

RG-50/120 #131
SHAUL SADAN

TAPE I

Background: He was born in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1925 [Charles Blaser], but as an infant moved to Middleburg in the Zeeland area. His parents' origins were partly east European and partly Portugese. He describes his family as assimilated, non-observant, though his father considered himself Jewish. His mother was actually his stepmother, a German Christian. [He never met his Jewish birth mother and only recently discovered a stepbrother.] He was the youngest of six children. There was no anti-Semitism. They were respected members of the community and Christians, especially Protestants, related positively to them as part of their high esteem of the Old Testament.

- 1.01 German Entry: In May 1940 the Germans entered and destroyed Middlleburg. His parents returned after a short escape to the country and refused offers to help them escape as they simply could not believe they would be harmed, or that anything happening in Germany would happen to them. But eventually the Germans forced all Jews to leave for Amsterdam, started recording their property and declared them 'enemies of the Reich'. Thus, at the end of 1941, the 120 town Jews plus hundreds from the surrounding areas walked towards the trains, while the town's people stood along their way to see them off.
- 1.28 Amsterdam: He lived with a Jewish family, his father at a camp for intermarried Jews while his mother took care of him from the outside. In Amsterdam he 'discovered the Jewish world' and elaborates on his new experiences with both Jewish people and customs. He describes the gradually increasing restrictions, having to buy yellow star, individual Jews being send east. He notes how their reaction was typically compliance with the restrictions and following the rules. The more 'common' Jews, however, together with their gentile counterparts, showed resistance and an anti-Nazi revolt by seaport workers was crushed. He describes himself as not fearful, although under stress, and attributes this both to his state of youthful excitement, coupled with ignorance, as well as to the relatively mild behavior of the Germans there at that time. He mentions what happened to his other siblings, who were in other locations already before the war.
- 1.50 Westerburg and another Camp: He describes packing his knapsack in preparation for Westerburg, which he believed to be a transit camp on the way to labor camps in the east.

Describes his trip and arrival [August 1942]. First time alone but still relatively calm. Spent two weeks there, as messenger. Further train travel but got off with selection of men 17 to 50, with whom reached small camp to work on train track for two weeks. Auschwitz prisoners there shaves them, assigned prison clothes and tattooed identification numbers.
- 2.11 Birkenau: They were transferred to Birkenau where they 'met hell'. Elaborates on the shock of that place, the constant feeling of imminent death, arbitrary and severe beatings, screaming, humiliations. Describes their Zellager [quarantine] barracks, the German Capo, the exhausting work of transferring stones. Saw transports to gas chambers and

crematorium. Possibly saw sister. Comments on the poor adaptability of Dutch Jews. Describes how he tried to survive in various situations, e.g., ignored severe wound while working. Describes how he tried to survive in various situations, e.g., ignored severe wound while working. Describes the need for older mentors yet the pain of losing such a relationship. Constant expectation of death. Spent almost a year in Birkenau.

- 2.50 Warsaw: 'Volunteered' for outside work, expecting gas chambers, but was marched [with several hundreds] to be sent to clean up Warsaw ghetto [after the revolt]. Describes the location and tasks of dismantling broken buildings and selling bricks to Poles. Camp was full of lice and typhoid. No heat. Of the original 3000, 15 survived. Got typhoid, became 'muselman' and was near death but managed transfer to 'Revere' through the German Capo Jup. Incredible story how he remained there as doctor's aid and even performed amputations. Thus recovered and survived. When the Russians attacked Warsaw they were sent to Germany, walking 120 km to border.
- 3.36 In Germany: Dachau, Kaufering: Describes travel to Dachau and working at building underground factories. Sent to Kaufering camp #3 where he was wounded in transferring huge concrete bags. Describes the struggle between hiding from the exhausting work and starving. As the end of the war approached, he volunteered for the very risky 'bomb commandos' who were neutralizing bombs which were dropped in the area, a job which got more food from guards. On one such mission American bombardment killed the guards but the prisoners returned alone to their camp as roaming alone in Germany was riskier. Finally, after an American bombardment killed 400 prisoners they were freed.
- 3.52 First moves after liberation: Describes his first moves after liberation; the behavior of the older German guard, the worse behavior of the Ukrainians and the Croates. Became translator for the American units, was well cared for. Returned to Holland to find his area and house under water and no one there. But found father in Amsterdam, and sister elsewhere.

