

KUCHAREK, Stefan  
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project  
Polish  
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Stefan Kucharek, who was born in 1922 in Małkinia, talks about the mixed Polish and Jewish population of Małkinia before the war. He recalls that during the Second World War he worked as a train engineer in Małkinia and that, among other transports, he delivered Polish and French Jews to the Treblinka concentration camp. He talks about the typical day of an engineer and in detail describes how the deliveries to the Treblinka camp were made. He remembers Ukrainian atrocities and comments on the more humane attitude of some Germans. He talks about sheltering and aiding Jews and how he helped them cross the Russian border. He remembers local Polish women who engaged in prostitution with the Ukrainian guards. He describes the war as a lawless time of terror and adds that everyone, including the Ukrainians, lived in fear of losing their life. He mentions hearing about the killings going on among the Ukrainians within the camp. He mentions the uprising at the camp and briefly recalls Himmler's visit to Treblinka. He shows the site of the Treblinka camp and describes the exact location of the gate, train tracks and the rail cars when the deliveries were made.

### **Box 1, Tape 1**

[01:] 00:44:03 – [01:] 09:54:06  
00:40 – 10:13

Stefan Kucharek introduces himself and states that he was born in 1922 in Małkinia; he adds that initially he was employed in a sawmill in Rostki and later, after the outbreak of the war he became a train engineer; he recalls Małkinia before the war and says that the Jewish population reached about 50%; he talks about his Jewish school friends, **Iciek, Enia and Livka [Lifka]**, with whom he used to spend his free time fishing; he speaks about German air raids, which started right after the beginning of the war and talks about the bombing of the railway station as well as other buildings; when asked about Treblinka, he describes it as a small station which before the war was used by trains making gravel deliveries; later Germans forbade taking gravel; he adds that Germans entered Małkina after the 15th of September and when the front moved forward, only gendarmes and Gestapo men were left behind; he recalls that local Poles were afraid of Germans and they tried to hide from them, he adds that being a train engineer meant that you wouldn't be sent as a forced laborer to Germany; he remembers starting work as a train engineer in 1939 after he turned 17; he was initially employed in a workshop and then he took a course in train driving, was issued permission papers to cross the borders of General Government [*Generalna Gubernia*] and started to drive passenger and freight trains; he adds that his dad was a train engineer by profession; he says that in 1941 he started delivering rails and railroad ties for

the construction of the camps; when asked about the Jews in the work camp he answers that he never saw the camp on the inside; he mentions delivering gravel which was loaded onto the trains by the Jews; when asked about his first time delivering the transport of Jews he answers that it took place around 1942; he says that he gestured to the Jews what fate awaited them at the end of the train ride but they gestured back that he was out of his mind; he knew what was happening to the Jews in the camp because the whole area was filled with the constant stench of burning bodies; when asked about delivering the Jews to camp he answers that the transport was were first divided by the Germans in Małkinia and then he would take half of the cars from Małkinia to Treblinka, he would leave them behind the gate and then the gate was closed; next he would take back empty cars from Treblinka to Małkinia; he would repeat the same steps with the second half of the transport.

[01:] 09:54:06 - [01:] 18:21:11  
10:13-19:01

*[He coughs for a long time]*

He explains that he doesn't know precisely how the Jews were unloaded , because the camp gate was closed promptly after the carts were delivered and he had to back the engine by about 50 meters; when asked if he was notified in advance about the arrival of transports he answers that he was called on duty only shortly before the arrival of trains; when asked about his first transport he explains that he didn't know Treblinka well at that time; he was given an order from the dispatcher and according to his instructions he left half of the transport in Małkinia and took the other half to Treblinka; there was no arguing the orders; when asked what types of trains he used to drive he said that he had passenger trains from France, all the rest were freight trains; when asked if he heard the Jews on the trains talk or cry he again tells a story when he gestured to the Jews that they were going to their death and they responded that he was stupid; when asked if he was not afraid to communicate with the Jews, he answers that he was risking his life but he believes that every man: a Jew, a German or a Pole has the right to try to save themselves; when asked how often he made deliveries to the camp he answers that it happened quite often; he remembers that Ukrainians were worse than Gestapo men and repeats that when he gestured to the Jews that death awaited them in the camp *[previously described scene]* a Ukrainian guard saw him and wanted to shoot him; his life was spared by a Gestapo man after another train engineer explained the situation to him in German; he talks about another incident, when on September 15, he offered a sandwich to a hungry Jewish woman who was in one of his transports; Ukrainian guards saw it and took away the food; when asked about the nationality of the train engineers he answers that they were all Polish; he said that there were neither Gestapo men nor other Germans on the trains *[this is contradicted later]*; the Gestapo stayed in the Treblinka camp; he adds that after delivering the transport he would wait for the empty cars outside the Treblinka camp, next he would take back the empty cars and then he would bring another part of the freight from Małkinia; when asked about the condition of the empty cars, he recalls that they were soiled with human feces and he could see Jewish inscriptions on the walls; the cars were later cleaned at the Małkinia station by other Jews from the Treblinka camp.

