

RG-50.120 #0250 3 Tapes
KOPEL KOLPANITZKI-MURAVCHIK

- 1.01 Kopel Kolpanitzki was born in 1926 in Chanukah. His parents were Itzchak and Pessia. His brothers were Moshe, born in 1920; Chana, born in 1924, and a sister Ida, born in 1930. He was born in Lakhva, Polesia, in eastern Poland. The village was 80 km to the east of Pinsk, and 300 km east of Brisk [Brest]. The village was built on swamp land, K'which made it impossible for any means of transport, except in the winter, when the land froze.
- 3.13 While he was still a child, Kopel and his family moved to another village, Sinkevichi, 11 km away, to allow time to build a new house in Lakhva.
- 4.50 The family moved back to Lakhva after the birth of Ida, in 1930. The festive opening of the house, saw all the Jews in town as guests [there were about 1200] and lasted many days.
- 5.40 Kopel's father was in the lumber business. The family had its own saw mill and also a flour mill, 60 km away, in the village of Tchelornietz [?] where his paternal grandparents and an aunt lived. The travel there, on horseback, took 20 hours, with a stop-over. In the summer, K's family would spend a month there, in a large house. They were well-off and the father could afford to send his sons to the Lakhva Hebrew school, where they demanded tuition payment. K loved his studies and especially liked to sing. His teacher took him under his wing to tutor him in singing.
- 8.10 When he was older, he joined the movement Bnai Yehuda, where they all swore to speak Hebrew. When the Russians came in, in 1939, they all stopped Hebrew speaking, except for one boy, who spoke it even after the Germans invaded. K also joined many other youth movements, and last of which was Betar.
- 9.40 All the Jews in Lakhva kept the traditions, went to the synagogue on Fridays and Saturdays, put on tefilin everyday.
- 11.00 Koppel's village was a typical one, as described by Sholem Aleichem. There were 7 grades in the Hebrew school, with excellent teachers. There was a big library in Lakhva, with 3,000 books in Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish. The only youth movement that did not meet there was the Bund. There were all the aid funds. There were 2 synagogues for the 'mitznagdim' and one for the khessidim. Kopel's maternal grandfather was a fish merchant. Kopel's father was away from home, at his lumber mill, most of the time.
- 18.44 K was the one who helped his mother the most.
- 20.20 When the war broke out between Germany and Russia, Lakhva fell under Russian's jurisdiction [after the pact between the 2 nations was signed]. K's father's business was

nationalized immediately. The father was allowed to continue managing the business. Outwardly, the standard of living remained, but the school was closed, as well as the library, and the youth movements went underground. K began attending the public Russian school, which he liked.

- 22.00 On Yom Kippur eve, 1940, K's father was taken by the NKVD and was accused of being a bourgeois exploiter of workers and Zionist. The family appealed to Stalin. The reply said that they were investigating the charges. Ultimately, the father was condemned to 12 years of exile in Kazakhstan.
- 25.00 Moshe, the eldest child became the only bread winner for the family who, soon after, began selling its possessions.
- 26.32 Relationship between K's family and the 'goyim' in the area.
- 29.01 Stirrings of antisemitism in the catholic neighborhood in Lakhva, also in 1938, on the eve of Jabotinsky's visit to the village.
- 42.54 The Lag B'Omer celebrations.
- 44.28 Polish refugees arrived into Lakhva, and began telling what the Germans were doing to the Jews in Poland.
- 2.07.25 The family expected to be exiled to Siberia [as were all the families whose heads had already been sent to Russia] and the appointed date was Sept. 21, but because the war against Russia was launched by Germany, the cooperation was cancelled.
- 21.47 Germans come into Lakhva. Not a single shot was heard. The Red Army had fled.
- 23.11 The rabbis were asked to appoint a Judenrat. Berl Lopatin was its head.
- 25.55 Work groups. Their organization.
- 26.19 The Jewish police. Moshe, K's brother, was one.
- 28.48 K's brother Chanan, was appointed the Judenrat's secretary.
- 31.22 Yellow patch is ordered for Jews between 14-65 years of age. More anti-Jewish laws.
- 36.08 They heard that in a neighboring town, the district capital, Luninyets, all the Jewish men were murdered [July-Aug. 1941] and also in another nearby village the same happened [in David Gorodok]. there, K's uncle and son, the Muravchiks, were murdered. The survivors came to Lakhva. Now there were 2,000 Jews in Lakhva, the latter ones and the ones that arrived from Poland in 1939.

