

RG-50.120*0174 2 Tapes
ZA'IRAH, ZVI

- 1.00.55 Herman Kline received his Hebrew name, Zvi Za'irah upon his arrival to Israel.
- 30.02 Zvi was born in 1928 in Szirma [Hungary], about one hour walk from Szelicse [Sirem or Sirma].
- 2.21 Zvi attended 'cheder' from the age of 4. The family went to the synagogue everyday. The town's Jews were very observant.
- 3.13 The shtetl was self-sufficient, except for a few products brought in from outside [sugar, chocolate]. There were only 20 Jewish families in the town, about 100 people. There were about 1,000 gentiles in the shtetl.
- 5.26 Zvi's first encounter with anti-Semitism took place at age 6, when he began attending public school. The priest provoked the attacks during his sermons in church, because the Jews 'had killed Jesus'.
- 5.52 There were 8 children in Zvi's family. He was the fourth among the siblings.
- 6.22 The city was under the jurisdiction of Czechoslovakia when Zvi was born.
- 6.37 There were two schools in the town: the cheder and the Russian [Ruthenian] school, and the children attended both, daily. Zvi's day started at 6 a.m. with the visit to the synagogue. After a hurried breakfast back home, they went to school, from 8 until 1. The day there began with Catholic prayers. The Jewish children were admonished by their rebbe not to attend them, so that they left the room [If not, the teacher would anyway kick them out: 'Jews, get!']. At the lunch break the gentiles ate their kielbasa while the Jews ate some onion and farmer's cheese, bread [either from wheat or corn], sometimes a potato and an apple, too. There was not much food to go around. Out of the 20 Jewish families in the shtetl, 15 were poor. Zvi's family was considered middle class. They owned some land and a shoe workshop [factory]. The father would go to the big city and copy the new shoe styles, which he then manufactured for sale to the local gentile population. Because of that and because of his participation in WWI, many of the town's gentiles who had fought and been in prison with him in Kiev kept a constant relationship with him. Zvi's father would sell them shoes at a discount. The lands the family owned, they worked themselves. Because Zvi's was a large family, they also worked the fields of two other Jewish families; Green and Schwartz, in

order to increase the income necessary to support a family of 10. The family also owned 2 cows, which the mother milked. A gentile worker, who had been born in Zvi's house, was in charge of tending the cows, and other jobs. The children worked from a very young age. There was no doctor in the shtetl, and people lived a very long life: 80-100 years! Zvi started to work in the fields when he was 7. He was very bored!

- 18.36 Since Zvi was not the strongest among the siblings, the family decided that he would be a rabbi [he was also named after one].
- 20.57 The family observed all the holidays. There were tensions during Passover with the gentiles, who accused them of ritual murder.
- 23.17 For the Shabbat meal, the family caught fish in the river. In addition, there were also the other traditional foods. A Shabbat sight was to see the very observant Jews dip in the frozen river, instead of a mikvah. They would crush the ice, immerse themselves twice. They were never sick! The rabbi told the children that their faith kept them healthy. Zvi says that although he is no longer observant, his faith in life and fairness kept him alive during his years in the camp. The same faith kept him in Israel even during the most difficult years.
- 34.03 Zvi was in charge of going to the shochet [ritual slaughterer] in the neighboring village, Fancsika. He would bring the fowl there to be slaughtered.
- 35.02 The older brothers left home for the bigger cities as soon as they were old enough. They didn't keep their observance strictly after that.
- 37.00 Zvi speaks about his image of God, and his observance. He never asked questions, even when they were transported to the ghetto he always believed and felt reassured to be with his family, and with other Jews. Israel was not part of the belief. They needed to wait for the Messiah to redeem them and restore the Temple. In the meantime, the Jews were dispersed because of their own sins. When, at certain junctures, the dream of Israel was mentioned the conversation was immediately squelched.
- 41.21 Cultural activities took place only in the synagogue, around holidays.
- 42.00 Zvi's older siblings were exposed to the Zionist movement after they left the shtetl.
- 43.00 The language of study in the cheder was Yiddish.

45.00 Passover menu.

47.00 Conditions of the Jews worsened in 1938. There were no radios or newspapers, but the rumors spread of an imminent invasion.

51.11 The Ukrainians, with a platform of hatred to the Jews, ruled for about 11 months. Then came the Hungarians, who instituted order and imposed Hungarian as the language of studies. The young Nazis carried out training activities in the school, excluding the Jews [who were 7-8 among 40 students]. Only the wealthy among the Jews went away to study up to 8th grade, which is what he did. Most of the Jews learned a profession, or a craft, in order to improve their livelihoods.

58.22 Military service was allowed to the Jews while under the Czech regime. [The Jews were even supplied kosher food. The Hungarians sent the Jews to 'work camps' instead of the army. They were assigned menial jobs and often tortured or denied food, too.

2.06.10 Zvi's two older brothers were assigned to work camps, then sent to Mauthausen - where they perished a few days before liberation.

