

SIMCHA ROTEM
RG-50.120*0130

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW TIME INTERVALS

Tape 1 :	1:01 – 3:01			3 hrs	
Tape 2 :	3:05 – 3:44				39 min.
Tape 3 :	5:07 – 5:33	3:36 – 5:07		1 hr	57 min.
Tape 4 :	4:03 – 5:33	8:39 – 9:08	6:04 – 7:05	2 hrs	59 min.
Tape 5 :	4:03 – 5:33	8:39 – 9:08	6:04 – 7:05	2 hrs	59 min.
Tape 6 :	7:07 – 10:11			3hrs	4 min.
Tape 7 :	10:12 – 13:20			3 hrs	8 min.
Tape 8 :	13:20 – 15:47			2 hrs	27 min.

Missing: 5:33 - 6:04

Tape 1

- 1:01 Born 1924, Warsaw. Describes family and early background.
- 1:14 Describes start of war Sept. 1, 1939. Family background continued.
- 1:26 Antisemitism in school. Knifing incident.
- 1:30 Meeting with Mordechai Anilevitz of Hashomer Hatzayr. Joins Akiva Zionist youth movement.
- 1:32 Start of war. Describes conditions in Warsaw. Family members killed in bombing. Simcha wounded. Warsaw surrenders two days after Yom Kippur.
- 1:48 Mistreatment of Jews by Germans.
- 1:53 Burial of family members killed in bombing.
- 1:55 Describes birth of his sister in 1934; his relationship to her. Still-born brother in ghetto.
- 1:59 First German decrees against Jews. House searches. Economic deterioration; food shortages. Simcha's black market activity; trading in nearby villages; going with gentile documentation.
- 2:12 Transfer to Warsaw ghetto. Describes living conditions. Leaves ghetto to stay with relatives in small village.

- 2:18 Return to Warsaw ghetto. Describes ghetto life; contacts with friends; slave labor and opportunities to trade for food with gentiles; search upon return; trading through ghetto fence.
- 2:34 City tram passing through ghetto without stopping. Mother, attractive and looking gentile, went into city; gentile friends helping with trading for food.
- 2:40 Describes black market in ghetto. Starvation, stealing of food. Simcha did not starve. Father did not, and was not able to help – prayed and studied.
- 2:47 Describes Rabbi Clonimus Shapiro before transfer to ghetto.
- 2:52 Inactivity of his sisters. Father teaching them.
- 3:01 Describes atmosphere, unreality of ghetto life.

Tape 2

- 3:03 Moving to relatives in village. Taking care of sick aunt and young child in ghetto. Working during day for gentile farmer as cow shepherd. Small ghetto formed in village – one street. Incident of German shooting a Jew. Decides to return to Warsaw ghetto.
- 3:19 Returns to Warsaw ghetto. Parents no longer there. Found them in former kibbutz Cherniakov. Working for *Volks Deutsche* agricultural farm, treated well.
- 3:25 Cousin, Edek, shows up one day, tells of his escape from Treblinka. Worked with clothing of those killed. No one believed him. Simcha did believe it.
- 3:34 Start of his resistance activities. Describes forced labor from ghetto. Comments on varied behavior of Judenrat members.

Tape 3 – following 5:07-5:33 segment.

- 3:35 Describes German-run show camps to mislead ghetto Jews. Describes different work experiences.
- 3:51 Back to Cherniakov, latter part of 1942, after “Large Expulsion” (*Gerush Ha-gadol*) – 350-400,000 Jews from Warsaw ghetto, July-August 1942. Describes mood in ghetto afterwards. First clandestine mission to ghetto, Sept. 1942. Mistrust of ghetto Jews.
- 3:59 Describes situation in ghetto after Large Expulsion, meetings of resistance movement members. Return to Cherniakov.

- 4:08 Closing of Cherniakov, move to Warsaw ghetto. Organization of resistance groups.
- 4:12 First uprising – Jan. 1942. Start of weapon acquisition.
- 4:19 Mother and family hidden by gentile friends in a hole dug in the barn. Simcha chooses to stay in ghetto with resistance movement.
- 4:29 Met Yitzhak Zuckerman. Mentions Arik Vilner, killed in uprising. Changed to Enoch Guttman group. Describes activities to get money for weapons acquisition; assassination of Jewish Nazi collaborators. Simcha's participation in freeing Jews arrested by Jewish police to be turned over to Gestapo. Impact on ghetto population.
- 4:42 Elaborates on January uprising – he was not active in it. Active group was able to kill some Germans, get some weapons; "action" stopped by Germans.
- 4:45 Family hiding in ghetto before going into hiding by gentiles. Describes how he got "Kazhik" nickname – pretending to be gentile Pole while seeking money from rich Jews for weapons acquisition.
- 4:50 Digging tunnel under street at entrance to ghetto for placement of explosives. Ignition depended on electricity in ghetto functioning.
- 4:54 Kidnapping of only daughter of a rich Jew to influence him to give money. Simcha dressed in Gestapo uniform, threatening to kill father – he gives in, but wants "gentile" Kazhik to save his daughter.
- 5:04 Justification of the many money extortion activities.

