

RG-50.120 #0244

SHATSMAN, VLADIMIR

5 Tapes

I

- 1.00 Born in 1916 in Daugavpils, now Latvia. Working class. Original family home was Polotsk, now in Belarus. Father died at age 40. He was a communist party member.
- 1.10 Talks about early youth. Lived in Polotsk. Many Jews in city. Vladimir one of 5 brothers. In 1928 family moved to Leningrad. Went to Jewish schools in Leningrad - but courses in Russian. In Polotsk, family spoke Yiddish at home but after move to Leningrad, switched to Russian.
- 1.13 In 1931, Jewish school closed - along with other 'national' schools. Vladimir began to work after finishing 7 years of school - in port. Talks about family during early 1930s.
- 1.36 In 1936 V entered military school - a course of 3 years. In 1938, V's uncle, living in Polotsk was arrested for telling a joke and 'perished.' V was then expelled from the military school. He received no explanation. But later, in 1939, during a period when the purges in the USSR were reduced and the atmosphere was more relaxed, he was reinstated.
- 1.46 Graduated in 1939 with rank of lieutenant. Was sent to North Caucasus, to a radio unit.
- 1.52 Asked about the mid 30s in Leningrad, the period when Leningrad party leader Kirov was murdered. V says Kirov was beloved by Leningraders. This was beginning of repressions in Leningrad and elsewhere.

[Break]

- 2.00 Shows photograph of family members. Says 4 brothers went to front during first days of war.
- 2.01 Resumes narrative of first days in army in 1939 in Caucasus. Unit was based near Cherkassy.
- 2.06 Troops found out about outbreak of war on 22 June. By end of week, unit was at the front - by train. Saw action first near Smolensk. Describes action he saw during first weeks of war. Was wounded in mid-July when his unit was surrounded near Smolensk. Brought to village, where rested. Changed into civilian clothes along with others in unit.
- 2.26 V and a few men from his unit captured by Germans. Asked about ethnic origin, V tells Germans he is Azerbaijani. Taken to grounds of monastery, where hundreds of other young Soviet men being held, some in uniform.

- 2.30 Taken to railroad station in Pochinok near Smolnsk where thousands of Soviet POWs gathered. V's group taken to Borisov.
- 2.35 In mid August, V and others loaded on freight cars. Didn't know where being taken. Slept in open. First station sign he sees is Terespol, in Poland, just west of Polish/USSR border near Brest.
- 2.40 Taken to Biala Podlaska and put into a camp. Prisoners mostly kept outside. In September began to build barracks. Horrible conditions, little in way of food.
- 2.49 Escape organized. Large group of prisoners breach barbed-wire fence. V escapes. With companion goes through a number of villages.

## II

- 3.00 V says he will relate a number of events after his escape from the POW camp - events he remembers very well. Tells how he saw police coming towards him on bicycles, but he continued walking in nearby field and they passed him by. On another occasion Polish farm workers urged him to work with them to deceive German landowner who came up to him.
- 3.09 Taken in by Polish family overnight. Next day heads for Biala Podlaska--- town that was fairly close to site of POW camp he had escaped from.
- 3.14 V changes subject, to discuss earlier operations near Smolensk. Discusses those who were killed. Names fallen comrades.
- 3.21 Shows photos - father as young man, extended family in 1908 in Polotsk. Many of them died in Leningrad blockade.
- 3.25 V resumes narrative about the period after his escape from POW camp. Discusses visit to another peasant house where he was fed.
- 3.28 Decided to go to ghetto in B----- . At that point made it clear he was Jewish. Put on arm band Jews had to wear. This was Sept. 1941. Not all Jews were in ghetto at this time.
- 3.32 Passerby directs him to a Jewish house. Occupant takes him to ghetto. Ghetto surrounded by barbed wire fence, but no guards. Goes to a house in ghetto. Eight people living in one room. One of them led him to a bicycle repair shop in the ghetto where he stayed for a while.
- 3.45 People who took him in thought. V, who spoke no Polish - might be more likely to hide inside a larger ghetto. Considered sending him to Warsaw ghetto. Moved to the hospital for one night to sleep. Men went to Jewish cemetery to stay with watchman. Passed himself off as a deaf-mute from Polish soldier.

