

RG-50.443*0003

Armando and Rebecca Aaron

Summary

Armando Aaron was born in Corfu on October 29, 1920. Armando graduated from the University of Athens shortly before the war erupted. Before the Germans invaded, Armando and his family lived under Italian occupation. It was not long before the Germans took control of Corfu and made life for the Jews there a living hell. On June 9, 1944, the Germans began deporting the Jews of Corfu to Auschwitz. Before deportation, Armando's family was first imprisoned; Armando was among a group of prisoners that was then sent to Skaddar. Shortly thereafter, Armando was able to join the partisans in the nearby village of Komi. After four months of working with the partisans, Armando returned to Corfu and found nothing but ruins. Most of Armando's family perished in the camps.

Rebecca, Armando's wife, was a survivor of Auschwitz. She and Armando were married on September 10, 1946. Rebecca's entire family was deported to Auschwitz, and most of them never returned. In Auschwitz, Rebecca was forced to perform hard labor, and after about six months she was transferred to Bergen-Belsen where she worked in a factory. Rebecca was liberated by the British and taken to a transit camp, Celes, where she stayed for four months. From there she was taken by train to Brussels, and then eventually boarded a plane to Athens. In Athens, the Greek Red Cross made arrangements for Rebecca to go to Corfu where she was reunited with her father. Rebecca says of Corfu today, "There is nothing much left of the Jewish life. There is a synagogue. Armando opens it and leads the services. There is hardly ever a minyan [quorum] except on holidays. There are some Jews in the area and they all seem to be doing okay, but there are no religious or social activities where Jews get together as before."

Time-coded notes

- 01:02:00** ARMANDO: "I was born in Corfu on October 29, 1920. I had four brothers: Isacco, Io, Dario and Marco. My parents were named Savas and Richeta. My father sold yard goods and my mother, a graduate of the University of Paris, was a professor of French. Before the war, I attended the elementary school, then the 'gymnasium' and finally the University of Athens and passed all the exams in economics and accounting. My brother Dario was killed by the German bombardment of Corfu. In my home we spoke French, Italian and Greek. When the new chief rabbi, Jacob Nehama, came to Corfu [from Jerusalem] he asked my mother to give him French lessons so he would be able to deal with the Greek authorities. In turn, the rabbi gave me Hebrew instruction. He also taught me the Shehita, the ritual slaughter animals. The rabbi was arrested with all of us on June 9, 1944, and was taken to Auschwitz where he perished in the crematorium. Earlier he had an opportunity to go into hiding because the Greek bishop offered him help, but he insisted that his responsibility was to assist the Jewish community."
- 01:13:20** "Before the Germans came, Corfu was occupied by the Italians. We lived quite undisturbed under the Italian rule. Then the Germans attacked, first by incendiary bombs, mostly on the Jewish section. They thus burned our three synagogues and the matzo bakery. Then, the Germans marched in, and transformed our lives into living hell.

The Germans tried to degrade us in every way possible. They also received help from the local fascists. The Jews had to report each Wednesday to the authorities. The Germans and their collaborators would walk into any Jewish store and take whatever they wanted. They would also call the Jewish community office and order them to bring goods and money. The Germans were in Corfu only nine months before initiating their 'Final Solution' on June 9, 1944 when they took all the Jews to Auschwitz.”

01:21:28 “The Germans ordered, through the president of the Jewish community, that all the Jews had to come to the great square at 6 a.m. on June 9th. Our entire family reported as ordered. We didn't think that the Germans would do anything bad just three days after the Normandy invasion. We were wrong. First we were imprisoned and taken to the 'fortress.' The Germans took all our possessions - money, gold, food, etc. We were kept at this fortress without food for several days. [The local Red Cross brought some food, but hardly enough.] I remained there about five miserable days. A few days later a group of us was taken away [to Athens], then a second group. I was in the third group. They took our group to Skaddar. To give you an idea of how our life was, I saw a Greek priest give a piece of bread to one of the Jewish inmates. When a German officer saw that, he killed the Jew on the spot with a pistol in the back of the neck. The Greek priest got a few kicks with the boot.”

01:29:00 “Then we were told we were moving on. They took us to another village. There I met a local guy, Georgio Machadis, who had a store and who was to become a good friend. He said that the Germans would kill everyone. He invited me to escape and join him.”

