

RG-50.120 #162

AVRAHAM WITZMAN

TAPE I

- 1.01.03 Avraham Weitzman was born in 1924 in Radom, Poland. [In 1992 he was 67 years old]. Parents names were Yosef and Esther Weitzman. There were 3 children: a sister was older than Avraham, and a brother was 4 years younger [Moshe]. Parents had a business of leather for shoes, which was the prevalent business in Radom. They lived very protected lives until Sept. 1, 1939. Home was observant. Father, following in the footsteps of his father, would go on pilgrimage to his rabbi. The last one of that dynasty was in Warsaw. Avraham's house was always open to visitors, and always generous with the less fortunate.
- 08.30 When war broke out, Avraham was 14 ½, a few days after the family returned from its vacation in Karabotka.
- 10.09 Radom had a population of 100,000 before the war. 1/3 of them were Jews. All kinds of Jews were represented in Radom, within its social ranks. The city was an industrial one. It was the center of leather manufacturing for Poland, and almost all the plants were in Jewish hands. All the youth movements were represented there. Avraham was a member of Hashomer Hadati, Akivah and Massada. On Shabbat, the Jewish businesses were closed. Avraham learned in many schools and cheders, because of his misbehavior. In 1938, he entered the Jewish gymnasium 'Hovevei Da'at'. He learned in Polish, but also in Hebrew. A couple of nights a week, he studied Talmud with a private teacher at home. He could read Hebrew freely, and would read the Hebrew monthly, published in Warsaw: On the way ['Baderech'].
- 17.20 The extended family was huge. Avraham's father was one of 10 boys and a girl. His mother was one of 4 sisters. Relations were very tight with them all.
- 19.41 In 1939 Avraham was supposed to start the first year in the gymnasium.
- 20.40 War tension had begun some time before, but after the annexation of Austria and the Sudetan [?], the Poles began reacting with patriotic slogans, mobilization, through street announcements and newspapers, began in August. But, still the first bombs that fell on Radom were a surprise to most.
- 23.25 On Sept. 5, many refugees passed Radom on their way east. Avraham's family began to think of fleeing too, but his mother nixed the idea. She still remembered the refugees arriving in Radom during WWI from nearby towns, and the upheaval it caused.
- 25.55 On Sept. 6 the first bomb fell on the Jewish quarter, on an apartment building, killing a few. On Sept. 8, German planes flew over the city, practically touching Radom's roof tops, and threw bombs and fired sub-machine guns. A few units of the Polish army

escaped through the city. At around 10 am, the bombing stopped, but a couple of hours later the German army on motorcycles entered the suburbs of the city. Then, the tanks entered the city, and other vehicles. There was no opposition. The Germans took over the public buildings, hoisting their flag on top of them. A militia, organized locally 3 days before to fight the Germans, was disarmed on the same day, and the Jews were isolated. On the next day, a Saturday, the first Jewish victims fell on the way to the synagogue.

- 32.49 On the first few days of the war, there was already lack of bread. The Poles helped the Germans to identify the Jews - who were then separated for worse treatment.
- 34.49 Tortures against the Jews - mainly the observant ones - began immediately. There were also many kidnappings to forced labor in the weapons factory.
- 42.00 A month after the entrance of the Germans in the city, the Jews who had factories were forced to turn over the stock to the invaders. They were interested in fabric and leather. Avraham's father hid some of his stock. A black market developed.
- 45.49 In December 1939, the Jews were commanded to wear a white armband with a blue star of David. It also became forbidden to exit Radom without a permit, or to walk on the sidewalks.
- 50.30 The Judenrat, of 24 people, was established in December 1939. Yosef Diamant was at the head. Lazslo, Blass, and other. The Judenrat followed the temporary community council, that followed the dissolution of the militia.
- 53.16 The Judenrat took care of the distribution of the limited supplies; welfare, registration, living quarters, labor [in order to avoid the kidnappings for the purpose of work].
- 57.58 Avraham's father and his older sister were obligated to go to work. He was not old enough yet. Avraham's father paid the Judenrat for a substitute to go to work for them.
- 59.56 In 1941, Avraham was sent to study mechanics for 10 months, in the weapons factory. That guaranteed him not to have to go to work.
- 2.02.56 Passover 1940: Jews still managed to obtain some of their goods for the seder. In that summer, Radom Jewry was forced to send 3,000 of their youth to work in the eastern front. That's how they found out that there were other camps in places they didn't know about: Chrzanow, Narol, and more. The work consisted in digging trenches against tanks, but the work turned out to be an excuse for torture. Many died. The rest were allowed to return to Radom.
- 05.08 Before the establishment of the ghetto, the order arrived one day to reduce the population by 10,000. Judenrat had to decide. The weakest classes, and the refugees who had arrived during the war, together with thieves and other undesirables, were chosen to go to the neighboring villages... but in no time, they all returned.

