RG-50.120 #107
MOR, LITMAN

TAPE 1/5

1.01 to 1.45 Family background. Born Litman [first name] Murautchick in 1917 in David-Gorodok, a small town east of Pinsk near the Russian-Polish border, a typical 'shtetl' with 1/3 of its 12,000 population Jewish. The non-Jews mostly of Belorussian-Tatar rather than Polish origin. He was the sixth of seven children. His father textile merchant. The Yiddish speaking home was traditional/observant rather than orthodox in religion, with greatest emphasis on education.

He describes the positive influence his tolerant home, his schooling in the 'Tarbut' Hebrew school, the Zionist youth movement on his self confidence as a Jew and a person; as well as the generally cohesive and self-contained life of the town's Jews who, though aware of the Gentiles' hostility, did not feel inferior.

1.47 to 2.13 Life in Vilna. At age 14 [1931] he left for Vilna to attend an accredited Polish Gymnasium, which enabled him to enroll in 1935 at the university in Vilna as a chemistry student – all with his families, budgets, visits home, and especially value of learning and the active cultural and political life at the university.

2.13 to 2.45 He describes the rising anti-Semitism after 1933, 'Numerus Clausus' at the university, and being punched there in the mouth – as a Jew – in 1937 –which still humiliates him today. Jewish students were active as communists, Zionists or Bundists and had a rich political and cultural life. With two older sisters already in Palestine, he was preparing to leave too.

2.47 to 3.00 War outbreak in Sept. 1939 occurred with he visited home. Describes his parents' acceptance of his difficult decision to leave; the Russian attack on his border home town; his escape to Vilna; his final brief visit with his parents on Nov. 17, 1939.

3.02 to 3.34 Describes and explains political life and affiliations of the Jewish students at Vilna University in the 1930s.

3.34 to 4.00 Describes his and others' presumed and assorted escape options from Vilna during the late 1939 to early 1940 period. He explains how at that time he was more afraid of the Russians [who then deported Jews to Siberia] than of the Germans, thus remaining 'stuck' in Vilna til June 1940.

TAPE 2/5

4.06 The Germans in Vilna. When the Germans entered [July 4th], they appeared less threatening than the Lithuanians who were known to kidnap and murder Jews without warning. He succeeded in obtaining assorted jobs to be saved from forced

labor deportation. He eventually obtained a coveted Yellow Star when the Germans started to thin out the Jewish population in January '42, which allowed him to move into the ghetto. He explains it was a 'struggle for survival'. His concerns were more about the fate of his family than his personal fears or humiliations.

4.50 Life in the Vilna Ghetto. He describes the crowded conditions, living 30 persons in a room. Initially, they were isolated and unaware of concentration camps and events elsewhere. Youth movement members started organizing around the ghetto soup-kitchen in matters of mutual help. There were unbelieved rumors of atrocities and they sent emissaries to Warsaw and Bialistok to find out what happened.

5.33 He talks about a meeting Dec. 21 when they heard Abba Kovner's proclamaton of 'Walking like sheep to the slaughterhouse' and the effect it had on them, and the slow realization that Ponar – the forced labor camp – will surely lead to death.

5.52 to 6.13 Jewish underground. As they were beginning to realize that the ghetto will lead to death, an underground preparing resistance/revolt emerged. He was member of a 5 person underground cell, working daily for the Judenrat – in charge of ghetto housing assignments – and by night printing underground leaflets and trying to obtain arms and ammunition [with the money collected for rent and food stamps during the day…] He emphasized, though, that the underground was more ideological than practical. But as such – important.

6.14 to 6.30 He describes the 'reasonably normal' life during that period , his relative freedom, working at assorted jobs; his main concerns about the fate of his family and increasing frustration by the unknown which lead him to plan joining the partisan outside.

6.31 to 6.44 The 'Wittenberg Day'. Describes that event, which involved an imprisoned communist member of the underground about the be delivered to the Germans by the Judenrat police, ad the day [July 16, 1946] he ripened his desire to leave [had written about that event in his book].

6.50 to 7.00 Escape from the ghetto. He describes the escape, meeting at the cemetery and going into the woods.

