

RG-50.120*0035

Elerat, Erna

Tape 1 of 3

- 1.02 She was born (family name, Markowitch) in September 1920 in the town of Auschwitz. Describes the town as 70% Jewish, mostly religious, middle class and living well. The local Volksdeutsche contributed to commerce and there was the prevailing German culture and language – residue of the original Austrian rule. The concentration camp was eventually constructed at the Polish military base, which had existed nearby for years. She came from a large, cohesive family with four siblings. There was an iron factory, they were not religious and were active in the Zionist youth movement. She spoke German at home and Polish at school. She felt anti-Semitism especially after 1933 with restricted schooling. Relatives left for Palestine. When her brother returned beaten from Breslau studies in 1937, it was the first time that they heard about Gestapo acts. Describes herself as a wild “tomboy” and fearless.
- 1.26 Describes the outbreak of war – bombing of town and the Polish nursing home on the first day of war. Her family (except for her brother in the Polish army) escaped by walking to Krakow and taking a train to Tarnov (in the direction of the Russian border). It was considered safer than the Germans for men and it is where her father and uncles had escaped. Her mother stayed in Krakow with her wounded brother who was in the hospital. She returned to Auschwitz and saw her first Germans there (and in Krakow) and “Wehrmacht behaved quite nicely” and life was almost normal. In November 1939, she went with her sister toward Lvov to look for their father. They were jailed for 4 days at the Tarnov border by suspecting Russians. Eventually, all of the family (except the brother) were back in Auschwitz and life was described as almost normal. Except for some humiliations, the “Germans let us live in peace.” This was October 1940.
- 2.06 With brother and sister, she volunteered in response to the Judenrat notice, “if youth, volunteer and parents can stay at home.” On November 5, 1940, they were sent to Annaberg, Oberschlesien (by train). Describes camp, run by German S.A. as “not too bad” initially and parents were safe. Men worked on road construction and women worked in the kitchen. In December, brother was sent with others to construction on the Auschwitz concentration camp. Parents received his ashes when they tried to release him. It was the first time the rumors regarding exterminations were believed. Describes meeting Obersturmfuehrer Lindner who was in charge of all of the Jewish camps in occupied Poland. She was sent to camp Ottmuth where she worked as a nurse after a 7-month training (with Dr. Wolf Leitner, who was respected by the Germans and sent to various camps to deal with health emergencies). She spent about one year there where the living conditions for those working in the sickrooms were far better than for those working on the roads. She sang German songs for Lagerfuehrer and won the return of her sister.

- 2.37 She faked appendicitis by eating sugar plus Benzin. Escaped from the hospital barely recovered from the surgery. She went searching for Dr. Leitner. She went by train to Sosnowich and succeeded in saving her parents. Her fluent German and fearless approach to S.S. Sondercommando saved her repeatedly.
- 2.56 Describes working as a nurse in Annaberg, Ottmuth, Blechhammer and Parschnitz (in the Sudeten area) where she spent most of 1942. Parschnitz had a central clinic for many of the women who worked in the area's textile factories and where Dr. Leitner was the regional doctor. She describes their work, lack of medication, doctor's examinations (Dr. Leitner had returned from Blechhammer from Russia, with Typhoid-infected railroad workers. Also, her mother and sister were brought to Sosnowitch rather than getting transported to Auschwitz (camp). Her father died earlier of Pneumonia.
- 3.16 Describes in detail how on September 12, 1943, she, Dr. Leitner and two nurses were sent to accompany a "transport" of about 300 forced labor workers who were sick with typhoid and dysentery by train and truck to what she recognized as Auschwitz concentration camp. All were pushed and thrown into a huge windowless structure, made to undress, and the iron doors were closed behind them. Suddenly, the doors opened again and German officers entered with a woman and newborn (apparently the reason for the doors' re-opening, thus, saving her life, as explained subsequently at 4.41). She approached the German officers asking to release them since "we were only assigned to accompany the transport." The four were indeed let out and the iron doors were closed behind them. Soon, they heard screams from inside and then quiet after 15 minutes. They were in a state of shock, as they knew where they had been, although they saw no crematorium or chimney then. They saw stacked bodies in heaps outside the building where they were detained.

