

### **Yakov Lieberman (RG-50.308\*0012)**

Yakov (Kuba) was born in Krakow in 1915. As a child he was a member of Akiba youth movement. Yakov was in the Polish military until he got injured in a battle between Poland and Germany in 1939. During his time in the hospital (foot injury), the Germans invaded Krakow. On Yom Kippur he was told by a hospital professor that the Germans are in the hospital, looking for Polish soldiers, specifically the Jewish ones. Yakov took the professor's advice and left the hospital. He stayed with his aunt and received medical care from the Jewish hospital in Krakow.

In early 1940, all Jews were ordered to wear a yellow star on their clothes and were ordered to leave Krakow. Only a few who were essential to the Germans stayed. Yakov and his family moved to a town named Skala, not too far from Krakow. They rented one room for the whole family. Yakov's brother was a dentist and Yakov assisted him.

In 1941 the Germans needed workers to build rail roads from Krakow to Russia, this is when they formed labor camps in Plaszow and Prokocim. They forced the young Jewish men from the communities near Krakow to work. Since Yakov and his family were new in Skala, the Judenrat decided to send them in the first transport to the labor camps. The labor camp wasn't very secure at the time, and the work was very hard. He registered as a dentist and was able to stay in a clinic inside the camp.

Yakov saw patients in the clinic, but if they had a bigger problem that required a hospital, he was allowed to take a group of people (by foot) once a day to the hospital in Krakow ghetto. This gave him a certificate to move freely between Plaszow and Krakow.

As members of a Zionist youth movement they felt that they had to do something about what was happening. Dolek (Liebeskind) thought it would be best if Yakov stayed in Plaszow, because his certificate to move freely between Plaszow and Krakow might help them in the future. Yakov went to the ghetto almost every day. He met with Polo or Dolek or Simek (Shimshon Draenger) at the apartment in Jusefinska street and transferred people in and out of the Ghetto.

In 1942 it was known that Akiba members started to form an underground activity and the Germans started to arrest all Akiba members (this was after Dolek and Simek had escaped from the ghetto) his brother was arrested and killed as well. Yakov remembers a time when he needed to help a group of 20 Akiba members get from Krakow to Bochnia, the rumor was that life in Bochnia ghetto was manageable. He paid a Polish guy to drive the group in his truck. Jozef Wulf organized the group of 20 Akibas, and Yakov reported that this group is going to Plaszow. The Polish guy waited for them mid-way and drove them to Bochnia. Yakov went back to Plaszow.

Even though Yakov was in Plaszow, he was always in touch with the ghetto. Poldek Wasserman or Romek Lustgarten would pass messages between Yakov and Dolek or Simek). One day he got a message that there were dollars or gold hidden in a basement of an abandoned Jewish house. He was asked to look for that money along with two Hashomer Hatzair members. Yakov had pretended to be SS officer (he had a big coat, similar to the ones the SS had) and the other two pretended to be Germans. They couldn't find anything, and later discovered that the Gestapo was there just two days earlier and took the money. Yakov was asked to do all sorts of errands like that.

In December, Yakov and Poldek received an order to watch the Jewish hospital in Skawinska and lead the people returning from Tsiganeria attack back to Plaszow (the hospital was a spot where people who

returned from underground activities met). They soon realized that Gestapo was already in the hospital and arrested the people who came back from Tsiganeria. They later learned that Dolek was killed. Simek returned to Krakow after Tsiganeria and was arrested for publishing underground newspapers, even though he had valid Aryan papers. People who worked at the car garage in Montelupich prison told Yakov and Poldek that Simek was taken there; they told Gusta (Simek's wife). They were later told that Gusta went to Pomorska (Gestapo center) to ask about her husband's arrest but she was arrested. Romek Lustgarten was arrested as well.

Around Jan-Feb 43' things were starting to fall apart, a decision needed to be made. Yakov, Hilel Wodzislawski, Poldek Wasserman, Hersz Bauminger, Natek Weissman and Julek Apple had a meeting in Zielonki (? not sure about the spelling of this place 16:35). They decided that the best thing to do would be to take the survivors to the woods. They knew that Krakow was going to be eliminated and had nothing to lose. They wanted to get some money before they went to the woods, and Wodzislawski told them about a rich Jew at Bochnia bunker who's hiding gold and dollars in his mattress. Hersz Bauminger suggested that Yakov (with his big coat) along with an armed polish guy should go to the bunker and steal the money. Yakov met with Kajik (the armed polish guy) at the central station of Krakow and went to Bochnia. Somewhere on the way Poldek and Natek Weisman told Yakov to abort the plan (not giving a reason why). He got off at the train and walked back to Plaszow. Later, when Yakov was in Montelupich prison he heard that Poldek and Natek robbed the rich Jew from Bochnia, just a few days after the original plan was canceled. The Gestapo went after that and killed the whole bunker.

