

BOBROWSKA, Jadwiga
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
English
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File 1of 1

In this interview, Jadwiga Bobrowska, born on August 28th, 1924 in Stodzew describes the repressions used by Germans towards Jewish and Polish population of Dęblin, Puławy, and Kraków, the places where she spent the WW II. She concentrates on inhuman treatment of Jews working at the airport in Dęblin and incredible high mortality among them. She also describes in detail the pacification action organized by German in Puławy as well as the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in the same town. Bobrowska remembers random crimes committed by Germans on Jews and describes the details of the ones she witnessed. More importantly, she describes the acts of persecutions directed at Jewish and Polish intelligentsia.

[01:]00:29:08 - [01:]03:00:13
00:00 – 2:36

Q: Good afternoon.

A: Good afternoon.

Q: Can you introduce yourself?

A: My name is Jadwiga Bobrowska.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born on August 28th, 1924 in Stodzew.

Q: And where did you live when the WWII broke out?

A: I was already living in Dęblin.

Q: Could you tell us how did the life in Dęblin change, what did the war change in Dęblin?

A: What the war change, well, it introduced terror. The occupant wanted to completely destroy us.

Q: Can you explain it, how did this terror look like, what was going on?

A: Well, first of all, they started from Jews. They were destroying, murdering, shooting at Jews and then, there were various repressions, round-ups and other things. The same when—after all, their goal was to destroy intelligentsia, both Polish and Jewish. There were few doctors in Dęblin, two

of them Jews. They liquidated them right away. It was a small town, but there were quite many people, and we were simply without health care.

Q: But what happened to these doctors, were they liquidated—

A: It's hard for me to say, it's hard for me to say. One of the doctors, they went back to his third generation and proved that he was a third generation Jew. Yes.

Q: And do you remember how the ghetto was organized?

A: You know, I don't know exactly, this, this situation.

[01:]03:00:13 - [01:]06:03:19
2:36 – 5:39

Q: And later, were you perhaps a witness, did you see situations when Jewish population was persecuted?

A: Yes, of course I saw it. Almost every day. Because I lived on the main street, I could observe how Jewish people pushed the corpses of their people on these wheel carts. They were bloodied, carelessly thrown on these carts. It was a very unpleasant sight. And besides that, before the war, trade was really in Jewish hands, the shops belonged to Jews. Suddenly everything was liquidated and we were deprived—it's not enough that there was little food, but in addition, there were no places to buy it.

Q: And when you just mentioned these carts with bodies pushed by Jews, how did you know that they were Jews, those who were pushing?

A: Well, you know, after all, after Germans came in, they immediately ordered Jews to wear these armbands with David's star.

Q: And did the bodies of those murdered people on the carts, were they also Jews?

A: Well yes, of course yes.

Q: Were they also dressed so that you could recognize it?

A: Well yes. Thanks to those David stars. But besides, you know, Dęblin was a small town and we all knew each other to some degree. If not personally then from seeing each other often. I was going to school with Jews, so I knew their parents. The same when I mentioned trade, various services which Jews performed for the population, so it was a rather small circle of people, I would say.

Q: You are saying that you used to see these carts. How often did you see them?

A: You know, there was this period of time, until I started working, when I saw them almost every day, this situation. At the beginning our mother didn't permit us, meaning, she was saying, "don't go, don't look at it." But later, we were growing older and my brother and I were watching it. Very sad sight, very sad.

Q: Can you estimate more or less, how many of these carts were going at one time?

[01:]06:03:19 – [01:]09:02:14
5:39 – 8:38

A: You know, it's hard for me to say, but certainly some five- six of them.

Q: And how many bodies could there be on one cart?

A: Well, I don't know. Perhaps even 10.

Q: Did anybody guard these Jews who were pushing the carts?

A: Of course. Of course.

Q: Who?

A: Well, German soldiers. They were simply escorting them. You know if for example those who pushed this cart—they were at the end of their strength, one can imagine that, after all they were the compatriots of those on the carts, right—there was immediately some kind of repression from the side of those soldiers.

Q: What kind of repressions were they?

A: Well, you know, they pushed them, they pushed them with the butts of their guns.

Q: And did you hear any conversations, did they say something during this pushing?

A: No, you know, we lived on the first floor, so it wasn't really possible.

Q: Those who were guarding, were they only Germans, or were there also soldiers of different nationalities?

