He said, "It's a idea. Stay." And we remained here, and I remained there with 100 people we remained on the site of the Wieprz – between the Wieprz and the Bug. And they went – the Wieprz, they went through, and they went to the terrain where I was before. Garbów, Lubartów, and other towns there. It didn't take too long. The Pollacks, the A.K., they came over to me, and he said, "You want to live. You want to live the group – a group nice there. You have to belong to us. You have to get with us together and work together. You cannot be on your own because everybody left – not you, not the Russians, not the Pollacks, everybody already. Only here you are, you are group. You have to belong to us." I said, "Oh, oh, this is, this is death." Meantime – the same time

Baranovskiy⁴⁰ a general from Russia came down with airplanes, and the whole group of real army. I'm telling you soldiers one by one. They were really equipped. Everything too. And this Baranovskiy we found out through channels he's a Jew too, but he didn't give it up. He didn't. He never said that he's a Jew. And after a few days, we said, "What do we have to do the A.K.?" We said, "We will go over to Baranovskiy and want to meet him. They say he came over on the terrain there." And we went to help him and how he can help us. We came over to him. He had a wife with him, and he had a pirate, a pirate, that's a pir- that is a big bird, and he had caviar and he took us in like a - and it was something else. We were dressed military dressed, very nice - I think was good looking then - and he start talking to me right way in Russia because I understood Russia, the Polish Russia. And he said, "What you, what you have to go by yourselves?" He proposed us until I - we didn't even say nothing. He said, "Come to me. Come to us. We will form one group. We have a few hundred people and you be there. I see you are soldiers. You are in that group. You come to us." And that's what we were waiting for. And we came, the whole group came to Baranovskiy. And when we came to Baranovskiy, he took us in, he divided with us right away. "No more Jews," he said. "You cannot be Jews. By a group you have to be separate. Every group, Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, whatever it is. You cannot be Jews by themselves. This is our policy. And this is it. You can do that otherwise. Whatever you want, you have to be divided." In the meantime, he made me - and he made a group in Russian - Russian kept separate, and he made from Polish people, A.L. he called them. The are Armia Ludowa. He made a group, and I was - he made me the leader. From Pollacks and from Jews and I was the leader of them. Not Chiel, Chiel stayed.

03:53:12

Then one night he calls me, Chiel, he calls out, "Listen you two. I want you to leave. I am sending you to Moscow, you two." I said, "What do you mean? we'll leave the people," I said. "Never mind, you two. I have very important papers. I have to send them over." "How you will do?" "I make a conference from all officers, Russian, Polish, anyone, and when I will say I have a mission and I need volunteers. Then you two get up fast because you knew already what to do. You get up, you two. When you are up that's it. I have to send you two." And we came to the meeting and sat and meantime at the meeting, there came a guy from Warsaw ghetto. He run away. He was a politician. He was - I think he was a communist, something like that. He was the political figure there. He said, "I'm going, too, at this meeting." He goes to the meeting too. And he knows about us that have to get up and we're together and we sit three of us together and all of sudden, this General Baranovskiy says, "I have to send out some people with papers and all this. Who volunteers?" Well, he gets up the first, Rubinstein⁴¹ he and Chiel after him, and I remained. Only two. And I remained there.

Q: I am going to ask you in the few minutes we have left to focus on the closing days of the war.

⁴⁰ General Semyon Baranovskiy

⁴¹ Dudkin Rubenstein

A: Yeah. That's what will come.

Q: Where you are now.

A: That's it. Then, then I remained myself here with Chiel away and they had very important papers and then they went together to the border to the river that they have to cross. There's a Pollack what knows where to cross, and he is the first one. He walks them into the river. He falls into the river. After him goes Rubinstein. The – Politruk, they called. He walks in. He fell in the water. And Rubinstein made a “gevalt⁴²,” starts screaming. He fell in the water with the uniform whatever, and he start screaming and the water was high over him and the Germans were not too far and they start shooting him already. We had to retreat completely. We came back. And this day when he retreated we had a big, big fight. The biggest one in the partisans. We had there one of the partisans. If the Germans find out that Baranovskiy is there, the group, he lives openly, you know they find out, they came with artillery. Like I said they didn't come from soldier. They came artillery, airplanes and – what's the name? And the tanks and all this came over.

