

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:] 36:30:09

[01:] 01:00:04-[01:] 04:13:10
00:50- 04:15

Q: Could you please tell us what is your name and where were you born?

A: My name is Ferenc Piotr and I was born in Kańkowo, township Małkinia; it was the Warsaw district. I was born in 1921, in June.

Q: And until the war you lived...

A: With my father. My father was a farmer.

Q: In Kańkowo?

A: Yes. I was helping my father.

Q: What—how do you remember the beginning of the (German) occupation?

A: The beginning of the occupation was horrible. The Gestapo agents were murdering people.

Q: Because they came here—this is how far the Germans got, didn't they? Were any Russians here for a short time or....?

A: The Germans were already quite far, past Białystok, but later they retreated. The Germans were already somewhere past Białystok. Only later—when the Russian Army began advancing—they divided Poland somehow and the Germans retreated almost as far as our village.

Q: Was the border far away?

A: It was where—the border was three kilometers away from Małkinia.

Q: And from where you lived?

A: One kilometer away.

Q: One kilometer from the border.

A: Yes.

Q: But you were on the German side?

A: Yes, on the German side?

Q: And what did your life look like there—during the occupation?

A: Well, generally speaking: in the first days I witnessed a horrible murder of a Polish officer. It is written in that paper. Since my father had a very good horse, he came from the village and said: “Take the horse and run away to the forest, because Germans are taking away good horses.” So I mounted the horse, I rode to the forest towards the glen. I let the horse loose, he was eating the grass and suddenly, I heard a throbbing noise, I looked—I got low on the ground and I looked—there was a caterpillar vehicle coming my way. Well, I kept lying low in this young forest; and behind the young forest there was a big forest. They let out a man in a Polish uniform. They tied him to a tree and put a grenade in his pocket—with the safety device released. They hid behind the broad trees and the man was blown to pieces. This was a Polish officer from Warsaw. I stayed down and I said: “If they see me they will do the same with me sine I am a witness.” But they didn’t walk around the forest. Instead they got back in (the vehicle) and left. Well, and later I walked close to the man—he was in shreds. His chest was completely torn off; his head was hanging by a piece of skin. Well, and the village-head (sołtys) had him buried in the forest and later his wife learned about it. She came down and took him. She moved him to the cemetery in Małkinia.

[01:] 04:13:10- [01:] 07:13: 22
04:15- 07:23

Q: His wife from Warsaw?

A: Yes, from Warsaw.

Q: Did anybody know why? Why was he executed?

A: This was the Gestapo—he was a Polish officer and they...

Q: It was already past/after September, right?

A: Yes, it was.

Q: Are you saying that it was still September?

A: It was—the beginning of October.

Q: And...

A: And later the arrests started! Gestapo agents were arresting people. They started to take them to the camp—to Oświęcim. They took my brother in November of 1939; he spent five whole years in Dachau.

Q: Did he survive?

A: He survived. He did. He survived only because he was a tailor and they took him to the tailor shop. He was mending and sewing various German uniforms. This was why he survived.

Q: Was there any underground movement here?

A: Yes, right away.

Q: Right away in '39, right?

A: Yes. In '39. It was—I don't remember (the name)—some party—and later it transformed into the AK party (Home Army).

Q: And were you involved somehow?

A: Yes, they would come to me and they had—a couple—I am not sure if they were married—from Warsaw. They would come here every two weeks—they would give me little packages [*he shows*], which were wrapped and tied with a string, and I would carry them to the Soviet side. I would cross the border and go to the Karpiński's. It happened every two weeks. And these people would follow me. They were apparently afraid that I could get caught.

Q: Mhm. And what was in the packages?

A: Well, it was some sort of correspondence.

Q: So you would cross the border and the couple would follow you?

A: Yes, right behind me—only they would walk a bit farther. They were taking things to the Karpiński's—then they would all go to the train station in Zaręby Kościelne—they would get on the train and go to Wilno.

Q: Was it easy to cross the border?

A: Initially, it was easy but later it was—they put two sets, two rows of barbed wire—and it was very hard to cross. But somehow by a pole there was enough—you could climb the wire like a ladder and then you could cross over. But later they started to capture and arrest people. Whoever was caught was sent to Zaręby, and then taken to the monastery, and then—these people were not coming back. They were going to Siberia.

[01:] 07:13: 22 - [01:] 08:45:13
07:23- 8:58

Q: Did you go to the other side often?

A: Well, every two weeks, every three weeks. When he—whenever that couple visited me I would always carry the packages.

Q: What do you think—where was the occupation worse, on which side?

A: Well—well, you could compare it, it was the same—because over here the Gestapo agents were taking camps and over there the NKVD (Council of the People's Commissars) were sending entire families to łagry (Russian camps).

Q: And where you lived—were there any Jews living there or in the vicinity?

A: No, they weren't. They lived only in Małkinia. They lived in Małkinia.

Q: Well, but you were not far from Małkinia, so surely...

A: Two kilometers.

Q: And what—what happened to them?

A: All of them from Małkinia—all the Jews escaped to Zaręby on the Soviet side. And later when the Germans entered in '41 they killed them all.

Q: Right after they entered?

A: Yes, within a few days.

Q: And it was the Germans or did anybody else help them?

A: Nobody helped them. It was only the Germans,

Q: And...

A: And these—the residents of these villages know for sure where these graves are. They might be even damaged.

Q: And how did you know that these were the Germans?

A: Because my cousins from Zaręby told me about it. I had a brother-in-law in Zaręby.

[01:] 08:45:13- [01:] 11:02:02
8:58-11:21

Q: How long were you involved with the underground movement and crossing the border?

A: Well, it lasted about....well, about a year.

Q: And what happened later?

A: And later you couldn't go any more because they would capture you and then deport you to Siberia. Whoever was caught crossing the border was taken to Siberia.

Q: And what happened to you next?

A: Well, I stayed—I went to work the rail.

Q: Here in Małkinia, right?

A: In Małkinia, right.

Q: And then what?

A: And what—and later I got arrested.

Q: Could you tell us about that arrest?

A: I sure can—I don't even know why I was arrested. A Polish policeman simply came...