- 39.02 Finally, the SS units that had just carried out the atrocities in the neighboring town, arrived also in Lakhva. A dark period began.
- 40.13 K, Moshe and others had to shine the SS men's shoes and clean their horses, in addition to some other menial work. They were abused cruelly while they worked. The SS was in Lakhva a month. At one point, all the men were led to be shot, but only the intervention, and bribery of Lopatin, the Judenrat's head, interceding in front of general Schmidt, saved them.
- 55.00 K worked in the fish farms, which allowed him to steal some for home. They were eventually caught. Work in the lumber-mill.
- 59.00 Fall 1941. The Germans were stopped in Moscow.
- 59.40 In the winter of 41-42, a delegation arrived from Pinsk, and it was decided to establish a ghetto in Lakhva.
- 3.00.47 Starting with the evening hours, there was a curfew that lasted the whole night. Lights were not permitted, and there was scarcity of all kinds of combustibles.
- 04.40 The organization and location of the ghetto. K's entire family was sent to the grandfather's house. The transfer happened on the eve of Pesach 1942, under the supervision of many Germans soldiers. The families were given between 3-10 minutes to pack and leave. [K's family had managed to move some belongings to the grandfather's house in the period between the ghetto decree and the actual move.]An onlooker could see something strange; people carrying their matzos into the ghetto instead of their valuables.
- 8.00 The ghetto was divided in 2 parts: the northern one and the southern one [K lived in the latter]. In between the 2 sections was guarded all the time. The river Smertz bordered the town and there were 3 bridges to cross it.
- 12.00 Work. Jews served as horses to pull the wagon. They were under the supervision of the TOD[P?]T, engineer corps of the army.] Punishments.
- 18.29 The underground. Efforts to obtain weapons.
- 20.00 Hunger.
- 25.59 On Sept. 5, 1942, when K was 15 1/2, he was working 18 km east of Lakhva, loading lumber onto trains to be sent to Germany. The Jews in that village, Mikashevichi, had been murdered the month before. In the middle of the work day, there was a big explosion. The partisans had bombed the train tracks between Lakhva and Mikashevichi.

29.00 The liquidation of the ghetto Lakhva. K is the only one in his family who managed to escape.

TAPE II

4.00.58 K, with a small group of other Jews from Lakhva, begin to move eastward, toward the partisans. Partisans don't want to accept them. Later, they request that a small number stay. Encounter with a large group from Lakhva.

10.24 K finds his maternal uncle, and finds out that his brother, having passed that same spot [Khost] decided to continue eastward, seeking to join partisans.

19.10 Moving from village to village in the area where K's father conducted his lumber business, and everyone knows the family. K finds out that his brother has been killed by partisans [a common occurrence] for the only reason of being Jewish.

22.31 Rosh Hashanah is spent idly, sitting by a bonfire. Other Jews the group finds on the way advise not to continue east because the partisans will not accept anyone, and even less, without weapons.

22.44 They decide to change direction and go toward Tcheloniets[?], home of his paternal grandparents.

24.00 K would sing for food.

28.24 Choosing a place in the forest to spend the winter.

29.45 Working in the farms of the area in order to obtain food.

31.24 All of the 12 people mourned the ones left behind. Each evening they would bring up memories, old songs, and cry.

37.23 K is 16 years old already [it was the new year, 1943]. He wanted to join the partisans, to a gypsy unit. They continued on their way until March 1943. They are ambushed by Germans. K's uncle and others are killed, K is shot on the side, but the bullet goes in and out. The rest of the group flees, including K, who is still bleeding. When they finally stop running [in circles, it turns out] they find out that the Germans burned alive the non-Jewish farmers in Tcheloniets and other farms around. A few tens survived out of hundreds of farmers.

46.34 K is directed to a house where they will take care of his wound. That family had also known his, and the father was the commander of the partisans unit.

