

-TITLE-MAX BIDERMAN

-I\_DATE-

-SOURCE-DALLAS MEMORIAL CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST STUDIES

-RESTRICTIONS-

-SOUND\_QUALITY-

-IMAGE\_QUALITY-

-DURATION-

-LANGUAGES-

-KEY\_SEGMENT-

-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-

-PERSONAL\_NAME-

-CORPORATE\_NAME-

-KEY\_WORDS-

-NOTES-

-CONTENTS-

00:00:00 My name is Max Biderman. I was born in the city of ukov (ph), Poland, on Feb, 11, 1917. My family consisted of my father, my mother and two sisters and five brothers. My sister Golda (pg) was the oldest.

00:00:30 She was born in about 1905. She had a husband and two children.

00:01:00 My sister Hannah and her husband, and a daughter.

00:01:30 The oldest brother was married and had one child.

00:02:00 The fourth child, a son was inmarried as were the rest of the children.

00:02:30 I was 5th. I was 22 when the war started. Sixth was my brother . The seventh, the youngest, was my brother Yankel.

00:03:00 We were a respected family, we were considered wealthy in that town, and the boys studied mainly religion.

00:03:30 My father and his two brothers had a factory. And my mother had a factory that made oil from seeds. The oil was used for cooking. I helped in the oil factory.

00:04:00 My father had two brothers. They lived in the same town. He also had a sister and her husband, who both died young, of cancer.

00:04:30 We had other family living in other parts of Poland.

00:05:00 In 1939 the German army invaded Poland. They made a rule that all Jews had to wear a white band on their arm. Later they changed it to a Yellow Star.

00:05:30 In September, the Germans began rounding up Jews and killing them. Our family hid.

00:06:00 Through a crack we saw that the house next door was on fire. We rushed out to put it out and I and two brothers were captured by Germans.

00:06:30 We were taken to a lot by the Catholic Church. On the way we saw bodies in the street, and some fires.

00:07:00 I recognized one of the dead men as Yankel from my father's school. These were the first dead people I saw from the war.

00:07:30 We were forced to walk 28 kilometers to the town of Siedlce. Behind us were soldiers and behind them wagons. Anyone who could not keep up

00:08:00 was shot and thrown into a wagon. At Siedlce, we were taken to the jail. Since we couldn't all fit in

00:08:30 some were cast outside. They served us terrible soup that I couldn't eat. The next day we were lined up in fours and fives

00:09:00 And we marched quickly to the city of Vrengove (ph). There the Germans put us in a        and added people from other towns.

00:09:30 Conditions were bad. We only had soup. We slept in the mud. It was cold. There were over 20,000 there.

00:10:00 Some boys were chosen to clean up a field full of human waste. My brother Joel was in that group and he ran away. After a few days we were each given half a loaf of bread.

00:10:30 Then the Germans marched us quickly through a main street of the town. My brother Simcha and I hid in a building and ran away.

00:11:00 We were reunited with our family, and with Joe who had returned. The Germans picked a group of people to act as intermediaries, and some as police.

00:11:30 I was selected to work certain days. Then the Germans told the Judenrat to inform able bodied Jews to report for work. My brother Simcha and I

00:12:00 and about 500 others were sent to        close the city of        . We were to dig out and clean the creek

00:12:30 The work was very hard. The Germans woke us at 2:30 in the morning. We got one slice of bread and ersatz coffee. We walked 7 kilometers to work.

00:13:00 The Germans shot people for no reason. A friend was shot because he fainted during roll-call. My parents heard how bad it was and were able to pay a bribe to get Simcha and me back home.

00:13:30 In 1942 we found out that people were being taken to Treblinka to the gas chambers. People had seen the trains going to Treblinka.

00:14:00 Hands through the barbed wire of the windows. People begging for water. A few days later I heard that a train had gone from to Treblinka.

00:14:30 I guessed that my sister Hannah her husband and their daughter were on that train. We never heard from them again. They probably were the first of our family to die.

00:15:00 In 1942, at the New Year, the Germans ordered the Judenrat to make a Ghetto for the Jews. The German Polish and Ukrainian police surrounded the Ghetto rounded up all the Jews they could find and sent them to the railroad station.