Greek Army of Liberation: Liberation Front

02:01:00 “I had never seen this person before He was a young barber in Patrasso. [I had entered his barber shop.] At this time the Germans used their dogs. He told me that I had a bad smell, and the dogs would discover me. He invited me to spend the night at his place. His father had just died a few days earlier and he lived with his mother and a sister. He said that if the Germans came to his house he would tell them that I was the sister's fiancée. The next day he took me to a nearby village of Komi where there were partisans. The partisans at first were not sure if I was a German spy - there were many such spies infiltrating the partisan organization. They gave me a choice: either go finish my courses at the University of Athens or stay with them. Since we need educated people, I chose to remain with the partisan group, working and fighting with them. I served as a bookkeeper and economist. It went on like that for four months, until the German pullback. I continued with ELAS for a while because I was grateful that they saved my life, then I returned to Corfu after four months.”

02:16:00 “In Corfu I found nothing but ruins. Our house was occupied by strangers and everything we had was stolen. For many days I lived on the street. My parents and my oldest brother, Issaco, were burned in the crematory the first day they arrived in Auschwitz. My youngest brother, Marco, sent me a telegram saying that he had survived and was coming home, but in August 1945 he was killed in a car accident on the way here. For a year I moved from place to place, being helped by friends here and there. At this time no one was concerned about the return of the Jewish property. The Greek

Jewish survivors did not return from the German concentration camps until four months later. To survive, I worked as a manual laborer or sold little things on the street. I made a claim in the courts and then two years later I was finally granted about half of my father's store, and life became a little better, especially after I got married on September 10, 1946.”

02:26:00 “Rebecca, my wife, was also a survivor from the concentration camp in Auschwitz. Rebecca says: “Things were rough at first, sure, but I found my father who was a plumber and he started working right away. I arrived in Corfu in September 1945. We disembarked from a small boat, about 6 or 7 of us. We had no place to go and, as luck would have it, it rained very hard. We slept on park benches. We walked from place to place until we arrived at St. Cecilia. This place was like a Jewish ghetto before, and we heard people speaking Jewish. There was a lady, Penina, who had returned before us and she had rented a place where she would welcome everyone, either for company or because they had nowhere to go. As we walked, I heard people talking Jewish and I recognized a voice, my father’s. I screamed ‘Father!’ and he came out of the first floor window and embraced me. This was my start in Corfu.”

02:29:00 “We received some help from the Joint Distribution Committee. With their help I bought a sewing machine, and since my mother had taught me how to sew, I began to work at home.”

[What happened to your mother?, asked the interviewer] “Before the war we were a happy family, my parents and my grandmother. We lived okay under the Italian occupation, but later the Germans came and you know the story after that. We were all deported, and, most of us, including my mother, never returned.”

01:00:00 “We received a little bit of assistance from Germany and with that we obtained a nice apartment. We both worked, so our status improved little by little. Armando worked as a professor of mathematics and accounting. Our son Marko studied and became a doctor. Both our sons are working. We are living now in a house which we are renting from the Jewish Community. Thank heavens, we are well. We have two grown children.”

[Interviewer asks if their marriage was based on love.] “Half love, half necessity. but we learned to adapt, and thank heavens, our marriage was quite successful.”

01:03:00 [Interviewer asks Rebecca about deportation.] “We were all deported: mother, father and two sisters. One morning the Germans came with their trucks, took us to Pyreo where they loaded us on cattle cars. They gave us some food for the trip – a little chicken and bread. The train took off, and we traveled for what appeared to be several days, until we arrived at Auschwitz. It was 1:30 a.m. 'All out!' they were screaming at us. Then they lined us up, separately, men and women with children. There we went through a selection, with those who were able to work forced to one side. The children were loaded on trucks and taken directly to the crematorium. After a short time we could see fire and smoke coming from the chimney. I asked some of the workers there what the fire and