*[Technical difficulties]*

The interviewee states that he is not he will be not afraid *[it is not clear whether he refers to a fear of public opinion or of memories]*; he describes the camp right after it was established and remembers that it wasn't fenced off; the Jews were digging ditches then and the area was surrounded by the Ukrainians; later barbed wire was put up and the crematoria were built because burning of bodies outside caused unbearable stench.

[01:] 18:21:11- [01:] 29:17:12  
19:01- 30:24

When asked about Franciszek Ząbecki, the signal man from Treblinka, he doesn't remember him; when asked about Ukrainian Wachmans *[watchmen]* he didn't know them personally; he adds that the Ukrainians arrived in the area right after the war had started; there were only four or five Germans in the neighborhood; he remembers that talking to Ukrainians was forbidden; he remembers that Ukrainians used to go to a nearby pub and establish relations with Mańka *[short for Maria]* from Warsaw; he adds that right after he got married he narrowly escaped dying at the hand of a Ukrainian; when asked about the Jewish population in Małkinia, he doesn't know what exactly happened to them; he assumes that they were likely deported, but he is not sure to where; he asked the Jews, who were his friends to write, but he never heard from anybody; he assumes they died; when asked if he tried to help other Jews he talks about **Iciek Werner [Werder]** from Białystok, with whom he worked at the engine house *[hard to hear]* construction site in Małkinia; he offered **Iciek** his bread and because of that an Ukrainian guard tried to shoot him; he was saved by a German *[later we learn that it was a Wermacht soldier on his way to the east front]*; when asked if he could hear cries for water from the transports, he answers that he could hear them all the time; he remembers that train drivers tried to hand out bottles with water when the guards were not looking; he mentions that the trains were guarded by Ukrainians who slept in special compartments next to the breaks, so called "bryki"; when asked about any cases of escapes and shootings he answers that they happened occasionally but he was not allowed to stop the train; he adds that there were German guards on every engine *[this is a contradiction of his previous statement]*; they stayed in telephone contact with other engines; he talks about **Iciek**, who escaped the transport and later found lodging in his home *[where he stayed is somewhat unclear]*; he adds that he helped **Iciek** cross the Russian border; when asked how he obtained information about what was going on in the camp, he answers that everyone knew that people were burned in there; the Ukrainians weren't allowed to spread any information under the threat of death; they wouldn't talk because they were afraid Poles might inform on them; when asked about the smoke from the camp he replies that the stench was choking; he adds that this is why crematoria were built; when asked about the uprising in Treblinka he remembers that a few prisoners escaped but it didn't change anything; when asked about the hunt for escapees he remembers that it took place in 1942 or 1943; he remembers that four Gestapo men and the Ukrainians summoned help *[the military and the fire fighters]* because they weren't able to handle it by themselves; no one was caught since the locals didn't try to hide any Jews in the neighborhood; it was certain to be discovered and punished by death; he remembers other cases when he personally offered shelter to two Jewish girls; they stayed with him for three days and

he talked to them about the camp and helped them cross the border; they escaped from one of the transports to Treblinka; he is not sure if they survived; when asked he answers that he wasn't afraid because these were also people and in those times everyone constantly risked their lives.

[01:] 29:17:12- [01:] 34:17:00  
30:24- 35:36

When asked if he talked with other train engineers about the transports to Treblinka he answers that everyone knew what was happening in the camp although not everyone was taking the trains to the camp; when asked about his friend Wacek [*short for Waclaw*] **Tryfon** he answers that he already passed away; he adds that there were about 100 train drivers from many cities, such as Warsaw or Łódź; none of them was inside the camp; they all passed away by now; when asked if he could hear cries after delivering a transport he answers that he was usually waiting too far away to hear anything, about half a kilometer away; he also explains that prisoners who cried were shot; when asked about Jews who helped to sort the cloths he answers that they were not saved but also killed; when asked about a typical day at work he answers that get the engine ready and drive to Treblinka with half of the carts; he mentions that initially the entire transports were taken to Treblinka but these trains were driven by Ukrainian drivers; he remembers working seven to eight hours a day; he was making deliveries to the camp once a day; a typical train consisted of about 40 carts; it was divided in Małkinia and he made two rounds delivering it to the camp.

