

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Isaac Kowalski
September 21, 1991
RG-50.030*0118**

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Isaac Kowalski, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on September 21, 1991 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview cannot be used for sale in the Museum Shop. The interview cannot be used by a third party for creation of a work for commercial sale.

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ISAAC KOWALSKI
September 21, 1991

Q: Okay. We're rolling. We're on. Would you tell me your full name please? Tell me your name.

A: I...I am Isaac Kowalski, born in Vilna, and we were three children. My parents have a printing business. One of us a doctor in Switzerland, and one is a He was in France, but during the war, the brother he was in Switzerland, and he was there during the war and he survived.

Q: Okay.

A: My brother was with the family...

Q: Okay. Let's stay away. Oh wait. We're rolling. Would you just answer the questions one at a time. Tell me your name please?

A: Okay. I am Isaac Kowalski from Vilna.

Q: When were you born?

A: I was born in 1920 and...

Q: Tell me about...tell me about your parents and your brothers and sisters.

A: Yeah. Okay. My parents have a printing business in the city of Vilna. We used to print few newspapers, daily papers and weekly and other...other things. And then before the war, we my brother was killed in France. He was a part of the printing business and we under our name Central Printing Company and this was till the end and then Germans came in the city.

Q: What happened when the Germans came in to Vilna to you? What happened to you?

A: Came in to me was a woman all the time bringing us, delivering us milk, and she came from a part of the Ponari. When she came she say that she saw a lot of people, Jewish people were...were brought over to Ponari and they were shot them, shoot them. When she told us to our people and nobody wanted to believe this what she said she saw. But I was among the only few what I believe it what she said. So I know already what we can expect from the Germans and therefore I tried something to do about this.

Q: What did you try to do?

- A: I...I have...I belong to all my years to the organization Betar, Zionist Betar organization. So I tried to contact all...a few other people what I know very well that she had something together organize an underground movement so we can go against the Germans.
- Q: Tell me...tell me...tell me who is in this movement? How did you get to know them?
- A: I contacted one...one of them is Dor Schneider, Dof Schneider, and a girl Rifka Karpikes. We three start planning to do something. And we do...we did all kind of preparation work to organize an underground. In the meantime came the head of the Lithuanian organization from Betar, the Betar, Joseph Glassman. So we told him what we did till now, and after he came to Vilna, to Vilna ghetto, we decided to give just to him he should be in charge of the whole preparation work. And he did so and I...he took over the whole organization work and he contacted other Vilna organizations and they organized altogether a movement by the name, name is United Partisan Organization. After a lot of work...
- Q: What work? What kind of work? What did you have to do to organize?
- A: We first organized to get...to get the rifles of the ghetto, ammunition to get...to get all kind of weapons to be able to resist the Germans.
- Q: How did one get rifles and weapons?
- A: The first thing we have to do to have money. But then we tried to buy from Germans, from Polish, from Lithuanians. Whoever want to sell, we have to be prepared to be able to buy. And to this reason we need a lot of money. So one time already...when we were already in the business...uh... organizing the underground, I came up...uh...with a project to print underground false paper...false cards, red cards. And this we can see the products and have money. And that's what we did.
- Q: How did you... Explain. These were false cards of some kind?
- A: I printed false cards and we got almost a million marks. Like now would be a million dollars.
- Q: Is this false money you printed?
- A: No. No. False cards. For these cards, we got from the Germans we get produce, products and we sold them. And that's for us the main ... the main income ... income for the organization. Before we did all kind of things. We made collections among themselves. Everybody give what they can. Even the gold rings, the wedding rings, other things but that wasn't enough to get for the ammunition what we need to buy because it was very expensive. But after this with my project, we got a lot of money. We were able to buy everything what we get until the end to buy.

Q: Tell me about the printing press? Where did you keep it? How did you physically do this with the Germans there?

