

RG50-120\*146 4 TAPES

Shotan, Moshe

TAPE I

- 1:01:01 Moshe Shotan was born in Svencionys, a village not far from Vilnius.
- 1:01:20 He was one of 6 children. Father worked in all kinds of jobs. Mother was a seamstress. All the children went to Yiddish school.
- 1:01:44 Moshe began working with his father at age 9.
- 1:02:04 Prelude to WWII, when war broke out between Russia and Germany in 1941.
- 1:03:26 22 June, 1941, when war broke out. The children were on school holiday for the summer. Local authorities fled, and the Jewish population panicked, as the "Germans were coming".
- 1:04:27 The Jews knew about the persecutions and prohibitions in Germany. They also knew about the ghettos in Poland, and the difficulties of the Jews there.
- 1:07:40 The Jews of Svencionys began fleeing eastward toward Russia, although the road was fraught with danger.
- 1:10:25 Moshe's family couldn't flee because his grandmother couldn't have made it. she was --- so Moshe, his family and friends decided that they would fight the Germans from the rear lines.
- 1:12:00 Decision to fight the Germans, even before they arrived and caused tragedy, arose from deep seated convictions. Moshe grew up in a Bundist home, where the rights of people were always discussed. The Germans were not only the enemies of the Jews, but of mankind. Moshe was also educated through the works of Victor Hugo, Jules Verne and others. He saw that not resisting was not the way to victory. He was also greatly influenced by his teachers.
- 1:18:00 Before the Germans entered the village; the Jews had obtained some weapons.
- 1:19:00 Arrival of Germans in town, and first cruelties; prohibitions, regulations.
- 1:23:02 Police force was made up mainly of Lithuanians.
- 1:27:00 Obtaining newspapers and a radio.
- 1:30:12 Radio Moscow exhorts the youth to go and fight as Partisans. [Aug. 1941]

- 1:32:02 Radio London exhorted people to collect weapons, but not to go out to fight yet.
- 1:32:50 Radio Jerusalem was also heard, but Moshe and his friends did not understand Hebrew. Help came from a member of a Zionist group in town.
- 1:38:00 Reasons for not getting along with the Zionists.
- 1:41:27 Order of expulsion of the Jews from the village came barely a month after the German entrance.
- 1:44:54 Moshe and his friend Shike decided to hide. Moshe's brother-in-law [and his family] was useful to the Germans. [He was in the printing business.] They were not deported to Poligon. Moshe's grandmother and a sister were taken. It was September.
- 1:46:48 Another sister, who had been spared deportation, was killed on the way to Glubokie to join her boy friend who had escaped there. She was 5 months pregnant.
- 1:47:55 A few days after the deportation, the Jews were sent to a ghetto. Shike moved in with Moshe and his family and the radio. Shike's family had been taken away.
- 1:52:44 A few days later, they heard that all the Jews in Poligon had been executed.
- 1:55:49 Moshe and others were hiding in the ghetto, but were not in the official roster. When others were sent to work, he was not. But, since he was not officially in the ghetto, he did not have a food ration. Thanks to a couple of girls intervention [the girls were friends of the Lithuanians] Moshe and the other illegal's in the ghetto were finally registered.
- 1:59:23 Jewish organization in the ghetto.
- 2:06:08 One of Moshe's jobs was in a storage of weapons left over from the Russians.
- 2:09:00 The theft of a sawed-off gun, which Moshe hides in his attic, was the beginning of a little arsenal in the ghetto. In the 'in' group there were now close to 20 people.
- 2:18:59 Berl Yohai was in charge of this underground group. Moshe and another young man were his lieutenants.
- 2:20:00 The story of the hidden revolvers, and its tragic ending.

- 2:30:45 Discussion in the underground group, whether to leave the ghetto and join the partisans, or to stay. The talk took place in the winter; it was hard to leave. The veterans in the group were for it, the younger recruits, against.
- 2:30:51 May '42. A group of Russian partisans killed 2 German officers. Vengeance is taken, this time, on the Poles of the town. At the head of the partisan group was one Markov, who at one point had been a teacher of Polish subjects in Moshe's school.
- 2:43:00 After Stalingrad, the Jews of the ghetto started to believe that the Germans will be defeated.
- 2:44:24 In the winter of 1943, the Germans brought into the ghetto more Jews from Bielorussia. Conditions were very crowded, and an epidemic of typhoid fever broke out. Many died. Work in the lumber mill.
- 2:51:01 Lumber mill in Doksht needed workers. Because the previous work was finished, Moshe's group was told to go to Doksht. He was sure they were being sent to their deaths, so he tried to hide. After they threatened to take his sister instead, he relented.
- 2:52:00 Work at the Doksht lumber yard was hard: 12 hours of work were followed by 6 hours of rest, around the clock. Food was practically nil. Moshe and another friend decide to flee. They make their way to the train station, in the direction of Novo Swenziani.
- 2:58:10 They jumped onto an empty train car ½ km from the station, onto a train returning from the front.
- 3:03:59 Arrival at Novo Swenziani and moved over to another small train with narrow tracks. Arrival in Swenziani, with the intention of going into the ghetto. Encounter with Moshe's mother.
- 3:13:00 They are forced to go back to the ghetto, and face their punishment: three days in a closed room a jail.
- 3:17:19 Judenrat gave the group 30,000 rubles, with which they bought a revolver.
- 3:17:48 End of 1943. Arrival of Jewish policemen from the Vilna ghetto who informed them that the Swenziani ghetto is about to be moved. The underground group decided to escape, independently of the partisans
- 3:19:30 He said goodbye to his mother, his 3 sisters, his brother-in-law and his

baby niece, and joined the group [19 boys and 3 girls].

