

10/07/1999

BOBER, Aniela
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0113

In this interview Aniela Bober born on March 12, 1925 in Bełżec talks about her life in a farmers' family in the proximity of a concentration camp in Bełżec as well as her work in the field near the concentration camp. She is a witness to Ukrainian collaboration with the Germans, specifically their aid in building the concentration camp, patrolling the neighborhood during curfew, and supervising transports of Jews. She describes contacts of some local girls with young Ukrainian soldiers and collaboration of some Polish families that boarded them. She mentions Polish railroad employees who collaborated with the Germans and guarded transports of Jews as well as Poles who helped the Jews by offering them food and occasional lodging. She describes an incident in which a female Jewish fugitive, who asked for shelter in her house and was refused, killed herself. She mentions a male Jewish fugitive who joined local partisans and describes another Jewish fugitive who was shot by a Ukrainian patrol. She talks about her work in the field in 1941–42 which she performed together with the Jews and recalls Jews who were brutally escorted to the camp. She talks about stealing Jewish clothing from the train cars that were standing on a camp platform and tells a story of her departure as a forced laborer to work in Germany in 1943.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 00:50:21 – [01:] 05:27:01
00:34 – 05:21

The interviewee introduces herself as Aniela Bober born on March 12, 1925 in Bełżec; describes recent historic changes of the city name, which initially belonged to Rawa Ruska, later was called Tomaszów Lubelski and finally received the name of Bełżec, which presently belongs to Lubelski powiat (an administrative unit near the city of Lublin); mentions the outbreak of the war which she witnessed as a 14 year old girl in Bełżec by watching train transports of German tanks and observing German Army troops assemble near her home; talks about the fear within the Polish population who anticipated death from German hands; when asked about the construction of the concentration camp, she answers that nobody could enter and see what was going on; adds that the camp was built by Germans in “black uniforms” [*Translator note: these were Ukrainians and I will refer to them as “Ukrainians” from now on*] and by the Polish laborers who were brought in for the occasion; asked about local collaboration, she answers vaguely that some of the farmers were bringing bread back from the camp and instead of sharing with their needy neighbors they were feeding it to their cattle; speculates that the bread was received in exchange for other agricultural products; mentions that the Poles initially thought the camp was being built for them but later found out that the camp was built for Jews.

10/07/1999

[01:] 05:27:02 – [01:] 15:04:00
05:22 – 15:22

The interviewee explains, in answer to interviewer question, that the boys in black uniforms spoke Polish but they were not natives; describes the black uniforms and black *furażerki* (brimless military hats which were worn by Ukrainians); mentions that some local girls were in relations with the Ukrainians and that they invited them to get-togethers and dance parties; talks about another village where the Ukrainians were paid boarders; adds that the Ukrainians had dark faces and looked like siblings; states that the Ukrainians didn't harm Poles but that they rigorously enforced curfew; recalls an incident when her neighbor forgot about the curfew and had to hide from a Ukrainian guard for fear of consequences; adds that the man in a black uniform was calling "Куда идешь?" (Russian or Ukrainian: "Where are you going"); mentions that the Ukrainians were stealing clothing previously owned by Jews from the trains and were trading it with the Poles; asked about the language of communication she answers that the soldiers were speaking Polish, but it wasn't error free; says she doesn't remember Ukrainian names; briefly mentions Poles pulling Jewish clothing from the wagons parked next to the loading platform; speculates that Jews must have been undressed before they were sent into furnaces [*presumably gas chambers*]; mentions hearing of Poles being chased away from the camp and its furnaces; recalls that Polish railroad employees were in charge of watching the cars filled with people, who were frequently asking for water; briefly adds having heard of a neighbor who gave the Jews a glass of water and was beaten by a Polish railroad employee; explains that the railroad employees and the Ukrainians were obeying German orders out of fear; adds that she personally saw a German guard office near the railroad tracks.

[01:] 15:04:01 – [01:] 21:36:07
15:23 – 22:10

She adds that she remembers the name of the man who gave water to the Jews: **Mietek Kopczan [Kapczan]**; mentions hearing that wagons were filled with different kinds of people, not only Jews but also Poles and even nuns in their habits; mentions that after some time one of the railroad workers who used to guard the trains talked about it himself; asked, she answers that she saw transports of people because they were passing right by the window of her house; says that initially the Jews were running away from the trains, however, they stopped later as the Ukrainian guards were shooting at them; tells a story of witnessing the escape of many people because the train slowed down by the railroad crossing near her parents' house; adds that Poles could be sentenced to death for sheltering Jews; says that a Jewish woman came to their house and asked for water, which she received together with a slice of bread; adds that later she asked for a razor which her father refused to give; quotes her father who refused the Jewish woman the razor saying that she was young and had her life ahead of her to which the woman replied that she had no life; briefly expresses sympathy for the Jewish woman; remembers that her father refused to let the woman in out of fear for punishment; asked, she confirms that she saw the same woman in the morning and that the woman had hanged herself from the fence; supplies more details about the incident, adding that after woman's death was confirmed, the Ukrainians were notified and they came together with a Jewish cart driver, who helped to take the deceased to the camp; mentions another Jew who around the same time used to buy food supplies in the village for German soldiers and who was also murdered in the end.