A: We...I...I was working in a...in a printing...Lithuanian printing place what I know before. He...he did for me a favor and he talked for me to...to work in his place. No...No Jews were...were allowed to work in no place...no printings. I was the only one to work in a printing place. And the reason was this because he went to...to the Gestapo to say that in the ghetto lives one guy, a Jew, Isaac Kowalski, and he can help me to...to publish the book...the...the magazines. If...if he'll not be able to come to my place to work, I will not be able to...to publish the magazine. And this was... uh...in their best interest there should be printed their...their publications what he is printing. So they give him a pass...special permission, so Isaac Kowalski can work in their printing. And I went with...with the intention to be able to steal material for our printing. And that's what happened. I...everyday...I stole all kind of stuff. When I completed...it took a few...few months, one, a Polish man what he was in the underground, the Polish underground. He was living in the city. He came to me every day and throughout the organization. As the connection, he came to me every day 12 o'clock past lunch time and I used to give him...uh... uh...what...what the army was wearing. The...they had to eat, you know, the soup. How you call it...you know, by hand.

Q: By bowls of soup. Bowls of soup.

A: Uh...the soup...the soup you know. So he came with that thing like this, and I used to exchange them. I used to give...I used to give him a full type, and he used to give me an empty one. I everyday 12:00.

Q: A pail of some kind.

A: A pail. Yes. For the army, special pails what the army was wearing. And he exchanged the same thing. I give him a full one and he give me a empty one. In this way took for months, 6 months, til he got all the material what he needed to be able to...to establish a little printing plant. One time he didn't came to me 12 o'clock. I was having...everything what I have my...on myself. So I was really supposed because I couldn't...I couldn't wait to go in back with the stuff so I went later on the ghetto with the stuff I have on myself and later on I found out why he didn't came because he felt that the Gestapo or some...somebody's going after him and look at him. So he decided not to come to me. This was for me a big...a big hardship, you know, to...to bear this all over the city and in the ghetto. But later on they...they caught him and they...they find him and they tortured and tortured him for death...to death. But not this time, and he didn't have a chance to say about me nothing because I was in the partisans. So otherwise, I would be together with him. Uh...The...the one ghetto...in ghetto I have also brought over material ...uh ...printing, so I decided in case something happened to the ghetto printing, I have another reserve printing in the city or if something happened to the city printing, I have

something reserved in the ghetto. So we have...there were two printing press...two printing places.

Q: Explain...explain a little more. You had yours in the ghetto...in the city.

A: I...I...I have a printing place equipped in the ghetto and have a printing place equipped in the ghetto...in the outside, and not in the ghetto. Sometimes I was working in...in this place and sometimes I was working in by the...by the Polish in his house.

Q: How did you get from one to the other through all the guards and everything?

A: Only the people what they were in the ghettos, they cannot understand what I mean. If I have to go to the city as a...as a not a Jew and to go...when I was there, I was not a Jew.

Q: You had false papers?

A: Yeah. But this was a very dangerous thing to do, but I...I managed to...to...to get where all these things, and we printed all kind of leaflets, publications against the Germans. Here...I have in my book a big writer, a famous writer, he wrote the story about my...my printing presses cause he...he find out these leaflets posted on the Gestapo's houses. And when they came out from their home, they find leaflets against the Germans. So they were looking...trying to find the printing for...for all kind of money. They offered a lot of money if somebody can point for them who did it. They didn't expect it that Jewish people are doing this cause they couldn't imagine something like...like this. But this writer, he...he positioned a airplane cut us off, in the 1950s, so he wrote the...the story about this. That all over the Gestapo houses where even their houses are posted our leaflets and was for them a big surprise.

Q: How did you feel doing all of this work? What was it like for you?

A: You see we were then a big organization. Very, very organized. There were some...a lot of people. We send them out from the ghetto. They distributed the leaflets all over. They...they posted them. They put them on the floors on the sidewalks, and Gentile people pick these up and this was a big sensation in the ghetto, but everybody was ...was thinking the Polish was being doing this, some...some...some other thing, but not the Jewish people are going to be able to do so. And the truth is this was complete a Jewish affairs. I...I did the project. I organize the help of all kind of people. But this was a Jewish enter...enterprise.

Q: Did you...how did you feel...you were in danger all the the time. How did you feel about that?

A: In danger, everybody...every Jew that was in the ghetto was in danger..in danger, but I was 10 times more in danger because if...if they would catch me, they wouldn't give me.

