

SAMUEL SOLDINGER -- PHOENIX COLLECTION

Phoenix, Arizona, May 16, 1989

Time

0:00:00 Samuel Soldinger was born August 28, 1924 in Krakow, Poland. His father was Solomon Joseph Soldinger, his mother Adele Pressinger. He went to school in Krakow. He had a brother who was three years younger than he.

0:01:10 His brother escaped to Russia and never returned. His sister was three years younger. She died in a concentration camp along with their mother.

0:01:30 His sister was Sabina, or Sheva in Hebrew. His brother was Jacob David. His brother was a good student in school before the war, and was involved in the Jewish Zionist movement, Akiba.

0:02:04 In December 1939, his brother went to Russia when he heard they were going to kill or castrate all the Jews. He later heard his brother died of typhus.

When war broke out, Samuel was in summer camp. They were all sent home. On September 1, in what he describes as a test, bombs were dropped on Krakow by the Germans. (He begins to read from a chronology he has brought.) When they first arrived, they gave all the Jews passes and papers. They would torture the Jews. He describes a torture, and says it was similar to that in China. The people were hopeless. The interviewer interrupts to point out the political differences between the Chinese situation and his in Poland. He agrees that the situations are different. He makes comments about how dictators are always compared to Hitler.

0:05:25 His chronology is from a book published right after the war. On 6 September, 1939, the Jews had to mark their businesses with large Jewish stars. Then they had to get new residence cards. They had always had residence cards in Poland, but under the Germans, their cards had large yellow stripes to mark that they were Jews. This was done on October 10.

0:06:30 On October 26, Governor Hans Frank, who would be executed after being found guilty at Nuremburg, outlawed the kosher butchering of meat. He also ordered forced labor for the Jews. The Germans would grab Jews off the street, including Samuel, who was a child. They were forced to work, they were beaten, and they were always hungry. The Germans would grab anyone off the streets of the Jewish section. He doesn't know if they were SS or just regular army. Later a Judenrat was established. There were instances of people who didn't want to work, and would pay others to do their work.

0:09:36 Next, all Jews had to register. There were 68,782 Jews registered in Krakow. He doesn't know what percentage survived the war, but it was very small. Next, all Jewish bank accounts had to be controlled by the Germans, through a special office. The Jews

couldn't withdraw money.

0:10:30 Q: Where the Jews with businesses allowed to keep their businesses?

A: The businesses were marked. The Germans would open up the stores for people to loot them. He can remember seeing one person walk out with one shoe and the other person walking out with the other. Everything would smell of gasoline, which was often used for lighting, because all sorts of damage was done.

0 ~ 50 In November, the Jews couldn't have cars or motorcycles. On December 1, 1939, the Jews had to wear a white armband with the Jewish star. All Jews aged 10 or older had to wear it on penalty of death.

On December 5 and 6, he remembers, for the first time he was shot at. He walked out of his building, which was a back building, forming part of a courtyard, on his way to buy something. He was shot at. There were several SS people posted all over, and they had shot at him. He jumped into his neighbor's home, and wouldn't leave for two days. The SS had some to loot private homes. Four to six soldiers led by an officer would come and take everything valuable. He heard of one woman getting raped during this. It was very common for the soldiers to force a pretty woman to strip and parade before them naked.

0:14:50 This happened in an area of Krakow that was 75-80 percent Jewish. His family was spared, partly because they had very little of value. Also, his uncle who had escaped from Germany was living with them. He spoke in German to the officers. Barof Shierman, his uncle, was a photographer, and a stamp collector. One day, the SS came. One man saw his uncle's stamp book. He began to look through it. Suddenly he sent all the other soldiers out, and then offered to buy one of the stamps. Samuel thinks this shows how crazy they were, when they had the power to steal the whole book, they became gentlemen when they saw the stamps.

0:16:20 On December 11, a curfew from 9 pm to 5 am. Jews couldn't go out without a special permit. On December 11, the Jewish students and teachers were removed from school. All the private schools were closed. A few months later, Governor Frank told the Judenrat that if they wanted their children to be educated, they should take care of it themselves.

0:17:50 The Germans were crazy that way -- one day they smiled at you and the next day they kicked you. It was horrible for the people. They didn't know who to trust.

In 1940, the Jews could no longer move to different cities or villages. Soon after, they had to bring in all their radios and cameras.

0:18:20 The Poles also had to turn in their radios. He was in camp with a man from his hometown who was able to smuggle in a small radio. The Germans didn't want them to get news from radios.

The Jews then had to prepare a list of everything they had, and then give all their belongings to the Germans.