- 3.53 Watchman later is fearful and asks him to leave. Goes to spend night in burial vault. New ghetto friends bring him money, food. Later, with money, goes to a cafe and store in the ghetto for food.

[Break]

- 4.00 Also associates with friends [mostly former Polish prisoners of war, Jews, who had escaped from camps, and were living in ghetto]. Goes with them to house in ghetto where they eat together. May give him food for his stay in burial vault.
- 4.07 Watchman kicks him out of vault. It was cold and snowy - October, 1941. He goes to small prayer house next to synagogue. There was a small bed there. There was a family living there.
- 4.11 Goes to his new friend, Dujbinsky, a former Polish POW living just outside ghetto. Returns to prayer house to stay for a while.
- 4.16 Polish police come to prayer house. V flees, goes to Dubinsky, who takes him to wood-working shop run by Pole of German extraction. Stays in shop for a few months. Many Jews hid there at various times.
- 4.29 Goes to live in small room housing two families. Dubinsky's house nearby. V acquires false documentation. Gotten for him by a Jewish woman who at the time, V was told, was living with a German bureaucrat working in the German labor office. Document said V worked at airport - he began work there.
- 4.37 Describes work routine. At one point put in prison for altercation with one of guards. Released, returns to work.
- 4.49 In summer of 1942, police raided area where V living. Dozens shot. Later that summer there were rumors going around that Jews would be moved to area of Pinsk marshes in Belarus.
- 4.55 Germans began to transport Jews - particularly women, children and old people out of Biela Podlaska ghetto [August 1942]. Later found out they were taken to Treblinka. Remaining workers knew that Treblinka meant death. V thinks about joining partisan group, but continues working at airport.
- 4.58 Decides to escape. Again assumes identity of Azerbaijani. Leaves ghetto. Intends to go towards Briz River - east to Glubokoye and Polotsk to join partisans.
- 5.11 Crosses Brig River. Enters forest. Goes to village of Gusakhad [phonetic] where a friend from Biela Podlaska had told him the village chief would help him.
- 5.17 Arrested by Ukrainian police, brought to police station. Interrogated. Gives story that he is Azerbaijani, Soviet POW, trying to get back to USSR.

- 5.26 Two SS officers come - one of whom he had seen in Biela Podlaska. They ask whether he is Jewish. Germans leave. V put under guard. Thinks about how to escape.
- 5.35 V manages to escape through a window. Police shoot as he flees into bushes and into woods.
- 5.42 Meets various small groups of partisans. Meets one partisan from Kobryn who joins V for a few days. Partisan takes him to partisan unit. This was a Jewish partisan unit - 30 or 40 persons, mostly Jewish, some Russians. This was end of August 1942. Head of unit was Boris Dubrovskiy, a resident of Kobryn.
- 5.52 Unit kept in touch with Kobryn ghetto. At this time mission of unit was not to fight Germans, but to collect equipment and weapons and to help people escape from ghetto. Also gathered food from peasants - usually stealing. Peasants summoned police on occasion.
- III
- 6.01 V specifies that he had crossed Brig River from Poland into the USSR near the Polish town of Koden.
- 6.02 Continues narrative of partisan group. He was chosen as head of unit, of 50, which was located near Kobryn. Man named Dubrovskiy preceded him as head of group. Group had ties with Kobryn ghetto, which had a 'fairly strong anti-fascist organization'. Stole arms from airport.
- 6.04 V names men who were in his unit. Partisans went into ghetto often - brought food, got weapons, medicines.
- 6.07 On Oct. 13, ghetto was surrounded by SS men. Ten of partisans unit inside at the time. Oct. 16 ghetto was destroyed, along with inmates.
- 6.11 V and other from unit decide to move east. Hope to join Soviet forces at the front. Most Jews in unit decide to stay in Kobryn area to seek relatives.
- 6.15 V and about 30 others moved east across Belarus.
- 6.17 At the time, Germans were killing Jews throughout area.
- 6.19 Group arrives nearer border between Byelorussian SSR and RSFSU [both part of USSR] and joined Nikolay Shesh [phonetic] partisan organization. This was in Leninsky rayon.
- 6.20 This was winter of 1942. Unit was Mischa Gerasemov. It had about 200 persons. Had a well organized and well-built camp. Sunder huts, tank traps, trenches,

dispensary.