- 06.41 Hoe the Jewish police was chosen: 80, many of them, who paid to be in the police force, requested to be decommissioned once they found out what was asked of them. They were entrusted with collecting dues from the Jews, or stuff people into already crowded houses.
- 11.03 April 1, 1941, the ghetto was declared; on the 7<sup>th</sup> it closed. Until then, people who lived in comfort had to leave their residences and move to the ghetto. Avraham's house was borderline. The house itself was on the Aryan side, but its 2 entrances were in the ghetto. They were entitled to stay.
- 12.00 Avraham's role in his family 'business' of selling the hidden leather stock to Polish shoe manufacturers.
- 21.40 Informal education in the 2 years, for the outbreak of the war, to the closure of the ghetto.
- 23.00 Conditions in the ghetto. Soup kitchens. Hunger.
- 42.46 Actions were carried out since 1941 and earlier.
- 47.00 Judenrat and Jewish police also fell in the actions; many were deported to death camps and killed.[Others were appointed in their place.]
- 52.00 Judenrat organized a course on precision mechanics. Then, they suggested to the Germans that its graduates could work in their ammunition factory. Germans accepted the idea. Living quarters were erected by the factory so that workers slept and ate there, returning to their families in the ghetto, only once a week.
- 54.54 Rumors about tragedies in other towns began arriving in 1941 to Radom, like Lublin. The older people refused to believe that there was gassing, remembering the Germans from WWI. Rumors about mass murders didn't stop coming to Radom. There were also Actions there at the beginning of 1942: Jews were killed or deported to Auschwitz [the latter fact was only known later.]
- 56.48 Beginning of August 1942. There were 2 ghettos in Radom: the large one, Balova, and a smaller one. On the night between August 4 and 5 the small ghetto was surrounded and emptied. People were taken to the train station [many died 'en route']. Since some of the train cars were empty, the Germans closed 2-3 streets in the large ghetto, and deported the dwellers there. The SS and the Gestapo, together with the Polish police [and even the Jewish police!] took people out.
- 3.00.00 Abraham's family prepared itself for deportation, too. On August 13, after lunch,  
03.00 Abraham went to visit a friend. He was taken to the ammunition factory, to work. On the week-end he returned home for a few hours. His parents tried to persuade him no to go back. He refused, took the money and the backpack his mother prepared for him, and he returned to the factory. It was the last time Abraham saw his family!

- 12.11 On Sudany there was an uneasy feeling at around 11 am. A group of factory workers who returned to work, from the ghetto, told the rest that the ghetto had been surrounded on Saturday night. All were taken to trains, under the constant blows and insults from the SS.  
There were about 100-150 Jews in each car which was sprayed with chlorine. The trains took the Jews to Treblinka.
- 27.54 There were about 2,800 Jews left in Radom. A few blocks of the former ghetto were encircled and the 'small' ghetto was born.
- 29.17 Abraham worked in construction in the factory, not as a locksmith. Work was tough. He felt very isolated and lonely.
- 30.52 In Sept, 1942, Abraham fled the factory, to go back to the ghetto, 3-4 km. A friend took him in, and told him about the Action. It was dangerous for the family to keep Abraham with them.
- 42.00 Abraham left to work in a coal unloading and distribution plant; they lived there. Abraham was still depressed by the loss of his family.
- 46.12 Abraham was only 16! He would get up earlier in the morning to put on tefilin.
- 52.00 Passover 1943, Abraham decided he will not eat bread. A woman in the kitchen [his future mother-in-law] prepared for him an extra portion of vegetables; his co-workers assigned him to work in a less physically demanding job for that week.
- 54.00 At the end of May that year, after the Warsaw uprising, the SS voided the contract with the Wehrmacht for the work done at the coal unloading plant. The barracks were emptied, and the workers sent back to Radom. Abraham became then a legal resident there. He was put to work cutting peat for fuel. There were about 3,500 people in the ghetto.
- 58.00 The management of the different plants were at the hands of foremen or policemen. The Poles in charge were anti-Semites.

