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KARPMAN, Feliks
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0150

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Feliks Karpman, [**Jewish first name is Wolf**] a Polish Jew born on November, 29, 1926 in Góra Kalwaria, tells his story of survival during the Holocaust. (As of 2002, the date of this interview, he still resides in his hometown of Góra Kalwaria). He describes living and escaping from the Góra Kalwaria ghetto for the Otwock ghetto, and being sent with his brother to, and escaping from, Treblinka. He describes returning to the ghetto and being transferred to hard labor in dry marshes in the Karczew forced-labor camp, participating in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and spending a year hidden in a barn by a Polish family in Góra Kalwaria. He also describes joining in the underground activities of the Home Army, "Armja Krajowa," (AK) and being hidden for the last six months of the war (before liberation in January 1945) in the home of his future wife.

[01:] 01:01:10 – [01:] 01:11:56

He says that his family lived in the Polish part of Góra Kalwaria where his father had a butcher shop; says that he was one of three sons in the family; mentions he never attended Hebrew school and does not read or write Yiddish; says that when the Germans entered the town on September 14, 1939, they brought out a Jewish man from the synagogue and shot him in full view on the main street; recounts that before the war, 3,000 Jews and 4,000 Poles lived in the town; believes Jews did well in town due to the well-to-do and respected Rabbi **Altman** (whom he refers to as Tzadik, a title for a pious man or Hasidic rabbi), who made many contributions to the community; recalls his family was not strongly religious but maintained Jewish traditions and went to synagogue on the Sabbath; says that from the start of the occupation the Germans issued rigorous regulations for Jews, including a curfew and forced labor; recalls that in 1940, the Germans established a ghetto with a barbed wire fence surrounding it that existed until February 14, 1941; says that at first, people could walk in and out of the ghetto relatively easily; says that his father could sometimes even bring in a cow to butcher; recalls that later while walking out of the ghetto, he and his brothers knew that if they were caught they could be killed; says that there were Polish police (also known as the Blue Police or the Navy-Blue Police), German gendarmes, and Jewish Ghetto Police (also called the Jewish Order Service or the Jewish Police); says that the Judenrat, established in 1940, was in charge of keeping the ghetto clean; says that he does not think that the Jewish Police had any advantages in terms of survival; tells about Polish "szmalcowniks" who would report Jews and Poles to German authorities.

[01:] 01:11:57 – [01:] 01:20:20

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Jews living in the ghetto sold their belongings to the Poles outside of the ghetto to buy food; says the reason the situation in the Góra Kalwaria ghetto was less difficult than other ghettos was due to an ethnic German (Volksdeutsche), named **Yankel**, who became a town mayor and who was friendly with his uncle; mentions that Rabbi **Altman** and his family left Góra Kalwaria a month or two before the war; says that he knows that the Germans had the rabbi's address in town and would have killed him and his family at the beginning of the occupation; says that two weeks before the inhabitants of the Góra Kalwaria ghetto were to be transported to Warsaw, the town mayor let his uncle know about the forthcoming evacuation and his family escaped to the Otwock ghetto, which they knew was less restricted because they had a cousin living there; explains that his father's name was **Shaia** Karpman and his mother's name was **Chaia Idith** Karpman; says that his brothers' names were **Joseph** and **Mordka**; says that he and his brothers (who were two and four years older, respectively) worked nights for the farmers in the area and in return brought back food for the whole family; says that this was their only way to eat; mentions there was no work in the ghetto, which was surrounded by barbed wire.

[01:] 01:20:21 – [01:] 01:30:56

They lived there for a year, until January or February 1942, at which time he and his brother Mordka were sent to Treblinka; says that once there, they both undressed, then hid in a pile of clothes; says that Jewish workers, who came at night to pack the clothing to be sent to Germany, found them and brought them to their barrack where a hundred young men were living; mentions they learned from other workers that the Germans were burning people in Treblinka; says that they worked for a few nights separating clothing to be packed; says that there was no work during the daytime; says they received one meal a day; says that they heard that after the arrival of new transports, Germans were killing workers who had arrived earlier; says that after 10 or 12 days, he, his brother, and another man escaped at night; says that they attacked and then killed a Ukrainian guard with a knife and then walked 4 km to a local house where they exchanged their clothing (they had worn regular clothes, since this was before the prisoners had been issued prison clothes) for railroad workers' uniforms; says that while wearing these uniforms, they took a train and arrived in Warsaw; says that after spending several days in the Warsaw ghetto, they took a local train and went back to Otwock where their family was still living; says that soon after they got back, he and his brothers were taken to a labor camp in Karczew; says that there were 350 men taken from the ghetto to work digging ditches in order to drain the marshes at a local castle that had been given to a German officer; says that in the summer of 1943, only 50 men were left in the camp with the other 300 being transported to the Warsaw ghetto, from which they were later sent to Treblinka; says that he and his two brothers remained at work among the group of 50.

