

Shlomo Schein

(Recorded October 6, 1987)

Shlomo Schein (ne Salek Schein) was born in 1920 in **Krakow**. He attended the Mizrahi School until age of 14, and then the Mizrahi Tahkemoni. After that, he attended Commercial school for one year. At the age 11-12, as a student, he joined the movement Hashomer Hadati. At age 15-16 he left that religious movement to join Akivah. In 1937, Shlomo was sent to the Hachsharah (farming training) in **Leopolddenuf(?)** in preparation to his immigration to Palestine. He attended for or 1 and a half years. He returned to **Krakow** a short time before WW II started. On September 3-4 the Germans entered **Krakow**, and conquered Poland. Shlomo lists all of the orders and prohibition against the Jews. The Jewish population of Poland was 50 or 60 thousand before the war (many of them refugees from Germany.) In 1939-40 the Jews could still circulate but it was hard to make a living. At the end of 1940, instructions came out for the majority of the Jews to leave **Krakow**. Only 1500 remained to work for the Germans. Everyone one else was deported, alphabetically.

In the winter of 1940, Shlomos's entire family was ordered to evacuate including his parents (religious Zionist) and siblings. Shlomo's father forbade him to join them. Shlomo had a valuable work permit, and thus could remain in **Krakow**. In March of 1941 a ghetto was established. In order to show he was productive, Shlomo said he was a farmer. In that way the Germans could use him to replace the men who were sent to the front.

For a time he worked as a gardener in a Gestapo neighborhood, on **Pomoska (?)** street. Shlomo lived in the ghetto in a small room with a friend from Akiva, **Benny Wexner (?)** Life in the ghetto and its entire vicissitudes. At the end of 1941, Shlomo started to work in the garage of a German company that provided (?) to the German army. The company was called "Power through Happy Mood". (**Kraftoor freude(?)**) The garage was managed by a civilian from Germany and his secretary. Shlomo worked there also as a German – Polish translator. In the winter of 1941-2, a young man came to his room in the ghetto, and reminded Shlomo that they had been together in the movement Hashomer Hadati...His name was **Eshek Bauminger(?)** Shlomo remembered that Eshek had been the leader of his group. Eshek had served in the Polish army, and then went east to join the Red Army. There he was taken captive and fled to Levov(?) When he arrived to the ghetto Eshek asked Shlomo to help him find work so that he could obtain a work permit and stay in the ghetto. Shlomo approached his manager, who agreed to accept Eshek in exchange of some gift. Shlomo had been, until then, the only Jew to work in the garage.

Many a conversation developed on the way to work between Eshek and Shlomo, the 22-years old friends, about the years gone by, their current situation and their uncertain future..

(At minute 19:12, Shlomo begins some comments in Yiddish and Polish. One word Shlomo used in Hebrew was "resistance".)

Eshek had been a soldier already, and could not stand by passively, even if there appeared to be no options. Shlomo was against boycotting the place of work. (More Yiddish.)

He finally agreed to do something against the Germans, but not in the garage. Eshek knew about how to work in the underground, and started planning for it, mobilizing the ghetto youth to fight the Germans. It was not relevant to which movement they had belonged, but they all decided not to die in vain, even without hopes to succeed, so that History will know they fought.

If to be a Jew was guaranteed death, to do illegal deeds, they knew, was a death warrant. Since they were not sure who to trust, they formed secret squadrons of five. The members knew only the names in their own group. Only the leaders of each group knew the identities of the others. Eshek was the Chief of Staff, **Benek Halbreich** (?) was in charge of operations, Shlomo was in charge of logistics, and there was also Adek (?). They met in secret, and did not acknowledge one another when they passed each other in the ghetto. They were weary also of the Jewish Police, whose role was to aid the Germans.

Shlomo and his friends decided that being in the ghetto was too confining for their activities. They had to be able to leave the ghetto as Aryans. (More Polish in minute 32.) For that, they needed three proper Polish documents: a birth certificate, an official ID and a work permit. (Polish again in minute 33)

They falsified or payed for the above documents. The seals were expertly falsified mainly by **Moishe Zuckerman**. Also, some Jews who worked in government offices were able to steal forms. Equipped with these Aryan papers, the Jews could be outside of the ghetto, exiting and entering it through hidden basement passageways or windows.