A: No, you know, not in Dęblin. Later on, in Puławy, I encountered some Ukrainian or some other army, but then, right after war, there were only Germans.

Q: And did you see where were they pushing these carts?

A: You know, in Deblin Wieprz river joins Vistula river and there were those huge empty plots and there they were digging the ditches there and dumping these bodies in them. That's why, I heard that after the war there was an initiative, a huge disinfection initiative.

Q: And did you perhaps see these ditches which were being prepared for the bodies.

A: You know, no. Because Germans weren't allowing anybody there.

Q: You are saying that this was such period of time when it was happening almost every day. When could it be?

A: Well, it was right after the Germans came in, so it was [19]39 when they entered, in September, right. So immediately, in few weeks this action begun.

**[01:]09:02:14 – [01:]11:02:22
8:38 – 10:37**

Q: And did it last for a long time, this period with these carts—

A: You know, it lasted all the time till the ghetto was created

Q: So it was before, before the ghetto was created?

A: Yes.

Q: And perhaps later on did you see any situations when Jews were persecuted or murdered?

A: Well, you know, were they murdered later on, did I see it, I didn't really. But I have to tell you that Germans' attitude towards Jewish population was very belligerent and even similarity, it could have been a Pole, a Catholic, but if he had any characteristic features or something, he was immediately under their suspicion. They immediately suspected him.

Q: What would happen when he became suspicious?

A: Well, you know, they immediately took him aside [on the street], checked if he had any documents so he could identify himself. And it also happened that they could shoot at such person.

Q: Were you perhaps a witness of such situation?

A: Yes. I was a witness of one such incident.

Q: Can you tell us about it?

A: You know, yes. I was driving my bike through the bridge over Wieprz river and a man was walking behind me. He was perhaps really looking like, well, he had very dark hair, he was still young, tall. And the guards stopped him and I don't know if he didn't have documents or I don't know. In any case I heard a shot and when I turned around, this man was already lying down.

**[01:]11:02:22 – [01:]14:10:12
10:37 – 13:46**

Q: How far were you from it?

A: Excuse me?

Q: What distance were you from this man?

A: Well, you know, I don't know, maybe 15 meters.

Q: These guards who were there, were they German soldiers or—

A: Yes. Of course, of course.

Q: And you didn't hear the conversation with this man before they killed him?

A: You know, no, I didn't hear. I mean, judging from his behavior, he was defending himself, he was explaining himself. But—

Q: What kind of behavior was it?

A: You mean of this man?

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Well he was terrified and he really didn't know what they wanted from him. I only heard this **"Judy, Judy, Judy"** [GERMAN: Juden, Jewish]

Q: And did you see the moment when they shot him?

A: No, you know, I didn't see this moment, because I passed them, only when I heard the shot, I turned around and saw it.

Q: And do you know what happened with the body of this man?

A: No, I don't know, I don't know.

Q: Later on, were you witnessing situations when Jewish people were subjected to persecutions and physical abuse?

A: You know, as I mentioned before, I was working in this German company at the airport and then I had a contact with Jews, because Jews who were brought from Austria, from Sudetenland were also working there, they were simply cleaning up the airport. And they lived in such barracks and were receiving a very little payment. And I was the one who was doing payroll for them. And the so-called leader would come, take these envelopes with money and after few days he would come back and gave me back some of the envelopes, because in the meantime, many people died.

Q: What part of the envelopes was returned?

A: Well, you know, sometimes half of them. In those barracks where they lived there were very hard circumstances, there were no sanitation, dirt, cold, they were hungry and because of that typhoid fever was attacking them. And they were dying from this typhoid fever.

[01:]14:10:12 – [01:]17:01:05
13:46 – 16:36

Q: Were you in this barrack?

A: I was.

Q: How did it happen that you were allowed, that you entered the barrack?

A: You know, I don't remember why I entered it, but I did enter. In any case, everything we did, our every step took place with a German escorting us. But in this situation, I don't know, I needed some data or something like that, I don't remember.

Q: And how many barracks were there?

A: I think there were four. But I already don't remember exactly.

Q: Can you estimate, more or less, how many people lived in one barrack?

A: No, no. In any case, you know, the workers of this company, and Poles in general, were not allowed to even approach those people who were working at the airport. We were not allowed to give him a piece of bread or something like that, because it meant for us a punishment by death.

Q: And did this prisoner, this leader who was coming to you to take the money, did he talk to you? Did he tell you anything?