Tape 4 – skip to 5:07

- 5:07 Training in use of weapons. Communal living. Reconciled to expectation of dying – periods of depression and of high spirits. Positive attitude of general population.
- 5:17 Ghetto population going into previously prepared elaborate bunkers to hide. During uprising many wanted to join but there were no weapons for them.
- 5:28 Describes failed efforts to secure weapons from outside ghetto.

Missing 5:33-6:04. Skip past 8:39-9:08 to 6:04.

- 6:04 After first day of fighting (April 19), looking for bunker to spend the night. Reactions to first encounter with Germans – helplessness and elation. Dresses in SS uniform.
- 6:16 Looking to establish contact with other units. Buried Michael Klebfish – first casualty of uprising. Collected weapons left by Germans.
- 6:21 Early morning April 21. Artillery and airplane bombing – ghetto completely on fire. Smoke drives everyone out. Looking to join groups in center of ghetto. Describes terrible sights of burning ghetto. Meeting up with groups of Enoch Guttman, Marek Ettelman and others. Simcha nad Shlomek sent to check for Germans at ruined wall. 40-50 resistance fighters – 15 come through. Reach large bunker in central ghetto.
- 6:34 Looking to make contact with other resistance groups. Germans leave ghetto at night. Piles of dead. Finds child in arms of dead mother. Connects with other groups, meets Lutek Rottblat who was in same bunker with Mordechai Anilevitz, Zacharia Artstein. Hears there are only few casualties among resistance fighters. Looking for food in abandoned bunkers.
- 6:43 Finding skulls in burnt bunker, barrel of honey. People fighting over food, others sharing their food with fighters.
- 6:49 Decision that further fighting in ghetto not meaningful - try to reach forest to resume fighting from there. Tuvia Vuzhikovski one of rare fighters succeeding to return to ghetto while attempting to escape – no one succeeded to reach forest.
- 6:52 Did not know Anilevitz during resistance. Night of May 1 Simcha requested to go to Aryan side to try to organize help for escape from ghetto. Henya Grabowski, gentile Pole, saved Vilner from Germans. Zalman (Siegmond) Friedrich went with Simcha to Aryan side. Adolph Hochberg accompanies them within ghetto to escape tunnel. Emerge on Aryan side in a house. Pretend to gentile they are gentile Poles stuck in ghetto having come to buy clothing from Jews. Informed house is under guard.

Tape 6

- 7:07 Lists members of his group: Zvi Edelstein, Shlomo Shuster, Dvora Baran, Zipora Zerev, Zipora Raboff, Adolph Hochberg, Josef Oberstein, Yashinski, Batja Filman, Shlomo Alterman, Avraham Eiger, leader Enoch Guttman.
- 7:08 Ambushed by Poles leaving house. Escape by jumping on passing truck. Reach safe house.

- 7:20 Simcha decides no one will help. Gets idea to use sewers. Germans fill sewer tunnels with gas. May 7th attempt to return to ghetto via sewers fails. Describes successful return.
- 7:45 Finds group of 10 fighters, including Pnina Greenshpan, Shlomo Schuster (friend), Yurek Blones (?). Takes them and others over to Aryan side.
- 8:07 May 10 – bringing out fighters from sewers. Over 30 leave by truck to Lumyanki grove near Warsaw. Returns to Warsaw to find out group of 15 in a nearby tunnel were killed. They were betrayed by Pole who at first was very helpful to fighters.
- 8:35 Buying lemons to alleviate effects of poisoned air in ghetto. Describes what he heard about events in ghetto while he was not there. Communal suicide in main bunker after Germans filled it with gas. Does not know whether Anilevitz was killed or killed himself. 2-3 managed to escape; one died soon afterwards.
- 8:46 Describes conflicting recollections about promises to bring out 15 who perished in tunnel.
- 8:49 Yehuda Vengrover is one who escaped from main bunker but died soon afterwards. May 11 or 12 returns with Antek to Lumyanki. Planning for group to join partisans. Three return with Simcha to Warsaw.
- 9:09 Bringing food to Lumyanki. Describes attitude of people there: expectations from and high regards for Simcha and others posing as Poles. Survival problems in Lumyanki.
- 9:24 Transfer to Vishkuv forest. Describes hide-outs and activities in Warsaw.
- 9:33 Goes with Lallo, man from Chenstakhov, to ghetto vicinity. Simcha saves Lallo from blackmailers who identify him as Jew.
- 9:42 Describes suicide of Franja Batus. Men-women relationships between fighters in ghetto. Contacts with surviving Jews in ghetto. Meeting with Polish policemen whom he knew before the war. Recruits him to help fighters: policemen brings weapons to Chenstakhov, serves as courier, brings out at least 20 Jews from ghetto through sewers (August or September). Describes meeting with these survivors. They attack food and a number of them die from it.
- 10:02 Consulting with Feleg, older Polish man, former devoted communist, who provides plan for hiding ghetto group. Feleg arrested by Gestapo; another Jewish member of resistance also arrested. People and weapons removed from these hiding places.