Q: But when—do you remember when it happened?

A: It was in November.

Q: '40?

A: '41. A Polish policeman came and said...

Q: A local guy?

A: A local—from Małkinia.

Q: Do you know his name?

A: I do. His name was **Pyskło** and he said: "You are ordered to go to the station"—police (station)—because the Polish police were working for the Germans. And—and I thought

to myself: "Should I go, or shouldn't I?"—but then I said: "I am not guilty." So I went. And he—I asked him. I asked the commandant, and he said: "You are arrested."—and I said: "Why?"—and he said: "I don't need to explain that to you."—there! I even offered him money. I said: "Commandant, sir, I will give you money and you could say that I never came." But he grabbed a rifle from the stand and took me down to the basement. They gathered 16 of us and brought us to the Arbeitsamt the next day. There was an Arbeitsamt in Ostrów Mazowiecka and they took me—us to the Arbeitsamt that was next to the town hall. They put us in the basement—we stayed overnight—and (they took us) to Treblinka the next day.

[01:] 11:02:02 - [01:] 13:27:13
11:21- 13:52

Q: To the work camp?

A: Yes, to the work camp.

Q: The death camp wasn't there yet, right?

A: No, there was nothing there. And when we got to—we were going to the camp. Two Polish policemen and two gendarmes were escorting us. And I looked and I could read from a distance that: "Arbeit macht frei" was written on the gate. Well, that means that work—freedom, work makes freedom.

Q: Yes.

A: Well, but when we got inside they led us to the office, to a barrack. Four thugs jumped out and they made us run. They were drilling us for two hours.

Q: You mean the Germans?

A: Yes, the Germans. They whipped us with their whips. I was a little cleverer, one can say, and I was trying to dodge it. When they started rushing at me I would run away. They whipped me only a couple of times. But there was a guy from Ostrów Mazowiecka—in wooden clogs. The poor devil, he couldn't run away. They whipped him so hard; he was totally covered in blood. And after these two hours they took us to a barrack, they cut off our hair, gave us bowls and spoons and—and the next day we went to work.

Q: And what did you do?

A: The four of us had to load up a car near the gravel-pit—a gondola-car—one (car) until noon and another one after noon. In the beginning we were loading it as long as we had strength. But later the hunger—we couldn't manage and the Ukrainians started to beat us, because we were not working—but we couldn't even swing the shovel. We would get 16 dekagrams of bread a day and some beet soup, with frost bitten potatoes—because the potatoes got frost bitten in the (storage) mounds. This was a smelly soup but we would eat it. We had to eat it to—to fill up our stomachs.

[01:] 13:27:13- [01:] 18:16:06
13:52- 15:11

Q: Were Ukrainians also the staff in that camp?

A: Yes, they were. Initially, when they took us and brought us in, there were no Ukrainians there. We had Germans from East Prussia and they spoke Polish. We could live with them. They wouldn't beat us and they only yelled: "Work, work, work!" They spoke Polish. A few days later Ukrainians were brought in, they were—savage people. They kept hitting and beating us terribly. It was most painful when one would stab you in the ribs with the barrel of his rifle. They would stab like that. They murdered and beat.

Q: They murdered?

A: Yes.

Q: In front of your eyes?

A: Yes. Whenever—when someone would take a few steps away they would shoot him.

Q: And....

A: And there was that one—in my time—when I was here, he was there too—what was his name?—he was tried in Israel...**Antonov [Antonow]**... a Ukrainian. This one was always dressed like a German.

Q: And you saw him?

[01:] 14:42:10- [01:] 18:16:06
15:11- 18:53

A: Yes, I did. It was him—he conducted all the assemblies—at noon, in the evening, and in the morning.

Q: Was his name for sure **Antonov**?

A: Yes, it seems so—it appears to me that it was **Antonov**. He was tried, but he—most likely, he was acquitted.

Q: And what nationalities were the prisoners?

A: Only Jewish and these—Polish.

Q: And how many Jews and Poles?—when you were there.

A: In the barrack we had—because there was only one that was in use—the Jews slept on the right and the Poles on the left. The Jews slept on the concrete and the Poles had bunks made of wooden planks. There were no blankets or anything.

Q: And were the people on the concrete also without blankets?

A: They all shivered on the concrete.

Q: In their clothes, just on the concrete.

A: Yes and we also slept in our clothes, because we didn't undress, because it was cold. The shoes theft had also started and we would put our shoes by our heads; but you had to be careful so that no one would yank them out. Because some people were brought in summertime, (they were) caught in Warsaw and taken only in their underwear. They didn't have any clothes. They would make their clothes out of the cement bags. Only later, when people in the camp started to die they would snatch some clothes from the corpses and they would put them on.

Q: Did many die?

A: Wow, they did! They did—in the barrack I had there were: ten, eleven, twelve (dead).

Q: Both Jewish and Polish?

A: Yes both the Jews and the Poles. And later they transferred me from the gravel-pit to the grave-digging team. We were burying the dead. There are many—on the Polish cemetery there are also many Jews. Because I used to carry them there, right. We had no stretchers and the four of us would just grab their arms and their legs. In one hand you had a corps and in the other a shovel. The ground was frozen and you had to pick and chisel—we had no strength to dig even a small hole to hide the dead. So then we would cover him

with the clumps and loose soil. When we would get there the second day it was all licked clean by wild animals. The corpses were dragged out. It was a horrible scene.

Q: Did you carry and bury many corpses like that?

A: Oh, a few days—I was there for quite a few days. There was one and then another—you would bury one and run to get another. There were no earth movers and you had to dig all the ditches by hand.

[01:] 18:16:06- [01:] 21:58:11
18:53- 22:46

Q: Were the Jews and the Poles separated at work?

A: When I was there the Jews were not taken to work. They simply stayed in the barracks. The Ukrainians would only come at night to rob the Jews. They would come at night and: “You, you and you—get up!” They chose a few Jews and said: “You will be shot.” And we could hear everything. And they came in order to—and the other Ukrainian would approach them (the Jews) and say: “Make a collection, give them something—and they will let you go.” And these Jews would make a collection among each other. Whatever they might have had: a wedding band, a ring—they would give it to the Ukrainians and they (the Ukrainians) then would go away.