- 6.28 Names other Jews in unit - about 10 per cent. They did and what he knows about them during and after the war.
- 6.52 Discusses other partisan groups in region and their leaders - at end of 1942 and beginning of 1943.
- 6.56 Discusses type of operations carried out by these units.

[Break]

- 7.01 Tells of battle at village of Svyataya Vozya. Attached German garrison.
- 7.05 Unit moved to island in the middle of a swamp. Then moved east to Leninskiy rayon. Germans had destroyed villages in the region. Many survivors joined partisans. Joined also by partisans from Brest and Bialystok oblasts [later part of USSR at the time]. Made camp again on an island of dry land in the middle of a swamp.
- 7.14 Describes operation of May 1, 1943. Planned to attack railway station at Bastyn [about 50 km northeast of Pinsk. Attacked, killed 20 Germans. Carried out further attacks in May in area.
- 7.21 Group ordered to move west. At the time a number of Jewish partisans formed a partisan unit named after Kaganovich. Unit moved to near the Ukrainian border in Ivanovskiy rayon.
- 7.26 V's partisan brigade grew and became very active. Consisted of 10 units, had horses. Supply organized. Had family camps and schools in the forests.
- 7.29 Describes operations, ties with Ukrainian partisan units. Describes how a group of fighters from the Warsaw ghetto uprising joined his partisan group in the summer of 1943.
- 7.35 Further discusses partisan organization and operations in Pinsk area. V served as brigade intelligence chief.
- 7.48 Talks about underground organizations which he said were in all ghettos in 1942 prior to destruction of the ghetto in Belarus. Describes experience of young Jew who had been in ghetto and joined V's partisan group - how group of Jewish escapees from ghetto were killed by a marauding group of escaped Soviet POWs.

[Break]

- 8.00 Describes his own functions as intelligence chief of brigade.

- 8.08 Interviewer asks about partisan actions in fall of 1943. V says there were many actions, defensive and offensive in the area of the Brig-Dnieper canal in Pinsk oblast. In Jan., Feb., 1944, partisans carried out many operations, and Germans heavily attacked them, often with aircraft. At that time front was approaching from East, and Hungarian troops were being moved by Germans to the front through the area of V's partisan brigade.
- 8.15 Continues discussing partisan operations and organizations in Pinsk oblast.
- 8.25 V crosses south into Ukraine. Joins with other partisans to form unit of about 40 fighters. Anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist groups active here, often attacking Red Army units approaching from East. V and his group crosses front line to obtain arms for their actions. This was in early 1944.
- 8.29 V with 2 other partisans are sent to the headquarters of the Belarus partisan movement located near Gomel. There he obtained arms and supplies for partisan units.
- 8.33 While at headquarters, V decides to try to get permission to go to Leningrad to see if he can find relatives. He had been out of contact with family since he was captured by Germans in 1941. This was mid-March 1944. V got permissions, given clothes, money.
- 8.35 Arrives in Moscow. Then got a train to Leningrad. Goes to where he used to live. Apartment is still there, but no occupants. Learned that mother was evacuated in 1942. Younger brother also had been evacuated. Four brothers, including V, were in army.
- 8.42 V learns that one brother died in 1942 on Leningrad front. Older brother died in 1943 at Leningrad front. Younger brother lost two legs at front.
- IV
- 9.00 Continues talking about family in Leningrad and what they lived through during blockades. Describes Nevskiy Prospekt in spring of 1944. Talks about school friends.
- 9.07 When his leave was over, he was sent to a reserve officers' regiment. Sent to 3rd Baltic front. In June sent to communications school in Kiev.
- 9.16 V speaks of watching huge 'parade' of German POWs along Kiev's main street - Kreshchatuk on July 16, 1944.

V returns to Leningrad, meets mother who had also returned. After two days goes back to Kiev. Assigned to front. But first went to area when partisans had been active. This was at end of Jan. 1945. Went to Pinsk oblast. Talks about fate of some former partisan comrades.

