

S H M U E L V I L L E N B E R G
RG-50.120*0255

1:00(start tape 1/3) to 1:09

Background

He was born 1923 in Chestochowa to a painter father and non-Jewish mother (who Did not return to her Russian homeland after the revolution). He had an older and a younger sister; went to Hebrew School till 1937, then family moved to Warsaw. When father could not teach high school anymore he painted synagogue interiors. He describes a difficult economic situation at home and himself as a somewhat unruly adolescent, who often skipped school to go on train rides.

1:10 to 1:26

War Outbreak

In '39 the family moved to Radosh (near Warsaw). At war outbreak he (with friends) jointed soldier groups going east to defend Kovel against attacking Russians, as well as to Chelm and Lublin, where they were bombarded by Russian tanks. He was wounded in the back. and many of his group died. Soon the Germans replaced the Russians and initially restored peace to Chelm. He describes his hospitalization and contacting a Jewish doctor. Spent September 10 to December in Helm, without contact with family.

1:27 to 2:04

Opatov and other wandering.

Germans' massive reprisals for the killing of three Germans affected mostly the Jewish Population and he escaped with his family to Opatov, where they remained till January '42. Describes their year in the small town 'ghetto within the ghetto' ; his mother getting Gentile certificates again to ease restrictions; his father painting for food; Rumors regarding Holocaust; father moved to Warsaw and he with mother to Chestochowa, Jews were herded to gather train at market place and into cattle trains.

2:04 to 2:22

Treblinka.

Describes the train ride and their arrival, men-women separation, piles of shoes and clothes. On advice by acquaintance, claiming to be 'builder', he was taken to separate barrack. Realized most were stripped before being shot. Met friends from Chestochowa - from an earlier transfer - who informed him this was death camp and urged him again to pass as gentile Pole.

2:23 to

Working and Surviving in Treblinka

He was assigned to work in sorting mountains of clothes and things left by all who arrived. Describes the working conditions, the Jewish Capos and Vorarbeiters in charge, the Ukrainians who could not shoot without the Germans' orders, the sadistic German Officers in charge and their dog ((Lalka, Buda, Franz?). There was an abundance of food, Jewelry and other artifacts left behind which they hoarded and used extensively in bartering and improving their living conditions., describes the 'living branches fence' made of tree branches tucked onto fence rail which prevented observing what was going on in segments of camp.

2:29 to 3:00 (end tape 1/3)

Everyday Life and Working Condition

Describes the "Lazaret" (hospital) which received daily transports, where all those disabled and awaiting treatment, or women whose hair was shaved, were shot instead. (His job was to sort clothes as well as to move bodies.). Describes Germans' annihilation of a transport from Grodno following a glass throwing incident. Describes the numbering system, and color coded barracks. The 'ghetto' of Jews within the U shaped barracks of the camp. Describes the abundance of valuables – which Jews had brought with them to camp (including medicine – he hoarded Zian Kali). Inmates like himself who were assigned to sort clothes and other items, used them to survive (got as much as \$100 at times): barter for food as well as help other inmates who worked elsewhere. This included bribing Ukranian guards who were thus their 'captives'. Describes everyday life in the barracks, his outside work in the woods on the tree-branch fence, various people met there (including a priest and doctor). He passed as a 'drunken Russian' because of his language and drinking.

3:02 (start tape 2/3) to 3:09

Killing the Sick

Doctors in Revere (clinic) justifying their injecting sick patients: rampant "spot typhoid" (which he had earlier) victims which Germans shot dead daily -- leaving 400 of 1000 inmates alive.

3:10 t

A Jan 9th transport with violinist Gold lead to establishing orchestra to amuse Germans

3:12 to 3:23

Beatings and Forced Running

Describes the cruel beatings which caused him a feverish wound (until he had friend cut it open). German commander Mitte (?) cruelty. Forced running of inmates and shooting those who collapsed. He found his sister's clothes among those of new transport. .Describes conditions during an important person's visit (possibly Himmler)

3:24 to 3:46

Treblinka. – Different Segments:

The known part of Treblinka was where prisoners undressed .But the “second” Treblinka entailed the 13 gas chambers and huge ditches into which bodies were piled. Ongoing transports, killing, suicides and madness. Describes the black smoke and stench as the bodies were eventually pulled out of the ditches be burned.

Other ‘renovation’ involved adding windowless structures between each barrack, which were taken to be for gun storage. Also, direction signs were added, as camouflage.. (All these were taken by the inmates to mean the war was not going well for the Germans) Describes the speculations and mood among them...