Q: Did you say that the Ukrainians—did it ever happen that they would shoot at—at—at the prisoners—did it?

A: They would shoot. How many times too!

Q: And perhaps...

A: They shot a Polish man in Malkinia right in front of my eyes.

Q: That means outside the camp.

A: Outside the camp; he was working on the rail.

Q: Was it still before—before the camp...

A: And they...

Q: ...before your arrest?

A: Already after.

Q: Aha, after.

A: Yes, after the arrest. Because later they (the Germans) were also taking Polish men to work in Malkinia—they would work on the tracks there, they would stand. They were doing the maintenance of the tracks...

Q: Now—do I understand correctly—it was already after you were released from the camp?

A: After my release.

Q: Very well. Please tell us the story when the man was shot...

A: Well, he—this—this man was walking away—perhaps he was fixing to run away, or so—and he fell back about 100 meters from the group and this Ukrainian aimed at him and killed him. And in just an hour a daughter came to visit him from Warsaw. And they were loading these dead bodies all together and taking them to Treblinka.

Q: Did any other shootings stick in your memory; some of the ones that you had witnessed?

A: Well, this...

Q: Any... something that you remembered in particular.

A: Well, with shootings it was like that—it was after I left (the camp)—when I was working the rail I saw that a Jew took a rifle away from a Ukrainian, but he didn't know how to shoot. And the Ukrainian was coming closer and closer, and closer—and the Jew was trying to back up. He apparently didn't know how to shoot. And on—he stepped close to the tracks with his feet and he fell over. And then the Ukrainian grabbed the rifle, he took it away from him, and—and—first he kept smashing and smashing his head with the rifle butt and then he shot him. I also witnessed when some Jews were going away to Treblinka and there was a drunken Ukrainian. One Jew couldn't get on the car because he was very weak—and that Ukrainian ordered them—the rest—the Jews to throw him on the rail car; he then climbed the car himself; he sat on his stomach and he kept stabbing his chest with the knife. Finally he cut his throat [*he demonstrates*—like that. I could see it because it happened about 20 meters away from me; on the rail car.

Q: And these were already the transports to the death camp or were they still to...?

[01:] 21:58:11- [01:] 24:56:17
22:46- 25:50

A: No, these (people) were the ones who came to work, the ones who worked on the tracks in Malkinia. They were unloading the coal into the storage shed. They did many various things (jobs). Later I saw—because I worked in the switch tower where—where we would bring in the trains. And I saw that—because there was a pond next to the tracks and the tracks were serviced by the Jews. And the Ukrainians—it was most likely December. The ice was thin so they (the Ukrainians) gave order to break the ice and swim. There were about 20 Jews there. And the Jews were swimming in that frozen water. Later when they got out everything was freezing solid on them. And that Ukrainian made one of the Jews sing and the others dance. And those poor guys were shivering and dancing. This sort of fun he had with them.

Q: Do you perhaps know his last name?

A: I don't.

Q: And you didn't know...

A: I don't.

A: There was a Ukrainian from Lvov. He said that he graduated from college in Lvov. I was trying to talk to him and I said: "Let me go"—when I was working at the gravel-pit I would say: "Let me go home", I said. And he said: "I am afraid." And later I regretted that I talked to him. I said: "They will come at night, pull me out and shoot me."—but he apparently didn't tell that to anyone. If he had told the Germans that was what they would have done.

Q: And when you were in the work camp, were the Germans shooting at prisoners?

A: I didn't see any Germans shoot because they—they were using the Ukrainians. The Germans were only beating us. Sometimes they would take us out—who knows why?—they wouldn't say. There was a huge table by the barrack wall, they would put a man on that table and the commandant would pick one of the prisoners to administer the beating; a stronger man. And he said to him: 25. And he then would beat the other one. And sometimes it would happen that he would be hitting lightly [*he demonstrates*]-like that—then the commandant would order the one who was doing the beating to lie down and he would say: "I'll show you myself how to beat." And after such beating a man would die within a few hours...

[01:] 24:56:17 - [01:] 31:13:17
25:50 - 32:23

Q: And did they choose randomly or did they have a grudge against someone?

A: I don't know why but there were various punishments: standing barefoot in the frost in front of the commandant's window—but why?—nobody would say. You weren't allowed to come near the well because you would be sentenced to ten lashes with a wooden pole.

Q: How did you manage to get out of that camp?

A: I got sick with the typhoid. And this was how it went—when someone got sick—the team counted 25 people—one was sick but they took him to the gravel-pit (just as well). And they also took me to the gravel-pit until noon. I was very sick and I had high fever. They put me down—I was useless for work. So he (the guard) came and—his name was **Szwarc (Schwartz)**. He was always so red in the face. He was walking around and supervising the work brigades. He came up to me and said: “Warum nicht arbeit?” And I said that I was sick, „krank”. So he would still, I am not sure three or four times, hit me with a wooden pole—and I sat on a rock and he walked away. When they brought me back to camp at noon –because I couldn't walk by myself—then I (decided) to hide. The bunks were very wide and I crawled close to the wall and I said: “I will die before the evening comes.” So I was lying by the wall and they started to yell: “Пойдем!”(Russian: “Let's go!”)—the Ukrainians called us to the assembly. They counted. One was missing. He said—I heard the Ukrainian scream: “Удрал.” (Russian: “He ran away.”)—but I was lying low, because if they had seen me they would have beaten me to death. I was lying quietly. They took another one in my place and they left for the gravel-pit. And I kept on lying down and the doors opened wide and I saw German shoes under—from under the bunks—and they (the Germans) were yelling. The commandant's second in command was speaking Polish. He had a limp because he was wounded in the October campaign. He had a limp in one leg. And he started to shout: “We are releasing the old and the sick. Get up for the assembly.” But I was afraid to get out from under that bunk while they were watching. So they had made the announcement and they left. I scrambled from under the bunk and joined the line, it was a row. They came up to me and they asked: “Well, how old are you?”—„Well, 20”—„What district are you from?”—„Ostrów Mazowiecka”, and the commandant hit me with his whip and he said: “Go and peel the potatoes!” The Jews were peeling the potatoes in the corner. I walked towards the Jews and I sat down on a bench next to them. I had no knife and... then I had a thought to get