- 01:06:00** smoke were about. They said that they were burning the prisoners' clothes. I didn't believe them because of the smell of burning flesh. Then they took us women, shaved our heads and made us undress completely. They took our clothes. They made us stand around naked until the evening, and then gave us striped prisoner clothes. It was awful. We couldn't recognize each other. They changed our lives. This was the worst evening of our lives, the worst! In the morning they tattooed numbers on our arms. I was # A-8413; my sister was right behind me with # A-8414. [My mother was taken to the crematorium the first evening with the children. Then there was another 'selection'. They took some more women, about 40 or 50, but they machine-gunned them, evidently not enough for a good fire. We were then taken to a 'block' where they left us until the evening without food. In the evening we were called out. I don't remember if they gave us any food, but none of us had any desire for food. We were taken to 'beds', about eight or ten of us to a bed. In the morning there was another lineup, and we were taken to 'quarantine'. After a 40 day quarantine [with baths] we were assigned to work. The Germans would take us to the work site, about 10 km from the camp. In the evening, if there were cars they would take us back to camp; if there was no transportation, they would keep us there, without food, for the next day's work. This was not a problem for them. In the meantime we became so skinny, like the Moslems (musselmen?). This was the camp routine. If you were sick, you didn't say so because the result would have been death. There were frequent selections, about once a week.”
- 01:15:00** “I did all types of work: breaking rocks into small stones, cutting down trees in the forest and similar. I remember an incident. There was this Jewish prisoner named Belina. She was a German spy. One day she asked me to give her my bread ration, threatening to tell the guard that I wasn't working. When I refused, she called the German and told him that I wasn't working. He kicked me so hard on my lower spine that I still feel the pain. The guards had heavy sticks and hoses, and they used them with vigor. [We met Belina in Corfu, and all of us survivors got even for what she did to us.]”
- 01:20:00** “After 6 months we were sent to Bergen-Belsen. There they put us to work in a factory. Life was rough; from the original 500 girls, there were only 20 of us left. When the Germans started losing the war we had less and less food. One time we had no food or water for five days. Some of the girls would break the water pipes to suck out some water. Needless to say, we were weak and susceptible to all type of diseases. When the British liberated the camp, there was a bakery with a store nearby with a lot of bread. The British did not let us go to the bakery. Instead, they gave a piece of bread to a dog, who immediately dropped dead. The Germans had poisoned the bread. The British then set the whole place on fire, the ovens, the building and the store. I saw all this.”
- “The British took us to another camp [Celes] where we stayed for about 4 months. I think it was a transit camp. Then they took us [on trains] to Brussels where we stayed about 20 days. Finally, we boarded the planes which took us to Athens. In Athens we were met by the Greek Red Cross. They put us in a house where we stayed a short time. Then they gave us the tickets to go to Petra. We went to the police and told them our situation. They made room for us there, then they made arrangements for us to go to

Corfu. In Corfu is where I met my father as I have already told you earlier. Thus ends this story, the story of murder of innocent people whose only 'crime' was that of being Jewish. I still suffer both physically and emotionally as I think of all my relatives and others who died under the most brutal of circumstances. I dream of my mother and my grandmother, and they comfort me and give me courage.”

01:31:00 [Interviewer asks about current Jewish life in Corfu.] “There is nothing much left of the Jewish life. There is a synagogue. Armando opens it and leads the services. There is hardly ever a minyan [quorum] except on holidays. There are some Jews in the area and they all seem to be doing okay, but there are no religious or social activities where Jews get together as before.”

END

The following is an additional set of time-coded notes, which may provide further information about the oral history interview.

RG-50.443 #0003

ARMANDO AND REBECCA AARON

1.2 -12 ARMANDO: I was born in Corfu on 10/29/20. I had ~~four~~4 brothers: Isacco, Io, Dario and Marco. My parents were named Savas and Richeta. My father sold yard goods and my mother, a graduated of the University of Paris, was a professor of French. Before the war, I attended the elementary school, then the 'gymnasium' and finally the University of Athens where I majored, and passed all the exams, in economics and accounting. My brother Dario was killed by the German bombardment of Corfu. In my home we spoke French, Italian or Greek. When the new chief rabbi, Jacob Nehama, came to Corfu [from Jerusalem] he asked my mother to give him French lessons so he would be able to deal with the Greek authorities. In turn, the rabbi gave me Hebrew instruction. He also taught me the Shehita, how to slaughter animals. The rabbi was arrested with all of us on 6/9/44 and was taken to Auschwitz where he perished in the crematorium. Earlier he had an opportunity to go into hiding, Greek bishop offered the help, but ~~the rabbi~~he insisted that his responsibility was to assist the Jewish community.

