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JAROSZ, Tadeusz
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0009

Tadeusz Jarosz was born on February 7, 1928 in Brzeziny, a village near Bełżec. During the war he was a shepherd and worked in the vicinity of the Bełżec camp. He describes what took place near the camp and reports on conditions inside the camp and the killing operations as he heard it from a Russian guard who confided to his uncle. He talks about a conspiracy of Russian guards to kill the German guards and efforts towards the end of the war to conceal what had taken place in the camp.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:46:18 – [01:] 10:36:21
00:00 – 10:13

During the occupation, Tadeusz says he lived with his uncle in Bełżec; reports that the camp was built by local contractors and says that the barracks in the camp were built by Soviet prisoners of war; adds that the camp became operational in 1942; says that local Jews were confined to the ghetto prior to 1942 and were forced to wear armbands with the Star of David; reports that during the first transport to the camp, he saw a Jew with a horse driven cart being taken off the train separately at the railroad station and brought into the camp; says he later saw him carting the guards' laundry around the camp; describes that a typical transport had about 80 cattle cars packed with about 80 to 100 Jews per car; states that the Germans could only accommodate about 40 cars in the camp and that they divided the transport into two parts; says that the first 40 cars were separated from the transport and driven into the camp while the second half had to wait at the station until the first half was emptied and the cars moved out of the camp; adds that after that, the second half of the transport was moved into the camp; elaborates that while the second half of the transport waited at the station, it was guarded by the Germans; says that the Russian and Ukrainian POWs were guardians inside the camp; adds that since he lived near the train station, he heard cries, screams and praying coming from inside the cars; recalls that people were also begging for water; says some German guards allowed him to give water to people inside the trains, but most guards prohibited any help.

[01:] 10:36:22 – [01:] 21:00:13
10:14 – 21:03

He says that when people arrived into the camp they were given some food; says he knew one of the Ukrainian guards named **Sabat** who was from Lwów (Lemberg); recalls that **Sabat's** wife used to come and visit him about every two weeks; says that she brought empty suitcases but left with full suitcases; speculates that they were loaded with clothes and gold; states that he used to shepherd cows on a field next to the camp; recalls that sometimes Jews had to work outside of

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the camp; describes one occasion in which a Russian guard named **Boris** allowed the Jews to buy food from a local store; says that **Boris** was not afraid that the Jews would run away and they did not; mentions that his friends named **Bolek, Borek, Mietek, Waśka and Rysiek Ubalek** witnessed this event with him; says that Jews paid for food with dollars; remembers that some POW groups also worked outside the camp; says he witnessed how some Jews were jumping off the trains and trying to run away; says that some Jews who jumped off the train were naked; recalls seeing a naked Jew running away from the train toward the group of shepherds; says that a German soldier jumped off the train and when he yelled "Halt!", the Jew stopped; adds that the soldier beat him with his rifle butt and walked him back to the train; says that the Ukrainian guards who watched the Jews did not allow them to talk about the camp but did allow them to buy food from the shepherds; says that a Ukrainian once caught him trading with a Jew and started to lead him to the camp commandant; says he was saved by the Ukrainian **Sabat**; says that during winter there was no work outside the camp.

[01:] 21:00:14 – [01:] 33:47:20
21:04 – 34:24

He describes how one time he and a friend climbed a tall spruce tree outside the camp to see what was happening inside the camp; says he saw how the Germans forced the Jews to run quickly in circles; speculates that they were trying to exhaust the Jews so they would die faster or from exhaustion; says that in the early phase of the camp, the Germans were executing the Jews and throwing their bodies into long, deep ditches; recalls that it caused a strong stench; says that the Germans tried to cover the bodies with cement but then after some time the cement started to crack from the gas emanating from the decomposing bodies; says that later the Germans started to burn the bodies which also caused lots of stench; says that the Germans planted tall trees around the camp to make it invisible from outside; recalls that the trees were planted by the Jews under German guards; reports that he was herding cows almost daily in a field outside the camp; describes an incident when a Jew escaped from the camp; describes the alarm and how the escapee was caught; reports that another time a naked Jew escaped from the camp and hid by climbing up a tree but that he also was caught; says that when trains arrived in the camp he heard a lot of crying and screaming and German commands; when asked how he knew what was happening in the camp, he answers that he heard it from a Russian guard who described how Jews were being gassed with Zyklon [B] and the construction and shape of the crematoria oven; says that one time the guard described how a young, pretty Jewish girl survived the gassing; says that she was standing among the bodies; reports that when the German guard saw her through a special glass, he added more Zyklon [B] but she still survived; says that when she was let out from the chamber the German guard shot her; tells about a conspiracy among the Russian guards to kill the Germans who worked in the camp but it failed because someone turned the conspirators in; says they were caught and taken into the camp but he does not know what happened to them; reports that the Russian guards were replaced by Ukrainian guards.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 00:43:18 – [02:] 10:50:19

00:00 – 10:31

The interviewee says that Ukrainian guards had some freedom to go to local villages, to do shopping or bathe in local rivers but that they always had a limited time for such visits; says that a German guard named **Irman** who used to parade Russian guards if they committed some misdemeanor, was himself killed; adds that some of the Russian guards, among them one named **Woloszyn**, ran away and joined a group of Soviet partisans; mentions the existence of Polish partisans; says that the camp commandant used to ride on a horse in the camp and whip people for no reason; recalls that the Germans working in the camp lived in railroad apartments near the train station while the Ukrainian guards lived in barracks inside the camp; states that Jewish workers also lived in special barracks; says that it was common knowledge that Belzec was an extermination camp; recalls that trains arrived loaded full of people and left empty; mentions that a young Jewish couple escaped from the camp but returned since nobody was willing to offer them shelter or a hiding place; says that people were afraid to hide Jews; specifies that in Belzec there were few Jews before the war but there were many Jews in a small town of Narol; adds that in Narol, the Jews were the majority of the population.

[02:] 10:50:20 – [02:] 16:19:21
10:32 –16:25

He says that towards the end of the war, the Germans started to liquidate the camp; recalls that the ground was flattened and raked and trees were planted on the grounds; says that the Ukrainian guards were moved to the camps in Trawniki and Sobibor; says that he visited the camp grounds after the Germans left and that there was nothing left except for an occasional human bone sticking out from the ground; describes how Polish people used to come and dig in the grounds in search for gold from dental crowns in the ashes of the victims; recalls that the ashes were mixed with sand and dirt and that all the barracks and crematoria were dismantled and removed; says that the Germans did not want to leave behind any evidence of the existence of an extermination camp in Belzec.

Time coded notes provided by Sam Ponczak