back in line as the last one—once again. Because they—across the whole barrack—it was long—they were still calling out and checking. And I stood last and my heart was pounding because I said: “He will kill me if he recognizes me.” But I was lucky. He came up to me and asked the same things again and I said: “From Ostrów Mazowiecka.” And the commandant’s second in command said: “Well, this Ostrów isn’t doing half bad”, and he said: „You will be released”, he said that to me. And this is how I got lucky. In about half an hour they went to their office; they came back in another half an hour and they started to call out; and they called me out. Well, and—but I—they took us to the front of the barrack and they opened the gate and I said to that commandant—to the commandant with a limp, that I couldn’t walk because I was very sick. So he chose two older men and said: “Take him to the village.” So they started taking me to the village. We reached the forest and we heard gun shots from the camp. So everyone dropped—they dropped me—each one scrambled, because they were afraid that there would be a chase and they would be caught again, and I—and it was getting dark. And I—and I thought—I would walk into the forest, the farther from the road the better. I left the road—it got really dark—for real. I couldn’t walk—from one pine tree to another but then I said again: “I can poke my eyes out”, because there were branches and other such things. And bli— (blind)—with my hands forward [*he demonstrates*] I was walking, suddenly I heard something—some dogs were barking and I said: “Ho, ho, there is a village here.” When the dogs are barking that means that there must be a village. And I got to Poniatowo at twelve at night. Poniatowo is a village. I got there and I said: “I will go into a barn and stay there till the morning.” And when I was opening the barn a dog jumped out at me. It started to bark and the farmer walked out and asked me: “Who are you?”—“I am coming back from the camp. I wanted to stay the night in your barn.” He said: “You’ll get cold”, and he took me to his house. He brought in the straw, I stayed the night and the next day he took me back.

[01:] 31:13:17 - [01:] 34:07:07
32:23-35:24

Q: Back where?

A: Back home. He took me home, to Kańkowo.

Q: And you said that later you started to work on the rail, right?

A: Yes, later; I started to work on the rail because they started to take recruits to Germany; they were taking recruits to work in Germany. And I thought: “If I start working the rail they wouldn’t take me.” And so it happened.

Q: You worked in Małkinia?

A: At the station in Małkinia, the whole time.

Q: And what year was it already?

A: It was '42-3; (I worked) until the Red Army entered in '44.

Q: Do you remember any Jewish transports to the death camp?

A: Of course! We were even counting how many trains went by each day. Because they would only run during the day. They didn't take any Jews at night. Because at night many of them jumped out and ran away. They only transported them during the day. The transports always had about 60—60 cars and each car had 60 people. They were begging and screaming: "Give us water..."—many people, mainly children were dying.

Q: And you could see that?

A: We could because the windows were wired but not shut. They were wired. And they (the Jews) were sticking their faces and heads out and they were screaming: "Give us water, give us water!" But we weren't allowed to come near the cars. Whoever came close to a car was shot by the Ukrainians.

Q: There were such cases...

A: There were.

Q: ... that someone came near?

A: Yes, there were. There were.

Q: Do you remember any?

A: Yes, I do.

Q: So who did they shoot?

A: Well, rail employees/workers. In Treblinka, I think, one was shot at the station—he was handing out water. They were shot in Małkinia, in Czyżew...

Q: In Małkinia it was your colleague, right? He also worked there...

A: Yes, he was also a rail man.

Q: Mhm. The transports in Małkinia... Wait, just a second—you said that you were counting, right?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: Well, and how many—how many did you count?

A: Well, sometimes—sometimes it went like this: two transports a day, one a day. We counted by the cars, that about million had passed through Małkinia. They were even transporting Jews from Estonia, from...from Lithuania, from Latvia, from Vilnius. From Estonia—from Latvia—from Lithuania they were escorted by Lithuanians.

Q: And these transports were coming to Małkinia?

A: Yes, they were coming to Małkinia.

Q: And what happened next?

A: And... Well, they were sent along; there was a side track on this side of the Bug River; it was called Majdan. The steam engine would detach, go around, attach itself in the back and then the cars were pushed. A Polish engineer was on the first car and the cars were pushed to the camp; onto the unloading platform

Q: But you didn't see the platform—did you?

A: That—that I didn't see. I didn't see the platform.

Q: That means—that means that you could mainly see these transports only...

A: Only at the station...

Q: ...at the station.

A: ...in Małkinia, right.

Q: And how long did it last since—since—before that steam—(steam engine)—from the time the train arrived to—before the steam engine turned around and then started to push—I mean, how long did it stay... a transport like that at the station in Małkinia?

A: Well, the tran—(transport)—well, it stayed in Małkinia only briefly, only to fill up with water. The steam engine would fill up with water and go to Majdan behind—near Poniatoŭo there was—there was a side track.

Q: So how many minutes did it all take?

A: Well, it could have taken about 40—around an hour. And later they (transports) were pushed from Majdan onto the platform. That platform is still there.

Q: So when that train waited for 40 minutes or an hour—where were you then?

A: I was in the switch tower. There was a switch tower. We were sending away and receiving the trains.

Q: How far was it from—from the cars (transport)?

A: From the cars—well, it was about 200 meters.

Q: But you said that they (the Jews) were crying and asking for water...

A: And I...

Q: ...so you had to be closer.

A: When they were coming—when they were leaving.

Q: Aha.

A: They were passing by our switch tower. A young Jewish woman jumped out once. She was shot here near our switch tower.

Q: By the Ukrainians.

A: The Ukrainians, yes.

Q: And you saw that, I understand? With your...

A: Yes, I saw it. I did.

[01:] 36:30:09

37:53

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

Box 1 Tape 2

[02:] 01:00:07

00:54

[02:] 01:00:07- [02:] 03:22:11
00:54- 03:22

Q: You said that the transports were coming with the Jews from Estonia, from Lithuania and from Latvia, right?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you know that these Jews were from these countries?