- 50.08 Spring of 1943. The area is now overrun by partisans. The Germans don't return. K and other survivors in the group, plus the surviving non-Jewish farmers, decide to build a house together, for the 2 groups.
- 52.00 One day, K is called to see Komarow, the commander of several partisan units. He is taken under his wing, as the commander also knew K's father. He became a shepherd, and at the same time, gets well and is well-fed. K's cattle are attacked by German planes, and decimated. K then flees and joins another partisan group. He lies about his age, receives a weapon and now he will be able to avenge his family. It was K's happiest day in his entire life! That day, he became a man.
- 5.01.04 There were other Jews among the partisans. They took care of each other.
- 10.44 Winter 1943-44.
- 14.20 Partisans' activities during K's service. Sabotage activities.
- 18.00 A German communist desserts to the partisans.
- 20.21 Encounters with Lithuanians and Ukrainians who were more anti-Semitic than the Germans.
- 25.42 The Byelorussians helped them always [1 in 4 were killed by the Germans].
- 27.08 June 1944. Meeting with the Red Army in a forest.
- 29.00 The partisans group K served under was known as the general Kopak unit, which soon became part of the Red Army.
- 30.00 The fight against the Ukrainians [in the area of Grodno, Dubno, Kremenietz] in northwest Ukraine. The partisans continued their fight against the Ukrainians until mid-November.
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- 32.00 While resting after a particular incursion, K received a letter. It began: 'My dear wife, my dear children'.... It was a letter from his father, and all the river of tears that K hadn't shed for 2 years, came rushing forth. He cried for hours and hours, and only afterwards

he was able to continue reading. His father was in Siberia. The letter had come to Lakhva, which the Red Army had liberated, and someone obtained K's army address.

- 35.35 After the November 7, 1944, uprising, it was decided to disband the partisan unit. Each partisan was allowed to return to his place of origin. K knew that no one was left in Lakhva, and that the war wasn't over, so he volunteered in the Red Army, which sent him to Kiev.
- 45.24 K was appointed to carry out counter-espionage in the Red Army, by pointing out the traitors among the new Byelorussian and Ukrainian recruits. His appointment lasted 3-4 weeks.
- 53.41 January 1945. They moved to the front.
- 54.38 Approaching Berlin in May 1945. They hid in the forest. They hear the war is over. It was May 9, 1945.
- 55.39 The next day, K went to the commander's office and requested that his birth date be changed from December to May 9, the day he was reborn!
- 56.00 K renewed the correspondence with his father, and tells him what befell the family. The father tells him that he had a dream. All his teeth were pulled out, but for one. The father interpreted the dream, such as there would be one survivor in the family, and that he turned out to be K.
- 57.59 The Red Army moves in the direction of Bialystok. Among all the people who greet the army as it passes, he doesn't see a single Jewish face: what has happened to the Jewish people?!
- 6.00.00 How the Red Army marched.
- 2.00 Friendships in the unit.
- 15.24 K works in counter-espionage.
- 20.00 From Bialystok they want to go to Germany. They walk without knowing the road. They follow the 'bread crumbs' of the troops that had departed before them. Return to Bialystok. Encounter with a Jewish baker, who invites K and his friend to eat with them.
- 29.03 Encounter with the rest of the unit in next town.
- 32.16 K becomes an officer. Organizes the Komsomol [the communist youth].

40.43 K did not get any mail because his family was liquidated. He was envious of those getting correspondence. He then began to write to the family and friends of the other soldiers, and they wrote back! He received mountains of letters! One of them was from a girl in another town, with whom he fell in love. They exchanged pictures, and letters... as well as with many other people! K never met her! He did have a correspondence with his father, also. The father asked K permission to marry a woman he had met. K gave him his blessing, and they married.

43.18 K finds out that his teacher [whom he loved] is in Warsaw. There are some hints of leaving for Eretz Israel. K decides to desert and go to Warsaw. It was 1946.

53.00 K deserts from the Red Army, and joins a 'kibbutz' in the south of Poland, where he is in charge of security. Beginning of his wandering to get to Eretz Israel.

TAPE III

7.00.00 Ks recollection of his being ill with typhus while at the Komerow Partisans.

5.57 Recollection of the murder of the Jews in Lakhva, when the blood of the victims in the trenches seeped out, and boiled for days. And it was stopped only by pouring plaster over them. 2 Jews managed to escape from the dead pit. One of them was the Yiddish poet, Slutzky.