This...all the time I expected this. One time even I...I asked they should give me, poison. I should have in case I needed so I got it because I figure if I fall in their hands it's better to kill myself than...than ...than fall in their hands. And I...I...I described this in my book where very, very...everything in detail what I am saying here. So I was...uh...lucky and I am alive. I am 91. I am getting interview for...for a movie.

Q: Okay. You were...you were doing these illegal printing presses and things were going on around you. You did all kinds of other illegal things. You had a conversation at one point with a Sergeant Schmidt. Can you tell us about this? Who was he?

A: Our organization came across of a guy, a German...a German officer which was for the Germans working, and we find out he's against...he's against the Germans. He's against the Gestapo, against the Third Reich...Third Reich. So we tried to...

Q: Wait a minute. I am going to stop you and ask you to say it again for the cameras, but I want you to say it and use his name. Okay?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. So your organization...begin.

A: Our organization got in contact with Schmidt. He was a sergeant in the German army and he was coaching them and he was anti...anti-Hitler. So we tried to find...I engaged him in our...in our organization, and he was happy to do this and did us...for us a lot of things. He gave us the and he was taking it from one place to another. He endangered...he endangered his life very much until he got one day caught. He got caught and...uh...they killed him. They killed him. They killed him. They sent later on they sent his shirt to his wife. They were living in house there. So they send his shirt to the wife to show that your husband betrayed the title and the...the shirt from your husband. But he was very helpful for us, and we remember him all...all the years.

Q: What was Antone Schmidt like as a person?

A: What did you say?

Q: What kind of a person was Antone Schmidt?

A: He was a very nice person. He was a...he was a anti-anti Hitler, anti-Hitler. He was...he was delivering the milk, the German milk to the farms, so he got trucks and he got the ability to move one place to the other. And this was very good for us. He was able to take us all kind of places with his truck til one day they caught him and they grabbed him.

Q: Okay.

A: But he was a very nice person, and I am respecting him all the...all the years.

Q: As the massacres began in Vilna...

A: Yeah.

Q: From 1941 on really...

A: Yes.

Q: What did you do? How did you and your organization respond?

A: Before we were driven in the ghetto came out a Polish newspaper. He was a Polish...his paper under German control. And this paper the editorial was...the first day of the editorial was...there's a Jew...when he is laying...when he is laying unconscious, you can still...still hit him and not have pity on him. So with words like this, I can right way imagine what we can expect from them. So this was...this was one of the...one of the driven motive to...to do something against the propaganda what the German were putting up to the people, the Polish and the Lithuanian that were living in Vilna. Let's tell the story the other side from the coin. We didn't have much for to say because the fronts were terrible. The Germans were going very fast and they were...they were...there were...uh...killing a lot of soldiers all over, so we didn't have what to say too much about this. But later on, we tried to...to bring news from the fronts to tell them that it's not entirely true what they say. They have all over just the...the...the right way for them. There was a lot of people were dying from their side and we called to the...to the population not to enlist in the armies...in the German Army and to the Germans we put out leaflets they should desert from the army or should go in the ...in the...to the partisans. Later on came out a lot of times, the Germans looked in the barracks and they find the leaflets but the Germans in the pockets and this was come out one side, this was a terrible blow to the Germans to find the leaflets inside this. On the other side, it's a good thing the Germans tried to keep the leaflets in case something happened they should be able to go to the...to the partisans to show for them a they didn't throw away the leaflets even when it dangers our lives because we really want one day to come to the partisans. And this... I was very proud and I heard it's a lot of times happen like this how the leaflets came to the Germans in the pockets. And this was my work.

Q: Okay. What happened after the famous massacre at Ponar. What did you do?

A: We did all right away like I say from the milk woman, this was from the fields they...they in the ghetto when they came in, in...in September, in June...uh...1941, so we have know right away what they are doing. But later on was in a massacre when before was few thousands, later on was a few...10 thousands. Right away, they brought them over and they shoot them. But the ditches...ditches...but they dig ditches where they...uh...in Ponari. And this is today a very well known story all over, like other places.

Q: What did you as a member of the resistance do after that massacre? Did you print more leaflets? What did you do?