[01:] 34:17:00  
35:36

[01:] 00:44:03- [00:] 34:17:00

### **Box 1, Tape 2**

[02:] 00:47:07- [02:] 13:48:23  
00:41- 14:15

The interviewee remembers that initially Polish train engineers weren't allowed to drive right to the camp gate; they started to drive to the gate only after the German engine broke; it was previously used to transport the carts inside the camp; when asked about the carts he retrieved he

says that they were empty and soiled with feces; he could also see Jewish inscriptions on the walls; although he was never inside the camp he knew what was happening in there; the Jews were first undressed, then poisoned and burned in crematoria; he learned about it from a Pole, the camp prisoner, who managed to escape; his name was Wacek [*Wacław*] **Kalisz** and he was a resident of nearby Górka; he passed away; when asked whether the outbreak of the German Russian war in 1942 changed anything in the area he answers that the Russian border still existed and it was guarded by the Germans, however there were no more Russian border patrols; when asked delivering transports to camp he answers that in 1939 Germans closed the gravel *pit* [*it is unclear when the gravel pit was closed as he previously talked about making gravel deliveries*] and started to build two camps: a work camp and a death camp; Poles and Jews were working at the construction site; he was making deliveries of gravel on special shallow carts called “suwki/sliders”; he used to drive about 23 to 30 of these carts; when asked about transports to Treblinka he said that first he drive a train from Małkinia to Treblinka and then he would back it to Małkinia; when asked how many times he delivered the trains from France he answers that it happened from time to time and adds that he could see wine bottles and other left over alcohol in the vacated carts; he says that he only saw empty trains and they were the so called “Pullmans”; when asked about security on the platform in Treblinka he says that there were ten armed guards, with no dogs, on each side of the train; he mentions that being a train engineer he was guarded by one of the Ukrainian guards and he was not allowed to descend the engine; the carts were detached from the engine by an Ukrainian; when asked about the Ukrainian called Ivan the Terrible he heard about him but never talked to him; he adds that one of the Ukrainians who belonged to Gestapo was killing other Ukrainians; when asked about the local pubs he answers that there were two of them in Małkinia; the Ukrainians used to go there often by train and there they were buying services of Polish women, who engaged in prostitution, mothers and daughters alike; when asked if he was afraid of Ukrainians he denies it; when asked about churches in Małkinia he says that there was one at the time; when asked if priests were preaching sermons against prostitution he denies it and adds that priests were afraid just like everyone else; he mentions that Ukrainians committed many murders; he remembers a grave of two Jewish escapees, who were killed by Germans in the nearby forest; when asked about the time when the transports of Jews ceased to arrive he answers that it was in 1944, when the Germans advanced to the Russian front; he adds that the last transport he delivered was a passenger train from France.

[02:] 13:48:23- [02:] 20:26:21  
14:15 - 21:10

He explains that at that time [*1944*] everything got shut down and all the Ukrainians left; he adds that it took place after the uprising in the camp; he recalls that he was not driving to the gravel pit anymore because it was also shut down; when asked if he came to the area after the Russians came, he says that he didn't because the terrain was full of mines; he adds that he visited the area after the war when he used to go mushroom picking; when asked about other stories involving Ukrainians he answers in a profane manner; he adds that Ukrainians would hit Jews, who helped to build the engine house, with their rifle butts until they died; he tells again a previously described story when a Jew asked him for some bread and that caused an Ukrainian to open fire/

start shooting at them; the Ukrainian was punished by a Wermacht soldier who was in a nearby train transport to the eastern front; he remembers that these were lawless times and human life wasn't worth anything; when asked if he was driving distant routes he answers that he was going to Warsaw with passenger and freight trains; when asked how many train drivers there were he remembers about 100 and adds that it was a large junction; he also remembers servicing military trains on the route to Białystok; when asked if train drivers were discussing Treblinka between themselves he answers that they did because they trusted each other; he adds that a German dispatcher was responsible for assigning Treblinka duty; when asked if he remembers Himmler's visit in 1943 he says that he does but gives no details; he remembers that the locals tried to keep to themselves because everyone feared for their own life; when asked what was thought about women who practiced prostitution with the Ukrainians he answers in a profane manner and adds that some of them are still alive; when asked if later they were able to find husbands he answers unclearly saying that they spent all the earned money on alcohol [*moonshine*].

[02:] 20:26:21  
21:10

[02:] 20:28:21- [02:] 22:45:20  
21:12- 24:37

[*Outdoors*]

He shows where the trains were coming from and where they would stop; he recalls that at that time the area was an open field, the Germans planted a grove that one can presently see; he says that he made deliveries every other day for a couple of years; he shows where the gate was and adds that there was no sign on it; he adds that the trains were allowed to drive only during the day, never at night; he shows where the side track was; he shows that the end of the train would stop next to the two stone obelisks.

[02:] 22:45:20  
24:37

[*A break, walking*]

[02:] 25:30:06 - [02:] 26:46:17  
26:26 -27:45

He shows where the track to the gravel pit and the gate was; he says that he never saw how the Jews were unloaded; he shows where the camp fence reached the road and where a grove used to stand *[now an empty field]*.

[02:] 26:46:17  
27:45

**[02:] 00:47:07- [02:] 26:46:17**

*[Time-coded from Polish by Agnieszka McClure]*