TAPE II

- 4.01 Westerburg revisited: Describes disappointment in visiting the place after the war. Repeats his experiences there related in Tape I above.
- 4.11 to 5.08 Auschwitz and Birkenau: Repeats his experiences in these camps as related in Tape I with some elaboration on topics such as: shock, the selections, the barrack structure where beatings took place [4.24], working on tracks with Sosnowitch Jews [4.30] and smoldering coal, about two months in labor camp near Katowitch within the first and last periods in Birkenau [4.30 to 4.46], kinds of suicides, training the youngest prisoners in construction [Mauerschule] which he learned for 6 weeks but didn't work at, describes groups in camp [4.53, 5.01], exploitation by Capos, enviable closeness of Greek prisoners [5.13], details of food distribution [5.06]; describes his thoughts on survival, death, his current feelings about Germans and Poles. In Birkenau til winter of '43/'44.

- 6.10 Warsaw: Repeats his experiences as related in Tape I, with some elaborations.
- 6.29 Liberation: Repeats his experiences at liberation and elaborates on his role as field translator when the American forces pursued Nazis in the conquered areas, during their field investigations.
- 6.39 Subsequent activities: Describes return to Holland as in Tape I. Found parents in Amsterdam and an older sister. Another sister also found who hid in 13 places. Two other sisters and brother did not survive. Did not wish to live in Holland and through contacts with the Jewish Brigade decided to go to Palestine.
- 6.44 Thoughts about the ability to share holocaust experiences: He describes in detail and painful memory the difficulty of telling about his experiences in the camps; about being ignored by disbelieving people and about his consequent withdrawal and distrust. These problems he shares with all survivors. The Eichman trial was the important event that finally opened the eyes of others to believe the horrible events of the holocaust. Although it is somewhat easier for him to talk about it now, he still finds it difficult to talk to his family about it. He believes that opening up survivors' stories, as he is doing now, will be very important for the healing process.

Time-Coded Notes Version 2

RG-50.120 #131 2 Tapes
SADAN, SHAUL

TAPE 1

- 1.01 Shaul Sadan [Blazer] was born in Holland in Rotterdam. When he was 6 months the family moved to the southwest city of Mettelburgh where they stayed until their forced exile. Shaul was born on 2/28/25. They were an assimilated, secular family, although they knew they were Jews. Few Jews lived in that city, and many of their friends were not Jewish. They did not experience antisemitism there. It seems that part of the family's origins was eastern Europe. Shaul's exploration of his family roots traced part of the family in Holland, to 1717 [when the civil registry of the population began]. Part of the family hailed from Portugal, on his mother's side.
- 4.55 This fact influenced the family during and also after the war. Shaul went to a public school, both elementary and high schools. His family was well known for its talent in the performing arts [theatre]. Until this day, people in Holland sing Shaul's uncles' tunes [Louis David]. Shaul's interest also pulled him toward the theatre.
- 5.41 Until 1940, when the Germans invaded Holland, life was lived predictably. Shaul's city [as well as Rotterdam] were leveled by the Germans.
- 6.19 At first, Shaul and the other friends his age, didn't think anything meaningful was taking place.
- 6.40 On May 10, in the morning, the bombardment took place in complete surprise.
- 8.03 Shaul's father had a car, and he took the family to one of the farms ____ where the father knew people. The family stayed there a few days. Shaul, his father and his step-mother fled together. [Shaul was the youngest child at home.]
- 9.50 Shaul's father had a clothes making business, and he had many clients among the local farmers.
- 10.01 Although the city was burning, 4 days after the bombing, Shaul's family returned to their home which, miraculously, still stood.
- 10.12 Until 1942, they lived under the Nazi occupation without major upheavals.
- 10.23 Shaul's step-mother was a Christian German woman, and they would visit the mother's family often. They loved Shaul.
- 11.14 One day, 2 Dutch friends of Shaul's father came to tell him that they will move him to England, because the future did not look good for the Jews. They were part of a rudiments of an underground, which would cross people on boats to England. The father laughed, dismissing the danger.
- 12.14 Life continued normally for a time. The first prohibitions centered around school, theatre and movie houses.
- 15.05 The non-Jews [Protestants and Lutherans] related to the Jews as to the 'chosen people'.
- 16.12 They knew about the persecutions from the refugees who fled Germany, but in Holland the Jews considered that was a phenomenon particular to Germany.
- 18.26 One day, a German soldier acquainted with Shaul's mother's family, came to warn them of the fate expected to the Jews. The father did not believe it. It was 1941.
- 19.12 The family was forced to move to Amsterdam because of reasons of the war. Their goods were expropriated, the entire population [non-Jewish] accompanied the Jews to the train, and saluted them. The Germans tried to stop this, to no avail. It was the end of 1941.
- 24.02 There were only 120 in Middleburgh.