0:19:15 On March 4, 1940, the Jews could no longer travel on any other part of the trolley but the back car. He remembers this well. The same sort of rule was in effect in Warsaw when he got there. Also, the Jews couldn't go to the big market in the center of Krakow. On May 18, 1940, it was decreed the Jews had to leave Krakow voluntarily or they would be deported after August 18, 1940.

0:20:30 This happened to his mother and he -- they were all alone. His father had died when he was nine. He was sixteen in 1940. They went to Narsaw, where she hoped to get a job as a nurse. They could go legally on the train. His brother had left for Russia in December 1939. (His sister went to Warsaw with them.) He was arrested after crossing a big river.

0:21:40 Then he went to Vilna, where he perished. Some people were permitted to stay in Krakow. He and his mother had gone to Warsaw. They were there a few months. They had to go into the Warsaw Ghetto. The Ghetto was still open then. They could leave during the day. There was a sign posted on the front of the ghetto that the area was contaminated with typhus. The streetcars still went through the ghetto, but the Jews couldn't ride on them. They rented a small room on the fifth floor of a building for a large amount of money. They had very little money left over. They bought passes to travel by train to his mother's sister's village, near Krakow, when they heard the ghetto was going to be closed. It was good they left. After the ghetto was closed, people started starving in the streets. There were people starving before the ghetto was closed, but not so many, because some were able to smuggle food in from the outside.

0:24:45 The Warsaw Jews suffered tremendously. The worst he suffered in the ghetto was hunger, and often the Jews had to be disinfected. They would be taken in large groups, often by building, outside of the ghetto to be disinfected. It was very unpleasant. There was a Polish man, not a soldier, who would beat them with a rubber hose. There were Poles who were nice.

0:26:30 It was impossible to fully disinfect the ghetto. In the little village, there was nothing to do. His mother couldn't work as a nurse, so she began selling margarine. Someone was teaching him English in exchange for margarine. He would play with the other children. Every Saturday, they held services in somebody's basement. It was hard, but not as bad as living under the SS constantly. He volunteered to work at the nearby airport.

0:27:45 They were paying labor wages. He also got a loaf of bread. He and his friends worked like regular laborers, but because they were Jews, they had to walk to work, an hour and a half each way. The workers got a pass. He makes some comments about the German obsession with official stamps. The pass had to be stamped periodically. It was a lifesaver, especially if he was

stopped by a German. He also took some pictures, although it was illegal. He thought the war would end in 1940.

0:30:30 He also worked for a while for the furniture store, before the airport. He worked for Mr. Konkerstein (phonetic). The owner was a Polish woman who was anti-semitic. Her husband was a well-known judge. They were collaborators; they had to be for her to keep her store.

0:32:00 They were forced to close their store. Mr. Finklestein, the judge, disappeared. The Polish woman told him to stay and got him more work. The shop was closed because they had made a chair with swastikas on it, and the SS objected to the idea of anyone sitting on a swastika. They saw the swastika as very important. He calls it a "terrible thing,~ but compares the German veneration of it to our respect for the flag.

0:35:00 The woman got a job running the Gestapo movie theatre next to the Gestapo headquarters. She was to replace the chairs in the theatre. He worked on this job. One day they had to work overtime to make a deadline. They needed permits to stay out past curfew. The women collected all the workers passes, and went to get the permits. She came back and told him he must leave. She did pay him. He had to go because when the Gestapo saw that he was a Jew, they said they didn't want any Jew touching their theatre.

0:35:25 Then he was working at the local airport. On March 3, 1941, the Krakow Ghetto was proposed, and all the Jews had to move there by March 20, for sanitary reasons. He says this is unbelievable, because the Jews are clean people. This is where the unsanitary conditions began because there were no facilities. Typhus and other diseases they had seen in the Warsaw Ghetto sprang up. It was also very bad in the Monthausen camp, where he arrived later. In the ghetto, they got no salt and no water. In Monthausen, 50 people would have to share a tiny cake of salt. He feel that if the Germans were smart, they would have helped the people working for them.

0:37:20 They went to the ghetto and got a new ID card, which was like a passport. His mother, sister and he were split up. He wishes the people in the ghetto had helped his mother, who was very sick, and had a very hard life up to the time she was deported in 1942. On October 15, 1941, it was decreed that the Jews could leave the Krakow Ghetto on penalty of death. In November and December, 2000 Jews from Krakow were deported to the Lublin area. Most of these survived and were brought back to the ghetto. When the mass deportations began in 1942, many thought they'd come back, too. He thinks the 1941 deportations might have been a psychological trick by the Nazis.

