

RG-50.120 #0136
SHLOMO SHAFIR

1.00 [start tape ½] - 1.26

Background: He was born in Berlin in 1924 and was raised by his father and grandmother [mother was sick], in Eitkoven [?], a small town in the Lithuanian-east Prussian border. He describes his Lithuanian family [though German speaking], and the Jewish schools he attended because of anit-Semitism. In 1936 he moved to Kovno to study at the Jewish Gymnasium; he learned Hebrew and was influenced by Zionism. He describes his social life and influential teachers,

1.28-1.47

Under Soviet Rule: He lived with his father who moved to Kovno in 1938. As the Soviets took over Lithuania in 1940, they confiscated his father's business [he was considered a 'bourgeois'] and soldiers lived in their house. He describes how they lived with increasing anxiety about the future and were planning for him to immigrate to Palestine. He also describes his participation, as a student, in Zionist group 'Brit Zion', its partially underground activities, and the mutual dislike between them and the Soviets/Communists.

1.48 -

Germans Take over Lithuania: The Germans entered three days after his graduation [June 22, 1941]. Anti-Semitism became much worse than before. He describes what they already knew about the war events from refugees and also from BBC broadcasts. Zionists' group activities became even more consolidated. He describes in detail his involvement with their paper 'Nitzoz' [Hebrew], its writing, editing, distribution. Mentions several fellow students who took part as well.

2.05-2.12

Germans in Kovno: Although the first week's murders were actually carried out by Lithuanians, they were also protected by [nationalists] Lithuanians and some who actually hid them. He describes how the Germans soon started 'orderly executions' and they were living in constant fear. His grandfather was killed soon and his grandmother and mother were moved to the ghetto and killed in September, presumably.

2.13-2.46

Life in Kovno Ghetto: He and his father were moved into the Ghetto, which was 'closed' August '41. He describes the different German 'Aktzion', including the 'Big Aktzion' which reduced the number of Jews in Kovno to 30,000. He describes their miraculous repeated escapes from being rounded off to be executed during the Aktzions. Describes how the remaining family members lived. He worked in forced labor, also in 'Brigade' - workshops outside Ghetto. Father worked in ghetto administration with community elders, and dealt with registering Jews' properties. Mentions names. Describes also the Zionists [including his 'Brit-Zion'] and other underground groups' activities, changes in their composition and relationship with the partisans who were mostly communists. Describes the groups' daily activities and publications, connections with Jewish police, school and other ghetto organizations and their attitudes.

Repeat of earlier topics:

2.48 Returns to describe Lithuanian reactions when the Germans entered, reorganization of Zionists parties, age composition of these groups and their relationships with the police.

3.00 Aktzions and gathering in Democracy Square. Attitudes towards self and others.

3.19 Editing and working on the underground newspaper. Topics and issues discussed [as of Sept. '43, the ghetto was considered a concentration camp, though really a forced labor camp].

3.33 - 3.47 March '44: After Children Aktzion[?] there was autonomy in ghetto, and police served Nazis. Beginning to hide in bunkers ['malinas']. Police killed in Aktzion. Names of those who participated in the writing.

3.48 - 3.52 Last Weeks in the Ghetto: Describes the Germans last activities; his own and others' hiding places; main party members were killed July '44.

3.53 - 4.00 [end of tape 1/2] Deportation: Was deported, with aunt, to Stuttgart, then to Dachau on July 13, 1944. Stuttgart was the worse because of capos beating.

4.03 - [start tape 2/2] Stuttgart: Describes short stay there; evacuated on July 20th, '44 [date of attempted Hitler's murder]. March through Nuremberg where residents threw candy at them [not knowing they were Jews]; by cattle trains to Dachau.

4.11 - 4.49

Dachau: He describes the camp and his forced labor work there. A hospital stay due to blood poisoning was shortened as he found that sick people were likely to be sent to Auschwitz. He explains the difference between Dachau Kaufering #1 and Dachau Kaufering #2. He was moved from #2 to #1, and continued his extensive underground Zionist activities and even theater [partly initiated by the SS] on Christmas '44. Describes what they knew or heard about the progress of the war and allies.

4.50 - 4.57

Evacuation and Liberation: Describes their evacuation, by train and march, to central Dachau camp. American attack killed many prisoners. Some escaped into forest, some returned to the camp, including himself. They were liberated on May 2, '45, helped by villagers. Typhoid epidemic, his father sick. Describes receiving the entering American army in blankets - like the photos - and the first few weeks afterwards. His father died.

4.58 -

After Liberation: Describes reading in Dachau library; being treated for paratyphoid in hospital but escaped to avoid being returned to 'land of origin', i.e. under Soviet rule [together with most Zionist prisoners] and with the help of Jewish American soldiers.

5.06

Moved to camp Freiman with the help of Jewish officers, spent two weeks in St. Totilien hospital. Describes in detail the reactivation of his Brit Zion organization and the rejuvenation of their Hebrew periodical Nitzotz. End to their underground status. In July '45 they established contact with the Jewish brigade. Describes his own activities in detail, joining political party, meeting Ben-Gurion, the '46 Zionist Congress in Basel.

5.30

Describes the survivors generally: most suffered more from sickness and starvation than directly from the Germans [who were interested most in their work output]. Also allows that the Zionist groups and his Brit Zion organization were just a small minority among the majority who followed self-gratification. His group, with its many branches, were working towards immigration to Palestine. Generally not advocating revenge on individual Germans. Describes his life in Munich.

5.50

Recounts his recollections of liberation at Dachau, transfer to camp Freiman and St. Totilien, living in Munich and working as paper editor, then Bergen Belsen and finally immigrating to Palestine in April 1948.

6.00

Elaborates on his thoughts regarding revenge, describes survivor conferences and the issues dealt with, various political and ideological leaders' views on these subjects. His current political views and affiliations.

6.10 - 6.30 [end of tape 2/2]

Describes his own life, his marriage to a survivor he met in the camp, his adjustment to life in Israel, service in the army and work as a journalist and writer. His main interests in writing, teaching and studying are the topics of German-Jewish relationships and its history.