A: I knew it, because there were mass transports of Jews and I knew that they (these transports) were Jewish.

Q: Yes, Jewish, I understand—but how did you, for example, know that these were the Jews from Estonia?

A: Because the Estonians—the country they were coming from—Lithuanians—Lithuanians were escorting those from Lithuania; the Estonians—those from Estonia.

Q: And you were so—you were able to tell by the uniforms?

A: By the uniforms—they were wearing black uniforms. And by the language.

Q: That means that you remember the Jews from Estonia....

A: Yes.

Q: From Lithuania...

A: Yes, from Lithuania.

Q: Perhaps from somewhere else?

A: Well—Vilnius; from that region; from Bialystok.

Q: And—and did you know where they were going?

A: Sure thing. Well...

Q: And how did you know?

A: I knew that there were Jewish—here in the crematoria—they were gassed in the gas chambers.

Q: You already knew it back then?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: And how did you....

A: I knew it from the start.

Q: How? How so?

A: We got it from the Jews; from the ones that were brought here to work.

Q: And where from were the people who brought them to work?

A: From different countries. There were also Jews from Germany; German Jews.

Q: So there was a regular crew that would bring them (to work), right?

A: Yes, the Ukr—the Ukrainians were bringing them.

Q: But it was the Jews who worked here, right?

A: Yes, the Jews.

Q: But not the Jews from the work camp?

A: No—they were only taking them from that camp; from the death camp.

Q: And they were telling all about it to you, the rail men?

A: Yes. Occasionally, they would work next to the switch tower. We would open the window and ask: “Where are you from?” And they would answer. Well, we didn’t understand German so well, but we could understand something. I remember that one—he was a handsome Jew from Germany, from Berlin—a doctor.

Q: And he talked to you.

[02:] 03:22:11 - [02:] 06:50:00
03:22- 06:58

A: Yes, he did.

Q: And he told you what was happening in that...

A: Well, he told me that they—that they were exterminating them [*demonstrates cutting throat*], that they were beating them and gassing them. From each transport they would choose,

select strong Jews to work the gassing—with the gassed ones. They were saying that they could see with their own eyes their father riding on a conveyer belt in—into the furnace from the gas chamber—their mother or their brother. They could recognize their own. And later when their spirits were broken, then the new ones were recruited—brand new, strong men to do the job. Only Jews worked there. The Ukrainians together with the Germans were only supervising. The Jews were working with their cremated ancestors (he likely meant: “relatives”).

Q: Did you have many meetings and conversations with these...

A: Almost every day. Because I would sometimes work at night and sometimes during the day—if they would bring them when I worked during the day then we would talk.

Q: As I understand, you remembered that doctor best—the doctor from Berlin.

A: Yes, I did.

Q: And what language did you speak with the others?

A: With the Jews?

Q: Yes.

A: Well—they were mainly bringing in the Polish Jews, so we spoke Polish. The Jews also spoke Russian.

Q: Do you—do you remember that Jewish rebellion – in the death camp?

A: I—I didn’t see it, but I remember that –it was known all around. The Jews had rebelled in the camp. And also one more thing...

Q: Anything... but—was anything said about it then?

A: Well, they said that many Jews had run away, but that they were caught. They were caught and murdered. And one more thing...what did I want to say... there!—in ‘43 General Goering came here to inspect the camp. .

Q: Which camp?

A: The Jewish camp. Because initially they didn’t manage to burn all the Jews in the furnaces so they were digging the ditches and burying them there. After he arrived he ordered to dig the Jews up and burn their bodies on the wood stakes in order to—to disguise it. So I lived about ten kilometers away and when the wind blew over there it was—it was such burnt stench—when it burned—it stank so... But they didn’t manage to excavate them all. Many remained.

[02:] 06:50:00 - [02:] 13:47:10
06:58- 10:30

Q: At the train station in Małkinia—besides that one Jewish woman whom you saw jump out, and whom, you said, the Ukrainians shot—did you see any other escapees?

A: I saw that when the train started going towards Treblinka the Jews were jumping out because they already knew—Małkinia was the last station.

Q: Did they know where they were going?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: And how did they know?

A: Well, what do you mean? It was widely known around the world. Perhaps America didn't know, but everyone in Europe knew that...

Q: Well, it wasn't perhaps that well known...

A: It was known; very well known. Everybody knew. First—first the Jews from Holland would come, from Belgium—on passenger trains. They were saying that they were coming to a colony. And they were already going to...

Q: And you saw these cars?

A: I did. Yes, I did. They even stepped out and strolled on the platform.

Q: Here in Małkinia?

A: Yes. And they were saying that they were going to—to a colony. That the Germans made a special colony for them and that was where they were going to live. But the Poles were showing them that they were ri—(riding) —going to their death.

Q: And the ones who were jumping out on the way to Treblinka?

A: And the ones who jumped out—on every car there was a Ukrainian—on the top [*he demonstrates*]. The Ukrainian was on the roof and he was shooting at them. Just as—because there were bushes there. If one didn't manage to get to the bushes he was shot. And later, afterwards—after the train with the Jews had left, the German gendarmes would run around and if they found anybody alive they would finish him off.

Q: Did you see any incidents like these?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: From the switch tower?

A: Not from the switch tower, I didn't work all the time. I was also at home, I walked around.

Q: And did you see those, who—who managed to get to the bushes and then hid somewhere.

A: There were only a few of those, only a few. Because it was always like that: he either broke his leg when he was jumping out or they shot at him or wounded him. And then later, the gendarmes would finish them off.

Q: So you didn't see even a single one?

A: Even here—in this forest next to the track, there is a Jewish woman buried. They killed her on the tracks.

Q: And who buried her?

A: Well, Polish people; the Poles.

Q: That means—and you didn't hear about anyone who somehow managed to escape?

A: Perhaps somewhere farther down, because here in Małkinia when the train started moving and they were jumping out—they were all either shot or wounded.

[02:] 13:47:10- [02:] 13:47:10
10:30-14:13

Q: Mhm.

Q: And how long did you work on the rail?

A: Likely a few days and then I ran away, because the Germans—because before the end the Germans put their own men in the switch-tower, and later when the front line was about 50 kilometers away from Małkinia, they sent three more soldiers to the switch-tower, and that was when I ran away. I wouldn't come to work anymore.