0:39:50 But only one person came back from all the deportations in 1942. In December, 1941, the Jews had to turn in all their furs. Jews and Poles had to turn in skis and boots to the Army. He was still working at this time, and was able to get a few things

for his mother and sister.

On June 8, 1942, all the Jews in the ghetto had to line up and get special stamps in their ID passes. If a couple wanted to stay together, the husband had to bring their cards together and they'd both get a stamp. During this line up, he saw his cousin and some friends. He's never seen them since. His cousin worked at the airport with him.

0:41:45 These people were deported to the death chambers. He remembers asking his cousin why he had pushed to be first in line, but his cousin shrugged him off. When his cousin got in the line, they weren't giving the stamps to boys. His cousin's and friends' ID cards (he refers to them as Kem cards) were taken away. The next day they were deported. The place where the deportations were made from was called, ironically, Freedom Square.

He then discusses a Pole, Pankavicz (phonetic) who owned a pharmacy near that square and helped many Jews to escape. He thinks that the number of Poles killed by the Nazis should be published.

0:44:50 He thinks the Poles and Jews should have worked together against the Nazis.

The airport people came looking for their workers since they hadn't come to work that day. The man who came took the Kem cards of all the workers he could find to get them stamped. The cousin's card had been confiscated. Samuel gave the man his mother's card along with his, hoping her card would be stamped as his wife. They did stamp his, and stamped his mother's, but then they must have realized she wasn't his wife and crossed the stamp in her card out.

0:46:40 The stamps were given out on a Monday. On Thursday, his mother had to line up to be deported. She went to the transport. A special SS unit was brought in: ~"The Army to Destroy the Jews," he calls it. It was headed by von Malotke. He would kill Jews individually. The bodies were lined up along the streets leading to the Freedom Square. He remembers working with a friend that day, feeling very depressed, knowing their family would be gone, and realizing they wouldn't come back like those from Lublin, but that this was the end.

0:49:17 It was on Thursday, June 1, 1942, that his mother was deported. On Sunday, the stamp was no longer any good. A new order went up about the death penalty. They had to return to where the first got the stamp. They were to get blue cards. Without one they died. The German employer who had gotten them the original stamp couldn't be found. Samuel went and got his own, he's not really sure how. Immediately afterward, everyone without a blue card was taken to an old factory and deported, and never seen again. He lost friends, his favorite uncle, and his baby cousin Johann.

0:51:52 He kept going to the airport and working. On October 28, 1942, the major deportation occurred. The people who were working had to line up near signs indicating their workplace. He waited

there for hours. They were supposed to go to the Freedom Place, but the Gestapo changed their minds. They were segregated (he doesn't specify on what basis) and sent to a different place. They were separated, told to go to the right or the left. He was told to go right; he was the last of 160 who went right. The ones who went left were deported. The remaining people were taken to the airport. They could never go back to the ghetto.

The people at the airport were much nicer than the Gestapo, more gentle, although he doesn't want to defend Nazis. He was rarely treated badly at the airport.

0:55:00 Usually they were more gentle. Once he was digging a ditch near a plane, and the pilot asked him to help start the propeller. The pilot would have never talked to him if there were any witnesses.

The work at the airport was hard and there was little food. They decided to escape. One person, Joseph Shamburg, escaped with their help. He was supposed to bring back help. They didn't hear from the man for months. The airport was a small camp with Ukrainians guards.

0:57:15 The man escaped through the wires without cutting them. The prisoners didn't know what the penalty for escaping was. The guards were very terrible to them, always beating them. He escaped, and they heard nothing until December.

0:58:05 They were repairing a fence that had been knocked down by a plane. The pilot came and asked them if they knew Joseph Shamburg. They said yes. The pilot asked for forgiveness, because he had been in charge of the patrol that had found him after his escape. He was executed on order of the SS.

0:59:20 Samuel became sick with rheumatic fever, although at the time he didn't know what it was. Later, he had to have artificial valves put in his heart because of the damage the fever did. He remembers lying in an empty ammunition bunker with no help. They gave him a few aspirin.

The SS wanted to send the prisoners to Klaschau (phonetic, he may have said Dachau. Names are difficult because the interviewee mumbles.)

1:00:00 The assistant leader of the camp, Leo Jones, came. First they took all the prisoners' property. He had to give up a fountain pen. It was a miracle he had this pen. This happened in May 1943. The ghetto had been liquidated, all the people had been shot on the street. The camp leader came to a nearby camp, and at that camp, he shot a boy that came from Mirchuv (phonetic), and killed him. The Jewish policeman said the camp leader would be coming back for an inspection of their camp.

1:02:45 After all of this, he was ill, so his friends put him in a foxhole and covered him. The bribed a Polish guard.