- 28.50 Arrival in Amsterdam, where Shaul 'discovered' the Jewish world. It was spring 1942.
- 31.25 Shaul worked in a doll factory.
- 33.03 Deportations begin.
- 36.00 When the yellow patch law went into effect, many in the non-Jewish population, the lower class, in fact, wore it too.
- 53.35 Shaul was taken to a concentration point at the Jewish theatre. After registration, they were taken to the train station where they boarded a passenger train to Westerburg - where they were registered again by other Jews - where he was appointed a messenger. It was the end of August 1942, and they stayed there for 2 weeks.
- 2.03.30 One day Ahaul was included in the list of people going east, to work camps. They travelled by passenger train again, and he was given the task of guarding the baggage in the cargo car. He was also given an arm band with a red cross.
- 5.20 At a certain point in the trip, Shaul was transferred to a regular car, and later on the train stopped at a place where all the males between 17 and 50 years of age were told to get off. Shaul was not yet 17, but at internal force propelled him to join those. It was September 12, 1942.
- 8.47 They were taken by truck to a small camp that was next to Auschwitz, as Shaul ascertained later on. The camp was located between Auschwit and Katowice. There were going to work on the train tracks.
- 10.57 After a short time they were taken to Auschwitz, and then sent to Birkenau.
- 12.22 When Shaul arrived in Aschwitz it was the first time he thought about death. The atmosphere did that to him.
- 23.08 The walk to Birkenau.
- 29.19 Work at Birkenau consisted of transporting big boulders, from a pile to Auschwitz, and to bring another one from there to Birkenau. Each was 5 km of abuse by the Nazis, shooting, dog assaults and more. Many of the prisoners died on those walks.
- 32.19 One day Shaul and others from Holland heard that a transport from Holland was arriving to Auschwitz. From the fence, they saw the trucks going directly to the gas chambers. On one of the trucks was Shaul's sister, Ettie. He wrote, in her memory, a poem in Hebrew.
- 'Like a Flame': I saw you, my sister, on the way to your death. I saw you and you didn't know... I saw you, my sister, on the way to your death: you were beautiful and proud. I saw you, my sister, on the way to your death. I look at you, tearless. I saw you, my sister, on the way to your death. I will always remember you as a flame.
- Shaul saw the flames, afterwards, shoot out from the chimneys.
- 36.48 Shaul thinks that to the Dutch Jews, who had never suffered discrimination or persecutions, getting accustomed to the murderous way of life in the camps was practically impossible.
- 38.00 The despair. The difficulty to establish friendships for fear to lose the friend, which in turn can get one depresses, and then dead.
- 50.00 This sense of impending death prompted Shaul and the 2 other young people from Holland and Belgium to