In 1942, the deportations and “actions” reduced once and again the size of the ghetto, whose surface was 3 or 4 big streets and some small ones. Before its liquidation, the ghetto had only 5,000 Jews.

The resistance groups started implementing their plans. The operations that Shlomo remember were the burning of a workshop that made German Army uniforms, the burning of a German garage, and damaging the train tracks to cause derailments. Many of the operations came about through happenstances. For example **Benik Albreich** dated a Polish girl, **Ianina Biga** (?) who agreed to help them. She gave him the keys to open the screws of the connections between the tracks to derail the trains. In the summer of 1942, the group decided to work more intensively.

At that time, the Jews did not work any longer in the garage. They devoted their time to the underground. In the mid of 1942, a woman by the name of **Gola Mire** appeared in the ghetto. Shlomo did not know much about her. She was a relative of **Gushka Liebeskind**. She had been a Communist before the war. She had lived in **Levov**, and was a member of the city council during the Russian conquest. When the Germans entered Poland, she fled, arriving in the ghetto in 1942. She was a dominant personality, very political and also advocated for the youth organizations to unite and become active fighters against the Germans. There were two of these movements in the ghetto: Shlomo’s and the Akiva former members. The groups did not have weapons. The only possible source to obtain them was to kill some lonely German at night, and steal his weapon. After an operation like that, Gola had to stay put for a month or two, because the guards became even more vigilant. Gola had a connection with the PPR, the Polish Communist group, since 1942. PPR could not help much with weapons or logistics (Again, Polish in minute 46.) **Gola** then advocated for the Jewish resistance to cooperate with PPR, so that PPR will give them weapons. After some hesitation, the PPR agreed. In the second half of 1942, the PPR took the Jewish resistance under its protection, providing logistics,

grenades, and places to live in the city. Starting in the fall of 1942, the two groups began operations together. At a certain point, the idea came to do a big operation to shock **Krakow**, during the Christmas season. The idea was to distribute flyers, and Polish flags, and operate against coffee houses and places frequented by Germans. The chosen date was 22 of December 1942. 40 people took part. The preparations were hard, both spiritually and physically. They wanted this operation to succeed but they also knew it could spell their end. At the end of 1942, the Jews already knew about the on-going annihilation of the European Jewry. On September 22, the Jewish resistance members left the ghetto to distribute flyers, to hang flags, to attack lone Germans. Two groups were assigned to attack 2 coffee houses, one of them was "Tziganeria. "

The ones in charge waited for a few hours, until they knew that everything had taken place. In Tziganeria and Germans were killed. All along the Vistula flew Polish flags, and some Germans were killed. After the operations were finished, and the members returned, the groups decided not to come out for 3 days. They waited for the Germans' response. They hoped the Germans did not believe the attacks were carried out by them. Three days passed, and no one knew what was happening outside. Shlomo lived outside the ghetto (more Polish in minute 56) afterwards, he met with someone and he found out that all the members of Akiva were found on the night of the operation, and killed.

That operation was the crowning achievement of the movement but also its swan song; it was also the end of the ghetto, as it was liquidated on March 13, 1943. The few surviving Jews were sent to **Plashow** (?). During that time, the resistance movement members did not meet. The Germans looked for them, but Shlomo doesn't remember what happened after. This was a time of panic, loneliness and hunger. At the beginning of February 1943, in a winter's night, Shlomo was awoken by a strong light shining in his eyes. He was punched in the teeth, (5 of which fell) and he bled profusely. Three or four Gestapo men surrounded him, screaming at him and at a young Polish man with whom he was sharing a bed. They looked for weapons. Shlomo and the Polish family were ordered to dress. In the hallways, and to his surprise, Shlomo saw a member of the resistance who had led the Gestapo to him with the promise to spare his life and his father's. They were killed, nevertheless.