1.13-20 Before the Germans came, Corfu was occupied by the Italians. We lived quite undisturbed under the Italian rule. Then the Germans attacked, first by incendiary bombs, mostly on the Jewish section. They thus burned our three synagogues and the matzah bakery. Then, the Germans marched in, and transformed our lives into living hell. The Germans tried to degrade us in every way possible. They also received help from the local fascists. The Jews had to report weekly Wednesdays to the authorities. The Germans and their collaborators would walk into any Jewish store and take ~~whatever~~anything they wanted. They would also call the Jewish community office and order them to bring goods and money. The Germans were in Corfu only nine months before their 'Final Solution' on 6/9/44 when they took all the Jews to Auschwitz.

1.21-28 The Germans ordered, through the president of the Jewish community, that all the Jews had to come to the great square at 6 a.m. on June 9th. Our entire family reported as ordered. We didn't think that the Germans would do anything bad, just three days after the Normandy invasion. We were wrong. First we were imprisoned and taken to the 'fortress'. The Germans took all our possessions - money, gold, food, etc. We were kept at this fortress without food for several days. [The local Red Cross brought some food, but hardly enough.] I remained there about five miserable days. Few days later a group of us was taken away [to Athens], then a second group. I was in the third group. They took our group to Skaddar. To give you an idea of how our life was, I saw a Greek priest give a piece of bread to one of the Jewish inmates. ~~When~~ a ~~As~~ German officer saw that, ~~and~~ he killed the Jew on the spot with a pistol in the back of the neck. The Greek priest got a few kicks with the boot.

1.29 Then we were told we were moving on. They took us to another village. There I met a local guy, Georgio Machadis, who had a store and who was to become a good friend. He said that the Germans would kill everyone. ~~He~~ Instead, he invited me to escape and join him.

Greek Army of Liberation: Liberation Front

2.01-2.15 I had never seen this person ~~before.~~ He was a young barber in Patrasso. [I had entered his barber shop.] At this time the Germans ~~usessent~~ their dogs. He told me that I had a bad smell, and the dogs would discover me. He invited me to spend the night at his place. His father had just died a few days ~~earlierage~~ and he lived with his mother and a sister. He said that if the Germans came to his house he would tell them that I was the sister's fiancée. The next day he took me to a nearby village of Komi, where there were partisans. The partisans at first were not sure if I was a German spy - there were many such spies infiltrating the partisan organization. They gave me a choice: either go finish ~~myyour~~ courses at the University of Athens or stay with ~~them.us~~. Since we need educated people, I chose to remain with the partisan group, working and fighting with them. I served as a bookkeeper and economist. It went on like that for ~~four~~4 months, until the German pullback. I continued with ELAS for a while because I was grateful that they saved my life, then I returned to Corfu after 4 months.

2.16 In Corfu I found nothing but ruins. Our house was occupied by others and everything we had was stolen. ~~For many~~Many days I lived on the street. My parents and my oldest brother, Issaco, were burned in the crematory the first day they arrived in Auschwitz. My youngest brother, Marco, sent me a telegram that he had survived and was coming home, but in August 1945 he was killed in a car accident on the way here. For a year I lived from place to place, being helped by friends here and there. At this time no one was concerned about the return of the Jewish property. The Greek Jewish survivors did not return from the German concentration camps until four months later. ~~To survive~~ I worked as manual laborer or ~~by~~ selling little things on the street. ~~to survive~~. I made a claim in courts and then two years I was finally granted about half of my father's store, and life became a little better, especially after I got married on September 10, 1946.

2.26-2.29 Rebecca, the wife, was also a survivor from the concentration camp in Auschwitz. Rebecca says: things were rough at first, sure, but I found my father who was a plumber and he started working right away. I arrived in Corfu in September 1945. We disembarked from a small boat, about 6 or 7 of us. We had no place to go and, as luck would have it, it rained very hard. We slept on park benches. We walked from place to place until we arrived at St. Cecilia. This place was like a Jewish ghetto before, and we heard people speaking Jewish. There was a lady, Penina, who had returned before us and she had rented a place where she would welcome everyone, either for company or because they had nowhere to go. As we walked, I heard people talking Jewish and I recognized a voice, of my father's ~~s.~~ I screamed 'father!' and he came out of the first floor window and embraced me. This was my start at Corfu.

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R01.00 to 02 We received a little bit of assistance from Germany and with that we obtained a nice apartment. We both worked, so our status improved little by little. Armando worked as a

professor of mathematics and accounting. Our son Marko, studied, and became a doctor. Both our sons are working. We are living now in a house which we are renting from the Jewish Community. Thank heavens, we are well. We have two ~~grown~~great children. [Interviewer asks is their marriage was based on love.] 'Half love, half necessity. but we learned to adapt, and thank heavens, our marriage was quite successful.'