## TAPE II

- 21.41 Work continued until September 1943. One morning the workers found the wells [from where they extracted the peat] filled with the underground water that had frozen. Since there were no other orders, the workers had to go into the ice-filled pits to work. At noon time, they were all called to the police station, and forced to find other jobs. He found work in an explosives factory. It was 50 km away from Radom. Pionki, the place and the factory, were out of bounds for Jews. It was clear that the ghetto was going to be liquidated.
- 25.50 Arrival in Pionki. The factory was large, located in a forest. Dwelling places were in-
- 30.44 side the camp. Abraham worked in the bicycle maintenance section.
- 45.00 Contraband of food and other goods was not permitted. Punishment was public hanging.

People in charge of the workers were sadists.

57.39 A few tried to flee, unsuccessfully.

59.00 The internal administration of the camp was done by Jews.

5.01.45 Living conditions in the barracks.

02.41 In June, 1944, there were many rumors in the camp. Bunkers were being prepared.

08.00 On a day when Abraham and others were returning from work, they noticed that the camp was surrounded by Germans, who were loading the Jews on trucks to be transported to Auschwitz. Abraham was among the 300 or so who were left behind, and promised that if they did complete satisfactorily an import job, they would be transferred to German. They were moved to housing nearby. [Abraham and others already knew about Auschwitz in the Radom ghetto.]

20.00 The thin line between life and death.

33.33 Family life in the ghetto.

47.36 The work mentioned above [#08.00] had to do with dismantling installations for transfer to Germany. There were no tools available. They were to be transported by train. No cranes were available to load the parts onto the train cars. They worked like this for a month, in which they learned that the Russians were stopped near the Visle, and also rumors of the Polish uprising in Warsaw arrived.

49.16 When work was completed, the crew was told to board a train in Radom, on the way to Germany. On the way, the train was attacked by the Polish underground. The next day, after the train was fixed, they continued on their way. They arrived to a town where they were supposed to dig anti-tank trenches.

59.50 His friendship with 'Toledo'.

6.00.00 After a month of working digging trenches and living in a silo, the whole group was returned to Chestochova. There, they boarded a train for Berlin and the put on trucks to Oranienburg. The saw the destruction of the city as they were traveling.

03.32 They were brought to Sachsenhausen, where Abraham saw for the last time the words: 'Arbeit Macht Frei'.

05.14 The women in the contingent were separated and sent to Ravensbruck.

- 05.52 Camp's sights.
- 07.00 Induction to camp life. Distribution of ID numbers. Abraham's was 94,634! The number was superimposed on a Magen David made of 2 triangles: one was red and one was yellow. The patch signified that the person bearing it was a Jew [yellow] and a political prisoner [red]. They were commanded to identify themselves solely by their number.
- 13.26 They were quarantined for 6 weeks.
- 14.41 There were some German prisoners in the camp who were brought there after they rebelled against Hitler in April 1944, in Munchen. Many were professors at the university there. They were treated as badly as the Jews.
- 16.00 Description of the block.
- 17.41 Abraham studied German in the camp from a Nazi paper, with the help of a professor From Munich.
- 18.41 Schedule.
- 25.06 The 'disappearance of 'Toledo''.
- 26.00 Yom Kippur, 1944.
- 32.00 The French prisoners, and their punishment for rebelling also inside the camp.
- 47.10 Hanging tree was first feature to be seen inside the camp.
- 7.00.00 An uncle of Abraham arrives in the camp, only one of this relatives to be with him until the end of the war.