00:15:30 Here the railway cars were waiting to take then to Treblinka. Jews from other small towns were on the train.

00:16:00 One of my brothers, , was caught. he died jumping of the train, as reported by eye witnesses.

00:16:30 His wife and daughter were alive in uk w at the time. The rest of my family were hiding in a hole in uk w. We hid there for several days until we head that the Germans had made a smaller Ghetto.

00:17:00 Also, they had promised that they would not take anymore Jews. And we were afraid that a Pole would turn us in.

00:17:30 So we decided to go to the Ghetto. The Germans took young Jewish boys and girls to collect the valuables from the homes that the Jews had left.

00:18:00 Some relatives and I were on this work detail. I ran away in the middle of the day because I didn't trust the Gestapo.

00:18:30 I went to an area about 3 kilometers away where some Jews were working for German factories. I thought that by doing useful work for the Germans, my chances of survival would be better.

00:19:00 Conditions were terrible. Food consisted of a slice of bread and some soup, for the day. Lice covered us and made our lives miserable.

00:19:30 Several weeks later we heard that the Germans had surrounded the Ghetto and removed all the Jews they could find.

00:20:00 Fortunately, our barrack was near the edge, and I saw the Germans approaching. Another and I were able to run into the forest, and returned after dark.

00:20:30 We learned that the Germans had rounded up the Jews and put them and others on the train. A week later, they surrounded the barracks again.

00:21:00 They came in the middle of the night and herded us to the field where the pig market took place.

00:21:30 I saw two of my brothers and cousins standing among Jewish workers.

00:22:00 The Gestapo man used these workers to loot the homes of Jews for the benefit of German officers. We were put in a large barracks because the train for Treblinka had not arrived.

00:22:30 German police and Polish police surrounded the barracks.

00:23:00 Most people were tired and depressed. But a group of us tried to open a door that was nailed shut. A few of us were able to get out and run away.

00:23:30 The Germans fired and some were hit. Luckily it was dark and raining and I escaped to a field. Not having any place to go, I returned to the Ghetto.

00:24:00 There were only three houses with lights. I looked in and saw my brother. The Gestapo man Berga had put his workers in this house.

00:24:30 My parents and others were hiding under the Vera (ph) house.

00:25:00 We learned that the Germans had made a smaller Ghetto.

00:25:30 In the new Ghetto, twelve family members lived in one small room.

00:26:00 People were dying from typhoid. I caught it. I was lying down in a closet with 104 temperature.

00:26:30 The job of a cousin was to collect things from Jewish homes. One time he had kept a potato peeler.

00:27:00 For that Yussel was put in jail but he managed to escape. He had a brother.

00:27:30 The police put him in jail instead. I pretended to be sweeping in the jail area and brought him some food.

00:28:00 He, Yitzchuk asked me to tell his brother to come to the jail because he couldn't stand it anymore.

00:28:30 Yussel was shot in jail. His brother was caught and shot. I testified against Berga at the trials in June, 1970. My testimony and that of others caused Berga to be convicted.

00:29:00 May 2nd, 1943 was the final liquidation of the Jewish Ghetto in L . In the middle of the night, the murderers, the Germans surrounded the last of the Ghetto.

00:29:30 We had a small room under the house, but I would not hide there. I escaped from the Ghetto.

00:30:00 I could not run far, and hid in an attic. In about Three hours, the Germans found me.

00:30:30 We were taken to the trains. I saw my brother trying to escape and he was shot and put on the wagon with other dead.

00:31:00 I found out later that when they came to bury him in a mass grave he was still alive and a Polish policeman finished him off.

00:31:30 They shoved us into rail cars, men, women and children.

00:32:00 Some people in our car just gave up. But some of us, with knives, were able to

00:32:30 get close to the door and were able to open it. We were close to Treblinka and travelling fast.

00:33:00 I was the first to jump. I could hear the shots at me. I lay as though I were dead. I could hear that the train had passed.

00:33:30 Nearby I saw a women who had jumped from another car. But she was badly hurt and there was nothing I could do.

00:34:00 I saw a forest about 2 km away, and I ran for the forest. After the trains for Treblinka had passed some bandits would come by looking for Jews who had escaped.

00:34:30 I reached the forest and fell asleep. I woke to hear some people speaking Yiddish. They had escaped from my car or others.

