

CHWIL, Jadwiga
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0132

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview Jadwiga Chwil, born in 1931, talks about her wartime experiences with Jewish prisoners of the camp of Poniatowa, which was located adjacent to a factory, when she was a child. She comments on the persecution of the Jews by German and Ukrainian guards and the subsequent killing of the Jews in a single day.

In addition, she discusses her meeting several camp prisoners and people who were involved with the underground resistance movement. She also describes several operations of rescuing and helping Jews to which she was an eyewitness.

[01:] 01:05:10 – [01:] 10:22:14

Jadwiga Chwil, born on December 11, 1931, in Wolwolnice, moved with her family to Poniatowa in the summer of 1939; at the time of their move there were no Jews living there; her first encounter with Jews was meeting two Jewish women from the Warsaw ghetto who were brought to the village by the Germans and were very impressed with the quality of food and fresh butter; thinks that they were brought there so that on their return to the ghetto they would advertise the place; since 1942 she saw Jews being transported by rail to the camp, which was established adjacent to the factory; barbed wire fence was installed around the camp; saw German and Ukrainian guards stationed at the camp; the Ukrainian guards wore black uniforms; her father was smuggling and selling ("Handel") food to the prisoners in the camp; one time he was caught by a German guard and badly beaten; she and her family were very scared of the Germans and Ukrainians and she remembers the SS men with their German shepherd dogs.

[01:] 10:22:15 – [01:] 19:30:39

She talks about two young Jewish girls becoming friendly with her 14-year-old sister; she assumes that the guards were bribed to let the girls walk out of the camp to the village; the girls' names were **Ella** and Eva (she doesn't think those were their real names); they borrowed and read books and had some meals with Jadwiga's family; says that they compensated for the food they ate; one of them told them she was from Warsaw, was a high school student there, and placed high in swimming competition; they never talked to them about the life in the camp; remembers that in early spring of 1943, a couple named **Pajewski** appeared at their house; on every visit they would bring false identity papers with them; her mother would bake loaves of bread, and the biggest loaf was sliced at the end, hollowed, the documents were inserted inside, covered with a bread slice and baked some more; the husband (Mr. **Pajewski**) would carry the bread loaves to the camp; does not know what contacts they had in the camp or remembers how many visits they made; remembers, however, that one time the couple brought a suitcase filled with guns with them; she only saw the suitcase, and was told about the guns after the war; these visits took place all of the summer of 1943.

[01:] 19:30:40 – [01:] 32:06:10

In late summer of 1943 she remembers a large passenger car arriving at her uncle's house, in which her family also lived at the time; men, all dressed in black, would come with the car; the car was hidden in the barn during the day, and reeds (for basket weaving) further camouflaged the yard and the car; her uncle would lead the Jews from the camp to the car; they would emerge from the bushes and run fast to reach the car; in the evenings the car would leave; she doesn't know how many people from the camp left in that car; once her mother saw that one woman, just before she got into the car, give the "men in black" a large bundle of banknotes and a handful of gold coins; another memory she has, is how on the way from church services on Sunday, she and her family saw a Jewish man shot to death; another recollection she speaks about is going to the camp with a Polish woman from the neighborhood; the woman's name was **Wala**, and she prepared some liquor to take with them; soon after their arrival, gendarmes beat **Wala** very badly; Jadwiga escaped by running across the double wall of barbed wire surrounding the camp; assumes in retrospect that **Wala** was connected to the underground.

[01:] 32:06:11 – [01:] 35:30:21

One night in 1943, she heard tanks, armored trucks and cars driving east from the direction of Opole (Opole Lubelskie) toward the camp; in the morning, while she was at school, shots were heard from the direction of the camp; soldiers of different nationalities (mentions Hungarians and Estonians who could be recognized by their uniforms), were at the site; the column of the cars, which she remembers as five kilometers long, left in the afternoon of the same day; later, many drunk Ukrainian guards from the camp were seen in the village; they told the local people that the Jews in the camp were killed and only some (less than a hundred) were left to bury the bodies.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 01:06:00 – [02:] 08:39:59

She tells about her brother **Marian** (a year older than her) accompanying a young man from the village who, with a horse and cart, was bringing drunk Ukrainian guards back to the camp; on their arrival at the camp, they saw piles of dead bodies on the ground just beyond the camp gate; people in the village heard from the Ukrainian guards that plans on how to dispose of the bodies were prepared in advance; two barracks were constructed where the people were to undress and ditches were dug nearby; shortly before the day of the murder, the ditches were covered with green pine branches; they heard that the Jews had to undress in the barracks before they were shot; the location of the barracks was the main point where the shooting took place; they were also told that people were shot in many other spots; the two barracks were burned within a few days after the shooting; she heard that some young, armed Jewish men were hiding in the barracks under the pile of clothing; the unburied, naked bodies remained on the ground for two to three weeks; sometime later, she and her family could see the Ukrainians leading the two young girls (**Ella** and Eva who often visited them before) toward the camp; she heard they were killed in some terrible way; she also heard that they were hiding in a bunker, outside the camp, before being found by the Germans; she adds that because her family was living in a shack, they could not possibly hide the girls.

[02:] 08:40:00 – [02:] 16:27:59

She does not think that anybody living around the camp visited the site before the liberation (which took place sometime in July 1944); the day after the Germans left, her family and many

people from the area came to the camp; they could see lots of human hair on the ground and her mother noticed a little hand sticking from the ground; she started to sob and left along with her older sister; Jadwiga, her father and her brother stayed and took bread, flour, grain and seven geese from the German SS food supply; she says that human hair could be seen on the campground for a long time after the liberation; she knows that local people were searching the campground for valuables, but it wasn't her family, and she did not want to talk about it in detail; *[she shows photographs of her mother's brothers: Mieczyslaw Szafran, and Stefan Szafran, and a sister:]* she says that they were all shot by the Germans and their remains were never found.

[02:] 16:28:00 – [02:] 24:10:15

At the prompting of the interviewer she talks about two more incidents, in which her family encountered Jews; in one case, a Jewish man named **Katz** asked her father to help him get back the money he gave to a villager who was to help him, but did not; he was offered a bowl of soup to eat with the family, and commented that a better soup was served at the camp, making her mother angry; in another encounter, a Jewish man was being chased by Ukrainians; her mother offered him a glass of water, and told the Ukrainian guards that her religion would not allow her to refuse serving water to a man; the man returned to thank her for the kindness, and brought with him a down blanket as a present; after the liberation, she and her family often went back to the camp to pick some vegetables that grew at the site where human ashes might have been; the ditches could still be seen; mentions that the firemen from nearby Opole, who were putting out the fires at the camp after the Jews were murdered, confirmed seeing the unburied bodies; in the ditches bones and black gunk could be seen; later, an orchard was planted at the site where the ditches were; mentions several locations in the camp where the bodies were burned; thinks that one of them was of the "cleaners" who were in charge of burying the bodies; there was a separate site for the children (where her mother saw a little hand sticking out) who were also kept in a barrack, separate from the adults.