Shlomo was tied up and taken to **Monte Lupich**, the well-known prison. Shlomo remembers little from that period, as the interrogations were endless and cruel. He was afraid to be forced to reveal secrets, and tried to remain silent. He also prayed to die. There were 2 Jews who helped the Gestapo. In the cell there were about 60 people from all segments of life. There were also some of Shlomo's friends. **Kuba Liberman** (?) was in his cell, and Shlomo witnessed his torture. Sharing the cell there were also some Poles who were educated in Germany. They were worse than the rest. Each of the prisoners received about 200grams of bread in the morning, and at noon a bit of dirty water (soup?) The inmates were ordered to run with this soup served on a flat dish... One night, two Germans entered the cell with a list of names. 30 of the 60 inmates were loaded into a truck, and everybody knew they were going to be killed. When the truck left, a rabbi from **Vinitchka** (?), also a prisoner thought the truck will come back and take the rest of the inmates. He suggested that since they were all going to die anyway, they should all recite the Confession (Vidui.) They did. Everyone wished they could be saved by death. Shlomo's turn came next. He was put on a truck was already filled with people. He was taken to Auschwitz. For some reason, he was believed to be a Pole at his arrival to Auschwitz, and until later on his arm was not tattooed.

Auschwitz. In Auschwitz, after a few weeks, Shlomo saw **Shemek** and **Poldek**. They were sent to work in a quarry that provided stones to a cement factory. Shlomo was there 16-18 months. The conditions were dismal, and again they prayed for death. Shlomo saw there also **Kuba** and **Gusta Deutcher** (?) In fact, they remained together all the time. Shlomo did some other work as well. In the winter of 1944, rumors started to arrive that the Germans were withdrawing. The camp was emptied one night, and the prisoners were taken out. Powerless and weak, the Jews hoped that the war was coming to the end. The Death March. Shlomo was for a short time in **Oranienburg** and also in **Flossenburg**. For a few days they traveled by train and arrived to a camp, to an open field that was a small airport, Ganaka (?) Shlomo recalls seeing the Allies' bombardments over the airport. The Allies, probably noticing the inmates, made sure to bomb only the planes and the war machines. While the Germans hid in the pits, the Jews had to lie on the open ground. After this attack, the Jews began to walk again. It was difficult. Sometimes they stopped and spent the night in a farm, on a straw storage. The Germans were also tired. A few hundred Jews had left Auschwitz, but just tens survived. Now they were guarded by Hungarians not Germans. Shlomo and two other friends decided to flee. It was mid-April, 1945. They hid in the forests. They walked until they saw a clearing with two small structures. As they inspected them looking for Germans, they saw an old lady come out, screaming, but they didn't understand her. Through gestures, she invited them to come in, to eat. Shlomo and his friends sat by the well and they asked some milk. After a while, an old man came out, and started talking, and invited them to stay with them. During this conversation, an SS man came out of the house. They panicked. It was the old couple's son who said "They are Jews. Kick them out". The old man said "It's my house. If you don't like it, go." The son took his weapon and his coat, and left. The old couple thought this act was going to be their insurance at the end of the war, their salvation. They washed the survivors, clothed them, and gave them space to sleep in the attic where they fell asleep. When they woke up, the couple's daughter brought them food. They stayed there for a few weeks until they recovered. After they departed, they came to **Egendorg** (?) then a DP camp run by the Americans. Shlomo did not return to Poland as he did not hope to find any relatives alive. He still considers Poland a huge cemetery. The 3 who were together, Shlomo, **Kuba** and **Gusten Deutcher** almost survived, but **Guster Deutcher** (?) died a short time before liberation.

Photos:

-a memorial plaque left in **Krakow** over Tziganeria.

-photo of the resistance members: Robert, who was killed when he jumped from the 3rd floor, and from right to left, next to him **Benny Heilbreich**, operation officer of the resistance group, who dated **Ianina Biga**, then **Romek Horowitz**, **Libek Kefner**, who was killed when he jumped from a train in **Krakow**, another person he doesn't remember, and Shlomo;

-a photo of Shlomo, in 1947, when he emigrated to Palestine;

-a photo of **Shalom Roberman**, one of the fighters who participated in almost all the operations. He now lives in Israel.