3:47 to 4:00 (end tape 1/3)

Various Transports

Describes a ‘different’ April 43 transport which they (subsequently) understood to be following the Warsaw ghetto’ revolt.; also a quiet transport of blankets which was full of thousands of bodies; describes Mitte’s and others’ cruelty, losing teeth through beatings

4::00 (start tape 2/3) to 4:12

Elaboration on previous topics

Repeats and elaborates on previous report regarding his work on the pine-branches fence, sorting victims’ clothes and teeth, knowing about the burning but not talking, about different transports, and being warned not to escape.

4:13 to 4:29

“Revolt“

Increased feeling that “Something is about to Happen” and why.; inmates sing patriotic songs; .explosions.

4:30 to

Escape with Guns

Describes how he and about 30 inmates ran into the woods, with 3 guns from the barracks’ storage rooms, towards the River Buck and woods. He ran, eventually alone, from village to village where he hid and got food from villagers who were probably smugglers. Approached Radosh near Warsaw. Knowing parents were alive gave him strength. Describes approaching Kosnitche, assorted events which happened him on the way, including seeking relief for wounded legs, and finally by train to Chernitche. And Warsaw.

5:00 to 5:14

More about Escape from Treblinka

Recalls apparently being warned (by Alfred Behm?) and prepared , e.g. wearing double pants. , Only about 6 from his Tarno Commando survived (‘Gold Jews’ were locked in their barracks .) First wave of escapees met furious fire and most did not survive. He ran in opposite direction.

5:15 to

Following Days: Travel to Warsaw and other Places

Describes his train trips from Cherwiche to Warsaw, people he encounters, precautions, Obtaining documents, to Chestochova, to Girardu - following leads in searching for parents.

5:30 to

Searching for Father and Finding him

Describes his search, finds father surviving by painting religious Christian themes And posing as mute for safety, Lives with father. Also connects with mother who works in factory and visits. Dangers of disclosing connections and Jewish identity. .

5:43 to 6:29

More about Connections, Underground, Organizations

Describes availability of Vodka and much else for money. He carries gun And describes how obtained and when used. Describes his search for apartment, people he meets and his father's good earning with his painting. Has no contact with Jews. Though occasionally identified some in disguise. Describes the financial support of the Bund to Poles – unlike the Zionist organization.

6:30 to 7:00 (end of tape 2/3)

The Warsaw Revolt

Describes the beginning of the revolt on August 1, his throwing grenades into Embassada, battles near the German area, heavy bombardment, stealing guns and killing Germans. His going to AKA headquarters because Nationalist Poles' Party wanted to kill the Jews. (Chernikow area of Warsaw).

7:00 to 7:22

With the Brigade at Polska Andeludova

Describes his work and experiences while there, names people he has met and how many Jews were among them and were killed.. Russians dropped food and information from planes. Generally the conditions were terrible . The AKA (communist) organization was anti-Semitic but did not kill Jews on command, but the NLZ (Nationalistic?) did so purposely and also collaborated with the Germans.. Describes Hungarians, criminals, and other groups as well.

7:25 to 7:58

Post Revolt Escape .

Describes his experience, people emerging from destruction, terrible conditions. Found his father who also managed to escape and helped him. After capitulation (October 5) he and friends escaped by train to Prushkov trying to get to the woods – various areas surrounding Warsaw - trying. .to avoid the Germans or those who could recognize him as a Jew. Describes wandering amidst the destruction, how they survived, people and

places he met, people killed and a couple he killed himself. He met both parents on Christmas day in Warsaw The difficult winter of 1944/45.

7:54 to 8:08

“End of the War for Me”

Describes the Russians’ takeover, his being caught and freed by them, going to Lodz where father was; getting apartment and papers, sent to military academy and becoming a “Polish Officer”. Finding Jews among the Russians and being recognized as one. He was finally discharged because “father wanted to go to Palestine”.

810 to 8:55 (end tape 3/3)

Activities in 1946 and beyond

Established contact with Jewish center in Lower Silesia. Describes his work for the Zionist Youth movement, training youngsters and accompanying them across borders on the way to immigrate (illegally) to Palestine. When his father died he returned to Poland and worked in tracing Jewish children who have been kept in non-Jewish homes. And describes several of these experiences. .

In 1950, following marriage and having been a successful factory owner, .he immigrated to Israel because of his Zionistic beliefs.. He is currently retired after a satisfying career as a government surveyor Has children and grandchildren.

He has visited Poland about 20 times, accompanying youth groups, and involved in dissemination of information about the Holocaust and especially the Warsaw Ghetto revolt He concludes his testimony in sharing some of his feeling about these experiences. He has written a book and had to face some questioning in reaction to his writing.

Translated and summarized by Hava Bonne’.
September 2004