

FERENC, Piotr
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0169

[The interview is in Polish; part of the interview takes place outdoors; there are no restrictions]

In this interview Piotr Ferenc, born in 1921 in Kańkowo, talks about the German occupation in Małkina, Treblinka and the vicinity. He describes the brutal killing of a Polish officer which was committed by Germans in the first days of the war. Piotr Ferenc talks about his involvement with the underground resistance movement when he was crossing the German–Soviet border with secret information for the Home Army in Zaręby Kościelne. He recalls hearing about the persecution of Jews in Zaręby Kościelne after the town had been seized from Russians by the Germans. Piotr Ferenc underscores the role played by a Polish policeman in his arrest and deportation to the Treblinka work camp. He describes in detail his stay in the camp: he talks about his work in the gravel-pit and the grave yard; he explains the inhuman living conditions in the camp and remembers the blackmailing of Jews by the Ukrainians; he describes his release from the camp and his journey back home. Piotr Ferenc talks about his subsequent employment as a rail man in Małkinia; he gives a detailed description of the transports destined for the death camp; he talks about the inhuman travel conditions in the majority of Jewish transports as well as their dramatic attempts at escape. While working for the underground movement, he was monitoring and counting the transports to the death camp and then forwarding the information to the Home Army authorities. He remembers transports of Jews from the eastern countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; as well as the western countries, such as Germany, Holland and Belgium. Piotr Ferenc talks about the persecution and killings of the Jews from the death camp who were performing the temporary maintenance of the train tracks in Małkinia; he gives examples of Ukrainian atrocities towards the Jews. He comments on the rebellion in the Jewish death camp. Piotr Ferenc recalls the fights of the local partisans and mentions his participation in the final offensive of the Red Army.

Box 1, Tape 1

[01:] 01:00:04– [01:] 11:02:02
00:50 -11:21

Piotr Ferenc introduces himself and adds that he was born in 1921 in Kańkowo; he explains that his father was a farmer; he remembers the early days of the German occupation and talks about the changes to the German-Soviet demarcation line; he clarifies that he lived near the German-Soviet border; he describes in detail the brutal murder of a Polish officer by the Germans; he recalls mass arrests of Poles by the Gestapo and their subsequent deportation to the German camps; he adds that his brother was taken to Dachau and managed to survive due to his tailoring skills; he mentions his support of the AK (Home Army) underground resistance forces by delivering information across the German-Soviet border; he adds that with time crossing the border became dangerous, the patrols got stricter and the trespassers were deported to Siberia; Piotr Ferenc says that the German and Russian occupations were comparable: Germans were sending Poles to the concentration camps and Russians to Siberia; he adds that in 1941 the Germans seized Zaręby Kościelne from the Russians and murdered all the Jews who had fled there to hide; he talks again about his year-long work for the underground; he mentions working on the rail in Małkinia; he talks in detail about being arrested by a Polish policeman and then being sent to the work camp in Treblinka.

[01:] 11:02:02– [01:] 21:58:11
11:21- 22:46

Piotr Ferenc in detail describes his arrival to the work camp in Treblinka; he remembers the brutal behavior of the young SS soldiers; he describes his hard work at the gravel-pit and the lack of food; he adds that the Germans from East Prussia were more humane than the Ukrainians; he recalls a Ukrainian named **Antonov**; he describes the inhuman living conditions of the Jews and the Poles in the camp; he speaks of the lack of proper clothing; he talks about his work at the graveyard and explains that it was impossible to dig proper graves in the frozen ground causing the corpses to be buried too shallow and frequently desecrated by wild animals; he recalls that only the Poles worked in the camp and that the Jews remained in the barracks; the Jews were blackmailed and threatened by the Ukrainians after nightfall; he remembers that the Ukrainians frequently shot at the prisoners; he talks about an incident when a Ukrainian killed a Pole, who worked on the maintenance of the tracks outside of the camp; he recalls another incident when a rebellious Jew grabbed a rifle from the Ukrainian guard, he couldn't shoot and was eventually brutally killed by the Ukrainian; he talks about an incident when an exhausted Jew, who was unable to work, was brutally stabbed by a drunken Ukrainian.