TAPE 2

0:00:00 (Begins with story of murder by camp commander.) The guard was a decent man who allowed Samuel to stay in the foxhole. The friends came back the next day. They carried him somewhere.

The camp commander came, and he killed the camp doctor after the two got in an argument. The doctor was a young, nice man. Samuel knew him before the war. He was killed because he said he should stay at the camp, where they needed him. They forced the doctor to undress and shot him. Samuel recently met a man in Florida who was an eyewitness to the shooting.

0:02:18 The prisoners had to line up and were transported to the new camp. Samuel was helped by the Lord, he thinks. When they got to the camp, the guards asked for machinists and the like. He said they were good electricians. He was still shivering from his illness. Thirty "electricians" were put on a truck and taken to Schindler. They arrived on a Sunday. They were interviewed one at a time by a man who spoke Polish. He was still sick, but he went to work the next day. There he met some cousins and his godmother.

The leader of the camp had built a small camp of his own because he said the Jews had to walk too far from the main camp. He was a human being to them. He would entertain Gestapo men at his camp.

0:05:30 One night, Samuel was going from building to building. He was stopped by the Gestapo commander for the whole district. The man was drunk and had a gun in his hand. The guard called him over, asked him what he was doing.

In the meantime, Samuel wasn't ill, because he had gone into the hospital for a while.

The guard's name was Schoener, he thinks. He told the guard he liked to work, and that he liked the camp. He was a machinist, he said. The guard put the gun away and told Samuel to fetch Schindler's driver. He did.

Schindler, the man who ran the camp, once came to the factory. He was using Schindler's dishes to do the laundry. He didn't do anything to them. Schindler used to come around drunk. He once asked Samuel if he could swim. When he answered yes, Schindler told him he should swim to America, because it was bad in Europe for the Jews. He was a fine man. He had to show proper conduct.

0:08:50 He had to work in a sulfuric acid room where metals were burnt. A Polish foreman was in charge. Once the foreman went to sleep on the job. Schindler came, hit the man, and fired him. Maybe Schindler did this to show he was fair.

The next day a new Polish foreman was in charge. Schindler put Samuel in charge. The new foreman always called him Mr. Solding.

Q: What were you manufacturing?

0:10:42 A: Munitions. They were making parts and ammunition on the side. He describes the process. The chemicals were very bad for his health. He couldn't deliver his quota. The new Polish foreman asked him if he "wanted to go against the world." He used

some influence to get transferred to another part of the factory. He asked for the transfer after getting in a fight with another prisoner.

0:12:40 He was taken to a nearby hospital. They had to get a horse and buggy to carry him. They had to go to Prussia. The hospital couldn't diagnose his rheumatic fever. He went back to Schindler's factory. Then they were transferred to Monthausen.

0:13:50 Q: Did you get any medication?

A: Aspirin. His heart was always pounding and he had a fever. He met a doctor, Rubenstein, in Belgium after the war, who finally treated him. He discusses his heart surgery.

Q: Are you being compensated by the German government?

A: Yes. Dr. Rubenstein gave him an evaluation. He's gotten a small amount from the Germans. Dr. Rubenstein recommended more. He still doesn't get much. He now hopes to get a pension, since he is retired.

0:16:50 His nose was also broken during the war. The main reason he's getting reparation is his heart.

Q: In Monthausen, did the fever subside so you could work?

A: He had a few colds and fevers, but not really.

0:18:36 He worked in the same quarry as Weisenthal. He saw the movie about him, and thought it looked like he was in Switzerland. They worked in a stone quarry, they were barefoot. They were only given underwear, not even uniforms. Their underwear had an ID number.

He has a small tattooed number from the first camp. At Schindler's camp, they had their heads shaved and had uniforms. When they first got to a camp, they had their clothes actually painted.

0:20:30 Schindler was a fine man. He gave them more food. It wasn't adequate, but it was a little better.

At the airport, they played soccer against the guards. Once, a Ukrainian who didn't like their playing tried to cross the field through their game. The German mad him get out of the way. At Schindler's camp, they also played soccer.

The Gestapo didn't always come, but it was bad when they did. Once, they came while a doctor was their. He wasn't supposed to be. Once the Gestapo was beating a man and Schindler saved him by buying him for a bottle of whisky. He was at Schindler's camp a year.

0:24:50 Q: Were the living quarters better at Schindler's?

A: They were cleaner. There were showers with running water. The

prisoners had to provide their own soap. There were places to do laundry. He was always dirty from his work. At one point in a displaced persons camp, a person remarked that he had become waterproof from all of the grime on him. They went to Monthausen when Schindler went to Czechoslovakia to build another factory.

