

## **Interview with Yechezkiel Tanzman (Yeheskel Tancman)**

### **Translation**

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### **Tape I**

Yechezkiel (Yecheskiel) was born in Pulawy (Pulavy, Pulavi, Pilev, Pilov, Pulov), Poland on November 8, 1925. Pulawy was near Warsaw and Lublin. There were 20,000 inhabitants—2/3 were Jews and 1/3 Christians.

The Jewish community was well organized; organizations such as the Bund (Bundt), Po'alei Zion (Poalei Zion, Poale Zion, Poalei Tziyon, Poaley Zionim, Poaley Syjon), and other Zionist organizations. There was a Hebrew School, Chesed Committee, etc. The town had a mill; there were businessmen, tailors, shoemakers, and many other trades and professions.

Yechezkiel's parents were Benyomin Hirsh, born in 1887—he was 55 years old in 1942; and his mother was Chaya D'vora Cohen born in 1892. He had five siblings: Abraham, Chana, Dina and Miriam (twins), and a younger brother, Leib Yidl. His mother gave birth to other children, but they died at a young age.

Their social life centered around the synagogue. His father prayed three times a day. He belonged to the Chevra Kadisha (burial society) and Tzedek committee. His mother was a housewife and took care of the children.

Yechezkiel started cheder when he was three years old. He finished his studies at the Talmud Torah in seventh grade in Pulawy.

Anti-Semitism existed in town before 1939. People were afraid to go out of town because they would be beaten. There were demonstrations by the Poles in town, and they threw rocks at the windows of Jewish shops; a young woman got injured.

Before the war they didn't have a radio; but they heard radio broadcasts when Hitler came to power. Conditions in town were poor; many shops were closed. Christians started boycotting the Jewish shops.

Yechezkiel's oldest brother wanted to make hachshara (go to Israel), but he was called to serve in the Polish army. He had owned a house and wanted to use the money to take his family to Israel; but it was no longer possible.

### **The interviewer then asked Yechezkiel what happened in town until the Germans came in?**

The young men were mobilized to serve in the army. There were lots of horses on the streets. They took the Jews into the military from Pulawy, Lodz (Lodz, Litzmannstadt, Litzmanstadt), Lublin, and Radom (Rodem). On September 15, 1939 the bridge and town of Pulawy were bombed.

They ran away to Kamionka (Kaminka, Kamyanka) when the bombing started. They had their first contact with the Germans there.

The Germans and Polish young people came in to observe the Jews and started occupation. When the Jews went to shul on Yom Kippur, they were observed by soldiers.

Jews were taken to work by Germans. Sometimes they were given food. Yechezkiel was grabbed, beaten, and then given some food.

January 1940—the Jews of Pulawy had to leave, and the Polish population rejoiced. Pulawy was bombed.

The Germans wanted to make the world Judenrein (get rid of all Jews). He was in labor camp; a Pole brought him a sandwich.

January 1, 1939-December 1939: Russians invaded Pulawy. Jews had to get out of town at the end of 1939. Men had to go on foot, and the women found some wagons and took with them what they could. Jews were beaten, and the Poles laughed at the beatings.

When they were chased out of Pulawy, Yechezkiel fled to Kuzhme (?), but before he escaped to Kushne (?), he took his youngest brother and one of his twin sisters to Lublin to their grandparents. His oldest brother was in Deblin (Demblin) with his wife and one child. His mother and other twin sister left on a horse drawn wagon for Opole (Oppein, Oppeln). Yechezkiel stayed in Kuzhme, but ran away to Lublin. His brother (who was in Deblin) wanted them all to come to him.

Passover 1940—We arrived in Deblin and stayed there for two years. In September 1941 the ghetto was established. It was situated on designated streets. We took our belongings on a wagon to the ghetto. Conditions were poor in the ghetto. Jews were allowed to get out of the ghetto to buy some items, but they had no money. At night the ghetto was patrolled by Germans. A Jewish Administration (Judenrat) was established in the ghetto of Deblin. Teichman was the Administrator. It was 20 kilometers from Deblin to Pulawy.