[01:] 21:58:11– [01:] 31:13:17
22:46 – 32:23

He talks about the Jews from the camp (likely death camp) who worked with unloading the coal in Małkinia; he recalls a brutal and malicious Ukrainian who ordered the Jews to take a bath in a frozen pond in December; he talks about an educated Ukrainian, a Lvov University graduate, who was a guard in the work camp in Treblinka; he mentions that he asked the Ukrainian to release him from the camp, but that he would not because he was too afraid to let him go; he recalls that the majority of killings were committed by the Ukrainians on German orders; Germans participated only in beating; they would often pick both the victim and the executioner from among the prisoners; Piotr Ferenc talks about other punishments applied in the camp, such as standing barefoot on the frozen ground in front of the commander's window; he talks in detail about getting sick with typhoid, which luckily resulted in his official release from the camp; he talks in detail about his journey back home and about the help he received from a farmer from Poniatowo.

[01:] 31:13:17– [01:] 36:30:09
32:23- 37:53

Piotr Ferenc says that he started working on the rail in order to avoid forced labor deportations to Germany; he adds that he worked on the rail until the Red Army advanced in 1944; he recalls in detail the transports of Jews to the death camp in Treblinka; he adds that an average transport consisted of 60 cars and each of the cars held about 60 people; transports travelled in the summer and the thirsty Jews were crying for water; all attempting to help were punished by death; he explains that the transports were coming from various countries, such as Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia; he talks in detail about the side track called Majdan and explains the maneuvers of the engine when it was pushing the cars onto the platform in the death camp; when asked he answers that the transports didn't wait long in Małkinia, they only stopped for about one hour to fill the engine with water; he briefly talks about his work in the switch-tower; he remembers an incident when a Jewish woman jumped off the train right by the switch-tower and was immediately shot.

[01:] 01:00:04 - [01:] 36:30:09

Box 1 Tape 2

[02:] 01:00:07 – [02:] 13:47:10
00:54- 10:30

When asked how he knew that the Jewish transports were coming specifically from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia he answers that he could tell by the guards, who also came from that country; when asked if he knew about the final destination of the Jews he answers that he did because some Jews from the death camp were working on track maintenance and they would spread the information; the Jews were additionally saying that they were forced to work in the crematoria and would frequently recognize their gassed relatives; Piotr Ferenc adds that the rail men were talking to the Jews who worked on the tracks in Polish, Russian and sometimes German; when asked about the Jewish rebellion he answers that he didn't witness it; he remembers the visit of General Goering who gave orders to exhume the mass graves of the previously killed Jews and burn their bodies on pyres; this open air burning produced unbearable stench in the area; when asked about the runaways from the transports in Małkinia he answers that the Jews knew that Małkinia was their last station before the camp; Piotr Ferenc voices his opinion that the whole world, possibly excluding the Americas, knew about the extermination of the Jews; he adds that the Jews on the first transports from the West: Belgium, Holland and Germany believed that they were riding to establish a new Jewish colony; he talks about the Ukrainian transport guards and says that mostly all the escapees were killed; the wounded were finished off by the German gendarmes; Piotr Ferenc witnessed many such incidents; he talks again about a Jewish woman who was killed and buried near the switch-tower; when asked he adds that he didn't work on the rail very long and he escaped shortly before the end of the war when the Germans put their rail men in the tower; when asked about the last year of the occupation he talks about the increase in the Gestapo arrests; he mentions that the front line soldiers didn't harm the Poles, though they recruited laborers for trench digging; when asked about the Polish underground resistance forces he answers that they were still active; he briefly mentions the fights between the partisans and the Russians; he talks about his joining the military and fighting alongside the Red Army in the IV Assault Battalion in Piła and Poznań.