- 3:31:53 Shimke Levi was the commander of the group in the forest. They walked c. 30 km.
- 3:34:33 It was a hard winter. Main goal was to make contact with other partisan groups. They spend 10 days and then went back to check on the family in the ghetto. The ghetto was readying itself for transfer to Vilna and Kovno. It was March '4-.
- 3:35:55 Arrival of Gentz and a few of his aides into the ghetto. Moshe doesn't trust him.
- 3:41:22 Moshe's family was sent to Kovno; however, Moshe preferred to go to Vilna. They were all killed on the way to Kovno, in Ponar. Brief stay with his uncle in the small Kovno ghetto. The way back to the forest.

## TAPE II

- 4:04:11 Most of Swenziani Jews were killed in Ponari, the ones who managed to escape arrived in the Vilna ghetto.
- 4:05:55 Attempt to find a train going in the direction of the Front. Trains heavily guarded by Germans.
- 4:17:08 Reunion with the others in the underground group.
- 4:17:39 Information on location of graves of different 'actions' given to the Jewish police by as German named Weiz. He also turned over to the police the clothes of the murdered Jews, for distribution among the people who were still alive in the ghetto.
- 4:18:45 Group makes contact with the partisans, the **Baranishky** forest.
- 4:19:00 Adventures on the way to join the rest of the partisans in the Kazan forest.
- 4:33:00 The group becomes full fledged partisans in the group **Chepaiev**.
- 4:35:29 The first assignment was to procure weapons for those who didn't bring any.
- 4:39:14 Moshe thought that, since his group was so well received by the Russian partisans in the forest, there is room for more Jewish ones. He said that since in the Vilna ghetto there is an underground - and they have weapons - he has to find a way to bring them also to the

forest. But the trek was 200 km.

- 4:58:57 Arrival in Vilna ghetto. Meeting with W. Henberg, head of the ghetto partisans, explaining their mission. After a week, the leaders of the ghetto partisans decided not to join Moshe's group in the forest since their mission in the ghetto was to organize an uprising.
- 5:05:01 The counter proposal was for Moshe to join the PPO, and stay in the ghetto. Moshe refused.
- 5:07:44 In the meantime, Shike arrived in the ghetto back from meeting the partisans commander and former teacher, Markov. The latter asked Shike to organize a group - among them his former students - to bring to the forest in Narocz [which was a larger base than Kazai]. The only requirement was to come armed.
- 5:24:51 Moshe is caught by the criminal ghetto police and tortured.
- 5:34:28 Moshe demanded a meeting with Genz, head of the Judenrat. Meeting also with Levar, head of the ghetto gates guards. After a long negotiation, Genz allows Moshe to leave the ghetto with a group of 20 armed future partisans. More wanted to leave, but it was not possible.
- 5:58:35 The group left the ghetto, under the direction of Shike Gertmasn, who knew the forest. Moshe closed the group, walking last - in order to help.
- 5:59:09 Arrival in Mantz, situated by the Narocz Lake.
- 6:03:06 Meeting with Markov. Drinking 'lechaim' over glasses of milk.
- 6:12:00 A new mission is given to Moshe and Shike, but Markov. To go back to Vilna, and bring the commander of the underground in the ghetto, Wittenberg, and one of the underground [communist or Lithuanian] from the city of Vilna.
- 6:15:54 An escort was provided by Markov, to accompany Moshe and Shike up to Podbroz, 50 km from Vilna.
- 6:19:05 All this happened between May-July 1942.
- 6:40:27 On the way to Vilna, they found that the city was in a state of emergency and that the heads of the Lithuanian underground had been taken. Moshe decided to wait a few days until things cleared up, but Shike wanted to continue. And he did, so that Moshe joined them.

6:42:47 25 km from Vilna's they decided to wait until the next day. Arrival in the ghetto. FPO tries to escape. Moshe starts negotiations with Genz to allow all of the FPO, and their weapons [about 200 people], to join Markov in the forest.

### TAPE III

7:12:00 Conversation with Genz.

7:17:07 PPO meets with Genz. Abba Kovner, Khiena Borowsky, Yankl Kaplan and Abraham Khvoinik. Moshe mediated between Genz and the FPO members. Genz allowed them to leave the ghetto, but with no identifying papers. FPO was in charge of organizing a group to go. Shike was already in Vilna, and waited for the group in order to lead them. So did Moshe.