A: No, no. He was only taking these envelopes, signed for them and was leaving. Of course all of that was taking place with the guard.

Q: So, during this, the Germans were present?

A: Yes. Of course. Of course.

Q: And when you worked near these barracks, did you see any situations when these Jewish prisoners were punished somehow, or were there perhaps executions?

A: You know, no. I didn't see anything in the barrack itself. But those who were working cleaning this airport were very badly treated. Any small detail was making Germans mad and there were repressions.

Q: What kind of repressions?

A: Well, they were beating them up, hitting with the butts of their guns.

Q: And did you perhaps see when they killed someone during such beating?

A: You know, I saw. I saw it, exactly at the airport I saw it.

Q: Could you tell us in more details how it happened?

[01:]17:01:05 – [01:]20:01:16
16:36 – 19:37

A: Well, you know, I already don't remember all the details, but, I don't know, I suspect that it must have happened that this worker, this Jew, was already very weak and he already wasn't working all that effectively. Perhaps he was ill, perhaps he had this typhoid, and Germans required effective work. And because he couldn't deliver it, so he paid for it with his life.

Q: How was he killed?

A: He shot at him. Just like that.

Q: I am trying to imagine this situation. Could you tell me how it was, was it during the work, how did it look like?

A: You know, yes, he was cleaning, either leveling the ground or something else, I don't remember anymore, but in any case, a German approached him, because it was obvious that this man was weak, ill. And then he [German] was pushing, pushing him, he was falling down, getting up and finally a German shot him.

Q: What distance were you from this place of murder?

A: Well, you know, I don't know, maybe 100 meters. I was just exiting this, because we were also working in barracks at the airport, and so I was exiting to do something and so I was a witness of this.

Q: What happened when, when a German shot this prisoner, what happened afterwards, with the body?

A: Well, naturally, his colleagues who worked next to him were taking him away. I don't know, I think that, I don't know, I can't tell you.

Q: During your work at the airport were you perhaps witnessing similar incidents or situations like that?

A: You know, no, no. Because finally I myself fell ill with typhoid and I stopped working.

Q: And when you got better, did you come back to this work?

A: No, no.

Q: And what did you do then?

A: I think I mentioned that they arrested my father, that he was shot and because of that they took our apartment away, they threw us out of it and gave us a very small boarding. And then I moved to Puławy. To the Institute. I was working there.

[01:]20:01:16 – [01:]22:58:16
19:37 – 22:34

Q: And why was your father arrested?

A: Because he was a teacher.

Q: Later on, when you were living in Puławy, did you see any Jews?

A: Well, you know, I used to see Jews who were working, cleaning some squares, sweeping the streets, but besides that, I didn't have any contacts with them. But in the Institute itself, there were some people of Jewish origins, who were simply hiding there among us, the workers. Among others, as I mentioned before, professor **Lausze-Kaufaman [Laushe-Kaufman]**.

Q: Did you know then that she was hiding and that she was a Jew?

A: Yes, because she wasn't hiding the fact that she was Jewish, she worked in the Institute already before the war. An academic worker. But she was so much liked and respected that for about two years she was managing to work there. Only later, when she found out that they wanted to liquidate her, so she organized, meaning our underground gave her some illegal documents and she left.

Q: And the other, other Jews who worked in the Institute, because you said that there were few of them.

A: Yes, yes. There was a son of the doctor from Kraków, and maybe three or four other people.

Q: And what happened to them?

A: Well, you know, they were lucky, they survived the war. So afterwards we all met here, in Kraków.

Q: You also mention those Jews whom you see in Puławy cleaning the streets. Were they organized groups of people or single persons?

A: As this woman mentions in this book, just as they brought Jews from Vienna to Dęblin, they also brought them to Puławy and they worked for some time, and later on, they liquidated the ghetto in Puławy and they deported them probably to Poniatów. This is where the ghetto was relocated.

Q: How did you recognize that they were Jews?

A: Well, you know, because they had an obligation to wear this armband with the star of David.

Q: Who was guarding them during their work?

[01:]22:58:16 - [01:]26:02:17

22:34 – 25:38

A: German soldiers.

Q: But earlier on you mention that you saw Ukrainians in Puławy?

A: Yes.

Q: In what situation?

A: Well, you know, it's hard for me to say. In any case they were a kind of auxiliary organization for the Germans. When Germans were organizing pacification for example, next to each house, they were usually one-family houses, there was a soldier keeping guard so nobody would come out of the house. Later, he was driving everybody to one square and there the pacification took place.

