

LACHOWICZ, Waclaw
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0154

Tape 1

In this interview, Waclaw Lachowicz, born in 1923, describes his experiences during World War II while in Gostynin, Poland, where he worked as a tailor in a workshop and later in a hospital of the German army. He describes the Jewish ghetto of Gostynin and his observations of Jews gathered and brought to a railway station. He outlines three incidents in which Poles in Gostynin were killed by the German occupants.

[01:] 01:15:05 – [01:] 08:34:22

Waclaw Lachowicz notes he was born February 4, 1923, in Stanisławów, Poland; says he lived in Gostynin during World War II, in the beginning at his aunt's house on Stodulna Road (ulica Stodulna); notes that during the German occupation he learned to be a tailor; says he worked in a tailor's workshop until 1944 and afterwards worked in a workshop at a German military hospital; remembers that the number of Jews in Gostynin was large: about 10,000 people, which according to him made up about 30 percent of the entire population; says the Jews lived all over town and that it was only during the German occupation that the Jews were gathered and resettled; remembers they were lawyers or shop owners, there were many Jews as well in a town nearby, living mainly on trade; says the Jews had different professions and that there were not many wealthy Jews because Gostynin was not rich, but rather a small and rustic town; says the German occupiers treated the Jews atrociously; describes which part of the town was partitioned off to be the ghetto: from **Plocka** Street (ulica Plocka) along the market place to **Zamkowa** Street (ulica Zamkowa); recalls that in this sector of town there were mainly one-story wooden houses and that the living conditions in the ghetto were unbearable; says he went to the ghetto with his colleague two or three times to buy shirts, because Poles at this time only could buy clothes and cloth with vouchers, "**Bezugsschein**", but in the ghetto, Poles could exchange food for other articles of daily use; vaguely remembers exchanging a box of margarine or some eggs; describes how they made it into the ghetto from the riverside, creeping through the wire fence; speaks about the conditions in the ghetto; says the ghetto was very narrow and overcrowded and that he saw straw mattresses on which the people slept at night; recalls a terrible stench in the ghetto because there was neither a sewage system nor running water supply.

[01:] 08:34:23 – [01:] 14:56:02

He says the ghetto of Gostynin was fortified by barbed wire and a gate that was protected by two guards, though four Jewish guards with truncheons opened and closed the gate for Jews to be brought out of the ghetto to work guarded by police and local gendamerie; says that because he worked nearby he could observe how the Jews, marked with stars, left the ghetto daily to work equipped with different tools; remarks that everybody there was depressed; tells how he became a witness to persecution of Jews; describes that together with some friends he observed how Jews were brought to a place called **cerkiew** (Orthodox church) in the southern

part of town; describes how there, the Jews were divided up into groups according to a list; describes how an elderly Jew who could not run fast enough towards the queue was whipped on the head by either a gendarme or Gestapo and blood ran from his bald head; describes that the people who wanted to help the elder man to stand up were beaten as well; remembers how a gendarme spotted him and his friends so they had to escape to another place to continue watching the scene; says the group of Jews was led to the (railroad) station, and that on the way between three and five Jews escaped from the procession into gardens; says the guards began shooting at them but did not run after them, in order to stay with the rest of the group; remembers how the procession moved on and that he thinks the group of escapees that day were able to survive.

[01:] 14:56:03 – [01:] 19:13:22

Lachowicz says he did not see Jews being murdered, but observed the killings of Poles; remembers that when the Germans first invaded the country, Poles were the first to be arrested—they started to take them away and shoot them; says the father of his employer, Mr. **Lewandowski**, along with others, was taken away on a truck and they were killed in the forest; says he did not see the killing; remembers that together with his employer, Mrs. **Rogalska**, he went to the forest to bring flowers and water; recalls that at the spot there were already many pictures and a large grave; says before the ghetto was built another group of Poles was shot in the center of the town; remembers how a Jew named **Brzoza [Brzosa, Brzos]** came to their workshop and talked about an upcoming disaster, because **Brzoza's** community had been ordered by either the gendarmerie or the Gestapo to prepare sandbags; remembers that **Brzosa** anticipated that there would be a shooting; describes that some days later on **Floreńska** Street (ulica Floreńska, where today there is an obelisk), a wall of sandbags was built; says ten to 12 Poles were shot there by a special firing squad under the command of a young lieutenant who gave the order, "Schießen!" ("Fire!"); admits he did not see the event but heard from someone how the commander shot those who were still moving with a pistol; remembers a third group of Polish victims, including the uncle of his wife; says that after the war they were exhumed and are now buried in the graveyard.

[01:] 19:13:23 – [01:] 24:17:10

Lachowicz answers the question of whether all Jews were deported from Gostynin at once, saying no; says the group of Jews he observed at the place called *cerkiew* consisted of about 200 to 300 people, but that altogether some thousands of Jews lived in the town; remembers that before the entire ghetto was liquidated only certain people (excluding women and children) were brought away from there; says he did not witness the liquidation of the ghetto; assumes the Germans did this at night so that no one would see what happened; remembers the day after; talks about **Brzoza** who was about 40 years old and is sure that Hitler, after eliminating the Jewish race, would go for the Poles next; says **Brzoza** was always sad and prepared to live through what he thought was unavoidable; remembers that as long as **Brzoza** was not living in the ghetto he worked in the workshop; says after the ghetto liquidation the houses remained unoccupied at the beginning, but that eventually Germans and possibly also Poles took things the Jews left behind; describes that later the houses were occupied by Poles and that also the workshop where he was employed moved to a larger place in the former ghetto; says that he does not know if Jews lived in hiding, and that after the war he did not have any contact with Jews who might have survived because he entered the army and therefore was not in Gostynin; says he does not know if any of the Jews from Gostynin returned to the town.