10.00 There was some news about what was happening with the Polish Jews, but no organization was done to deal with it in the event that the same would happen to the Hungarian Jews. The only strategy was prayer and faith.

12.00 Zvi's maternal relatives in Hetenyegyhaza.

18.08 The family was expelled from the home, ordered to put a few belongings on a horse-drawn wagon. The baggage was on the wagon, the family walked behind it. They were taken to the ghetto; it was May 1944. Only 4 adults survived the war.

38.00 Zvi bemoans the fact that no one organized them to flee, because he is convinced that the Ruthenians would have saved or hid them.

41.27 The ghetto was set up in Szelicse. Zvi's family was assigned the attic of a single house. Each family did its own cooking.

3.01.07 Ghetto organization. They stayed there for a month. Then, they were sent to the train station, and stuffed into cattle cars. The local population observed the Jewish exodus with indifference.

16.00 The train trip lasted 2 days. Life on the train. No one asked where they

were being taken. Their faith in God was infinite.

19.37 Zvi accuses the world Jewish leadership of indifference.

21.06 Arrival in Auschwitz. Zvi was immediately separated from his mother and siblings. He never saw them again.

25.54 Life in Auschwitz.

34.40 Transport to the Warsaw ghetto in a work detachment. [They built barracks, a crematorium, etc.] They didn't know that there had been an uprising.

40.27 No one speaks about the concentration camp in Warsaw.

45.48 The walk to Kutno, called the 4 day 'death march'.

47.43 Transport to Dachau; then to camp #7.

50.22 Work in the nearby forest.

51.13 Area of the 'forgotten camps' [13 camps, with over 30,000 Jews from all over Europe. Only 15 survived.] Area was Kaufering.

53.12 Zvi's work in the disposal of bodies into an open mass grave. At the end of the day, there came a group that sprayed chlorine over the bodies in order to prepare the place for next day's bodies, and also covered the odor of the decomposing bodies.

4.05.42 Zvi's father became ill, and was removed to a sick-people camp, where he died.

TAPE II

13.00 More about the work in Warsaw.

20.55 The organization inside the concentration camp.

22.04 Zvi was on his best behavior, to avoid torture at the hands of the cruel kapos. The work consisted of saving and reconditioning the red bricks left after the liquidation of the ghetto. These bricks were then sent on.

24.02 Zvi had access to the basements of the destroyed ghetto, where he found some holy books.

- 34.56 Many people lost limbs in Kaufering because of the cold. Zvi and his friend made sure to exercise and move all the time.
- 36.20 Crises of belief prevented Zvi from continuing his rituals. He believed in fate, or luck, more than in God.
- 49.33 How did the inmates know that someone died? The one person lying next to him felt that the temperature in his proximity changed. On one side he felt warmth, and on the other side it was cold. The one on that side was dead.
- 5.00.00 More about Zvi's work in removing dead bodies and then his transfer to work clearing forests and building barracks for new arrivals.
- 05.13 Arrival of well-to-do Hungarian Jews who died soon because they couldn't stand the conditions in the camp.
- 07.00 The Allies front approaches the camps; American war planes bomb the camps. Zvi escapes with his brother. The Germans caught them and returned them to the 'sick' camp - which was almost totally burned down. From there, they put the barely surviving Jews on a train, and began moving. They didn't know where they were going. The train cars were open freight cars. Two Germans guarded each car. Not one of the prisoners thought of fleeing: they did not have the energy. The Allies bombed the train; Germans fled, as did Zvi and his brother - who survived the Allies attack. Return to Dachau and liberation on the same day.
- 22.05 Thousands of surviving prisoners just sat there, without energy to rejoice in the entrance of the American soldiers into the camp. Zvi weighed 28 kg on the day of liberation; he was 17.
- 28.00 Americans evacuate Dachau. All the Jews, in a truck caravan, travel to Pilsen. There, they underwent medical check-ups. Zvi was let go after a couple of days. He and a couple of others went to Prague, where they underwent more medical examinations. Zvi kept in touch with his brother, who was still recovering in Germany.
- 31.21 Zvi thumbs his way to his birth place.
- 35.00 The return home, where he gets the news that 2 of his brothers were killed at a bombing in Mauthausen, a couple of days before liberation.
- 38.00 Zvi spent 2 days in his home, and went to join his cousin in the village of

Szelicse. Two cousins agree with Zvi to go to Prague.

42.00 Zvi could move freely because he had been given a 'laissez passer' from the American forces.

49.00 Zvi decides to immigrate to Israel. In Prague, because he was younger than 18, he was sent to an orphanage.

58.00 Zvi is recruited to become an aviation technician in Reichenberg. They learned on a Spitfire, a Messerschmitt and a Russian Cabosh [?].

6.00.00 The course was organized by the Jewish Agency and the Embassy of Israel, for people who intended to immigrate to Israel.

01.48 The immigration to Israel under privileged status. This was January 1949. They sailed from Constanza in the ship Transylvania. They were 30 technicians and 40 pilots. Zvi's credo: not religion, but only being strong will save the Jews.