Q: Did you perhaps see such action?

A: I saw it. I even took part in it. Yes.

Q: Where, When was it?

A: It was in [19]42.

Q: And where?

A: In Puławy.

Q: In Puławy?

A: Yes.

Q: Could you tell us about it?

A: I was working in the Institute, but I was beginning work at 5 a.m. because I was working feeding animals. So I had to be there early to distribute food and other things for them. And while exiting the house where I used to live, it was a house of my grandparents, I saw near the gate a soldier.

And he didn't let me out, he pushed me back inside. And then I saw that a soldier was standing at almost every house. He entered the house maybe half an hour later and everybody "**raus**" [GERMAN: out], we were to leave. My uncle was very ill, He had tuberculosis and was lying in bed. He was in his pajamas, so I wanted to dress him at least in a sweater. He didn't let me, he hit me in the face, this soldier, and they drove us all near the cemetery. It is the outskirts of Puławy, called Włostowice. And there were already a lot of people near this cemetery. And so they set on fire the house standing nearby. Firemen came, but they were not allowed to put the fire out. And we heard very well how the animals, the cows were crying, the dogs were barking, because all of this was burning in front of our very eyes.

[01:]26:02:17 – [01:]29:10:16

25:38 – 28:46

A: And later, when this house burnt down, Gestapo entered the action and part of the people, mainly, they were already directing to be taken to Oświęcim. And I, because there were few other workers of the Institute in this crowd, we were lucky enough that the boss of the Institute came, a German, and he, how do I say it, took us out. And this is how I simply escaped death. Perhaps.

Q: How large was this group of people whom they gathered?

A: You know, large, very large. I think perhaps 500 people. Perhaps more.

Q: And those soldiers who were guarding the houses and ordered you to come out, what nationality were they?

A: They were exactly--you know they called them there Kałmuks, I don't know why they called them this. They were, I don't know, some people from the east.

Q: Did they have different uniforms than Germans?

A: Surely, yes, of course. Different.

Q: And what language did they speak?

A: Well, in their language. I don't know Russian, so it's hard for me to say. Perhaps it was Russian, perhaps Ukrainian, perhaps Byelorussian.

Q: And were there people in this house which was burning or only animals?

A: No, people probably—they first evacuate the people. They ordered them to go out.

Q: During this time when you were living in Puławy, did you see other example of repressions of civilians?

A: You know, they happened very often. Very often. For example, they would come to the Institute's front yard, drove everybody from the building, from the offices, from the labs and it would always end in arresting of few dozens of people.

Q: And were there for example public executions in Puławy?

A: I didn't witness it. Perhaps they did take place.

Q: And do you perhaps remember the liquidation of the ghetto in Puławy?

A: You know, yes, I remember. It was winter, horrible cold and they, despite the fact that there were Jewish activists, who, I don't know how they were called, **Juderant [Judenrat]** such Jewish township and they wanted to bribe these Germans. But it didn't work.

[01:]29:10:16 – [01:]32:01:23
28:46 – 31:37

Q: And how did this liquidation look like?

A: Well, you know, they drove everybody in the direction of this Poniatowa, I think they had to go through Kazimierz Dolny. Well, there were few trucks where either children or some luggage were riding.

Q: Did you see how Jews walked to this—

A: I saw it. I saw it. And of course rushed by Germans. By the soldiers.

Q: So you saw Jews who were walking and trucks with children and luggage.

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: Mhmm. How, can you tell, how long did this march of Jews last?

A: Well, quite long, quite long.

Q: Was it the entire day or half a day, how—

A: Ahmm, this is what you mean. Well, I think several hours.

Q: And where were you then?

A: Well, you know, it just so happened that I was coming back from the cafeteria for the workers. And I found myself on the main street. And I saw it.

Q: Was this march of the Jews peaceful, or—

A: You know, when I saw them they were already so decimated that they were going, they were simply walking. Their heads were down, they accepted their fate.

Q: And did somebody try to escape?

A: No, it wasn't, it wasn't possible.

Q: And who was guarding them during this march?

A: German soldiers.

Q: Were they only German soldiers or perhaps also soldiers of different nationalities?

A: No, probably there were only German soldiers.

Q: And did you perhaps see Jewish police?

A: No.

Q: And did you see shots during this march?