7.52 Blood, sweat and tears are the components of those 4 years in Ks life. He cannot believe that, as young as he was, he managed to survive and become a stable adult. He took revenge, making sure that he always did be with 'hot weapons', and not with his own hands. He never had enough satisfaction.

9.58 K doesn't want to brag about his feats during the war.

11.18 After the war, he always looked for the Jewish faces: he couldn't find many. He looked for the well-known clues of the Jewish homes: the houses he found, but they were empty!

12.39 K was about 20 when the war was over. Without family, without education, without the youth years.

13.54 Then, the war for his own spiritual and physical survival began...K wanted to do it in Eretz Israel. It took years until he got there.

14.25 He left Poland with a new name: Asher Barash. From Katowice to Czechoslovakia, Bratislava [He encountered his Red Army unit, on the way back from training. It was 1 1/2 months after K deserted. He wanted to wave to them, his heart was broken by not being able to reach to his good friends there....but it was impossible!] Then, to Austria, via the Danube. In Vienna, they went to visit Herzl's tomb; that visit strengthened Ks Zionist feelings. He was, in Vienna, in the Rothschild hospital, full of refugees. Then, to

Germany [not far from in Windsheim Nuremberg]. Yosef Gluz, from Betar, asked K to join his kibbutz. They did. He became a Jewish police officer there, so that the nights would be free to affix posters on the walls, on behalf of Etzel [the military underground].

- 25.34 There, he met a group of 10 Jews from Bialystok who began to 'pay' the Germans back, whenever and wherever Germans could be found.
- 31.46 After a month in Windsheim, word came from the headquarters in Munich to send 5 people to start the immigration to Israel. K was one of them. There were, altogether, a group of 100 people from Betar that assembled in Munich.
- 32.32 By train to Paris, with the help of the Bricha [escape] movement, that helped the group cross the border. They meant to be there for only a few weeks, and then proceed by illegal ship to Israel. A group of the youth was sworn in by the Etzel. They helped process ammunition.
- 34.27 At the time, the Zionist movement was choosing delegates for the Zionist congress, and many speakers came to Paris. One of them was Ben Gurion. The Etzel people, K among them, were placed in different places in the auditorium. They had the order to disturb the speech if Ben Gurion would mention the underground [Jewish] in Israel. He did, and a tumult ensued. It was only stopped when Ben Gurion said that, in fact, the only terrorists in Eretz Israel were the British. Then, he was able to finish his speech.
- 36.53 After 2 months, the group was sent to the south of France to await the ship.
- 37.45 February 23, 1947. Sailing to Israel in a wooden sailboat with capacity for 100, but which took 850! The ship's name was 'La Negev'. The journey lasted 23 days. The arrival to Israel's coast.
- 42.17 British destroyers stopped the ship, and directed them to Haifa. The captain refused. The British tried to board the ship, and the immigrants put up a fight. Then, the British won.
- 43.47 In Haifa, the Jews were transferred to a British ship, and sent to Cyprus, to a DP camp.
- 44.44 Life in the camp.
- 8.00.00 News was broadcasted to the general population by the Jewish Etzel group.
- 1.17 The British distributed 750 certificates a month in the DP camp, to enter Eretz Israel. The Jews would send more people out, in backpacks or suitcases!
- 5.28 In February 1948, K finally made it to Eretz Israel. They were sent to an immigrants' camp in Kiryat Shmel, near Haifa. A group of 10-12 decided to go to settle in Beer-

Yaakov, to set up a kibbutz. The group fell apart. K returned to Tel Aviv, where he was homeless. Etzel helped him.

- 12.40 After the establishment of Israel, K enrolled in the army, and made a career there.
- 18.20 In 1950, K was sent to an officer course, and that's where he received a message from his father, that he was arriving in Haifa. The encounter of the last 2 surviving people in the 2 families, was very emotional. Life with father. Marriage. Family.
- 25.00 Return to Lakhva in 1990. There, he got updates of the last days of Lakhva, from the still remaining non-Jews.
- 58.00 More recollections.