R01.03 to 06 [Interviewer asks Rebecca about deportation.] We were all deported, mother, father and two sisters. One ~~good~~ morning the Germans came with their trucks, took us to Pyreo where they loaded us on animal rail cars, ~~for animals~~. They gave us some food for the trip, a little chicken and bread, ~~for the trip~~. The train took off, and we traveled for what appeared to be several days, until we arrived at Auschwitz. It was 1:30 a.m. 'All out!', [Alex _____] they were screaming at us. Then they lined us up, separately, men and women with children. There we went through a selection, with those who were able to work to ~~on~~ one side. The children were loaded on trucks and taken directly to the crematorium. After a short time we could see fire and smoke coming from the chimney. I asked some of the workers there what the fire and

R01.06 60 to 12 -smoke ~~were was~~ about. They said that they were burning the prisoners' clothes. I didn't believe them because of the smell of burning flesh. Then they took us women, shaved our heads and made us undress fully. They took our clothes. They made us hang around naked until the evening, then they gave us striped prisoner clothes. It was awful. We couldn't recognize each other. They changed our lives. This was the worst evening of our lives, the worst! In the morning they tattooed numbers on our arms. I was # A-8413; my sister was right behind me with # A-8414. [My mother was taken to the crematorium the first evening with the children. Then there was another 'selection'. They took some more women, about 40 or 50, but they machine--gunned them, evidently not enough for a good fire. We were then taken to a 'block' where they left us until the evening without food. In the evening we were called out. I don't remember if they gave us any food, but none of us had any desire for food. We were taken to 'beds', about eight or ten of us to a bed. In the morning there was another lineup, and we were taken to 'quarantine'. After a 40 day quarantine [with baths] we were assigned to work. The Germans would take us to the work site, about 10 km from the camp. In the evening, if there were cars they would take us back to camp; if there was no transportation, they would keep us there, without food, for the next day's work. This was not a problem for them. In the meantime we became so skinny, like the Moslems. This was the camp routine. If you were sick, you didn't say so because the result would have been death. There

R1.13 were frequent selections, about once a week.

1.15-1.20 I did all types of work: breaking rocks into small stones, cutting down trees in the forest and similar. I remember an incident. There was this Jewish prisoner named Belina. She was a German spy. One day she asked me to give my bread ration, threatening to tell the guard that I wasn't working. When I refused, she called the German and told him that I wasn't working. He kicked me so hard on my lower spine that I still feel the pain. The guards had heavy sticks and hoses, and they used them with vigor. [We met Belina in Corfu, and all of us survivors got even for what she did to us.]

1.20-1.24 After 6 months we were sent to Bergen-Belsen. There they put us to work in factory. Life was rough; from the original 500 girls, there were only 20 of us left. When the Germans

started losing the war we had less and less food. One time we had no food or water for five days. Some of the girls would break the water pipes to suck out some water. Needless to say, we were weak and susceptible to all type of diseases. When the British liberated the camp, there was a bakery with a store nearby with a lot of bread. The British did not let us go to the bakery. Instead, they gave a piece of bread to a dog, who immediately dropped dead. The Germans had poisoned the bread. The British then set the whole place on fire, the ovens, the

R1.25 building and the store. I saw all this.

The British took us to another camp [Celes] where we stayed for about 4 months. I think it was a transit camp. Then they took us [on trains] to Brussels where we stayed about 20 days. Finally, we boarded the planes which took us to Athens. In Athens we were met by the Greek Red Cross. They put us in a house where we stayed a short time. Then they gave us the tickets to go to Patra. We went to the police and told them our situation. They made room for us there, then they made arrangements for us to go to Corfu. In Corfu is where I met my father as I have already told you earlier. Thus ends this story, the story of murder of innocent people whose only 'crime' was that of being Jewish. I still suffer both physically and emotionally as I think of all my relatives and others who died under the most brutal of circumstances. I dream of my mother and my grandmother, and they comfort me and give me courage.

R1.31-1.35 [Interviewer asks about current Jewish life in Corfu.] There is nothing much left of the Jewish life. There is a synagogue. Armando opens it and leads the services. There is hardly ever a minyan [quorum] except on holidays. There are some Jews in the area and they all seem to be doing okay, but there are no religious or social activities where Jews get together as before.