A: Yes. We...we printed leaflets. We with a...to the people whoever doesn't believe is a fool. You can see what is happening. They took out a lot of people and they never came back. So don't make illusions. You should know that ...that they're taking away the people to Ponari or some place else. You never come...they will never come back. So we to...to put up a resistance. This was our main work. We want to have all the masses behind...behind us, and this was very complicated because one day they find it...one of our coworkers, Polish or Lithuanian, they grabbed him. From them...them came out...they find out they are in contact with the commander of the partisan organization, and he...he was caught from them, and they killed him too. But we to the people that when we will make their work in the ghetto, they should stay behind us. But really didn't work out exactly they way we want put up a resistance in the ghetto. We decided to leave the ghetto to go to the forest. And up there to be put the...the resistance because more favor of...to the...to the...for us, for the partisans we can put up a better fight. So we decided the organization to move to the forest and this is another chapter in our organization because...uh...we...we have a...a code word. We were to put up a resistance in the ghetto, in the walls in the ghetto, but after what was happened to when we say this...the masses, they are not sure they will go behind us so we decided to leave the ghetto. On one part we went to the forest, 680 miles from Vilna, far away and up there was Glassman, Joseph Glassman. We told our 10 people...30 people were there and they were apprehended on the way from the Germans, when they have to cross a little bridge and a lot of them fell in battle but half of them managed to come to the forest, and up there they were in the partisans movement organization.

Q: Excuse me, but which forest?

A: forest. And there they were a few months, and they were fighting the Germans til they were caught...came across a big...a big offensive when the Germans with airplanes, with tanks and muscle and most of them fell again in this... in this battle with Joseph Glassman and...and...and...was among them. I was in another part of the forest with. This was closer to the...to the ghetto. We managed to...to leave in the last moment when the ghetto was surrounded from the Germans from Lithuania, from Estonia, all kind of army, SS, we were surrounded. Nobody could leave the ghetto and everybody was taken away in last moment to Estonia, Latvia, and we didn't know exactly what's going to happen. But that's the last final moment from the Vilna people. We managed to go to the canals. We went to the canals. We have this organized before. We...we...we have another couple of places, openings, and we went through the canals. I was among them. We went through almost half a city we have to go out. And we went out when ... in a place what was one block from the the main police station. Was an empty story...was an empty store and there we came out from the canals. This is a big chapter and I have this written in all details in my book too.

Q: Were these the canals or were they sewers. Were they sewer lines?

A: Sewers. Sewers. Yes.

Q: Sewers. You came up a block from the police station?

A: From...from the police station. There was the...the exit place for us, but we went all the way from the...from the ...from the canal through the city. I will never forget the first impression when I came in...in the hole to go in...in the canal. It was a fear here is my...my place where I am going to die. Shoes. I had a big mouth, shoes...I see mice...not mice...how you call?

Q: Rats.

A: Rats. Big rats like...like cats. Cats they be so big. They were sitting over all and they were looking at...on us. We were coming down. I figured they're coming to jump on us But they...they have mind their own business. They were looking at us like under...they understand what is going on that these people are going to go through the canals. We don't have to touch them. They were sitting quietly and they let us go to all the way to canal. To me this was the biggest impression what I have made in this time. And was sometimes I have to...to swim in...in the filth until my health...half of my...my...til...til my face was full with what I have to jump in the filth. We went all kind of places. Other places were less filth. Other places were only to the knees. But other places we have to go to half of the stomach in the filth. And this way we have to move forward a half a city like this. And we came out...we came out like I say in...in the exit place was very close to this police main office. We chose this place because we figure whatever they will try to find, they are not going to find behind...in their own back yard. So there...we chose this place should be the...the exit place. There we have a place...people what we are waiting for us, she's a Vilna partisan, and, a Lithuanian, a policeman...a regular policeman from the...from one of the police. He was working with us. He was...uh...watching that nothing should happen to us. And this used to come to me in my printing. His...his task was to look on the...on the...on the woods because we have to go with woods to the forest. So one time he came to say the roads on the...are full with the army...people with...with trucks. We can't go. So this we have to stay another day. And when he say the trucks are not running there, so we were able to go. So this was a big story you know to go through the city...uh...for us to write the full story about it, but here I can't...just to say a few words about this. So we managed to come to the forest. Up there we found some other partisans, and we were regular partisans became and we were fighting the Germans whatever we can whenever we can.