Q: Do you remember any other dramatic episodes from that last stage of the war? That means – the last year of the occupation.

A: Yes I remember—the Gestapo agents were making a lot of arrests. They were coming, riding around even at night. They organized round ups. They arrested entire families. Because the German front line soldiers did no harm. They would only capture you for trenches—to dig trenches. They also captured me, but I escaped.

Q: And after they advanced —after the front line moved through—was there any Polish underground movement here?

A: Yes, it was still here. It was.

Q: And were there any fights or...?

A: The Home Army. There were no fights any more... There were accidents—a Russian was killed or a partisan was killed, because such was the guerilla fighting.

Q: That means: did the Russians kill a partisan or did the Germans do?

A: Just like any ...

Q: Yes, any guerilla fighting, as you said...

A: The AK. The Home Army.

Q: Yes. That's right. That means that after the front line advanced and after the Russians...

A: Yes, right. They were still here but then the Russians were trying to capture them and send to lagry (Russian camps). And I immediately joined the army.

Q: Mhm.

A: And I wasn't worried.

Q: And what happened to you later?

A: Well. I was on the frontline. I somehow managed. I was—I completed parachuting training. I was supposed to be dropped in the enemy's rear but the offensive had started and a general—a Russian general arrived and he said: „Нельзя.” (Russian: “You mustn't.”) The Germans were running away.

Q: Did you take part in any battles?

A: Yes, we belonged to the IV Assault Battalion. The leftover Germans—because when the frontline retreats some battalions remain, they don't have enough time to retreat behind the front line—we were disarming them.

Q: And in what region?

A: Over here: Piła, Poznań.

Q: And—I read in your memoirs, that after the war you came across that police commandant from Małkinia. The one who didn't—he sent you to—to the camp or first to Ostrów.

A: Yes.

Q: And he was not—not to be swayed.

[02:] 13:47:10- [02:] 15:18:24
14:13 – 15:48

A: I saw him in Białystok.

Q: Could you tell us about it.

A: He joined the military because he was also afraid. He tried to find a shelter in the military. And I was going—we were going to get some bread in the bakery. I looked—the commandant, in a Polish uniform.

Q: Do you know his last name?

A: Zając.

Q: And his first name?

A: I don't know his first name. I don't know the first name. Commandant Zając. I yelled—I yelled very loudly: “Commandant, sir!” And he immediately jumped to me and said: “Brother, don't say anything.” He asked me not to say anything, because if I had reported that to the information (he likely means: “informants”)—because we had information (likely: “informants”) the military. They kept the order—they would have immediately arrested him. But he begged me and he said: “I have small children. I want to bring them up.” And I felt sorry for him. I didn't report anything. I only said to him: “You see, you sent me to death but I forgive you.”

Q: Is he still alive perhaps?

A: No, he is not alive any more. Back then he was—how old?—40, and I was 23.

Q: Great. Thank you very much. I am sure that my friends—they are watching us downstairs on the monitor...

[02:] 15:18:24 - [02:] 17:29:22
15:48 – 18:05

A: When they brought in 60 elderly from the old folks home in Warsaw, these people were so emaciated, thin, feeble—they couldn't even get off the cars. The Germans were pushing them off, heads first [*he demonstrates*]. After a few—after a few weeks they all died. Because that was how it went: they couldn't get through to the soup, because you had to make your way to the soup and to the bread; they hardly ate. They all died.

Q: Here you go—do you have any...?

Q2: You said that when you got to the work camp only one barrack was in use...

A: Yes, the other ones were still under construction.

Q2: And you—you remember that there was a separation between the Poles and the Jews.

A: The Poles and the Jews.

Q2: And you slept together. And where were the Jews from? Do you know the towns?

A: The Jews were from Kosów Lacki, from Sokołów, from Siedlce. These were our Jews—Polish.

Q2: Were they also released, or weren't they? Was it like that, that some of the Poles, like you, for example—you were lucky; some others I also know were released—and the Jews? What about them?

A: They didn't release the Jews.

Q2: They didn't.

A: No.

Q2: And—and what else were they doing in the camp—because you remembered that they were peeling something in the kitchen. Because there were two separate kitchens: for the Jews and a separate one for the Poles.

A: In a barrack—they were peeling potatoes in a barrack and then they were carrying the peeled ones to the kitchen.

Q2: And what else were they doing? Do you perhaps know whether they were used for other work...?

A: No. When I was present the Jews were not doing anything. They weren't even taken to the gravel-pit.

Q2: Do you remember any names? Perhaps something particular about the Polish or Jewish groups: people, names?

A: There was a man from Małkinia... **Majer (Meier)** was his last name. I don't remember his first name but his last name was **Majer**.

Q2: And who was he in Małkinia, what did he do?

A: He was a cobbler. He made shoes.

czy tutaj, gdzie teraz—później powstał ten obóz zagłady coś już wtedy było robio

[02:] 17:29:22 - [02:] 19:42:05
18:05- 20:23

A: Because my brother had a shoe shop and he (**Majer**) was making shoes for him. And I saw that he was in the camp. But he disappeared in two or three weeks and I didn't know whether he died or whether he was deported.

Q2: What sort of professional was he? Was he reputable and well known here in the area?

A: He was a good professional. And his wife didn't look Jewish at all. She was a good looking woman, because I used to visit him.

Q: Did you happen to remember any names of the Germans or Ukrainians in the camp?

A: No, I don't remember. I was there with the one who was later tried in Israel. His name was **Antonov**, or so.

Q: Was there a Polish kapo in the gravel-pit—do you remember any last names? Was anyone in charge of you? Any team leader?

A: This is how it was: 24 people in a team and the 25th was the kapo—he was chosen from the prisoners to rule over them, and one Ukrainian. We had teams like that.

Q2: Mhm. Because you—when were you released? In the winter of '42—here—was here a death camp yet, was there anything done? Were they busy doing anything there?

A: They were. The area was fenced off and they were doing something.

Q2: Was anything going on in there...

A: Yes, they were building.