Tape 2 of 3

- 4.00 She was assigned to Block 10 as a nurse to women undergoing gynecological experimentations, mostly radiation of and surgical extraction of ovaries. Sterilization experiments were conducted in Block 21 (the male counterpart). She describes activities on each floor, surgeries, names of several doctors, and their responsibilities. Mengele visited occasionally. She was told that he was the one to order them out of the gas chamber because nursing personnel were needed. Young Greek girls were most experimental patients. No sterilization and no anesthesia. Many died. Mentions names of co-workers and some are in Israel now. Describes big Jakov, the corpse carrier, and other helpful people. Was told and saw many corpses of liquidated political and "a-social" prisoners in Block 11 as well as those of German-deserter-soldiers. There were relatively decent living conditions (with food and beds) for those working in Block 10. Jealous Slovak co-workers had her transferred to Birkenau in January/February 1944.
- 5.01 She was transferred to Block 2 with terrible living conditions. Describes the "Union" munitions factory where men worked, the S.S. guarded it, but the Poles

- delivered boxes to trains. She was assigned to be the translator to Wehrmacht in Auschwitz. Hessler, in charge of all transports, asked her to “swear allegiance.” The factory manufactured boxes (for bomb parts), locks, etc. Her role was to inspect. Describes sabotage plot to bomb crematorium, which involved girls stealing powder and transferring it via laundry to men in Birkenau. She knew nothing about it. Some were caught and executed. She was beaten and lost teeth. She had to resume work. Mentions Ervin Tichauer whom she met there (partisan?) will not talk even today. Describes difficult everyday life, locked camp, little food, many sick. Dead and sick bodies were placed outside each morning. Americans bombed latrines. Cites a comforting Wehrmacht soldier, “es geht alles vorueber, es geht alles vorbei, erst geht Adolf Hitler, dann geht seine Partei...” and some political prisoners with whom one could talk. No knowledge of the situation outside. Mentions Ernst Landau, Ernst Hoffman (the latter was executed by Polish court following a milder sentence in Nurenberg).
- 6.01 Describes trading goods for food at “Union.” Women prisoners whose job was to sort clothes of liquidated transports found hidden money and other valuables (Hungarians hid jewels in jam glasses) and traded it for food from the men who were generally better fed. Even S.S. men had “their Jew” from whom they got valuables and brought back some food from their vacation.
- 6.08 She describes life in Auschwitz (Auschwitz #1 – apparently transferred there after Birkenau, while still working in “Union” factory) as much better than Birkenau. She had clean (non-striped) clothes and showers. She attributes the fact that she did not get sick to the better hygiene there. Food was also better and they were even given coupons (premia) to “buy” shellfish. Even the Red-Cross visited (they visited Union” but never Block 10) although they did not talk to the prisoners. Those who worked in “Union” were considered the elite because their work was important. It was a Wehrmacht factory. In Birkenau, she remembers the crematorium. Especially after the explosion, the one remaining was not enough and the corpses were thrown into a ditch dug around the camp, and burned – was called “Koeningsgraben.” Toward the end, it became a common sight with the increased number of transports and neither time nor space left. Describes seeing the ongoing selection among the Hungarian transports. Unlike the more local Jews, they did not know where they were going so the youngsters refused to part from their parents and stayed with them to the end.
- 6.39 On January 18, 1945, there were explosions, the alarm sounded, and they were forced to march out. Describes very difficult walking under winter conditions with minimum food, corpses everywhere, and shooting (“Todesmarch”). They walked 7-10 days until Magdenburg in Oberschlesien, then by open car trains to Ravensbruck. There were hundreds of women of all kinds. At Malchow (on Elbe) she was told about the war’s end.

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- 7.03 After two weeks in Ravensbruck, they were marched to Taucha. As they approached the Elbe Bridge, she and two others hid in pipes along the way while the rest were herded, shot and exploded with the bridge. She changed clothes and burned out the number tattooed on her arm. They were saved by a young P.O.W.. Described chaos as she moved back and forth between the Russian and American sectors trying to get to her family.
- 7.28 Arrived in Sosnowitz on May 7, 1945, and the war had ended. Mother and sister came. She worked and got papers for all. An American Jewish soldier helped. Connection with Tichauer.
- 7.40 Testimony – meanwhile, she was picked up daily for 2 to 3 months to testify to the IMIC (International Military Investigating Committee) in Munich(??) Describes how some camp commanders were unjustifiably accused because they beat up Jews without realizing it was done to save them (Demeren? Also, Feldman). Describes the terrible Lagerfuehrer of Blechammer, finally beheaded in Katowitch. Recently, she was shocked when listening to Dr. Leitner's taped testimony because it was very inaccurate, but it was recorded just two months before his death in the USA. She states she gave very detailed and complete testimony (at the police station?), which was even used in the Nurenberg trials. It was the first time for such formal testimony. She does not understand why it is not know to the interviewers. She did not testify at Yad Va'shem or at the Diaspora Museum.

(see the end –note- by the translator, Hava Bonne)