- volunteer when the call came, to a supposedly better job. They knew that those people were sent to their deaths. It was the winter of 1943.
- 52.00 They were surprised to see that instead of being led in the direction of the gas chambers, they were taken to Auschwitz. There they were allowed to shower, they got a new change of clothing, and were given a loaf of bread! For several days they were in the barracks.
- 53.29 One day they were told they were going to Warsaw. They didn't know there had been an uprising there. They arrived to clean up the ghetto in October 1943. Uprising had occurred in the spring of that year.
- 56.16 The ghetto camp was teeming with lice. This was a phenomenon Shaul was not familiar with. As in Auschwitz and Birkenau, during Shaul's time, there were signs: 'One louse equals your death'.
- 59.00 There were 3,000 Jewish prisoners in the camp in Warsaw. Soon after their arrival, in the winter, they began to be felled by disease. Only 15 survived! Of these, 12 more died after they left Warsaw.
- 3.01.28 Description of the camp in Warsaw, with its 16 barracks.
- 7.20 Shaul contracts typhoid fever; has to crawl instead of walk, and can barely speak. He is a true "muselman".
- 10.00 A few hours, this is how he felt, before he died. Shaul saw one of the guards whom he knew to be from his mother's birth-place. He asked him for a job. The guard, a nurse, told him to come to see him that night in the infirmary. He was sure Shaul would not survive to keep the appointment - but he did!
- 14.00 Shaul remembers little, except for the fact that the nurses there washed him [he had lost all sphincter control] and treated him for lice [which had found a welcoming place in Shaul's leg wounds, oozing with pus]. Shaul's mother's landsman allowed him to stay there, under the infirm quota, and after he got well he became an illegal aid there. He also became assistant to the surgeon.
- 17.52 There were many amputations required after gangrene set in in frozen limbs, and because they couldn't stand the foul odor the surgeons taught Shaul how to amputate. He was not yet 18.
- 21.00 The German SS called him 'her doktor'. The local Polish partisans invade the camp, trying to free the prisoners. The attempt fails. The Germans decide to move the prisoners to Germany [an order to shoot them is, inexplicably, reversed]. They walked from Warsaw to Kutno, on the Polish-German border, 120 km. They had no food and dug for water. It was summer, and very hot.
- 37.03 From there they were put on trains and transported to Dadian. They travelled for 4 days.
- 38.46 They had to build underground factories.
- 39.12 Shaul was sent, after a short while, to Kaufering 3 [?] Work there. His survival there. It was close to the end of the war.
- 49.00 Liberation by the Americans.
- 57.21 Shaul knew some English. He became the translator of the American liberating unit.
- 59.01 Return to Holland and search for family. Encounter with his sister.
- TAPE II
- 4.00.00 Recollections of his arrival in the first camp, in Westerborg, in September 1942.
- 8.04 Leaving Westerborg.

- 16.28 Recollection of his arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The feeling. The forced labor.
- 30.00 While working building the train tracks, Shaul worked together with Jews from Sosnowice, who would come from their own homes, where they still lived. Sometimes, they would bring food to the rest of the workers.
- 5.08.00 More details about work and food in the camp.
- 24.53 Showers, the regular ones, could also kill people. Sometimes the water was too hot and people would collapse and die. Also, no one knew whether they were walking into a real shower or to death by gas.
- 45.00 The attitude toward God and religion; the responses.
- 51.00 Survivors perceptions of those about to die. Their reactions to death.
- 6.00.00 Shaul's opinion of the Germans then and now revulsion. His hatred of the Poles.
- 9.10 Exit from Birkenau. Destination: Warsaw. The conditions there: illness, hunger, lice infestation, cold.
- 16.52 5,000 inmates arrived to clean up the remains of the ghetto.
- 19.03 Conditions in that camp in Warsaw were much worse than anything in Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- 29.25 Shaul's work, after liberation, for the American army, in the unit that searched for Nazis.
- 33.00 Description of a hunt like this.
- 40.00 The return to Holland.
- 42.00 Encounter with the father, in Amsterdam. Two sisters and a brother had also survived. Two other sisters and the other brother did not return.
- 43.00 Shortly after, Shaul felt he did not belong in Holland any more. He found a way to go to Israel.
- 44.39 It was not possible for the survivors to speak of their war experiences in Israel. They experienced guilt for having survived. The Israelis were not interested in the survivors' stories.
- 46.53 Survivors psychological baggage.
- 48.27 Shaul himself was silent, never told the story to his own family until recently.
- 53.16 Shaul feels that only since the Eichmann trial, the survivors were legitimized, and the dialogue began about what had happened to them.