Q2: ...in there at the beginning...

A: It was under construction.

Q2: ...at the beginning of '42. You said that there were still transports coming here—they were going during the day—to the camp, full of people?

A: Yes, because at night there was a lot—at the beginning, when they were travelling at night a lot of Jews would escape at night.

Q2: And at the train station in Małkinia—were there guarded transports staying through the night?

[02:] 19:42:05 - [02:] 21:30:19
20:23- 22:16

A: No. Most often when they started in Białystok they would stop only in Małkinia to fill the steam engine with water.

Q2: Only. And they wouldn't stay in Małkinia through the night....

A: No, they wouldn't.

Q2:...I mean...

A: They didn't stay.

Q2: They didn't stay. And you said that there were 60 people in the car, but how—how do you know—how—how were you able to count that?

A: Well, I was getting the information from the Jews, who were working—because some of them were selected to come and work at the station in Małkinia. There were 60 people each.

Q: But the cars looked a little different back then. Their size was probably a little smaller...

A: They were smaller.

Q: Do you remember, more or less, the dimensions of these cars? What did they look like?

A: They had about 18 ton capacity and now the cars are much larger.

Q2: Did they have one or two axles?

A: One.

Q2: One axle.

A: One.

Q2: So that means... Because there are various quotes for how many people there were. I came across...

A: They had most likely one axle.

Q2: Because I found—some say 80 or 100, and you said 60 and this is so... But coming back to the death camp—you mentioned the rebellion. The escape or... were there any people from the camp roaming around? The escapees from number 1 or number 2 were they here in the neighborhood?

A: I didn't see that, but I heard that the men were joining the partisans. The Jews were joining the AK (the Home Army). They got weapons.

Q2: Here in the Ostrów area?

A: Yes, that's right.

[02:] 21:30:19-[02:] 23:07:05
22:16- 23:56

Q2: But you heard that?

A: Yes, I did.

Q2: Well, because—well—it was... Has anything else, as if, stuck in your (memory)—something about the death camp? Were you—because you collaborated with the Home Army, right?

A: Yes.

Q2: Why were they interested in that camp? Can you—can you tell us anything about it?

Because I know that there was counting going on here in Małkinia of—of these cars and some information was forwarded to Warsaw.

A: Well, they wanted to—they probably wanted to pass this information to the West, it seems to me. Perhaps the America didn't know about the murders yet.

Q2: But you—to someone—with someone—you had contacts with someone in Małkinia and these ca—(cars)—the counting. You, as if, forwarded that—or the notices that the transport set off or so...

A: There was a commander—he commanded the unit in Małkinia, in Kańkowo, the village of Kańkowo—we passed it to him. He was forwarding it further.

Q2: Mhm. You mentioned that you were burying people over there—at the cemetery next to...

A: Yes, I did.

Q2: And these people—how they died—was it typhoid... were they shot or beaten...?

A: It was typhoid and hunger and they were shot.

Q2: But there was no separation; you wouldn't bury the Jews or the Poles separately?

A: No. No there was not.

Q2: All of them together...?

A: Together. Many Jews...

Q2: Everyone together in a ditch and that was it...

A: Yes, that's right.

Q2: ...and then you would dig another ditch. There was no...

A: No. All of them—together. Together.

Q2: Very well, thank you.

[02:] 23:07:05-[02:] 23:10:14

23:56- 24:00

[Break]

[02:] 23:10:14- [02:] 24:23:19
24:00 – 25:16

Q2: And one more—I have one more question. Can you tell us about Zaręby—and still one more question—I'll put it down in order to—about Zaręby Kościelne—it was Zaręby Kościelne, right?

A: Kościelne, right.

Q2: Yes.

A: After the Hitler's army entered in '41, in just a few days all the Jews were rounded up and escorted to the village of **Skłody [Sklody-Średnie, Skłody-Stachy, Skłody-Piotrowice]** and there they were murdered. I also heard—I heard that they were buried; they were still alive, they were moving but they were covered with sand. Whoever wasn't—whoever was not shot, he suffocated.

Q2: But...

A: And it was all so quiet about it! Nobody talked about it.

Q2: Well, because I heard that from one transport some—in Zaręby Kościelne they stopped a transport and buried it there—well, there was something like that, but I don't know the details. And now—and also—one more question: when you were in the work camp, were the Gypsies there too? Did you see the Gypsies?

A: There were no Gypsies. Not when I was there.

[02:] 24:23:19 - [02:] 25:10:20
25:16- 26:05

Q2: And when you worked at the train station in Małkinia, did you see any transports of Gypsies to—tell that these were Gypsies?

A: They came later, later. It was later. Not at the beginning—only the Jews. Later also the Gypsies were coming.

Q2: Because some talk about Zaręby Kościelne and say that Gypsies were drowned there... they were ordered to go on the thin ice... and then they drowned.

A: It is very possible that such thing had happened, but I only know about the Jews, that the Jews were murdered. Because I had a cousin in Zaręby and he told me.

Q2: And were there any Ukrainians or Germans, who staffed the first or the second camp, coming to Małkinia at all? Perhaps something...?

[02:] 25:10:20- [02:] 25:34:15
26:05- 26:30

A: Wow, they were sitting in the restaurant in Małkinia non-stop. They were sitting there and drinking non-stop. They stayed drunk.

Q2: And did you know that they were from Treblinka?

A: Yes, I did.

Q2: And how did you know that they were from there?

A: We already knew them.

Q2: Very well, thank you.

[02:] 25:34:15- [02:] 28:34:19
26:30- 29:37

[Outside, rail tracks]

[Low volume]

Q: Could you start talking... When did you start working here?

A: I started to work here in (19) '4...

Q: Already after—after...

A: In '42 in May, already after the camp.

Q: Yes, and you were working....

A: I was working.

Q:until the end—until the end.

A: Until the end, yes; until the Red Army entered.

Q: And you didn't work on the rail after the war anymore?

A: I did.

Q: Aha.

A: I have a rail pension.

Q: So you are a rail man.

A: Yes.

Q: I must have misunderstood that _____ these tracks here are the same as before or is there more of them?

A: Well, they are a little changed. There were more tracks—there is more now.