[01:] 01:30:57 – [01:] 01:36:08

Recalls that on April 19, 1943, a messenger came from the Warsaw ghetto with the news that there would be an uprising in the ghetto; says that he and his brother, Mordka, decided to go there; says that his other brother in the camp, Joseph, was at first sent to the hospital after getting sick with typhus and was then transferred to Treblinka; says that he and another fellow escaped from the train, but Joseph was shot and killed; says that he learned about it from the other escapee who survived; says that he and his brother Mordka left with the messenger on a local

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train to Warsaw; says that they spent 12 days there, until the Germans started to bomb and burn the ghetto; says that in 1942, while still in Karczew, he and his brother bought firearms from a Polish man (who most likely got it from the Germans), hid them, and brought them to the ghetto; says they fought together with other resistance fighters, as he says, "from backyard to backyard," shooting anytime they spotted Germans; recalls that the partisan group they had joined had their headquarters on **Gesia 27**; the interviewer asks if he knew of any other partisan groups with which this group had associated with, such as Habonim Dror (or simply, Dror), Hashomer Hatzair, etc.; responds that he had no idea and that all he wanted was to fight for his survival.

[01:] 02:01:11 – [01:] 02:10:10

In the Warsaw ghetto his group consisted of 40 men, some of whom had weapons and some of whom had Molotov cocktails; says that one time they joined forces with two other groups in an attack on a German patrol; says that there were people in the ghetto who did not participate in the uprising, but he thinks that they also were glad to see the fighting; says the religious people prayed to God to stop the shooting and killing; says that food was a big issue and many people died of hunger; says that during the uprising the Polish underground was helping to provide supplies like food and arms; says that on the twelfth day, upon seeing the burning ghetto, he and his brother decided to escape at night to the Polish neighborhood; says that they walked only at nighttime and found a house in Józefów where they changed clothes then returned to the camp in Karczew; says they stayed there until June or July 1943; says that in August of that year they were moved to a different camp, in the village of Nadbrzez; says that while there, they were gathered together for an evacuation; says that his brother shot a gendarme who fell into a ditch and that he and his brother escaped and crossed the river to Góra Kalwaria; says that they came to the house of a Pole named **Piotr Szymanski**, his son **Julian**, and his wife **Marianna**; says that the **Szymanski** family knew the Karpman family; says that before the war, **Piotr** was working for his father in meat distribution and his father helped them after **Szymanski's** house burned down; says that they hid there until June or July 1944 in a barn, without ever going out.

[01:] 02:10:11 – [01:] 02:20:45

As for his parents fate he says that while in Karczewo he and his brothers learned in June or July 1942 that the Otwock ghetto was to be evacuated to Treblinka; says they [*the Germans?*] came at night from Karczewo and transferred his parents to a town 30 km away; says that they found out a month later that they had been sent to Treblinka; says that he and his brother came out of hiding after the Russian forces got near and moved into the home of the **Konarzecki** family (his now-wife's family) and remained hiding there; says that they left the hiding place only at night; says that they stayed there about six months until the liberation on January 15, 1945; says that his now-wife and her brother received an award as Righteous Gentiles; adds that when the Russians first got close to the Bug River in the summer of 1944, he and his brother came near the front line to the house of **Wojciech Brzezinski**, and they thought about joining the Russian forces; says that after a week, however, the Russians retreated to their previous position and they went back to their hiding place; says that they joined the AK and worked for two weeks cleaning arms in a cellar of their friends' house; says that after the war he and his brother stayed in Góra Kalwaria and worked as butchers, then in 1946 his brother went to Germany and from there, due to contact with their cousins living in the United States, he moved to America; says that he

received his papers to move to the States as well, but at the time he and his now-wife were not permitted to move there; says his brother died in 1961 in the United States; says that he and his now-wife got married in 1946; says that very few of the Góra Kalwaria Jews survived the Holocaust, several of them by escaping to Soviet Russia in 1940; says that he thinks that in all, 10 or 15 people out of 3,000 survived; says that currently two more Jews originally from Góra Kalwaria (one is 85 and the other is 80 years old) live in town; says one survived in **Wartka** and the other was also hidden by a Polish family west of the Vistula River (Wisła River); tells how on the first day of his arrival to the forced-labor camp in Karczewo, the gendarmes had called all of the 350 prisoners and read aloud the name of a person who was told that he will be executed because he left the camp at night; says that the man was a local barber before the war; says that once he lay dead on the ground, all 350 men were ordered to kiss him.

[01:] 02:20:46 – [01:] 02:33:06

While in the camp in Karczewo he could see a police station across the street; says that the gendarmes would bring several people there from time to time, lead them to the riverbank and execute them; says that he could see their brains being splattered; says there were many such events; says that in the interview he spoke only about a few of his experiences since there were so many: for example, one time in 1944 when he was hiding in the barn, a German gendarme walked in and if he had moved could have easily spotted him and shot him there; describes Treblinka, noting there was a band playing at its entry; *[at the request of the interviewer he describes in more detail the escape from Treblinka]*; says that one of the inmates, an electrician, disconnected power at the time he and his brother approached a gate with a Ukrainian guard; says that the lights came back on only after they were about 2 km away from the gate; says he did not know about canal passages within the Warsaw ghetto when he was there; says that given the size of the ghetto and the various partisan groups, there were limitations to passing information around.