Tape 7

- 10:12 Describes attempted killing of Polish women suspected of betraying hiding places of Jews.
- 10:20 Stefan arrested, killed while trying to run away (early May).
- 10:31 Feleg released from Gestapo by bribery. Money obtained from Jewish agency sources. Describes meeting with Feleg; discovers source of betrayals. Natek killed trying to run away.
- 10:46 Describes collaboration with Stefan Pokropek (gentile). Purchase of weapons arrangement betrayed; Gestapo come in shooting. Simcha escapes through window in hail of bullets. Tadek killed. Stefan killed.
- 11:01 Gypsy fortune teller warns Simcha will be in great danger and will also receive regrads from Kriska, who he thought was killed by Gestapo (she survived).
- 11:10 Simcha and Antek move to different hiding place. Describes their underground activities, including contacts with Jews inside work camps.
- 11:30 Land-lady suspects Simcha being Jew. He offers to prove otherwise. Describe clandestine activities; Antek's problem with his Polish pronunciation giving him away.
- 11:46 List names of people of the underground that he worked with.
- 11:50 Describes change of hiding place in 1944.
- 11:53 Describes visit to his parent's hiding place. His sister perished visiting ghetto on eve of uprising. Moves his younger sister to different hiding place.
- 12:05 Organizing Jewish fighting group to join expected general Polish uprising.
- 12:12 Start of general Polish uprising; Simcha participation.
- 12:18 Escape or release of Jews from central prison (Pavjak) a few days before general uprising. Attempt to contact them.
- 12:33 Planning of Polish uprising unit, which Simcha had joined, to escape from Warsaw. Simcha objects to their wanting to stop fighting only after 4-5 days. They accept his objection. (ghetto resistance fighters fought for 3 weeks). Contacts his own Jewish group. They decide to join socialist Polish uprising forces. Jews refuse offer to be excused from fighting units.

- 12:43 Leaves Polish uprising unit – they already dispersed. His Jewish underground group leaves Warsaw hiding places to join Polish general uprising units.
- 12:49 Describes Polish AK resistance group forcing Jews to enter burning market to bring out food. Given assignment by AL to arrange movement of fighters via sewer tunnels.
- 13:03 Antek orders move of his group to Leszno street. Simcha objects to going towards German occupied area. Arrive in apartment on Leszno Streer. At night Germans in courtyard ordering everyone to come out but Simcha and his group don't go. House set on fire. They escape burning building by jumping out window from one flight up. Hide in sewer.

Tape 8

- 13:21 Leave sewer after about 24 hours. Everything around burning or smoldering. German command post in house next door. Find Allied surrender leaflets. Caught by Ukranian collaborators, bribe them to be taken to civilian population collection point. SS officer stops them, identifies Jews, orders to take them to Ukranian command post. German soldiers don't let them through – it is a battle zone. Arrive to civilian collection point and disperse. Taken by train to transient camp.
- 13:50 Evacuated from Warsaw with old, women and sick. Describes contacts with Krakow underground, obtaining identity papers and money.
- 14:08 Goes to Krakow. From there goes to contact partisan leader Michal Borwicz.
- 14:21 Describes difficult conditions in Krakow prior to capture by Red Army. Clears German military identity check. Contacted by Warsaw underground members. Joins group hiding in hospital, pretending to be sick. Serves as helper to priest at Sunday services.
- 14:42 Moves to Grodzisk. Dec. 1944 – searching for his parents. Comes to house of Poles where they had been hidden, but they are no longer there. Ordered to cross front line, go to Lublin, seat of new Polish government. At front, German army in retreat. Russian army comes in. Goes on to Lublin in truck with Nazi prisoners of war.
- 15:04 Describes reaction to liberation by Russian army. Meets with Gomulka, head of Polish government, who takes him to communist party center where he meets with Sommerstein and AL leadership.
- 15:14 Returns to liberated Warsaw; city completely destroyed. His pre-war home occupied by Poles. Finds empty, large apartment in center city. Finds his father and mother. Recounts how they survived.

- 15:26 Searched and robbed by two Russian soldiers. Complains to Militia who go out and arrest two soldiers on the street. They are released because Simcha can not positively identify them.
- 15:31 Describes mother's reaction to her experience; his own adjustments to living with his past.
- 15:36 Illegal emigration to Palestine. March 1945 – to Bukarest. Meets Vitka and Abba Kovner and others. Common topic – revenge and implementation of revenge plans. Simcha returns to Warsaw for that purpose. Takes his family to Budapest and goes to Italy to meet others of revenge group.
- 15:43 Describes his relationship with Abba and Vitka Kovner.

END OF INTERVIEW

See also: Simha Rotem (Kazik) *Memoirs of a Warsaw Ghetto Fighter: the past within me*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994. (English)