Q: Just one big battle.

03:56:09

A: Big, big battle. Big battle! And the same day the other group what went the other side to my end was a part of my group too went to show the way there because was – what was the names? What was his name? Morel, Zelazny, Bleichman – you will hear a lot because he will I think he will be also there. And they – he went back with this group, and they had the biggest fight also in the war. Because the Germans want to clean up the partisans. They knew what's going on. The knew that the army's coming back. When the army comes back, they will hinder us whatever. They were afraid. Then they had a order to clean us up.

Q: What did they do?

A: And they had a very big fight there. Bigger than ours, maybe, with this and they had a lot of people. A lot of people! But in the night, they disappeared.

Q: The Germans disappeared?

A: No, the Germans was staying there, but our people disappeared in the night. Most of them came back to us. They had our base already. They came back to us. And our fight with Wola Wereszczynska we went into the woods. And I don't think somebody was killed. I know one airplane was shot down. I know a few Germans were killed right what I saw in the, in the fight because we went into the woods and he was standing there. There was a very big flash was in front of me. I was behind a, a tree, a big one, and there

⁴² Emergency (Yiddish); a cry for help.

was some water there in the front of this. All of sudden, a splash there in front of this. Artillery hit there, and it didn't, it didn't explode. And then Baranovski was not too far. I said to him, "Look here, I almost got killed." He said, "Jews don't get killed. You are a Jew." Just like that. He made a joke.

Q: So you went through scot-free?

A: I went through scot-free. After this, it took a few days, a few days after, the Russians start coming. Started coming. It was the worst part in our life cause the Germans were all over because they came from the front. And there was tanks and the small vehicles and all over the field all over. We didn't have where to hide. We didn't have where to hide. It's impossible. Then I don't know, we had no choice. It was some kind of a wooden area, small woods, small woods and we went into this. Lucky we didn't go into the fields because they went through the fields. The Germans went through the fields. And we were, were there in this, and we laid down still sitting there. I remember one of the women got up and she had a red, and red this – a handkerchief or something like that she ripped it off her head and I pushed her down. And we were laid down, that the Germans came with airplanes with all this, we were laying there. Somehow, they had their minds with something else, and they went through us.

03:59:26

Q: With one minute left, I want you to tell us how the Russians came in and actually liberated your area.

A: The Russians came in, and we were like an organized group, it came in a Pollack with a beard – he looked like Messiah. He came over to us, he said, "What are you doing here in the woods? You know the Russians are here in this village. Right next to you, in this village the Russians are here." Said, "What?" Said, "Come with me." And we start walking with – marching a group, like soldiers, you know. We going – we're proud. All of a sudden the Russians start shooting. The Russians, on us! Because they knew – didn't know who this is. They thought it's Germans. A column of people going?!? And we laid down and we sent out two or three guys with white – this handkerchiefs and all this. And they went over to them and they told them it is a group of partisans and this, and they said, "Jews on top of this, what?" Here this – a Russian general came over, a Jew. And then another officer, a Jew. There's a lot of Jewish officers there, between the Russians. And they were happy to see us, and they hugged us. And they said, "But we have no time. We are at war to go. There is a place, there, not too far, what the SS staying and we have a big fight with them. You stay here and then you – we took over Lublin already. We took over Lubartów and all other towns are taken over already from us. And you go back and you are free." And this free was, was very, very sad, very sad. Then we start feeling how alone we are. Everybody start looking for family. Everybody start looking for, for somebody to, to, to share his problems, share this. I couldn't – with my family I was cut off, I didn't know what happen there. Then it takes – took time a little bit, they start coming from the other side, they told me that my family was killed, all of them in one day, they took them out, they killed everybody. My brother was killed in a, in a

camp. And everybody, what remained there, from, from millions of millions of people, remained 150,000 people remained in Poland. Why I know, because after this I organized registration and I was working with Dr. Sommerstein⁴³. Maybe you heard about him? He was a big leader for the war, he our leader from – in war for the area government and I was working with him, yes. I had a very big job in Poland too, they gave me a job right away, and I registering all the Jews, everybody what lived through, came to me and they registered their child and this. And I found what is going on, how many people and where they lived—

04:02:28

[Conclusion of interview]

⁴³ Dr. Emil Sommerstein