

ŚWIĘTOJAŃSKI, Józef
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
English
RG-50.488*0013

File 1 of 1

In this interview, Józef Świętojański, born on September 8th, 1916, in Chlewiska (a village in Lubaczewski district, Podkarpackie province, seven kilometers from Bełżec), who, during the war worked at the railway station in Bełżec, talks about Jewish and Gypsy transports to the death camp in Bełżec. He also talks about the organization of delivery and unloading of the transports at Bełżec station. Świętojański recalls Jews and Gypsies, who attempted to escape transports. He mentions his participation in September campaign of 1939, and the deportation of his entire village to Romania, during the Soviet occupation.

[01:] 00:08:17– [01:] 05:10:00
00:01 -05:15

The interviewee introduces himself as Józef Świętojański, born on September 8th, 1916, in Chlewiska (a village in Lubaczewski district, Podkarpackie province, seven kilometers from Bełżec); he says that he took part in September campaign of 1938, and that, after the surrender, in November of 1939, he returned to Chlewiska, which was already on the Russian territory; he continues, saying that in 1942, his family, together with the entire village was deported by Soviets to Besarabia, to Romania, where they spent about a year; he describes a return of his family, which was done mostly on foot; he says that after reaching Russia, they were detained by Soviets in a village of **Muchilów [Muchilowo]** for about two months, after which his family travelled to Lvov in wagons transporting hogs, and then walked to Chlewiska; he further says that he lived in Chlewiska till 1947, but during the war, he worked at the Bełżec train station, where he walked every day; he says that he moved to Bełżec only in 1947; he relates his work in Bełżec, and says that he saw the buildings of the camp as well Jewish and Gypsy transports to the camp; he recalls how Germans were driving out Jews and Gypsies from the cars, and how they escorted them in the direction of the camp's buildings; he adds, that he saw it only from afar, for the Germans did not allow anybody to come close to the camp's gate.

[01:] 05:10:01– [01:] 09:50:15
05:16- 10:08

He says that his work at the Belzec train station consisted of maintaining the rails, and in general, of doing whatever work he was ordered to do; he mentions, that there were no Jewish workers at the station; he recalls, that when he worked at the station, he saw arriving Jewish and Gypsy transports, that sometimes, there were even two transports a day; he talks about a terrifying scream coming from the camp, when Germans were opening the wagons, and about a complete silence, after Germans escorted Jews to the gas chamber; he mentions, that he knows about gassing of Jews from other people, that he did not witness it himself; he also found out from the local people, that the gas chamber had a floor, which would open up after the gassing was done, and let the bodies fall down into the wheel-carts placed below the chamber; he continues, saying that after that was done, Germans transported the bodies on the carts to the ditches; he talks about Jews and Gypsies who were escaping transports and how Germans were shooting at them, which he also did not see himself, but heard from local people [*cough*]; Jews and Gypsies were running towards nearby forest, where to this day their remains are buried; he says that he went to these places to put crosses over them, and that since the end of the war, to this day, local people have been going there on All Saints Day to light candles; he says that some of the burial places he knew himself, and that local people showed him other ones; asked if people in Belzec traded a lot, he answers that they did not, that only sometimes people from beyond Soviet border came to Belzec to buy provisions; asked about Ukrainians in Belzec, he answers that local people called them “Black Ruskis,” and that it was Ukrainian, who drove people out of the transports and escorted them to the camp, making sure that nobody escaped; asked if he knew any names of these Ukrainians, he answers that he didn’t because it was not allowed to come close to the place where they were unloading the transport.

[01:] 09:50:16 – [01:] 15:07:00
10:09 – 15:37

He says that he knows from the local people, that Ukrainians were visiting local farmers to buy provisions; he mentions that he didn’t see it himself, for he was living in Chlewiski, and that after work, he was returning home; he adds that he moved to Belzec only in 1947, and that at that time, there were no buildings at the site of the camp, only empty lot remained; asked, if local people were going there in search for gold, he answers, that Germans and Ukrainians were guarding the territory of the former camp, and that after the war, it was guarded by militia; he adds that he heard about people going there during the night, but nobody admitted to this. [*a car passing by*]

[*change of the interviewer*]

He says that he saw Jewish transports at the station in Belzec; he talks about locomotives, which pushed the wagons via a side track towards the camp; he mentions that the camp was fenced, but that despite some distance from the station to the camp, he could hear screams of people, whom the Germans were dragging out of the cars; he adds, that he saw closely the cars of the transport, because he was working along the railroad tracks, and also saw the locomotive pushing the cars towards the camp; asked how long the unloading took, he answers that it depended, usually an hour, but on occasions, it could take up to two-three hours, after which the cars came back to the station empty; asked, if he heard what the people from the transport screamed, he answers, that there were too many voices, and that he couldn't understand particular words.

[01:] 15:07:01– [01:] 20:00:15
15:38 – 20:43

Asked, if he cleaned empty cars after the unloading, he says, that he didn't, and that he didn't see the inside of the cars; he also mentions, that he didn't see people in the cars, because the cars were locked; he continues, saying that those in the transport, who could open the car, jumped from the train; he adds that there was a car with Germans and Ukrainians at the end of the transport, and that they were shooting the escapees; he repeats, that there are still graves of those who perished in the nearby forest, he also repeats, that it was impossible to come close to the camp, because Germans could shoot, or include somebody in the transport, and that everybody was fearing for their life; asked if he knew about young boys, who climbed the trees to observe what was going on inside the camp, he answers, that he did, but he didn't do it himself, for he was too old for that, and besides, he had to work; asked, if he knew about Jewish people hiding in Belzec, he answers, that he did not, and that he says only what he saw himself.

[pause in the interview, new interviewer]

Asked how many Ukrainians were stationed in Belzec, he answers, that about 20-30 *[cough]*, but he saw them only from afar; asked, if the station master was Polish or German, he answers that there were many stationmasters, and that he didn't know them.

[01:] 20:00:16– [01:] 24:58:10
20:44- 25:53

Asked how many Poles worked at the Belzec station, he answers that there were a lot of them, perhaps 50 or even 100, for people from neighboring villages were coming to work there; he mentions that they worked day and night; he adds that Ukrainians did not work at the station; asked about locomotive station in Belzec, he answers that it was used for locomotives, and that in general, it was a place where steam engine drivers gathered; asked a question about the number of trains in one transport, he answers, that there were 20 or 30 cars in one transport; he adds that

if the whole transport could not fit inside the camp, Germans divided the transport into half, one half was unloaded first, and after the empty cars came back to the station, they were taking the second half to be unloaded; asked who was driving the transport, he answers, that steam engine drivers were doing it, but adds, that there was a German accompanying the steam machine driver and the driver had to do what he was told by the German; he adds that steam engine drivers did not see anything either, because they couldn't leave the locomotive; asked if there were transports at night, he answers that he doesn't know, because he went home after work; he adds that normally transports arrived in the afternoon.

[change of the interviewer]

Asked if he saw transports from other countries, he answers, that he heard about them, but did not see them himself.

NOTE

[01:] 05:10:01– [01:] 09:50:15

05:16- 10:08

In this part of the interview, Świętojański, gives the same information concerning the opening floor in the gas chamber, as did Bronisław Czachór, in the interview RG50_488_0015.

Time Coded Notes prepared by: Elizabeth Kosakowska

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There is no restriction on this interview.