

Jan Bokus
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
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[Approximately 100 min]

SUMMARY

Jan Bokus was born on February 4, 1921 in Warsaw. He talks about the beginning of the war in Warsaw; in the first two years of the war he attended a vocational school and learned to be a carpenter and electrician; he talks about his work as an electrician in Dęblin in a German airplane hangar in 1941, where as the result of an accidental fire he was arrested by the Germans. After his release from prison, Jan Bokus moved from Warsaw to Wąsosz in hope of crossing the nearby border to Upper Silesia; there he hoped to avoid further German prosecution. Mr. Bokus briefly recalls the Jewish population from the town of Wąsosz, where his sister and her husband lived. He talks about his limited interactions with the Wąsosz Jews and explains that his sister and her husband were sheltering Jews in their attic. Due to his brother-in-law's contacts, Jan Bokus managed to leave the General Government and cross the border to Upper Silesia, however he was soon apprehended by the Germans and transported to the Oświęcim concentration camp; he talks about the inhuman transport to the camp and the trauma of arriving at the camp. Mr. Bokus worked in the camp as a laborer and then as an electrician. He comments on much worse hygiene and living conditions in the women's camp in Birkenau; he also remembers seeing female prisoners who were subjected to gynecological experiments. Jan Bokus observed selections of Jewish transports on the platform in Oświęcim; he comments that the transports were most frequent in 1943 and therefore new crematoria and burning pits had to be constructed. He recalls Jewish Sondercommandos [*Special Units*] which were responsible for servicing the crematoria. Mr. Bokus worked on installing electricity in the crematorium number two; he describes it in detail and explains how it operated [*he draws pictures*]. Mr. Bokus gets agitated while discussing writers like Rajczak, who don't believe that Jews were gassed in Oświęcim. He describes his relocation through Sachsenhausen to Buchenwald in 1944, where he helped to manufacture airplane parts. He talks about the evacuation of the Buchenwald camp and his march to Teresienstadt. Mr. Bokus recalls getting sick with typhoid shortly before the liberation; he describes his journey back to Wąsosz. Presently Mr. Bokus is president of Polski Związek Byłych Więźniów Obozów Koncentracyjnych [*the Association of Former Prisoners of Concentration Camps.*]

[Prepared by Agnieszka McClure on 12/01/2010]