They made us work on restoring the road and streets. Money had to be raised; but if the leader could not come up with the capital, he was arrested. Within the ghetto, under the Jewish leaderships, there was a Jewish police who brought people to work and back to the ghetto. There were doctors. When Yechezkiel was asked if there was a Resistance movement, his response was “No”. The religious activities were organized; prayers for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and minyanim as needed.

### **Did people try to runaway?**

Some girls had falsified papers and ran away to Germany. Food was rationed in the ghetto—items like bread, at times we got some brown sugar, jam, or honey. It was cold in the winter. In January 1941 Yechezkiel's sister was caught with coal in her pocket; she was shot. Water came from the outside; no electricity, heat.

In 1941 conditions deteriorated. There was no money; unemployment was high. Many people, including children, died of starvation and illness. He had typhus.

Jews were sent to Sobibor. Yechezkiel's father, mother, one of the twin sisters, and youngest brother were on this first transport which took place in May 1942 where they all perished. September 1942, the second transport went to Treblinka. Yechezkiel, his older brother, and oldest sister were at work; so they were spared from being on those transports.

The ghetto was liquidated. He worked in a labor camp near an airport. There were 800 people, including some children who had escaped or were hidden. He saw all the transports from there. They did not wear uniforms, were given food, and had heat in rooms with bunk beds. They did not receive any beatings; it was nothing like concentration camp. All camps were liquidated after the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He was there for two years until August 1944.

### **Tape II**

We were liberated by the British Army. Yakov Herzog (Rabbi in British Army) addressed us and told us that we had to say the prayer thanking God that we survived (Bentch Gomel). We were starved and wanted bread instead of prayers.

### **When Yechezkiel was asked, what was the reaction of the survivors towards the Nazis?**

We wanted to kill them and take revenge. We Jews had no strength, but the Russian and French inmates were much stronger, since they had been cooks in the camp and were able to steal some meat; so they were not like skeletons. We Jews were like bundles of bones.

We were examined by doctors and weighed; and were sent to D. P. [Displaced Person] camp in Bergen-Belsen. We received food and clothing. The administrator of the camp was Yoshke Rosenzaft. He could have left for Palestine, but they needed him to help out in the D. P. camp.

He met many people in Bergen-Belsen, amongst them his future wife. She was 18 years old when she came to Bergen-Belsen with her father and brother. She and her family were in hiding in Russia; they then went to Berlin after the war, and then came to Bergen-Belsen.

In March 1947 Yechezkiel made aliyah with his wife to be. He had family in Brazil, but he wanted to be in his own country after surviving the Holocaust. Yechezkiel and his wife traveled to Palestine on a French ship, "Providence". They had wonderful food and celebrated the Seder on the ship. It was their first experience living a normal life after the war. Our food was Kosher for Passover. We had new shoes and took a small radio with us.

They came to Palestine to Kibbutz Degania (Dgania) Bet. They married in July 1949. Yechezkiel was in the army, and his wife worked in Tel Aviv. They had three children, two sons and one daughter, and have eight grandchildren. One son and daughter live in Israel, and one son lives in Boca Raton, Florida.

He spoke about the importance of passing on his experiences to his children and grandchildren. His revenge would be if Hitler got up from his grave and saw that he did not succeed in making the world (Judenrein) free of Jews; and that we married, have families, and the Jews have their own country. He would want to crawl right back to his grave.

**The last question the interviewer asked was: How would you describe your life before the war?**

His response was: I had a happy childhood. My father always had a smile on his face; he had lots of friends and provided well for his family. He helped the needy for Shabbat and Passover. He really believed and worked at G'milut Chasadim (Gemilut Chasadim, Gemilut Hasadim). On Shabbat my father would read one or two newspapers. Literature was very important.