00:35:00 I recognized the voice of one man who used to be our neighbor. He had jumped from the train to come with him,

00:35:30 He said there was a German company, Bitz (ph) that used Jewish workers.

00:36:00 Yankel had become friendly with the supervisor by giving him presents. Waxman (Yankel) had found a place near the factory where his family could hide.

00:36:30 The German supervisor suggested he should hide there with some of his family. Yankel invited me and some others to come there. I thought I shouldn't trust any Germans.

00:37:00 We made our way back through another forest. We arrived back in uk&w (ph) in the middle of the night.

00:37:30 I separated from the others. I went to look for my family at a couple of hiding places but I couldn't find anybody.

00:38:00 I remembered that in the middle of town there was a hiding place. I stopped at a Polish bakery and bought two breads.

00:38:30 There I met another Jew, Israel, who had married a local woman.

00:39:00 That night I went out to look for my family at one more place. I took off my boots so I wouldn't be heard walking.

00:39:30 There, a man caught me and said he was going to take me to the police. I hit him with my boots and ran, leaving my boots, back to the hiding place. Israel was still there.

00:40:00 At daylight, a Polish man came to the opening and called to us to come out. We didn't.

00:40:30 Maybe he knew people hid there. Maybe he had seen me go in.

00:41:00 We ran out to the next yard. In the middle of the yard was an outhouse.

00:41:30 It had two doors, one for the public, and another for the owner who lived in the front.

00:42:00 We went in the public side, and crawled through the hole to the locked side.

00:42:30 We could hear police and firemen coming to the hiding place. They called to come out, and when no one did, they broke in the floor.

00:43:00 About half an hour later the baker came, opened the door, and was amazed to see two people.

00:43:30 We begged him not to tell anyone. He said he wouldn't and left. We ran out to the next street.

00:44:00 We went into the creek. Some Polish boys saw us and began to yell. We ran about 4 km outside of town.

00:44:30 We found a low place to hide. The German and Polish police were patrolling. Around noon, a Polish wagon drive we knew passed by.

00:45:00 He told us to stay hidden. He said there was still a Jewish Ghetto in M .

00:45:30 Early in the morning we started out for M following the creek.

00:46:00 We saw a woman walking on the hill near the creek. I asked her to sell me some bread.

00:46:30 She recognized me. She had bought merchandise from my family. She also asked Israel

00:47:00 his name. Since she knew my family, she thought I would have gold and American dollars. She also said she was hiding a Jewish man.

00:47:30 Schmuel Rosenbum. Schmuel was a shoemaker. Jewish tailors and shoemakers who could get work would travel the neighboring villages.

00:48:00 She told us to go into the barn with Schmuel. She thought she would get rich from hiding us.

00:48:30 That night, the farmer came in and shook our hands.

00:49:00 He asked how much gold and dollars I had. I didn't have much but I didn't say that.

00:49:30 He said the Germans were looking, and he would be killed if we were found. We asked Schmuel if he could find us another place to hide.

00:50:00 Schmuel took us to another farmer and asked him to keep us. he told him that we would pay him well.

00:50:30 He said we could stay for a few days but it was not alright with his wife.

00:51:00 The wife finally agreed. Shmuel went to another farmer where his sister and her husband were staying. We gave the farmer a gold piece.

00:51:30 We slept in the barn, in a loft. At night the wife brought us a little food. They didn't have much.

00:52:00 Shmuel was supposed to come for us but didn't. The farmer's wife wanted us to leave. Israel was older than me. He had been married.

00:52:30 He begged her to let us stay. I heard them kiss.

00:53:00 In the morning, she seemed happy and brought us breakfast. The farmer was happy because the wife had stopped complaining about us.

00:53:30 About three weeks later, the farmer told us about a Jew who had come to sell him a piece of leather, Yakov L.

00:54:00 Yakov must have recognized that the farmer was a good man because a lot of people would not have let a Jew in their doors. Yakov wasn't aware that we were there and he asked the farmer if he would be willing to hide some Jews.

00:54:30 Yankel said they had money. The farmer told me he would think about it, to come back. He asked us what to do. We told him to get the names of the people.

00:55:00 He got the names, and we were happy because we knew them.