TAPE 3/5

7.11 to 7.50 Joining the partisans. He describes his escape with about 20 people; a 7 day trip of walking at night and hiding in the woods during the day. Shaike Bogen was the leader and he his deputy. They were nearly caught by the Germans several times. They extracted food from local peasants, threatening to use his pistol. He talks about the effect of having this gun on his feeling now more like a fighter than a mere refugee. Describes the 'rules' of partisan living; the Germans'

policy during 1943/44 of avoiding entering partisans' territory at night. He describes the various ethnic groups within the partisans, and the Jewish ones' – including his own – experiences of anti-Semitism. Describes the eventual German blockade of their area which forced them to flee into the surrounding swamps and near collapse. They reorganized under the leadership of Markov. Their assignments involved intelligence, recruiting food, collecting ammunition, sabotaging airports and trains behind enemy lines; the importance of finally in November 1943 obtaining enough arms to make him feel like a 'real' partisan. He describes assorted incidents of partisan life, the relationships within them and especially their attitude towards their Jewish comrades who were singled out and often ridiculed.

8.32 to 9.30 He discusses in great detail the issues of the Jewish partisans within the larger partisan body, his own reservations from and non-identification with the gentile ones – although he adjusted well and did not feel personally threatened. Makes frequent comparisons among Russian, Ukrainian, Poles, especially in their attitudes towards Jews, who were never allowed to feel as equals even within the partisan community. He elaborates on his feelings towards the Germans as mainly war adversaries at that point, not yet aware of the extent of their atrocities.

9.30 to 10.00 Leaving the partisans at the end of War. With the liberation of their area by the Russians, his orientation was to go westwards and to be discharged from the partisans and their still ongoing organizations, which he felt no more part of. He spent time as POW interpreter and other odd jobs but was most intent to discover the fate of his family he saw last in 1939.

TAPE 4/5

10.00 to 10.50 Traumatic return to his home town. He describes the difficult trip through roadless but mined areas to his home town and then the initial encounters with his town where no Jews were left, his family home empty and ransacked, townspeople shocked to see him and pretending ignorance of Jews' fate. It was at this time that he feels he experienced the Holocaust personally. He was eventually able to reconstruct the events of the day in July, 1941, when the local town people invited the German Einsatzgruppen from Pinsk to liquidate the Jews as presumable risky elements. All men – including his father and brothers – were shot. Women and children expelled and eventually perished. Nobody was left to testify. After two dazed days in town he was expelled as 'law breaking' because he entered neighbor's house where he saw some of his family's belongings; but he was able to retrieve hundreds of unclaimed letters addressed to his and other perished Jewish families by outside relatives.

10.50 to 12.00 [11.10 to 11.17 not audible] Conflicts, options, search for identity and activities towards war's end. He describes his conflicted state of mind following the encounter with his destroyed home and school; five years 'wasted' as a partisan, because he does not see himself as a professional soldier; alienated from

Russians, Poles, Ukrainians as a Jew, distrustful of the Soviet regime; considers options of emigrating to United States but his Hebrew early schooling propels him in the direction of Palestine where his sisters live. First, he returns to Vilna, searches for acquaintances [mentions names]. He has a promising job as an engineer but asks his puzzled Soviet boss to be relieved as his decision to emigrate matures. Established contact with relatives.

12.08 to 12.50 Work in refugee repatriation and emigration. Describes his activities as a [first time paid] community worker, with various Zionist organizations dealing with transfer of refugees to emigration centers, gathering Jewish children from monasteries and more; activities involving traveling within and between the chaotic countries of post-war central Europe. Describes his first encounters with the delegates of the Zionist parties ['Shlichim'], as well as with soldiers of the Jewish Brigade, in the context of preparing displaced persons for illegal emigration to Palestine, and the emotional impact of these experiences. He elaborates upon the complexities and difficulties of working with the varied groups of refugees and the differences between partisans and 'displaced persons', [psychological v. real], and tells the story of the hunger strike by the camp refugees against its UNRRA staff as an example of the incredible cultural gaps between them.

12.50 to 13.10 Attitude towards Germans, etc. Elaborates upon his feelings towards the Germans and Germany, past and present, and the issues of taking revenge of and the emotional effects of the Holocaust.

TAPE 5/5

13.10 to 13.28 Testimony and book reference. Refers to his testimony on refugee issues at the 1946 Truman Conference on Refugees which was cited also in wubsequent book: Bartley Crum Behind the Silken Curtain.

13.28 to 1354 Refugee-related. Further elaborations on his experiences, activities and thought relating to his involvement with the life and organizations of refugees – until his own [legal] emigration to Palestine in August, 1946.

13.54 to end Epilogue – in Palestine: describes impressions, reception by sisters, attempts to find work. Discusses the difficulties of immigrant absorption, participation in Israel's War of Independence and adapting to its society; his professional life and the importance – to him – of public service. He ends by presenting very thoughtful evaluations and reflections on the effect of the Holocaust experience on him and others.