Q: How did you set up in the forest?

A: In the forest...

Q: How did you live?

A: In the forest we have...in the beginning it was very hard to live. With food we are a problem. With food but we managed to get it from...from the villages around, we got our food what we need, and we have our ammunition and rifles what we brought over from the...from the ghetto. With this, we... we went all kind of actions for...against the Germans. We killed the Germans. We took away their rifles, their ammunition from time to time. Every time we got bigger ones and more successful and we blow up bridges and railroads and we gave the Germans really a hard time. And we have...to this we have a lot of luck, because the Germans considered us much, much stronger than we really we were. They were very much afraid. They have posters all over. Be careful. Go with your...with your...uh...with your rifles ready because here is...the forest infested with bandits, with Jewish bandits cause they know they are going in this...in this neighborhood they have to expect everything from the Jewish bandits. The Jewish bandits were partisans from the Vilna ghetto.

Q: Did you ever go on these raids to blow up bridges and things?

A: What did you say?

Q: Did you ever go on a raid to blow up a bridge or attack a German?

A: Yes. I was a few times.

Q: Can you tell us about one of those raids?

A: We were...one time we went to...was a village, a very strong village, a big village. The Germans give them...give them rifles everybody and say listen, "Your task is when you see going through the partisans, you have to kill them to...to kill the partisans. You don't have to wait to call for the Germans to do the job. First, you will protect yourselves this way from the partisan, and on the other side, if you are not going to do the way what we...we like, you'll get killed from us." So they didn't really have another choice, and they...they took the...the rifles from them and they...that's what they did. When we were...have to go to this village, they used to apprehend us and...uh...we have to fight with them. We have all the time a little...uh...people...were...were fell in battle and...uh...the Germans were...were very happy with their work so they give them all kind of ...uh... sugar, things, other things what there were shortage and but we decided if you are working with the Germans, then we'll ...we'll give you a lesson what we have to do. So one day we for fuel places and we apprehended the village and we killed a lot of people there and we...we destroyed the village. And this...all the villages around saw what happened if you take ammunition, if you take weapons from the Germans, then the partisans...partisans will go behind you...after you. So they...they rejected to take the weapons from the German, and from this time we were able to go wherever we want

without having losses of partisans. This was one operation. Another time we were...the Germans used to travel on the front on the...from the locomotive assigned to victory. They were traveling to the...to the front with weapons, with tanks, with other things. So we know already this...all the time in this time...and this how he is passing by a special point close to us. We went there and we mined...put our mines and we blow up the...the train. One time. Another time. They have a lot of casualties the Germans with a lot of dead, and we have...sometimes we have also casualties, but most of the time we was very successful. They were very afraid to go passing by. They first they discontinued to the town in the nights because we...for us it was much better in the night. We saw what you're doing. We know the...the neighborhood and everything. So the first thing what they did, they discontinued to travel in the nights. They were traveling only in the days. So this way we already accomplished something you know. They couldn't travel 24 hours like they want. And then we...we did our work in the days. We...we

Q: Okay. Let's stop for a minute. You might want to take a Kleenex and wipe your mouth and take something to drink. You can use the towel here if you like.

A: Yes.

Q: Take something cool to drink. No. You want to keep going? Just fine. Give Mr. Kowalski a chance to breath. Let's just fix your jacket a little bit. There you go. Uh...What other raids did you go on or partisan attacks did you go on? What other kind of fighting did you do with the partisans?

A: We did like...that what I told you, we blow up bridges. We blow up...uh...trains. We blow up...uh...electric poles...poles we cut it down...we cut it down the poles, and they were disrupted in the telegraphic...in the electric, in the telegraphic contacts. This was our main thing we blow up factories where they were working for the Germans. And then we...uh...after...after German they posted the Germans, we used to fell...came after them and we used to kill them. One episode is what to tell is a...a village where 10 Germans were posted there to...to...to watch our...our section in the forest so they know what they can expect from the partisans. So they contacted the partisans. They told them, "Let's make a deal. We will not touch you. You don't touch us." We made a deal. We made with them the deal, and we didn't touch them and they didn't touch us.