10/07/1999

[01:] 21:36:08 – [01:] 30:44:18
22:11 – 31:41

She talks about the above-mentioned Jew and says that his name was **Moszko [Maszko] Hellman [Helman]**; adds that he participated in dance parties (previously mentioned get-togethers with the Ukrainians) organized by the local girls; recalls another Jew, **Dykla [Dykiela]**, who used to live in the area but left before the war; asked about Jewish fugitives, she answers that there were more of them and that they were approaching other houses in the neighborhood; talks about **Aniela Gomoch [Gamoch]**, who after the war admitted to sheltering a Jewish acquaintance by keeping him covered with straw; adds that **Aniela** kept him for two weeks and afterwards, despite danger from Germans, drove him to a nearby village of Łówczy (Lówczy) where he joined local partisans; mentions that the Jewish man was very grateful but that despite his promises he never wrote back; asked about the type of the partisan unit the man had joined, she answers that she doesn't remember if it was the non-communist Polish Home Army, "Armia Krajowa" (AK) or the communist People's Army (AL); later recalls that a unit was called KBW [*Translator note: she is most likely confusing terms: the Internal Security Corps (KBW) was established in 1945 to suppress democratic underground in Poland*]; asked about other Jews she remembers hearing of **Julia Pępieczka [Pępiakowa]**, who sheltered a Jewish woman; explains that **Pępiaczka** had the right conditions for sheltering a fugitive because she lived alone, far from others and she had a basement; adds that the Jewish woman was sending gifts and letters to **Pępiaczka** after the war; asked if other Jews came to her parents' house she talks again about the morning when she discovered the Jewish woman who hanged herself, including more details and mentioning the shawl that the woman used for hanging; asked about others who died, she talks about a corpse of a Jew who, as she heard it, jumped off a train by the railroad crossing and was shot multiple times in his legs by Ukrainians; adds that next he was taken to the back yard of the house where the Ukrainian girlfriends lived where he died and his body was transported to camp on a horse drawn cart.

[01:] 30:44:19 – [01:] 35:42:14
31:42 – 36:53

Asked if she often heard the train guards fire, she briefly confirms and adds that the Ukrainians were chasing away Polish children who wanted to watch the trains but they wouldn't shoot at them; asked about the Gypsies she says that she saw them on horse drawn carts and between the utility buildings of the nearby farm where they would sit together with the Jews; mentions seeing the Jews on her way to work in the farm; adds that [*presumably Jewish and Gypsy*] men were working together with them in the fields and that they would ask the Poles for some bread; adds that the Poles were bringing food back from their lunch breaks and that they were getting small clothing articles in return; mentions that field workers weren't well watched; talks about the incident when she witnessed about 300 Gypsies taken to a dirty pond for a bath; adds that the Gypsies were kept in the neighborhood for about three months and then taken away into an unknown location; briefly mentions seeing Jews brutally escorted to camp by Germans.

Box 1, Tape 2

10/07/1999

[02:] 00:43:01 – [02:] 07:10:20
00:34 – 07:18

Asked about her work place during the war, she answers that she was hired to tend cows by **Antosia Syrdowska [Swyrdowska]**, and that she was doing it in the proximity of the camp, frequently together with her friend; mentions approaching the trains together in hope of finding clothing on the cars and disregarding danger of being shot; adds that a railroad employee warned her about the Germans but she, like many others, nevertheless tried to pull out a few clothing articles from the train and regrets that she didn't succeed; asked, she answers that the cars returning from the camp were filled only with clothing; speculates that the Jews were undressed before they entered the camp; adds that from time to time she could see 17 cars on the track; mentions that clothes would occasionally tear while pulled through the cracks of the car; asked if the whole train was filled to the top with clothing, she explains that she isn't sure but she assumes so since you had to reach high to pull out the clothes; asked about the girlfriends of the Ukrainians, she gives their names: **Leona** and **Juliana [Julianna] Bialek** and explains that they are deceased now and that one of them died recently and the other died of tuberculosis during the war; adds that the girls had a large house and were criticized by the local boys for going out and dancing with the Ukrainians.

[02:] 07:10:21 – [02:] 16:06:23
07:19 – 16:37

Asked about her work on the farm with the Gypsies, she answers that they would come to work intermittently and that they would work separately from the Poles; adds that the Jews and the Gypsies were weeding the field ahead of the Poles who were trimming the beets; describes that they were brought in by a Polish field guard, who wasn't armed and that despite that no one would run away; asked about the Soviet-German border she doesn't recall any Jews running across the border and vaguely speaks of Poles crossing the border; asked about her further life, she says that she was sent to (compulsory) work in Germany; describes how a "militia man" *[probably means a Polish policeman]* and three officials came to her house and wanted to recruit one person from her household to help peel potatoes for the army; says she volunteered in place of her older sister who needed to help their older father; recalls that afterwards she was warned by her younger brother that she was being recruited to work in Germany instead so she decided to run away and hide in her neighbors' house; recalls that after their futile search the officials decided to take her older sister; says that what motivated her to leave her cover and volunteer to go to work in Germany; explains that she asked to be sent to the farmers who her older brother had worked for since 1941; adds that her papers were issued very quickly and she left for Germany in 1943; mentions that the German farmers were good to her; remembers staying on the military base after the liberation; adds that she hoped to go abroad after the liberation but eventually she decided to return to Poland in 1947 together with her husband.

[02:] 16:06:24 – [02:] 19:10:14
16:38 – 19:49

10/07/1999

Asked for the names of her friends who used to pull clothing from the trains together with her, she answers that they were **Kryisia Panasowiec [Panaszowiec]**, who is not alive any more as well as **Stefania Panasowiec**, who is still living; mentions that there were many others but she doesn't remember their names; asked about the Gypsies, she says that they were camping near the farm in 1941/42; asked again about their length of stay, she confirms her previous answer and says that it was about three months; speculates that perhaps there were two separate rounds: one of the Jews and another of the Gypsies camping there; states that she was working in the field only with the Jews [*Translator note: this is a contradiction of her previous statement*].