00:55:30 A few days later, six boys joined us - he lists the names of four that he remembers.

00:55:00 They arrived with 50 pounds of meat. It was the first meat I had eaten in a long time. The farmer was happy to have meat for his family.

00:55:30 At Kruchevsky's farm, two more Jewish boys joined us. Our group went out at night twice a week to get some good.

00:56:00 Our situation became more dangerous. K. told us that the AK, fascist youth, were searching for Jews.

00:56:30 Somehow, a girl from a neighboring farm found out about us. It was no longer safe. There were about 10 of us at this time.

00:57:00 We left. We went to another farmer that we had heard about. Shmuel's brother was there. We couldn't stay long. We moved from one farmer to another.

00:57:30 One farmer was an especially fine man. His name was Bronkevitch (ph) . There were other Jews hiding at this farm.

00:58:00 Yankel's family was hiding at a nearby farm. He attempted to find another hiding place for his family. Shmuel and his two children

00:58:30 a sister and brother-in-law and others were also there. There were about 10 at the farm.

00:59:00 Bronkevitch told us that the AK went from place to place.

00:59:30 Finding and killing Jewish families. He did not tell us to leave but we could tell that he was scared. The next night he came running in and said a gang

01:00:00 was coming our way. We could see their lights. We decided to go from the little house to the barn.

01:00:30 About 40 men surrounded our barn. We decided to shoot as soon as they opened the barn.



01:01:00 They were surprised to be shot at. Some shot back, others ran away. A few minutes later we caught one.

01:01:30 He and Yankel Kesselbrenner (ph) recognized one another. He said he wasn't from the AK, he was just passing . . .

00:00:00 Repeat from about 00:58:30

00:00:30 Repeat

00:01:00 Repeat

00:01:30 Repeat

00:02:00 Repeat

00:02:30 Repeat

00:03:00 Repeat

00:03:30 The man called Yankel said he could prove

00:04:00 he was not AK because he knew where Yankel's family was hiding, and he hadn't told. It was decided to let him go.

00:04:30 The rest of the AK had run away. We killed three.

00:05:00 Fifteen minutes later we could hear the shots and the cries from Yankel's family.

00:05:30 The AK had shot them. We then realized that the man we had let go was an AK man. Since there was no place left to hide

00:06:00 We decided to leave for and a forest called . We dug a hole

00:06:30 and cut trees to cover the hole, leaving two opening to go in and out.

00:07:00 We also dug holes for our food and for a toilet. If a person came close enough he would see our hiding place.

00:07:30 We kept guard, taking two-hour shifts.

00:08:00 If we were in danger from the Germans or unfriendly Poles, we still had a little freedom in the forest.

00:08:30 About two weeks after the battle, we went to the home of the man we had let go.

00:09:00 We heard someone inside. We set fire to the house, but somehow he escaped.

00:09:30 Another time, we joined up with a group of five who also had guns. Our mission was to go to the home of the AK man who only went out at night.

00:10:00 This man had reported the hiding place of some Jews.

00:10:30 He also looted empty Jewish homes. He was not home, but we looted his house.

00:11:00 Later on, this group of five went to a farmer asking for a place to hide for one day, and the farmer agreed.

00:11:30 The farmer reported them to the Germans who came for them, and the five were killed.

00:12:00 About a week later we went to the farmer's house, broke in and found him upstairs in the attic.

00:12:30 We shot the farmer and burned his house down. We wanted this to be an example to other farmers if they reported Jews to the Germans.

00:13:00 Mr. Biderman is looking for his place in the MS.

00:13:30 We couldn't fight the Germans. If not for the Poles we could have gone out at night because the Germans did not.

00:14:00 Late at night we would go to farmers we could trust and buy food. Sometimes we went to rich farmers, and told them that since we didn't have any money

00:14:30 and they should help us because we had no food. When they saw our rifles, they would agree. Once in a while we would go to the farmer Kruchvsky (ph)

00:15:00 and give him some money to go into town and buy us things we could not get, like cigarettes and newspapers.

00:15:30 For safety's sake, we would wait a few days before going back for the supplies. I would read the newspaper, which was in Polish.

00:16:00 Sometimes we could read between the lines to find out what we wanted to know.