Q: Aha.

A: There was less. The switch-tower was over there; it was a wooden shed/booth.

Q: We are walking towards it, right? It is gone already?

A: It is gone.

Q: Hopefully nothing is coming [*they are crossing the tracks*].

A: No, not yet...

Q: During the war there was also a line bringing supplies to the eastern front.

A: Yes.

Q: You said that those who were coming back from furlough—that means, the Germans going away on furlough also...

A: Yes. When they shouted: "Jude raus!" (German: A Jew escaped), all the soldiers started to chase after that Jew.

Q: Were the soldiers—Wermacht soldiers, right, who were coming back from—from the front line?

A: Right over there, where you can see the overpass.

Q: Let's go, perhaps we can cross. *[They are crossing the tracks.]*

A: The Jews were working, building a garage and one Jew got the courage to hit a Ukrainian with an ax. He hit him and ran away—all the Jews ran away.

Q: Here you go... *[They keep walking.]*

A: But they were caught and arrested in that forest.

Q: That means right here...

A: Yes.

Q: And what did they do to them?

A: Well, I don't know. They took them to camp. And I don't know how many either.

Q: And did you often see—were there many situations when the Germans totally uninvolved with the occupation, for example Wermacht soldiers who were going on furlough, took part in these—in these spontaneous, as I understand...

A: Yes, they did. It mainly happened in the waiting area there. Over there, where you can see the station. So when they shouted: "Jude raus" then these—these soldiers would chase after them.

Q: And what did they do with them.

A: They would hand them to the Germans. Sometimes they managed to catch them. Sometimes they didn't. They ran away.

Q: Well, we are almost here by the switch-tower.

[02:] 28:34:19-[02:] 30:30:13
29:37- 31:38

A: Right. Over here, in this spot a Jewish woman was shot *[he points]*. She jumped out over here. When the train was moving away she jumped out and she was shot here *[close up]*.

Q: Did you see many incidents when people were jumping out?

A: Yes, I did. I did. Most often I saw it over there—over there as you approach that forest [*he points*]. Next to that forest, they were jumping the most next to that forest.

Q: Because here is the side track to Treblinka.

A: Yes.

Q: So the trains would come out from there—they would arrive—stop somewhere here on...

A: They would stand on the tracks and—and the engine would go around and then pull (the cars) to Treblinka again. There was a side track in Treblinka—it was called Majdan. And there the engine would go around one more time and then push the cars. It would push the cars from the back towards the platform—to the camp.

Q: And when the trains arrived, how long were they staying at the station?

A: They didn't stay long—only to take water. They would take water and leave.

Q: And what was happening...?

A: That means, it was—it simply was...

Q: What did you see?

A: It simply was—it was simply frightful—because when the train started to move the Jews started to run away, to jump. Frequently we had to lie on the floor because the shots were whizzing by and the shells were flying and we had to hide.

Q: And how did the Jews look like?

A: Well, pretty miserable. Awfully miserable, because—it was scorching heat, it was summer and there were 60 people in one car—it was horrible. They were screaming for water. They were asking for water, but we weren't allowed... it wasn't allowed.

[02:] 30:30:13-[02:] 32:16:18
31:38- 33:29

Q: And you could hear it from here, right; literally from here?

A: Yes.

Q: And they were passing by...

A: Yes.

Q: Still slowly, right?

A: Yes still slowly.

Q: A train couldn't—couldn't pick up speed here. And you also told us earlier about some cases of beating or even killing Jews, who worked here, by the Ukrainians. These were Jews, I understand, that were brought here to work from the camp—the work camp.

A: Yes, I saw it.

Q: Could you tell us where it happened?

A: Here, on that track [*he points*], right here a rail car would be prepared for the Jews who worked here. Before evening, sometime after 4 PM the Jews were gathering on this platform. That platform was long. And here I witnessed when one Jew wasn't able to climb the platform, because he was very weak. Others threw him on and then a Ukrainian climbed the platform, he mounted his (Jew's) stomach and started to stab his chest with the knife. And later I saw that he was tickling his throat with the knife [*he demonstrates*]. Initially he was squealing: „Uuuu”, but later he stopped. Over there—there where you see that alder tree—far over there—there was a pond. In December they (the Jews) were ordered to swim.

Q: By the Ukrainians?

A: The Ukrainians, yes.

Q: And they swam?

A: They had to because he was hitting them with his rifle butt.

[02:] 32:16:18-[02:] 33:39:10
33:29- 34:55

[*Train tracks*]

Q: Were the Jews from the work camp working here long?

A: Well, until the end; until the end.

Q: Until the end that means...?

A: Till (19) '4... the end of '43. But when the front line started approaching they wouldn't bring them anymore.

Q: You also said that when the Jews were transported to the death camp '43, they knew what—where they were going.

A: They did, they did. They were screaming: "Help!" They were asking for help. When the train was leaving they were screaming: "Save us!"—but how were we supposed to do it.

Q: Well, but the first transports from the West...

A: The first ones didn't know. The first ones were saying that they were going to a colony. That the Germans prepared a colony for them and they were going to that colony.

Q: In what conditions were they travelling?

A: In good conditions; in passenger trains.

Q: Were they allowed to walk out?

A: They were; they were walking on the platform.

Q: And were you giving them any signs or...?

[02:] 33:39:10- [02:] 34:15:11
34:55- 35:32

A: Yes, some were giving (signs). Some were afraid to because the Germans were closely behind them. But they already kn—(knew)—well, they perhaps didn't know because these were the Jews from Germany, Holland and Belgium. But when they were coming from Poland, Lithuania and Estonia—they all knew where they were going

Q: Thank you very much.

[02:] 34:15:11- [02:] 36:11:12
35:32- 37:33

A: The end?

Q: The end, unless you remember something else, any incidents you didn't talk about yet. Is anything coming to mind? ...Well, then it's the end.

A: Yes, the end.

[A camera is rolling along train tracks]

[Standing trains]

[Passing trains]

[A fork in the tracks]

[A person on the tracks]

[02:] 36:11:12
37:33

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

[Translated by Agnieszka McClure 11/05/10; there are no restrictions]