

SIKORSKI, Czesław
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0076

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview (conducted outdoors), Czesław Sikorski, born in 1921, and a native of Bielany-Jarosławy, discusses his time as a railroad worker in Sokołów Podlaski during World War II. He focuses on the carrying out of the transportation of Jews to the concentration camp Treblinka.

[01:] 00:30:18 – [01:] 04:35:05
00:00 – 04:39

Sikorski begins by explaining his date and place of birth as December 28, 1921, in Bielany-Jarosławy; says he lived there through the war and comments that it is about seven kilometers from Sokołów Podlaski; says that for the duration of the war he worked at the railway station in Sokołów Podlaski; says he began there as a switchman, then was a signalman, and eventually a train dispatcher; notes that in events such as the illness of other staff members he covered for them at different stations from **Siedlice** to **Kosów Lacki**; says in 1943 he participated in the monthly bookkeeping in Warsaw; notes that he currently lives in Treblinka; says it was not possible to enter the ghetto in Sokołów Podlaski that was created in 1941; says the gates were secured by the Jewish police, and at times by Germans; says he did not live in the ghetto.

[01:] 04:35:06 – [01:] 12:51:10
04:40 – 13:15

He remembers that the first transports of Jews to the camp in Treblinka passed through in July 1942; says these trains usually were let through; and were only stopped for technical reasons; says the prisoners were treated better in the beginning: the German stationmaster of the Sokołów Podlaski station, **Bleszmic [Bleschmitz, Blehschmitz]**, allowed water to be given to those in the trains; says this was later prohibited because sometimes those in the trains were given not just water, but a variety of objects (crowbars, hammers) to take the barbed wires apart, as well; remembers cases in which money was thrown out of the trains in return for water, but the money was collected by the security staff (without giving water); says the trains consisted of about 50–55 freight cars and one passenger car for the escort of the transport; says the escorts were predominantly German SS, Ukrainian, Latvian, and Estonian men; says that generally there was one train a day, sometimes none, and at times two; remembers seeing smoke rising over the forest and smelling a musty smell during his travels from Sokołów to Warsaw over **Malkinia**; says that some of those imprisoned knew where they were going and tried to escape though the barbed wire but were shot dead by the SS men; confirms the question of whether he saw corpses on the way and continues that the dead were buried in the place where they were shot, by the locals and railway workers forced by the military police, but does not know where exactly that location is.

[01:] 12:51:11 – [01:] 22:33:23
13:16 – 23:21

Sikorski describes the loading of the Jews at the station in Sokołów: they arrived on foot to the station, and were pushed onto the train by the military and Jewish police; says that during an average loading, approximately 50 people were killed; says that after loading, the train was connected and immediately left for the camp; says that Jews trying to escape were shot and killed; says that Jews from Belgium, the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, and other countries (like Greece) who did not know where they were brought to, were at the beginning allowed to leave the train, go to the **buffet** [?] and could move freely on the train; says it was prohibited to talk to them, but there were cases in which somebody would try and nonverbally gesture to them, to assist in their understanding of where they were going [*shows gesture*]; says that people who demonstrated such gestures, warned passengers, or hid Jews, were all punished in the same manner: killed and burned; remembers learning from coworkers that in the forest about three kilometers away from Sokołów a trainman was keeping Jews in a dugout; says that when this became known publically the forest was surrounded and they were caught; says they were told to dig a hole, were pushed into it, and burned – together with the whole family of the trainman; explains that after the deportation of Jews out of Sokołów, only the Jewish police guarding the ghetto and the Jews caught last remained; remembers that after the loading of the last Jews with the help of the Jewish police, the Jewish police were told to enter the train, although they were promised to be spared; remembers **Lakiernik**, a Jewish policeman, protested but was pushed into the train and it left for Treblinka.

[01:] 22:33:24 – [01:] 25:52:21
23:22 – 26:51

Sikorski says he knew a lot of Jews when he was in school; says that after the ghetto was created, the Jewish shops were closed; says he did not see any mass executions; says that after the war he did not know of any Jews returning to Sokołów; says he saw one Jew, **Einemer**, [**Ainemer**] and his sister in **Skowie** [**Kowiesy**] who survived in a dugout in the forest near **Podnieśno**; says he worked afterwards in the Ministry of Public Security in Sielce.

[01:] 25:54:22 – [01:] 35:27:15
26:52 – 36:48

He remembers the names of three Germans responsible for the whole track from Podnieśno to **Kosów Lacki**: **Bleszmid** [**Bleschmiet, Blechschmidt, Blechschmied**], **Ludwig, Teufel Schelfel** [**Schäfer**]; says that a part of the rails on the Małkinia–Kosów Lacki line from the gravel pit to the extermination camp in Treblinka was completed in July 1942; remembers that the station in Treblinka was managed first by **Bronicki** then **Kuźmiński** (both Poles); mentions two Germans, one named **Rudolf** [**Rudolff, Rudolph**]; says the rails and trains were operated by Polish trainmen and engineers; says that trains with goods (declared as military transports) passed through Treblinka out of the camp to Germany (Frankfurt); says that sometimes these transports were secured by the military police and train guards, who consisted of subordinated Ukrainians and Russians; says the captives who did not surrender were brought naked to the camp for Soviet soldiers in Podnieśno. Says he began to work in Treblinka in 1944 and that what is left of the former place of the camp is only a big churned up field.