

ROGALSKA, Sabina  
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project  
Polish  
RG-50.488\*0153

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Sabina Rogalska, née Wisniewska, born on January 31, 1925, in **Leszcze** [**Łęczycza**], describes her observations on the destruction of Jews in the Polish towns of **Leszcze** and Grabów. In addition, she comments on her being deported to Hamburg by Germans in June 1942, where she worked as a forced laborer until May 1945.

[01:] 01:10:00 – [01:] 12:29:59

Rogalska states that until the start of WWII, the population of **Leszcze** consisted of Polish, Jewish, Russian, and German inhabitants; the largest ethnic groups were Poles and Jews; the size of the Jewish and Polish population was about the same; Jews were a thriving group; they owned many stores and real estate; the persecution of Jews started immediately on September 1, 1939, when the German army occupied the town of **Leszcze**; a ghetto was formed right away; Jews were thrown out of their apartments and businesses and were forced to move in designated apartments in which three or four Jewish families had to live together; recalls that in her building, Jewish residents were forced to move into the ghetto, while the German family **Sonnenberg** [**Sonenberg**; **Zonenberg**] took over the bakery that belonged to the Jewish family **Rotenberg**; the **Sonnenbergs** also appropriated half of the building; Rogalska hid a Jewish family, **Chaja Chorniakowa**, Chaja's uncle **Isaac** and Aunt **Luba**; Rogalska hid them in the attic behind a chimney; she lied to the German soldiers telling them that she did not have the key to the attic and that the only key was held by Mrs. **Sonnenberg**; witnessed the hitting and beatings of the Jews by the German soldiers; emphasizes that German soldiers participated in the beatings; the ghetto was not walled in like ghettos in large cities, such as Warsaw, Łódź, and Krakow; in **Leszcze**, the ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and certain streets were off limits to the Jews; Poles could go in and out of the ghetto; she witnessed a German soldier who grabbed a Jewish man by the beard and cut it off; the Germans organized a Jewish police force which maltreated Jews; mentions that there were also Poles who had no pity on Jews and cooperated with the Germans; says that the situation in the town was similar to that which existed in the town of Jedwabne; in the ghetto Jews were not allowed to use the sidewalks; instead they were forced to walk on the street; describes that in December 1939, the Germans burned the town's synagogue; the Germans forced the Jews to light the fire and made the whole Jewish population watch while the synagogue was burning; [*she shows a picture of the burning synagogue*]; the Polish population was also forced to watch the burning of the synagogue; talks about witnessing a Jewish policeman beating an elderly Jew with a truncheon; when she intervened in defense of the old man, she was told by the policeman that he was forced by the Germans to beat up the Jews; she did not see any Germans in the vicinity during that incident; states that the Jewish family, which she was hiding in the attic, eventually left their hiding place

and went into the ghetto; Rogalska remained in **Leszcze** until July 1941, the year in which she also escaped to Grabów; she went into hiding with some friends to avoid being deported by ship to Germany as a forced laborer.

[01:] 12:30:00 – [01:] 28:09:59

Between July of 1941 and June of 1942 she was in hiding in Grabów; she spent some time in hiding with the **Tomaszewski** family; the information about the Jews in **Leszcze** during that time came from her mother who used to visit her; Rogalska's mother witnessed Jews being hanged in **Leszcze**; Rogalska recalls that while she was still living in **Leszcze**, a 40-year-old Jewish woman begged her to save her 4-year-old daughter; the woman was offering her gold for saving her child, but Rogalska refused, because she was 17 years old at the time and could not justify having a 4-year-old child; she also knew that harboring Jews was punishable by death; an older daughter of that woman survived by escaping to Soviet Russia; her name was **Esther [Estera]**; the woman left some family pictures with Rogalska's mother for safekeeping; after the war, **Esther [Estera]** returned with her husband to **Leszcze**, reclaimed the pictures that Rogalska's mother had saved and left for Israel; there was also a young couple named **Ryng**, who returned from Russia, reclaimed their house, sold it and left for Israel; most of the **Ryng** family was killed during the war; (when the war ended, the government requisitioned houses of the Jews who did not return to **Leszcze**; those who returned and had prove of ownership were able to reclaim their houses);

while Rogalska was hiding in Grabów, she saw that Jews were being brought to the church and locked in; she saw trucks arriving at night, loading the Jews and taking them towards Chełmno; Germans forced Poles to watch the Jews being loaded into the trucks and vans; she knew that Jews were being killed in Chełmno; she met and talked with two young Jews who had managed to escape from Chełmno; they told her that the Germans were using some sort of electric vans which killed and burned the Jews inside them; when the vans arrived near a forest they discharged the ashes in the woods; the two young men told Rogalska that Jews were liquidated in Chełmno; Rogalska believes that her Jewish friends **Elka** and **Chaja** were killed this way along with their family; she also describes that Gypsies from **Giez** and **Ozorków** were also deported to Chełmno to be killed; she is convinced that these were Gypsies because she did not recognize their language; she knew it was not the language used by the Jews; trucks and vans were traveling from the Grabów church to Chełmno very frequently; the two men that told her about the vans that used electric current to kill the Jews stayed with her long enough to eat and change clothes; they left right away; they swore to her that they saw ashes coming out of the vans; Rogalska also remembers that while she was in **Leszcze**, she saw groups of Hitler Youth beating up the Jews; the Hitler Youth organized marches through the streets of **Leszcze**; the members of the Hitler Youth were mostly young German boys who lived in **Leszcze** before the war; she particularly recollects two brothers from the **Kacwarczyk** family who were extremely cruel towards the Jews.

[01:] 28:10:00 – [01:] 36:05:00

In July of 1942, Rogalska arrived in Hamburg as a forced laborer; in that group there were people from many different countries, such as Poles, Russians, French, and Italians; there were no Jews among them; the group of forced laborers, of which she was part, was not treated too

badly; they were free to move around the city; they worked ten hours per day and were given food twice a day; she recollects that in 1943 she saw on **Schulestraße** a woman who wore a yellow Star of David; she and a friend approached the woman and asked her if she was Jewish; the woman explained that she was Jewish and the wife of a German soldier; Jewish women married to German soldiers had to wear the Jewish star; she recollects that Hamburg was bombed very heavily by the English air force, especially the wings of Polish aviators stationed in England; mentions air groups 303 and 305; mentions the military base of Peenemünde, which was between Bremen and Hamburg; mentions that when she was in **Leszcze** she remembers that there were Poles who collaborated with the Germans; one of those was her friend **Psarkiewicz**, the other was a Russian fellow from **Leszcze**; his name was **Włodzimierz Podnomarenko**; both escaped from Poland right after the war; both were afraid to remain in Poland after the war; Rogalska returned to **Leszcze** in 1945.

Time coded notes provided by Sam Ponczak