7:20:00 Moshe was interested in taking his relatives and friends to the forest, too

7:29:00 It becomes clear to Moshe that his friend Shike has left the ghetto with a group from the FPO, without telling him.

7:31:00 Next day, news arrived that the group was ambushed, some were killed, some taken prisoner and some fled. They had been carrying ID papers showing that they had lived in the Vilna ghetto. Their families were taken from the ghetto, and killed [about 85 people].

7:36:00 Moshe cuts his link with the FPO, after the group decides not to send any more people to the forest, but rather rebel in the ghetto itself.

7:38:02 20,000 Jews were left in the Vilna ghetto.

7:39:00 Moshe feels that out of the three organizations in the ghetto, FPI, partisans and Genz, the latter was the only truly heroic one.

7:40:00 In praise of Genz.

7:45:00 Individual cases of ghetto dweller who either decided to stay behind, or to go to the forest, with or without weapons.

8:00:00 Before Moshe leaves the ghetto with his group, there is a recruitment of 2,000 workers and their families. The Nazis send them to Estonia.

8:09:21 After a month in the ghetto, Moshe gets ready to leave.

8:18:40 Exiting the ghetto in a group of 20.

8:25:06 Arrival in the forest, where Markov was not to be found. Glasman, of the

original group who had left the ghetto [and one of 10 survivors of an 80 + group] met Moshe and his people, and told them what had happened to that original group. Shike failed them as a guide.

- 8:54:46 Moshe leaves the forest, the politics with the FPO and his former friends, and strike out as a partisan. Two well known poets join the group: Kacherzinsky and Sutzkever. They had arrived with a fresh group from the Vilna ghetto; this time, the group had belonged to the FPO. Moshe goes back to belong to his original group: Nekamah.
- 8:50:00 Anti-Semitism rears its head in the forest, in the Markov group. Moshe becomes convinced that not the ideology of the Bund is right, but Zionism is: the Jews need a country of their own.
- 9:03:11 News arrive about a blockage set up by the Germans around the partisans. Worry in the midst of the Jews [those non-fighting ones].
- 9:05:21 Moshe was made to give up his weapon in favor of a non-Jew who had none. Only those with weapons could leave the compound to fight the Nazi blockade.
- 9:13:10 Moshe's group is made to stay behind, by the other partisans, when the latter flee the Germans.
- 9:46:00 After trying to flee to Czeremcicha, group returns to the forest. Moshe joins another partisan group, but not made up of Jews. They were going to the east, in the direction of Bielo-Russia. They were about 15, they were armed with a few rifles, on sub-machine gun. Moshe only had a hand grenade. Life with the non-Jewish partisans.

#### TAPE 4

- 10:00:00 How Moshe was saved from execution after having fallen asleep at his watch.
- 10:10:20 Activities of the partisans. Winter 1944.
- 10:31:32 End of April, beginning of May, the Germans are about to lay siege. Partisans decide to fight them, from a position in the cemetery.
- 10:40:00 Difference in treatment of Jews and non-Jews.
- 11:20:00 Encounter with a retreating German army, on the way to Pleshtchenitz with a Red Army detail.
- 11:29:06 Order to rejoin all other partisans in Minsk.

- 11:30:23 Moshe is stricken with typhoid fever, and sent to the hospital in Minsk, where he stayed for over a month. Afterwards, he was inducted to the Red Army, in Minsk.
- 11:33:00 Reaction of the partisans to essays by Ilya Ehrenburg. Moshe calls him the 'soul' of communism.
- 11:37:39 Moshe and his sister were the only ones to serve in the war.
- 11:40:00 Moshe's service in the Red Army, in the NKVD section.
- 11:50:00 After an early discharge, Moshe is intent to go to Palestine.
- 12:21:22 Moshe's account of his conversation with Alexander Bogen, when they were still in the ghetto Vilna. It had to do with Moshe's new belief that Zionism is the only way for the Jews, as it will lead to a country where they can be free.
- 12:25:30 About Gentz's attitude and behavior in favor of Jews in defense of Gentz.
- 12:51:32 Moshe's opinion of Wittenberg.
- 12:55:13 German anti-Semitism. Reflections.
- 12:58:02 Lessons from the Shoah: people don't learn from history; there's an inherent cruelty in people. One has to fear three kinds of people: 1, the influential ones, who have an answer to every question; 2, a mass of people, in ecstasies after a speech by a dictator; 3, the unthinking – indiscriminating people.
- 13:03:07 Moshe's biggest pain: loss of family and friends, all the victims, Jews and non-Jewish. In praise of David Hozak, the only bright point in the ocean of despair.
- 13:04:09 He was a 13 year old, bright and intelligent.
- 13:16:20 Moshe arrived in Israel in January 1949, via Cyprus, after a two year internment in a camp there. He left Russia in December 1946, through Poland, Czechoslovakia, France and Cyprus. From the boat, he was taken straight to the army. Then, he went to a moshav, left there, and moved to the city. Worked in building, for the most part.