

KIRSZ, Stefan  
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project  
Polish  
RG-50.488\*0012

In this interview, Stefan Kirszt, born on December 26, 1915, in Krystynopol (now in Ukraine, the name was changed to Chervonograd), who during the war worked as a train driver on the route Rawa Ruska – Belzec, talks about Jewish transports from Rawa to Belzec. Kirszt concentrates on the description of the organization of delivery and unloading of these transports on the Belzec train station. He underscores the existence of Polish transports to Belzec, and describes the conversations among Polish train drivers who worked on this route. He also mentions his participation in September campaign, 1939, and the relationship between Soviets and Poles on the Soviet occupied Polish territories.

**File 1 of 1**

[01:] 00:11:185– [01:] 05:04:09  
00:03 -05:05

The interviewee introduces himself as Stefan Kirszt, born on December 26, 1915, in Krystynopol (now in Ukraine, the name was changed to Chervonograd); he says that before the war, he worked at the Jewish sawmill in Krystynopol, and when the war broke up, he was on active military duty, in the artillery division, in Warsaw; he continues, saying that after capitulation, he was detained by Germans in Puławy, as one of the 20.000 captured Polish soldiers; he says that he received a pass and that Germans released him, and after that, he went to Rawa Ruska, for he had a cousin there, who worked on the railway station; he adds that at that time, a German-Soviet border was already in existence, and that he crossed it in a village of **Rebenne [Rabenne, Rabenowo]**, where Soviets took away from travelling Polish ex-soldiers their carriage and horses; he says that after arriving at Rawa, he worked as a construction worker, for Soviets did not allow Poles to work on the railroad, and only Russians could be employed there; he mentions that during the Soviet reign, Poles lived a normal life, and that he could work without any documents, which were still in Krystynopol; he remembers that an engineer helped him to get military documents, and that later, he obtained an I.D. card, which required almost 20 daily visits to People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutriennykh Del (NKVD).

[01:] 05:00:10– [01:] 10:00:19

05:06– 10:18

He says that he got married and started working on the railroad, when Germans already took over Rawa; he mentions that at the beginning, he worked as a helper, but later, after he finished a course for steam engine drivers in Lvov, where he was sent by the head of the station, Berezwowski, he started working as a steam engine driver; he mentions the routes he was assigned: Lvov, Stanisławów, Samborg, **Abdenty** [**Abdent**]; he adds that the routes took about six days, and after such route, Germans could call steam engine drivers for another route, even after few hours of rest; he remembers that he lived in Rawa till 1943, and then moved to Szczebrzeszyn, because of murders of Poles perpetrated by Ukrainians [*a sound, similar to passing train*]; he says that at the beginning, in 1940, he lived in a village near Belżec, but since everything was burnt down [*apparently due to the war activities*], he moved to Belżec proper [*the interviewee seems to confuse dates of his moving, for the facts narrated by him later testify that he moved to Belżec in 1943*]; he says that his first job in Belżec was patrolling the rails, for there were many Germans and Ukrainians hiding in the vicinity, but when his supervisors saw his professional documents, **Lukh Furer** [GERMAN: meaning unknown] they moved him to the steam engine station in Zamość.

[01:] 10:00:04 – [01:] 15:04:22

10:19 – 15:34

He says, that during the war, he drove Jewish transports from Rawa to Belżec; he remembers that there were 60 freight cars in one transport, and that Jews were locked inside of them; he continues, saying that only his helper and he were in the locomotive, but when the train approached Belżec, a German stationmaster, carrying a thick, bamboo stick, would get in, and since that point till leaving Belżec, Poles could not look around or get off the locomotive; he describes the process further and says that in Belżec station, Germans divided cars in half, and one half would enter the camp to be unloaded, and after it came back empty, Germans would take a second half and repeat the process; he mentions that the unloading of the entire transport took about half an hour; he adds that because he could not look around, he doesn't know what was going on in the camp; he also mentions that there were no civilians on the station; asked if he heard any screams from the cars, he answers that there were SS-Men riding on the breaks of each car, and that he couldn't hear anything because of the noise inside the locomotive; he underlines that in one of the transports, there were around 4 cars containing Polish prisoners from the Lvov's prison on Kazimierzowska street, which was the largest prison in Lvov; asked if he was afraid to drive to Belżec, he answers that every steam engine driver was afraid, for there might had been a mine planted on the rails by those who wanted to save Jews [*Most likely, he refers to partisans.*]