- 9.25 Then V goes to Minsk. Meets relatives of his friends. V talks about Minsk underground.
- 9.37 V sent to front. On the way stops in Biela Podlaska in Poland where he had been POW at beginning of war.
- 9.43 V continues to Warsaw. Meets other old partisan comrades.
- 9.46 V proceeds to front - along Niesse River near city of Guben. Joins his unit - an infantry brigade. This was end of March, 1945. Describes organization of his unit – a communications outfit.
- 9.56 16 April 1945 Berlin operation begins - 2 hour artillery barrage, then begins crossing of Niesse.
- 9.59 Soviets take the city of Frst. Headed for Cottbus - which was taken on 22 April 1945. Troops continue on highway towards Berlin. When V's unit was approaching Berlin suburbs, it was ordered south to assist in battle around Prague.
- 10.11 After a battle in Meissen, proceeded to Czechoslovakia. Welcomed by crowds.
- 10.16 May 8 V hears announcement that Germans have capitulated. His unit enters Prague on May 9. After a short while sent to Karlovy Vary. Describes how he gets food for his unit from local population - mostly Germans. Took only what was necessary. Got beer for his troops from Americans, who were occupiers of Pilsen.
- 10.27 Describes impressions of Karlsbad. Former ghetto children being fed and treated with waters.
- 10.32 V sent back to Prague. Stayed in a hotel. Had two-week vacation. Then assigned as communications officer in an artillery regiment. Was sent to Tabok - in Czechoslovakia. V stayed in Czechoslovakia for 6 months. Was sent to Linz in Austria in November 1945.
- 10.42 In May 1946 sent back to USSR. Went by road across Austria, Hungary, Carpathians. V is demobilized in August 1946. Believed at the time that, having been a POW, he could have no successful career in the army.
- 10.46 Goes to Kiev, then to Leningrad. Meets mother, brothers. Enters Herzen Institute - history faculty.
- 10.53 V never joined Party. Got an appointment as director of a school in area near Leningrad. He was married at the time to a doctor who was working in another town. V decides to seek work in Belarus. Through an army friend, gets a job in Grodno as an historian in the Grodno regional museum.

- 11.00 But before he could start, the job offer was retracted. V later learned that oblast party officials did not want a Jew in that job. But then V produced letter from chairman of the Belarus council of ministers ordering him to Belarus, so local party officials obliged to give him museum job.
- 11.06 Discusses work at museum - also taught in schools. Worked there 14 years. Liked his work, but missed Leningrad.
- 11.19 In 1964 returned to Leningrad. Had a son and daughter. Worked as a teacher. Returned at age 60 - 1976.
- 11.20 Discusses vacations he took after he returned.
- 11.27 Discusses his friendship with famous Belarus author, Bykov.
- 11.31 Discusses rise of anti-semitic organization Pamyat in Leningrad in 1980s. His daughter and her husband decide to go to Israel. V and his wife also decide to emigrate - late 1980s.
- 11.38 Describes arrival in Israel.

V

- 12.00 In summer of 1948, V graduated from history faculty of the Herzen Institute in Leningrad. Same summer married Maria Goldberg. Wife had just finished medical school.
- 12.04 Shows various photos of wife and family. Discusses wife's family history, members. Wife's father arrested twice in 1930s. Spent 6 1/2 years in prison. In first weeks of war, he was in army and killed in action near Smolensk.
- 12.15 At age 16, V's wife was sent with her classmates to surrounding area of Leningrad to dig tank traps - this was at the start of the war.
- 12.20 Describes evacuation of wife [as young girl] and other children, women, old people from Leningrad to Urals area at beginning of war. Worked on a collective farm - Kolkhoz.
- 12.26 V talks again about his assignment to Grodno historical museum.
- 12.30 Discusses fate of various family members during the war.
- 12.35 Interviewer asks why many people in occupied territories welcomed Germans at first. V says it was partially a result of harsh Soviet policies - forced collectivization, other mistakes.



- 12.38 Another error was purge of Soviet military just before war. Poor preparations for war.
- 12.42 Talks about his own views of Israel, internationalism.
- 12.46 Interviewer returns to war and V's view of war in 1941 and 1945. Realized that Soviets lived a lot worse than the West – he saw Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia. First time he saw West. Realized that Stalin destroyed innocent people.
- 12.50 V also felt he was under suspicion after war because he had been a POW. As Jew not offered good positions.