[02:] 13:47:10 – [02:] 23:07:05
14:13-23:56

He talks about his post war meeting with the Polish policeman —the collaborator who had sent him to the work camp in Treblinka; the former police commandant had joined the military in hope to hide his past and avoid responsibility for collaboration; taken with pity Piotr Ferenc didn't report him to the authorities; commandant Zając is not alive anymore; Piotr Ferenc remembers a transport of elderly Jews to the camp (work camp in Treblinka) and adds that they

all died shortly after their arrival for the want of food; when asked if there was any separation between the Poles and the Jews he answers that they all lived in the same barrack but the Jews slept on the cement floor; when asked where the Jews came from he answers that they were mainly locals; when asked about their last names he remembers a Jew named **Majer [Meier]**, who was a cobbler in Małkinia; when asked about the last names of the Ukrainians and the Germans he mentions again the Ukrainian named **Antonov**; when asked about the gravel-pit he describes the work teams; when asked about the construction of the death camp he answers that it started around the time he was imprisoned in the work camp; when asked about the transports to the death camp he answers that they were travelling during the day since too many Jews managed to escape at night; when asked if the trains stopped for longer times in Małkinia, he answers that they didn't; when asked about the capacity and the type of train cars he answers that they were one axle cars and could accommodate about 60 people; when asked about the rebellion in the death camp he answers that he learned about many Jews who joined the Home Army partisan units afterwards.

[02:] 21:30:19 – [02:] 28:34:19
22:16- 29:37

When asked why the Home Army was interested in the camp, he answers that the information about Treblinka was passed to the West in order to inform the entire world about the camp; he delivered messages personally to the commander of the resistance forces Kańkowo; when asked about his work in the graveyard he answers that he was burring Jews and Poles in a common ditch; when asked about Zaręby Kościelne, he answers that he heard about the Jews murdered in a nearby village of Skłody; when asked about the Gypsies, he didn't see them during his imprisonment in the work camp in Treblinka; when asked about the transports of Gypsies, he answers that they started late; when asked about the Gypsies drowned in a pond in Zaręby Kościelne, he had no information about the incident; when asked if the Ukrainian guards from the camp were visiting Małkinia, he answers that they were frequently drinking in a local restaurant.

[02:] 25:34:15- [02:] 36:11:12
26:30- 37:33

[The interview takes place on train tracks near the former location of the switch-tower; Piotr Ferenc explains that some of the events which he has described took place near where he presently stands.]

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Piotr Ferenc recalls starting his job on the rail after he was released from the work camp in 1942; after the war he became a professional rail man; when asked, he answers that during the war there were fewer tracks at the station in Małkinia; when asked about the line bringing supplies to the eastern front, he answers that this line led through Małkinia; he remembers German soldiers going home on furlough and adds that they frequently participated in spontaneous chases after the Jewish runaways from the Treblinka transports; he remembers a Jew from the work brigade who killed a Ukrainian guard with an ax; the Jew didn't manage to escape but was caught instead; he adds that spontaneous chases after the fugitives happened frequently; he points to the spot where a Jewish woman was shot and buried *[he points to the tracks; a close up of the tracks]*; he shows the tracks leading to Treblinka *[he points to the tracks]*; he talks again about the maneuvers of the engine on the Majdan side track; when asked again if the transports waited long at the station in Małkina, he answers that they stopped briefly to fill the engine with water; he remembers that after the train had left the station the Jews would start jumping out; when asked about the condition of the Jews in the transports he answers that they were thirsty and exhausted; he points to the spot where a special wagon would wait for the Jews who temporarily worked on the track maintenance *[he points to the tracks]*; he shows where the Ukrainian stabbed the weak Jew *[he points to the tracks]*; he shows the spot where the Jews were forced to bathe in the frozen pond *[he points towards the forest]*; when asked how long the Jews were working on the tracks he answers that until the eastern front line came near; he reiterates that the Jews on the transports knew where they were going and they cried for help; he clarifies that the Jews coming on the first transports from the West thought that they were traveling to start a new Jewish colony; he mentions that the Polish rail men attempted to warn them, but often they were too afraid of the Germans to do so.

[02:] 02:00:07- [02:] 36:11:12