

Troitze, Ari
RG-50.120*0235
Three videotapes
Recorded March 30, 1995

Abstract

Arie Troitze was born in Švenčionėliai, Lithuania in 1926. He grew up in a comfortable, moderately observant Jewish home. The pogroms began in 1938, when the windows of his home were broken. The Russians entered Lithuania in 1939, and the Jews experienced many changes. Many Jews, including Arie's father were shot by Lithuanians in the forest. Arie was left with his mother. In September 1941, Arie was transferred to the ghetto in Święciany, where he lived for one and a half years. His mother was killed. Arie was transferred to Vilnius, where he lived in an orphanage. He was then transferred by train to a forced labor camp in Estonia, and later he was transferred by boat to the Stutthof concentration camp. At Stutthof, Arie was badly beaten, and he barely avoided being sent to the crematorium. After Stutthof, he was transferred to Buchenwald. He injured his leg and spent ten days in a medical clinic, where he witnessed cruel experimental medical procedures. When the camp was liquidated, the Germans killed 50,000 prisoners. After liberation, Arie returned to his hometown. He then went to Germany and emigrated to Israel in May 1949. He feels that it is important to share his story.

Tape 1

- 1:00** Arie Troitze was born in 1926 in the small town of Švenčionėliai (Nowe Święciany), ninety kilometers south of Vilnius. He was the youngest of three boys. Their home was comfortable and loving, and the family was moderately observant. His aunt and uncle lived with them. Arie went to Yiddish school. The Jews were a majority in the town – they had better houses. Arie describes his friends and his experiences at school.
- 1:10** Arie describes several pogroms, which began in 1938. The windows in his home were broken. He describes connections between his town and the larger Švenčionys (Old Schwinzan) twelve kilometers away - they were separate but connected Jewish communities. He describes his grandfather and other relatives.
- 1:21** The Russians entered Lithuania in 1939. Arie describes the changes they experienced. There was less business, and the Lithuanian schools were changed. The Russians left in 1941, and many Jews (including his older brothers) left with them, or went to Palestine. The Lithuanians ruled for seven months before the Germans came. Arie describes the cruel dominance of the Lithuanians, and the atrocities they committed. They killed 104 Jews in the Baranover (?) Forest, then took 43 people from Arie's town, including his father, and killed them in the forest. Arie was left with his mother.

- 1:39** On September 27, 1941, 8,000 Jews from Arie's and other small towns were transported to the Poligon – a decayed site of old barracks. Arie describes the terrible conditions there, beatings, filth, and no food. Those people with skills needed by the Germans were transferred to the ghetto in Švenčionys (Old Schwinzen). After twelve days in the poligon, an opportunity developed for Arie to go to that ghetto too. He took this opportunity at his mother's urging. Within five hours, all those remaining in the poligon were killed, including his mother.
- 1:56** Arie describes life in the Švenčionys ghetto. It was a difficult and lonely existence, as 'illegal' relatives were under constant danger of being turned over to the Germans, as had happened to others.
- 1:59** Arie shows photographs of various family and cemeteries. He describes roaming the streets, hiding from the Germans, and once even hiding in an outdoor toilet hole. He was treated 'like a dog' by the family, pursued for stealing some food for his very hungry cousins. Eventually, he became "legal" and worked for the Judenrat, carrying lists of Jews who could work for the Germans. He describes the jobs available inside and outside the ghetto, like construction.
- 2:18** During his time in the ghetto, Arie made contact with people in the Vilnius ghetto, and participated in underground activities. He describes the people he met during this period, especially young people with whom he met secretly. They collected arms and eventually joined the partisans. Arie was present at a meeting with Abba Kovner, who was recruiting young people for these purposes. Arie names many people that he knew at that time. He spent one and a half years in the Švenčionys Ghetto.
- 2:30** When the Lithuanians and Judenrat divided the Švenčionys Ghetto population between Kaunas and Vilnius, Arie was transferred to Vilnius thanks to his father's friend, Michel Gordon. All those assigned to Kaunas were liquidated soon after the selektion. Arie describes the Vilnius ghetto and his life there. He had difficulties in his relations with families and acquaintances. He explains how he kept many of these experiences to himself for a long time. He describes the role of the Judenrat in concealing the ghetto's underground activities from the Germans.
- Tape 2**
- 3:02** Arie describes hiding places in the Švenčionys Ghetto. He describes a brief stay at the home of the "witch," a scary old woman with an incredibly messy and dirty house. Arie and his cousins also hid in the home of Mr. Koslovsky, who was a communist who helped Jews. Arie spent one month in their cold cellar, which was risky because of the young children in the home. Arie describes the hopelessness, and his terrible state of mind.