A few weeks later Mueller was looking for Yakov, Goth the camp commander had ordered to arrest him (later on Yakov found out that Weissman had given his name to the Germans). He was taken to Pomorska for interrogations then taken to Montelupich prison. He was alone in a cell and was interrogated by Gestapo. He remembers it until today. Every once in a while they would send people in to his cell to try and get names out of him. After the interrogation he saw Simek. He told him about the interrogation and didn't see him at Montelupich again.

After a while he was released from Montelupich and sent to Auschwitz. In Auschwitz he saw Poldek, Simek, Shriber brothers. He spent just a few days in Auschwitz until he and Shlomo Shine were taken to Gollerschau (cement factory), where they stayed almost until the end of the war (Gustek Duitcher was there as well).

Interviewer asking about Yakov's parents whereabouts during the time he was in Plaszow-

His Parents and brother stayed in Skala and were later taken in a transport to Slomniki and from there, they were taken to Belzec. Yakov was able to use his connection with Mueller to transport his brother from Belzec to Plaszow. He could not save his parents.

Yakov remembers that he visited his parents in Skala two months before Skala's elimination, he tried convincing them to come with him to Plaszow, but they wanted to stay in Skala.

Yakov was released on May 9<sup>th</sup> from Mauthausen, he then walked by foot and hitchhiked to Krakow to look for family. He found his brother (the dentist) in north Krakow, he was released from Chenstochova (Częstochowa?) in January by the Russians. He also found friends from the Akiba movement. They were working since January.

It was very dangerous in Krakow, Yakov went back to his family's old apartment, but the doorman wouldn't let him in. He knew the doorman from his time in the Polish army, where they served together. The doorman opened the door and was surprised to see that Yakov was alive (29:15-29:22 Yakov is telling the interviewer what the Polish doorman said to him in Polish). Yakov felt that it wasn't safe to be there, the Polish would kill a curious guy like him, so he left.

Interviewer is asking for more stories about Plaszow (the following stories are more random, no storyline).

- When Plaszow was a still a labor camp people were allowed to come in and out freely, this was when Noiman and Peltz where there, but when Mueller came they closed the gates.
- After the elimination of Pustków camp, a few surviving families came to Plaszow (his brother was a doctor in Pustków but didn't want to escape, and went with the rest of the Jews to Belzec). Hofstetter family was one of the families who came to Plaszow after the elimination of Pustków camp. Hofstetter (Otto Hofstetter?) was a pharmacist, he used to give Mueller a lot of presents like gold and diamonds. One night Mueller came with his dog to the Hofstetter family room, the dog attacked Mrs. Hofstetter (Pola Hofstetter?) who, in self-defence, hit the dog. Mueller got mad, took the Hofstetter family outside and killed them all.
- In Krakow ghetto, Yakov and a group of religious Jews from Hashomer Hadati built a bunker on Jozefinska street to try and protect themselves. Rap brothers hid there along with Yulek Wulf's sister. Moshe Zukerman (from Hashomer Hatzair in Krakow) visited the bunker and promised to bring them weapons, it never happened. Later when he was in Montelupich he heard that the Germans killed everyone in that bunker.
- When Dolek was still in the ghetto, Yakov was asked to go to Yaroslav and look for a path leading to Romania. When he got there he saw that the Jews were already being killed and sent to the ghetto. Yakov describes the Polish people as their biggest enemy, because they had a six sense to spot Jews and turned them in to the Germans. It was impossible for a group of people to cross the border with all the Polish people around, maybe one person, but not a group. Yakov felt that it was too dangerous for him to be there, even with his Aryan papers and returned to the ghetto.
- In the ghetto, they used to sell other Jews Aryan papers to make money. They needed the money to help feed people, clothing and later on for weapons. They only did this for a short time, because the Germans realized that there were a lot of fake papers and it got dangerous. Dolek and Simek had authentic papers, they got it from a priest.