Q: That's quite a story.

A: Yeah. Was...was...was a big surprise to me too.

Q: Okay. Stand up. I just want to fix your jacket a little bit. There we go. Okay. Uh...You did some printing in the forest.

A: What did you say?

Q: You did some printing in the forest, didn't you?

A: Yeah. Then...then...then after awhile I was in the forest, we decided the...the...the main...the main command. There were...there were people that were dropped from Moscow. They were dropped from the...the airplanes. They were in the command of the old partisan forest...the partisan. We belonged to them. And they decided to bring the printing...the printing from the city to the forest because in the city was very...but they didn't find out the printing. So we...we managed to bring the printing in the forest.

Q: Okay. Let's stop a minute. You get whatever you want to get out of your pocket.

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. You're comfortable?

A: This is not going to be shown.

Q: No. No. Nobody is going to show this in public. This is just raw tape.

A: Thirty years ago I didn't have to do that.

Q: Thirty years ago we didn't have to do a lot of things, you and I. Okay.

A: Yeah.

Q: Alright. Let's...uh...stand up a minute will you and just...we're going to sit you...stand up a minute and we're going to sit you down in your jacket again. Okay, sit up straight and... Are you comfortable?

A: Yeah. Yeah.

Q: Okay.

A: So...

Q: No. No. No. What I want to do is ask you to tell us...

A: Yeah.

Q: How...who brought the printing presses in the forest and how were they brought in?

A: They have...like I told you at the printing place in my...in...in...in the city and they command given to contact with the people in the city and they told them to bring over the printing. They brought us over for...of a village cart...in a village cart. Uh...You know

what the villages ...are are using. A cart which was on top was potatoes...I don't know what was on top and under was the printing. And there was on the printing and they gave it to and they told me, "Now, you are again the business. You do again what you can do." And I published all kind of newspapers. All kind of newspapers and our partisans event all over, all kind of missions, the letters on the...on the highways. I put a little stone on this and when the people used to passing by, used to pick it up in the villages and we distribute among the villages, and there we told the story on the...on the fronts that the Germans are getting a lot of casualties and so on. And then was open the 7th front. All the commanders were away. Happened like...like that that all the commanders were away, but I was still there with the printing press. So I decided on a thing like that, a second front is well to make it a big...a big story. So I...I give up a position to publish the communique what was about the opening of the second front. So they told me...the commander told me, "You take care of this." I should be...be able to...to publish this. So I...I went in place to the Jewish group of the partisans. I know of a couple of people they know perfect the German language. One was Dr., who died a couple of years ago and one is. He is still alive here in the United States. I decided to...to give them the...the... the mission to write a communique in German language, and he wrote in a perfect English. I printed this and we distributed this and a lot of copies all over among the Germans...among the Germans. And this was...for this I was really commended later on after the war when the command was in order to get a very high medal for this, but I didn't wait to get the medal. I went right away. I left Vilna, but anyway there were very happy with...with this accomplishment from the German leaflet. I have this...I have the photostat from this...to this day in my house.

Q: The communiques were printed in German?

A: Yes.

Q: Okay. Uh...

A: We were printing in Lithuanian and in Polish, but the main thing was this one made a very big impression cause it was stated to the Germans.

Q: Where was the printing press hidden and how? How did you keep it hidden?

A: We were...we have sleeping cots. We were sleeping in bunkers, and like you...you saw this from you know in the forest in the jungles, we have bunkers under the... under the...under the...under the soil, and this was, but not like apartments, but you could...this was very good. We have our places where to sleep, and you could...we could...we have ovens from...the ovens what gave us the heat what we need from the cold weather. We have ovens...ovens, ovens, and we could live there. And there we have the mainstay...main stop which was sleeping there, and we have a radio. We have a contact with the...with the other parts of the partisans, with Moscow. I was sleeping next to the guy, the radioman, and he was all the time talking with Moscow. He was so I was all the

time...we were...we know exactly what is going on with the weather and things like that. But we...that. But there we have other...our printing press, and I used to work like I used to work in the ghetto like I used to work in the city. We printed a lot of publications and we distributed them. And the command, the main command was very pleased with this because they thought it worked of things like it because some of the population, they figure if we have a printing, we can print like things like this then we should be very...very strong which can make...not a big people can do this. So this was for us a big propaganda for us. Because we are a organization, the partisans which have their own printing, own presses because the Polish paper one day we show up the Polish people because they have behind the masses...all the masses from the city, the people buying them so they figure out. So they...for them was a big ...a big accomplishment to have a printing press. So if...then... then Jewish couldn't...couldn't accomplish this. To them it's a surprise that we have a printing place.