### TAPE III

- 09.56 Second part of October, 1944, the prisoners were told they would be sent to a secondary camp, to reassemble the heavy equipment they had taken apart in Pionki.
- 11.10 Arrival at the work camp of Glueben[?] to work in DAG factory where Abraham was appointed as 'manager' of the new arrivals , in charge of food distribution and barracks cleaning.
- 15.00 Details of food distribution.
- 24.25 Blood donations in exchange of food.
- 32.11 Transfer to Bergen-Belsen under great difficulties, because of lack of transportation and of

vehicles. February, 1947.

47.00 Abraham saw and received help from the SS during his stay in the Glueben camp. He cites the cases often in his lectures, to prove that the German officers, when they wanted it, did not have to forge their human traits.

57.20 Rattenwo. Work in a factory that produced airplane wings.

08.03.29 April 1945.

06.12 Conditions in Rattenow very difficult. Thousands of prisoners were there, from all over Europe. Abraham's group was the only Jewish one. For that, they were singled out for worse treatment.

10.00 Reflections on the influence of his parents' home and education to withstand the attempts of the Nazis to dehumanize the Jews in the camps.

20.00 February-March 1945. Returning from back breaking work, walking in the snow with wet

shoes, they saw the old people living around the camp, sitting in front of their houses, warming up their bones in the nascent sun of early spring. In front of the houses, little flowers [crocuses?] began to emerge from the melting snow. Abraham reflected on the beauty of nature, despite the ugliness of the war, and thought: will we get to bloom again?

21.47 25 April, 1945, working a day-shift. Suddenly, work stopped and all the workers were returned to the camp. Rumors that the Russians are approaching from one side, and the Americans on the other...but the prisoners were still in the hands of the SS.

23.49 Bombardment as the front approached, April 27.

24.20 SS escapes. Fences are de-electrified. Prisons run to the neighboring farms in search of food.

28.45 Arrival of the Russian army, and liberation.

30.42 The Jews left the camps with some food and drink. Abraham says that since that day he and his wife always take some food and drink before they leave the house - no matter for how long. They trained their children to do the same, because you never know.

37.09 May 13, 1945. Germans sign the surrender. Abraham and two other Jews are sent by the group to Berlin to make contact with refugee organizations. Berlin was burning. The bridges leading to it were destroyed.

40.00 About the Glueben camp.

- 53.00 About the Rathenow camp.
- 56.44 Abraham never returned to Radom, as he knew that he wouldn't find anyone there.
- 57.02 Abraham lived in the small city of Neuruppin after the liberation. The city was in the Russian zone.
- 9.01.22 Abraham moved to the British zone of Berlin afterwards, and immigrated to Israel in 1948.
- 05.00 The repercussions of the Shoah in Abraham's family life in Israel.
- 10.00 The special attitude towards the survivors in post-war Berlin.
- 10.29 Helping local and international organizations.
- 11.30 UNRRA's special displaced persons camps.
- 16.00 Abraham looked for surviving members of his family in the first months after liberation. An uncle, who was already living in Brazil, obtained a visa for him. The only restriction was for Abraham to declare himself a Catholic. After all he went through for being a Jew, he refused the invitation.
- 20.00 Renewal of the ties with his future wife Tobe. Reflections on a future family life.
- 30.52 Sept-Oct, 1945, Russia began applying pressure on survivors to return to their place of origin. Abraham was not interested in returning to Poland. He was advised to forgo his classification as a 'displaced person' [DP].
- 35.00 Obtaining a German passport as 'stateless'.
- 39.54 Abraham is approached in 1946 to help the Zionists to send people to Palestine in the chapter known as 'Breicha' [escape]. His role was to escort groups from the Russian side to either Munich or Hanover [which were in the hands of the Americans and British, respectively]. Then the groups were placed in DP camps, awaiting ships to transport them to Palestine. Many of the groups that Abraham escorted arrived in Palestine aboard the Exodus. Abraham did this work until the end of 1947.
- 10.00.00 Abraham receives papers to leave for Palestine. It is a 'tourist' visa, under an assumed name.
- 01.00 The influence of the Holocaust on Abraham's children.

#### TAPE IV

Abraham's work for preserving Holocaust memories.  
side to either