00:16:30 I was happy to read that the Russians and Germans were fighting at Smolensk.

00:17:00 Three weeks later we went back to Kuchevsky and asked him to buy us some things including a newspaper.

00:17:30 The farmer's wife was still attached to Yisel (ph) and wanted him to stay several night but he didn't want to stay by

himself.

00:18:00 He asked me to stay with him. I felt I would be safer with the group in the forest, but I thought that if we ever wanted to use the place again, I should stay on.

00:18:30 So I stayed. I had a hand gun, Yisel (ph) had none.

00:19:00 Kruchevsky returned with our supplies. I was disappointed to read that the Germans and Russians were still fighting near Smolensk.

00:19:30 I didn't know how much longer we could hide out in the forest. We went to sleep that night in a hiding place prepared for us.

00:20:00 on the farm. In the middle of the night the farmer's son came to us and said that the sky was lit up. I could hear bombs falling all the time.

00:20:30 I could hear planes, dropping flares and bombs. I was happy - it looked like the Russians had started the offensive here.

00:21:00 I could not believe it. What the paper reported was not true.

00:21:30 In the morning the farmer's son came in and said that Russian soldiers were about two miles away.

00:22:00 I couldn't believe it. Yesterday the paper said the Russians were 600 km away, and now he said he saw the Russian soldiers.

00:22:30 We saw Russian soldiers getting water from the farmer's well. But we were afraid that it was not true.

00:23:00 We decided to go back to our group to tell them. On the way we met two of them and they didn't know what had happened.

00:23:30 This time, as we came to our hiding place, we shouted, "Come out, The Russians are here. We are liberated."

00:24:00 We left the forest. I went back to uk&w (ph). Before the Germans left the village, they set some buildings on fire.

00:24:30 I saw dead people and dead horses from the mines that the Germans had left to slow down the Germans (sic - he obviously means "the Russians")

00:25:00 Not a Jewish person was to be seen. A Polish gentleman told me there was a Jewish family in the brick factory. I went there and it was the Prengler (pg) family.

00:25:30 A few years later, their daughter Helen, then 16 years

old, would become my wife. Then came the bad news none from my family lived through the war.

00:26:00 Helen Prangler told me she and her family were hiding in a house next to the one in which my family was hiding. She heard them being taken away.

00:26:30 She heard their cries, their pleas, the shots, and then everything got quiet. I am not sure about my two brothers, Shmuel and Yankov

00:27:00 But I did get a report from a Pole that just two months before the liberation, one of my brothers went out from the place where he was hiding

00:27:30 At night, for water, and a Pole caught him and took him away. I don't know which brother it was.

00:28:00 That's it. Now if you have any questions to ask, do so. (Until now, the interview has consisted entirely of reading from a manuscript.)

00:28:30 Q: What effect did all this have on you?

A: I've been dreaming for quite a few years; a few times a lot.

00:29:00 About my parents, about my brother. About my whole family. I suffered plenty for it.

00:29:30 Q: What did you do after the liberation?

A: (Seems confused, unable to answer.) Since I was alone

00:30:00 Several of us decided to go to Brest-Litovsk, near the Bug (river?)

00:30:30 We wanted to find out if some Jewish people survived. The only way to get there

00:31:00 we bribed a Russian truck driver to take us to the city of

00:31:30 We didn't know the Russians had taken it from Poland.

00:32:00 when we got there, we were asked for passports. We didn't have any.

00:32:30 They put us in jail and the next day they turned us over to the NKVD

00:33:00 They thought we were spies. We told them that we had just been liberated.

00:33:30 They didn't give us any food. They sent us to work. The next morning

00:34:00 The next day they questioned us again. Asked what we wanted. We said we want to work and get some food.

00:34:30 They said OK, they would give us papers. We started work and we were stopped by other soldiers.

00:35:00 They said we should go to city hall, where we would be given papers and work.

00:35:30 I noticed a woman listening to the conversation. She asked if I was Jewish and I said yes. She wanted to know what we were doing there.

00:36:00 We told her.

00:36:30 She asked if we had eaten that day, and when we said, no, she said to come to her house in five minutes.

00:37:00 We were there in five minutes and there was food on the table, and meat. I found out that she was Jewish.

00:37:30 Her general was in charge of bringing supplies from Russia to Poland, so there was plenty.