[01:] 15:04:23– [01:] 19:59:01  
15:35 – 20:41

Asked how many times he was in Bełżec, he answers that he doesn't remember, maybe several times; asked if many steam engine drivers went to Bełżec, he answers that it was one of the regular routes, and that everybody went there; asked if anybody managed to jump from the car, he says that there was an SS-Man, sitting on the break of each train, and hence there was no possibility of escape; he doesn't remember anything unusual during his trips to Bełżec; he adds that Poles from the Lvov's prison were traveling to Bełżec in the same conditions as Jews did: in the freight cars, with the windows barded with barb wire; he says that once he managed to jump off the locomotive and that's how he saw Polish prisoners; asked, if he talked with the prisoners, he says that it was prohibited, and he only managed to hear that they were prisoners from Lvov; he adds that they were asking for water, but already in Rawa, the transport was surrounded by Germans and it was impossible to hand them anything; he mentions that after the liquidation of the camp, people would dig out crosses and small religious figures; he goes back to the story about unloading of the Jewish transports in Bełżec, and says that there was an official car in front of the locomotive to prevent it from entering the camp, and that there was a conductor and train manager in it; he continues, saying that after the unloading, he exited the station backing off; asked if there were empty cars in the train, he answers that there weren't any, asked if freight cars had double walls, he says that he doesn't know, that it wasn't his business.

[01:] 19:59:02– [01:] 25:32:14  
20:42- 26:28

*[a sound reminding of the rewinding tape]* Asked, if anybody tried to approach the transport, he answers that nobody did, that there were no civilians at the station, and that the train was surrounded by Germans, answering the question about Germans and Ukrainians posted on the stations, he says that he didn't know any of them; he adds that there were a lot of Ukrainians, who escaped Russia and enlisted in German army; asked if steam engine drivers were talking among themselves about routes to Bełżec, he answers that everybody was afraid, and that they repeated, that Jewish fate today may be theirs tomorrow; he adds that everybody knew that Jews were going to their death, but they didn't know how Jews died, for no one knew what was going on inside the camp; asked, if he thought about escaping this territory, he answers that he didn't have any place to escape to, and that only after liquidation of the camp, when Ukrainians started to murder Poles, his family moved to Szczebrzeszyn at the advise of his train helper; asked, if he drove to Bełżec till the end of its existence, he answers that he didn't, that he was given other routes *[A break, during which the interviewer asked another man if he has any questions, change of interviewer.]*; asked if the Polish National Railways, Polska Kolej Państwowa (PKP) station master in Bełżec was Polish or German, he doesn't give an exact answer, only says that there

was a station master, his assistant, and a traffic controller [*There is a mistake in a question asked by the interviewee – PKP, as the name indicates, was established after the war, when the railroads were put under state control.*]; asked, if he could recognize them now, he says that he couldn't, but answering the question about Berezowki, he admits that he knew him, that he was a young man, who should be in his 70-ties by now; he knows that Berezowski left Belzec after the war, but doesn't know where he went, he doesn't know what happened with the German stationmaster either, and says that it is not his business, answering the question how many people worked at the station, he answers that Rawa was a major railway hub, and that a number of people worked there, 90 teams in locomotive department itself; but when asked the same question about Belzec station, he says that he doesn't know [*first interviewer continues the interview*]; asked about the number of personnel in one train, he answers that it was only he, his helper, the German who would come in Belzec, and the guards on the breaks of each car.

[01:] 25:32:15 – [01:] 28:14:00  
26:29- 29:16

Asked, if he heard shooting, he says that he didn't hear anything, because it was very loud in the locomotive; asked if he remembers anything unusual from his trips to Belzec, he answers that he didn't, that all routes to Belzec were the same; asked, if there were trains from abroad, he answers that he saw trains from Czech Republic, and heard that about trains from different countries as well; asked, if there were Gypsies in the transports, he answers that most likely there were, but he didn't see them; he recalls that there were signs **“Jugensuk”** [GERMAN: “Juden-zuk” : Jewish train] on the cars; asked if he remembers anything else about the trains, he says that only the manager of the train knew trains' numbers, while he only had route documents, which the traffic controller in Belzec had to stamp, asked, if he remembers how they looked like, he says that he doesn't, because they were changing all the time, but they usually had a number of the train on them, and the name of the steam engine driver, where he had to sign, but the rest was filled out by the train's manager.

Time Coded Notes prepared by: Elizabeth Kosakowska

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There is no restriction on this interview.