0:26:36 Their introduction to Monthausen was to be tortured as much as they could be. They were on the train for three days. They got off and were beaten and kicked. They were taken to a bathhouse next to a crematorium, and searched for valuables. He gave someone Polish money he had for some water. They were told that they were the first load of Jews who were not killed. Someone told them that this was a sign that the war was over, because the Germans were afraid to kill them. They were taken to the barracks.

0:29:40 They were shorn and taken to quarantine. It was very clean. It was small and very congested. People were put in beds head to toe. The guards were bad to them. They examined the prisoners' rectums for diamonds. All they were allowed to keep was a belt. He had hidden some family pictures in his rectum, but threw them away to avoid being beaten for them. He had put away his belt before the search. He tried to retrieve it, but was beaten by a Czech guard.

0:32:30 He won't defend Jews who voluntarily helped the Nazis, but will defend Jews who helped involuntarily.

In the quarry, they had no shoes. They were given smelly uniforms that had been worn by Russian prisoners. They had to dig out stones and dump them somewhere. There were no purpose, it was just to give them work. They would have to march with their stone. IF they couldn't make it, the SS man would push them down the quarry. If the SS man beat them, this meant their stone wasn't large enough, and they must find another stone. He chose a stone, but it was too small. He was beaten. He didn't think he could carry a larger stone. He dropped the first, but then he picked it up again. They didn't whip him the second time.

He went through this a few days, then realized he was going to perish. He pretended he was a window washer.

0:36:40 He would be beaten by the barrack guard, but he would do anything he could to not carry the stones. Then a train of prisoners from Dachau were brought in, and they had to carry the stones.

0:37:30 They were very happy. They then had to carry blankets. Then, they had to pick up sticks, they were told to be kappos He refused, and the guard hit him. So he had to be a kappo. He was put in charge of 150 prisoners. He didn't hit anyone. At the end of the day, someone was missing.

A guard came to arrest someone from stealing jewels.

He said maybe the group had originally left one man short, so no one was missing. Then Eckert, the guard, came.

They were sent somewhere else. They were given new uniforms and shoes. They were transferred to a new camp in private railroad

car. He volunteered to be an electrician. They were repairing damage from bombing.

He was woken in the middle of the night once to fix a light, but he didn't know how. He pretended he knew how, and in five minutes was able to fix them. The fuses had been knocked loose, not burned out. So he pretended to do something useful and then fixed them. The guards were surprised he could do it. After that, the guard would always greet him nicely. His friends didn't believe his story, but the next day he got extra food.

0:45:15 A few days later he was assigned to a big factory. He was transferred to a new block where he was until his liberation. There were mostly Russians in this camp. The camp was only ten percent Jewish. He saw a Christian German hanged a few weeks before the war ended. He was Russians hanged.

He once came out of the factory to see a Russian plane. The pilot was all covered in mud.

0:46:30 He walked back to the camp.

Once a week they had their heads shaved. They had a reverse mohawk.

One day, working in the factory, a guard took him aside and accused him of falling asleep and tried to kill him. He begged the soldier to let him off. He had accidentally fallen asleep standing up, and he hadn't meant to.

Then one day, a mean looking guard asked for his number, he didn't know why. A while later, bonuses were given to good workers, and he received thirty cigarettes as his bonus.

The factory made windows for tanks. He once made a mistake, but the foreman was a civilian and let him hide the mistake at the bottom of the pile, saying that the war would end before they got to it.

Once his German boss came to him and told him that when he bought cloth for his business in Linz before the war, he was treated like a king in Jewish stores, but treated poorly in nonJewish stores.

0:50:41 He was at the camp until May 5, 1945. He didn't have any shoes. He had shoes he had gotten in Linz, but they were torn. He once went to the camp commander and told him about the shoes. The camp commander told him to go to the man in charge of the dispensary and get some shoes.

0:54:00 He was once arrested in Krakow by a Polish policeman. He was arrested by the same man a second time. He then saw the man at Linz. He had been a prisoner at Auschwitz.

On May 5, 1945, the prisoners were evacuated. They were marched to a mountain, Shtierig. They were given a whole loaf of bread and some margarine. They were going into a bunker. They realized the Germans intended to kill them all in the bunker. They decided to try to escape.

The Polish kappo came and told them they were liberated by the Americans. They were to return to the camp. He had to carry people back. Passing by the factory, an American came out and made

the Germans give up their weapons.

Before the Americans came, the prisoners had made plans to save themselves.

In the hospital, a priest gave him some boots. He helped out in the hospital.

1:00:00 end.