Q: Did you ever have to move the printing press?

A: Yeah.

Q: How?

A: One time. One time we find out...uh...our intelligence group find out that Germans going to attack us. They are marching a lot of tanks and airplanes. Our intelligence find out. They're going to...to make a big...a big...a big...uh... offensive against the partisans. So we decided to move towards the whole store, all the printing place in another part of the city...of the forest. I was myself moved maybe 30 miles from there, but really never materialized the...the big offensive. What they did they bombard...they bombard with artillery and with airplanes, but they was afraid to go with the...with the what we were really 20, 30 miles away. We didn't have nothing to do with them. After we find out that the Germans disappeared, we come back. This was the only time when we have to move the printing press.

Q: Of all the people you worked with in the resistance...uh... perhaps one of the most famous of the resistance leaders was Abacostner. Did you know Abacostner?

A: I know him very well because we were in the same group.

Q: Okay, let's stop a minute for the tape. When you go back, would you say, "I knew Abacostner very well."

A: I know very well Abacostner very well. He was really close. We were working very close. And I'll tell you even a piece. After the war we start organizing the...the escape of the Jewish people from Russia. So we...we organized an organization by the name Brichah. And this is how...later on it came out a big organization with the help all the people whoever want to go...to leave the place, to leave Lithuania...Russia to go to Israel,

we helped them to do. So I was the number two...the number two man. With Abacostner, I was the second and this...and he helped me with the...in the Committee of the organization to...to move the people from Lithuania. I was the...his...very much in contact with him. We were working very much together.

Q: Okay. Can you tell us...before we get to after the war in Brichah which is a special chapter, during the war...during this period in the forest...first in Vilna and then in the forest, can you tell us about working with Abacostner during this period? Give me an incident where you worked with Abacostner during the war.

A: I was working with him...

Q: Again, say it again, I was working with Abacostner...

A: I was working with Abacostner together because he was in the main...the main...uh...command from the partisan organization and the first time I came with my project to make a printing press, I came to the command of the partisans and he was among them. And I know him even...from even before the war, so whenever I saw him the street, we were talking like...like two friends. Not just because of the business, but later on he...we were winter times together in all kind of involvements which have to do with the partisans.

Q: Give me an example. What kind of things were you involved with with Abacostner? What did you do with him? Did you fight with him? Did he help you with the printing presses? Give us an example.

A: He...he know everything. He was only from the few what really know what is going on with the printing press. Nobody know from the...from all the partisans didn't know. But the command people know about this, and he appreciated it very much because he know that I am printing the...the cards, and that we are getting a lot of...a lot of money. We are...we are buying weapons for this. So he told me a couple of times he is very proud of my work what I am doing because I'm...I'm...I'm the most what I am responsible for...for getting the weapons and everything on the outside. I made it possible to...to get all kind of money for this...for this thing. So I...I...and then...and then I have a lot of times with him to do everyday things and then when I was in the forest I was in another...uh... by the Lithuanians...the main...the main organization. I was...have station...my station was ...was there. But I used to come very often to them few months...few months away and Abacostner was the commander...was all the partisans altogether there and I used...when I have a little free time, I used to come over to them and we used to sing songs together and so forth.

Q: Okay. Uh...When you were in the forest and...and the war is drawing to an end, are there any other incidents that stand out in your memory? Did any...any...anything happened in

the forest beside what you've told me that...that stands out, that's important, that should be told?

A: With the Abacostner or in general?

Q: In general. Anything at all?

A: Uh...We have...This was our daily bread. Every day we used to rest a day and then a day to go on all kind of missions and fight the Germans, blow up trains, and blow up rears and this was...and blow up...uh...poles, electric poles. This was our life all the day...all the days, and we came from operations we didn't have casualties and death...but for us a...a big holiday. And we left...one time...one time we destroyed a train. Was maybe 200 German...German casualties. We have a big...big press with this. This was our life. To be killed, to get killed. This was the life of partisans. We did it work every day.