00:38:00 Finally she told us that here was not a place for you to stay.

00:38:30 She said we should go back to our home town. We said we would have to cross a border now. She said she would talk it over with her boyfriend the general.

00:39:00 He hid us in the back of a truck and in this way we went through the border.

00:39:30 I was scared to stay in ukřw. The AK was still looking for people.

00:40:00 So we went to Katowitch (ph) and from there to Munich.

00:40:30 Q: When did you come to the U.S.?

A: In Sept., 1949.

Q: Where did you live in Europe?

00:41:00 A little over three years, I lived in Munich.

Q: Is there anything else you want to tell us? Tell us about your family here.

A: Well, I think you met my wife.

00:41:30 I have three children.

00:42:00 And four grandchildren.

Q: Is there something you would like to share with your children?

00:42:30 No. I didn't want to talk about it. I think someday they're going to ask me. But they haven't asked me until today.

00:43:00 My daughter typed the manuscript. My son went into the other room.

Q: Could you share with us something about the trip you took with the children that you told us about?

00:43:30 I just wanted you to tell me what you did and the reasons for doing it. (He refers to a film his wife made.)

00:44:00 I took my children and their spouses, they wanted to see where their mother had lived.

00:44:30 At the same time they wanted to know where I lived through. We went to the barn, I showed them where we were hiding.

00:45:00 And so on.

Q: What year did you go?

A: About 18 months ago. (The interview was done Nov. 10, 1985, so it was summer, '84)

00:45:30 If there is nothing more, we can finish now.

A: There is one thing more I would like to read to you.

00:46:00 Most non-Jews ask me today why the Jews didn't resist more, why they always went back to the Ghetto.

00:47:00 We didn't have enough ammunition to fight the Germans.

00:47:30 It was cold. But the Germans gave the Poles a kilo of sugar if they turned in Jewish people.

00:48:00 It was very hard to find rifles and revolvers during wartime since before the war it was illegal

00:48:30 To own any gun. When the Germans came in, they ordered everyone to turn in their guns and ammunition or be shot.

00:49:00 So that is why it was so hard. Later, people got some guns, the hard way and felt a little safer.

00:49:30 The Jewish people didn't have guns. We went out in the middle of the night to help as much as we could.

00:50:00 Ninety-five percent of those who jumped off trains, or ran into the woods, didn't survive.

00:50:30 Everyday, the Germans and the Poles were looking for Jews. If not for the Poles, it would have been possible to go out at night.

00:51:00 Biderman pulls out another document. He declines to read anymore, It says it is a deposition he used in court proceedings, and says it can be read afterwards.

00:51:30 The American council (consul ?) sent me

00:52:00 and my father-in-law a letter asking if we could come and identify some pictures. We went.

00:52:30 The pictures were taken when they were much younger but I did recognize him.

00:53:00 This was in Houston. The man, Berger, I saw in the Ghetto, but I never came very close to him.

00:53:30 When I recognized him, the German consul told me no, this is not the man.

00:54:00 What happened, we called him Berger, spelled B-E-R-G-E-R. But his real name was Burger, B-U-R-G-E-R.

00:54 30 The German consul in Houston covered up the names. But in Germany they did find out that this was the same man.

00:55:00 That was in 1970 when they asked if I was willing to come to testify against this man. I went and I told them the story.

00:55:30 He shot a man just outside the Ghetto, he took him inside and shot him by the gate.

00:56:00 The young man was not dead, and managed to walk to the other side of the Ghetto.

00:56:30 Burger aimed back and shot him again. And that's why some others testified too.

00:57:00 They needed witnesses who saw him shoot the first time and saw him shoot him the second time too.

00:57:00 Let's go back to the German consul. He asked me what I knew about Burger.

00:57:30 I told him the story about how Burger killed two of my cousins.

00:58:00 But they didn't ask me about my cousins in court. In the end, they said they would like me to tell the story

00:58:30 Everybody listened, it was like a new story to them. They listened carefully.

00:59:00 I left some things out. Like, in Ghetto, the Germans would come through and want some gold.

00:59:30 The next time they would want fur coats. They did send in a lot of refugees into our city.

01:00:00 That way they found more Jews to kill.  
.END.→