- 3:15** After hiding, Arie returned to the Švenčionys Ghetto, where he became 'legal' and worked outside the ghetto. He describes the places that he worked, and the activists and partisans that he knew. He saw an SS convoy explode. But he also expresses the difficulty of remembering events of that time.
- 3:27** Arie describes the liquidation of those left in the ghetto
- 3:30** He recalls the good and bad aspects of life in the orphanage in Vilnius. He learned carpentry. He describes how food was obtained. He witnessed beatings. He recalls (Yitzchak) Wittenberg surrendering to the Nazis. He lists friends and acquaintances he knew in the ghetto, and where they are now. He emphasizes the importance of the group, and sharing.
- 4:00** Arie returned to Estonia by train. On the train, there was panic, and no food. They were taken to Vivikonna, a small outdoor place where they lived in tents with dirt floors. He describes working on the rail tracks, He would run away to steal food from peasants, and then return, trading the items for food. People wore regular clothes with numbers. He remained there for six months. Arie describes the very difficult working conditions, especially the hard beatings by cruel Germans and the Kapos, including a Jewish Kapo. He provides detailed descriptions of severe beatings - of fellow prisoners (provides names) and including himself. Those who fell or were too sick were shot. The escapees were hung in the appell square.
- 4:42** They were loaded onto a boat from Tallinn to Germany. The trip took one week, and many people died and were thrown into the water. The young SS men were especially cruel in their beatings. After the boat trip, they walked for five hours to Stutthof concentration camp.
- 4:48** The first two days at Stutthof they were given no food and there were harsh beatings. Then they were taken into a building and given striped clothes (pajamas) for the first time. In the camp, there were many Jews from different countries. There were kapos and Germans inside the blocks. There were beatings all day. Arie worked inside, and there was little food. He saw his cousin on the other side of the electric fence (the women's side), but when he called her he was so severely beaten so that she thought he was killed, and she told her family this later. A friend saved him, and Arie, and eventually he healed.
- Arie describes the routine transfers of those weak or wounded from hunger or beatings to the crematorium, which was visible from their barracks. Arie, along with thirteen younger and taller men, was selected to stay behind, while 500 other men were led to the crematorium.

There were no days without beatings; the beatings were worse in the shower. Ari describes the hanging of three escapees who had been mauled by search dogs. He describes the total isolation. His life was centered on food. He worked outside and inside. He was in Stutthof for a total of seven or eight months. He describes the 'water dripping' punishment which ended in repeated beatings so severe that he could not work outside for weeks.

5:34 In response to the interviewer's question, Arie admits that inmates were sexually exploited in the camp. The abuse was perpetrated by SS and Kapos. In return the inmates received more food or privileges. Arie knows those involved, to this day, but he does not want to talk about it.

5:45 Arie was transferred to Buchenwald. He was initially placed in a small lager, for one month. There were mostly Jews in that lager. Arie describes the hard work and beatings inside the barracks. He and his few friends (provides names) were weak. They witnessed the constant transfer of inmates to the crematorium. Their lager was different from the bigger lager where the conditions were better – there were more political prisoners and fewer Jews.

Tape 3

6:00 Arie describes the two Jewish blocks in Buchenwald and his work schedule. There were holes in the floor of his new barracks where he hurt his leg so severely that he couldn't work. A kapo transferred him to a small clinic, otherwise he would have been sent to the crematorium with the most weak or injured prisoners. There was constant wavering between the hope to heal and the fear of healing, because the crematorium could be the eventual destination.

6:05 Arie describes the medical clinic, where treatment and surgeries were performed without any narcotics. Procedures were performed by young German personnel for experimentation rather than for healing. Afterwards, patients were sent to the crematorium to hide what the doctors did in their training. Arie eventually recovered but he was in extreme pain during the recovery process. He spent about ten days in the clinic, and again he was about to be transferred to the crematorium.

Arie joined a group of Poles returning from work outside until he returned to the Jewish group. They saw Russians escaping, being captured and hung.

6:55 For the final liquidation, Jews were called to the appell square and rounded up. As the bombers approached, Arie and four others escaped into a sewage ditch near the work area. They joined a Polish block and were given new prisoner numbers. Group after group of Jews were taken to the crematorium.

- 7:09** The Germans killed 50,000 prisoners during this final period. When the Americans and Russians entered to liberate the camp, there were aerial bombardments and Germans fled. The kapos fired at the escaping Germans. Many inmates were still dying. The Americans told the Jews to leave, to avoid the approaching Russians. Arie and five others decided to wait. The Russians entered, and Arie and his friends worked for the Russians as translators.
- 7:25** Arie returned to his home town and escaped to Vilnius to avoid recruitment by the Russians. He connected with his cousins and his brother in Lodz, and then went to Germany where he prepared to emigrate to Israel.
- 7:40** Arie emigrated to Israel in May 1949. He describes his immigration training and the adjustments he made, settling in Israel and establishing a family. Later, he visited locations in Europe where he was during the war, sometimes with his family.
- He talks about his thoughts and emotions regarding his experiences during the war years, the loss of his family, and the constant suffering which he experiences to this day. It is very important to him to share his story with friends, family and even his grandchildren.