Q: Can you tell us about liberation? When the war ended, how did the war end for you?

A: When we...we...when we got the message when the war was close to Vilna, we got an order from the main command. We must...uh...all the partisans have to go to...to liberate Vilna. And everybody...whoever is not without a foot, without...without a hand, he had to go...to go to...to ...with the partisans to liberate Vilna. But I was left behind because I was printing leaflets to...to the population of Vilna they should...the partisans they should honor them and they should help them whatever they can. They are a friend of them. A leaflet I was working, and one leaflet was from...from the main command written by...written by command, which...whom I meet later. I meet later cause he know about my activities, so he want to see me. So one day I have a big story of this, but this is a private thing. I don't want to talk about it. Anyway, when I came in in the city, I find my leaflets that I printed on the walls all over posted from the partisans recalling to the population they should...they should be happy and friendly to the partisans because we are not enemies from the population. We are friends of the population. We are...we are destroying the Germans. And this was my leaflet that I was working...working the last moment. And they came in...the Germans I don't know why...for why kind of reasons, they put up a stiff resistance in the city, with tanks, with airplanes, with airplanes, and they lost ten thousand people, just...just in a...in a city like Vilna. The civilians was a big...big surprise because if they have to put up a resistance like this with each city, then they have...they need another 10 million soldiers. But after like this...in Vilna they put up a big resistance the Germans and they lost...they lost heavy.

Q: Okay. After liberation, what did you and your printing press do? Did you bring your printing press back to Vilna?

A: Yes. Yes. We were disbanded. All the partisan movement was disbanded. Everybody had to do something else work, and we were by the commanded appointed to do all kind of...I was...I was appointed to be the main...the editor, the director of the printing business all

over, not on the front, for Vilna, for Lithuania, all the Baltic, all the printers and they entrusted all the...like a union all the printers the Baltic I was appointed. This was my work after the war in the beginning. I was there a short time and I left. And then we...we organized printings in the city. I...I retired to live a normal life. Everybody...whoever was a doctor, whoever was an engineering, a bookkeeper, retired. They appointed him his...to his branch of work. That's a lot of people went to the other...other government functions, but all in all, we were appointed from the government. They have the amnesty list and they give us all kind of work.

Q: Tell me about organizing Brichah? How was Brichah organized?

A: The Brichah we know right away, we have no future in Vilna anymore because it was so much before Rosh Hashanah. We have a big synagogue. The...the...the synagogue was not destroyed. Only few synagogues was torched and destroyed They destroyed the biggest synagogue in the city, because the Germans were holding their pharmacy...pharmacy supplies so survived the...the synagogue. After this comes the Rosh Hashanah, and all the people what they were survived come...come to the Rosh Hashanan to the...to the schul. So I know the schul before the war used to be 5 or 8 thousand people used to take in, so we were maybe 500 people all in all what survived after the war. From the partisans were hiding. So all the people were around the Bema• just in front of them, so we were talking to...to ourselves. What's left of us in Vilna. It was a pity to look around the Bema the people what survived the war. So we know this right away there's no future for us to stay there. We don't have t be a Zionist all the time. We dreamed to go to Israel to Palestine this time, so I...I apprehended Abacostner. I told him let's do something to move our people there. He was very, very, very happy to hear this because he was of a mind to...then he called another. He was over the main command from the partisans before and we quickly...quickly organized the beginning of the Brichah. And this is not natural. Again a big, big story. We were sent up to people to find out how to...how this works. We sent away. She became in Israel a very popular person. We sent out from Vilna she should go to...to Rumania then to Israel to...to tell the story of the regards from our people. And she accomplished this. She went over from...from Vilna. From Vilna I gave her a...a document, and that she's an editor of a newspaper and I'm sending her to Rumania and with these papers she came to Rumania uninterrupted and from there she came to Israel and she gave a report to...to a high...to Ben Gurion, other people from Israel, and they have a very good information what was going on during the war in Vilna.

Q: Okay. I think you have told us the important...