

RG-50.120 #0258      2 Tapes  
ISERS, TZVI

I

- 1.00 Born in 1923 in the town of Lenin on the border of Poland and Russia. Since it was directly on the border, even in 1923 the Polish authorities imposed a curfew every night at sunset.
- 1.03 When he was 2 years old his father was murdered by Russian bandits who robbed him as well. Mother was left with 6 children and expecting a 7th.
- 1.07 Lived in dire poverty. Mother knitted for the gentile neighbors. Remembers always being hungry.
- 1.09 Tzvi loved learning and books. Studied in synagogue first, and then went to a Jewish elementary school Tarbut, for 4 years. Upon graduation moved to Polish school for a couple more years. Could not afford high school education.
- 1.14 Loved physical labor. Worked in apple orchards belonging to Polish landlord. No work in village. Most youngsters were carpenters.
- 1.17 When Germans invaded Poland, his eldest brother was drafted into the Polish army. The Soviet army crossed the border and 'liberated' the area. Schools opened and Tzvi enrolled in Russian school. Always loved books - read Yiddish, Polish, even Hebrew and Russian.
- 1.22 Belonged to Pioneer youth movement. His sister immigrated to Palestine in 1931. Sent money home to Poland.
- 1.26 Under Soviet rule life improved slightly but Poles intensified anti-Semitism - accused them of being communists. Tzvi joined Komsomol [Soviet youth movement] - believed in communist message of equality. But period was
- 1.30 short-lived. The Soviets crossed border in the summer of 1939 and in the fall, September, the German army invaded Poland.
- 1.34 Describes life under Soviet rule - cultural life enriched, included musical festivals and trips to Minsk.
- 1.37 Refugees from Poland, Fall of 1939, local Jews didn't believe the stories of what was happening in Poland. One of them married one of his sisters. This is the period of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact - Soviets are aligned still with Germans against the West.
- 1.43 Tells of his brother's life as a Polish soldier - was arrested by the Germans and was sent to a large German estate where he worked as a foreman. Jews and communists were exterminated. His brother passed as a Byelorussian and was

- sent to labor camp instead. In winter of 1941 escaped but caught again and put in prison in Brest. When Russian captured Brest he escaped and returned home.
- 1.49 Goes back to start of war in 1939 - describes retreat of Russian forces across border - general evacuation of Russian army local youth wanted to escape. Borders were closed. Germans already in Smolensk. Tzvi and friends joined retreating Prussian army - wanted to be taken East with them, but Russian commander refused - they returned home.
- 1.55 German era begins. Created Judenrat youth, was taken to labor. Ghettos were not established yet. Tried sabotage whenever possible.
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- 1.00 Local Byelorussian started atrocities against local Jews, with German weapons and blessing. Anti-Jewish edicts - Jews were not allowed on sidewalks. All their gold and jewels confiscated. Were not allowed wood for heating.
- 2.06 Tells of atrocities, a murder of local Jewish family - including mother and babies - all committed by Byelorussians.
- 2.09 Describes burial of victims' bodies that had been left on streets.
- 2.13 Tzvi wanted to flee to the woods, but a German decree announced that the entire families of the escapees would be exterminated. He stayed with mother and sisters and continued with labor camp. Lived on bread and water only. The weak and sickly were shot.
- 2.22 Winter, 1942, entire Jewish communities in small towns - Byelorussian were being exterminated already.
- 2.25 In a camp of approx 600 men, Tzvi was member of a small resistance group of 10-12 men. Heard that his home town of Lenin was destroyed and family killed. They then decided to plan escape. Had nothing to lose. Wanted to join partisans across the woods and swamps. Describes plans - the secrecy and plots to liberate the entire camp. Only a handful managed the escape, at first. Many others followed, but Germans exterminated all those who stayed behind. Very few survived, August 1942.
- 2.42 After the great escape, persecution of Jews intensified. The Germans offered 'prizes' like extra sugar, flour and monetary gifts to anyone who would disclose hiding places of Jews, or better still, kill them.
- 2.45 Escapees tried to reach the partisans but when they reached them, were turned away by the partisans who wanted to have nothing to do with them, for they had no weapons, no experience and no organization.

Restricted portion

- 3.48 Tzvi tells how some Jews refused to include him in the groups they had created based on family relations. Tells of selfish, self preservation sentiments of those Jews. Decided to follow the partisans, in any case.
- 3.00 When he found finally, about a month later, a group of partisans they were caught in cross-fire battle with Germans. Tzvi was rewarded by being accepted to their ranks - was even given weapons and treated as a hero.
- 3.10 Tzvi tells about this group of partisans - comprised of Russian prisoners, many hard core criminals and a few political prisoners. They escaped a big prison camp and the toughest survived and fled to the swamps, forests and became partisans. Majority of them were thieves and murderers and very anti-Semitic, but took Tzvi, his younger brother and 2 more friends in with them. Describes the toughness of this group which was nicknamed 'the wolf eaters'.
- 3.15 Describes military objectives - mainly sabotage of German trains heading east to the Russian fronts carrying ammunition and troops, even tanks and other armored vehicles. Tzvi 'invented' special mines and other explosive devices and received partisan's accolades.
- 3.24 They took no prisoners - killed all captured Germans with bayonets, so as not to waste precious bullets. Describes wolves attacking the dead Germans corpses.
- 3.31 Spring of 1943. Germans brought Magyar [Hungarian] reinforcement to fight the partisans.
- 3.33 Describes hardships and even famine - partisan ranks at some periods and the changing fortunes of war when they had captured several villages after Magyars retreated. Description of military operations on the eastern front alongside Red Army.

## II

- 4.01 Retreat of partisans. Arrive in liberated territories. Some partisans were conscripted into the Red Army. Describes skirmishes and attacks by local anti Soviet groups, including patriotic Ukrainians, farmers, etc. Tzvi joined a battalion of 1500 to fight these groups - destroyed entire villages.
- 4.15 Description of attacks on German army. Life in the Red Army - hunger and other shortages. Tzvi liked the discipline and dedication of Red Army. Was chosen to a special forces unit. Confronted a German division which Hitler kept holed in the area after his retreat from Leningrad.
- 4.20 End of Fall 1944. Different military operations - assaults and retreats - near the Baltic sea. Tzvi was wounded in action. Description of Red Army military hospitals triage and operating rooms after he suffered extreme frost bite. A Jewish surgeon from Minsk saved his arm. Stayed in hospital till almost end of

war [till April 1945]. There were only 2 Jews in entire hospital. Tzvi was discharged from army. After a visit to Moscow, where he delivered a rare medicine for venereal diseases [given to him by a Jewish doctor in the military hospital], he decided to go to Minsk, and then try to get home to Lenin.

- 4.50 Different jobs in Minsk. Then enrolled in Minsk Las school. Got married. Life was good, economically and socially. Had many friends who were also partisans during the war.