A: You know, yes, I heard one shot. And I saw that this person fell down and this mass moved along and this shot person was still lying down. Later someone took him away, but I don't know who.

Q: Did you see how it happened that he got shot?

A: I suspect that he was weak and he couldn't keep up with the rest.

[01:]32:01:23 - [01:]35:05:15
31:37 – 34:41

Q: What distance were you from this man who was killed?

A: Well, maybe 300 meters. Because it was forbidden to come close [to them]. It was also punishable by death.

Q: Did you live in Puławy till the end of the war?

A: You know, in [19]44 we were evacuated to Skierniewice. All the workers of the Institute were taken there.

Q: And you were living in Skierniewice?

A: No, no, because I managed to escape the transport. I was pregnant and we arrived at Skarzysko Kamienne and there I saw, my husband was there too because he was also a worker at the Institute, we saw a train to Kraków. With the plaque "Kraków." And then I told a soldier who was guarding

us there in this train, this transport, that I wanted to drink some water and the well was there. Well, he let me go and I already didn't come back to this. Without documents, without money, just as I stood, I found myself in this train to Kraków. Luckily I somehow got there and there I already had my parents in law. My parents in law lived in Kraków, so—

Q: And your husband?

A: And my husband went to Skierniewice, yes.

Q: During the time when you were living in Kraków did you see any situations, crimes committed on the civilians?

A: Yes, I saw. I was walking behind a man who was escorted by a German soldier. And suddenly, he was several steps from the hallway of my building. They went into this hallway and I heard a shot. A German went out, I waited some time because I was very nervous, I got terrified [not knowing] what might have happened, and when I went into this hallway, I saw a terrible sight. He shot him in such way that really, his brain was on ceiling of this hallway. It was terrifying.

**[01:]35:05:15 – [01:]38:03:20
34:41 – 37:40**

Q: What happened later with the body of this man?

A: You know, later on somebody probably let the police know, our blue police, and they took away this body.

Q: Do you know who this shot man was?

A: Excuse me?

Q: Do you know who this shot man was?

A: A Jew. Because, if I know correctly, Jews were hiding their valuables somewhere under some—there was this balcony in our house and there, under the floor panes, someone, a Jew who was living there before, hid there his valuables, his savings. And later on, he must have revealed it, perhaps he wanted to buy himself out and he went there with this German soldier, showed him under which pane it was hidden. And he took it and they left. Perhaps it was this man who—

Q: You are saying that the shot man was a Jew. How did you recognize that he was Jewish?

A: *[she point to her arm, meaning armband]*

Q: Can you say it, because—

A: Yes.

Q: Can you say it—

A: Ha, ha, well, thanks to this armband which they had to wear. With this star of David.

Q: Do you remember other situations of this kind, so to say?

A: You know, no, probably no. Not really. Because after this incident, after this what I saw then, I was afraid, because I was pregnant, that I may, that it may influence even my child.

Q: I will ask for a moment of break.

Q: We had a small technical break but now I wanted to return to our conversation and to ask you several more detailed questions. At the beginning, when you started talking about how the WWII broke up, how the situation in Dęblin looked like, you mentioned the action against Polish and Jewish intelligentsia which was led by Germans. What happened with the representatives of this intelligentsia, could you tell us about it?

[01:]38:03:20 – [01:]41:16:20

37:40 – 40:52

A: You know, Germans were organizing round-ups, they were arresting people. For example, my father was arrested when he was coming back from the Church, it was the second day of Easter Holidays, he was with his friend, also a teacher, and he was arrested. On that day there were over 30 people arrested in Dęblin.

Q: When there was such situation that they arrested many people, what happen to them?

A: Later on these people were deported, my father, he found himself in the Lublin Castle [*Germans converted it into prison*]. And almost a month later we received a notification about his death. And all the people who, all the families of those who were arrested received this notification with the same content, that on one day, at night from 12 to 13th May “**ich sterben**” [GERMAN: to die]. So everybody was simply shot.

Q: Do you perhaps know if the representatives of Jewish intelligentsia were treated in similar way?

A: I think that even worse, that the repressions were even greater.

Q: Do you know perhaps about some special incident, about someone you knew?

A: You know, well, I knew, I knew this doctor. They took him from his bed at night and he disappeared completely. The family didn't know anything about his fate.

Q: Do you remember the name of this doctor?

A: Yes. **Kornensztajn** [**Kornenstein**]. I was going to school with his son.

Q: I also wanted to ask about this situation when you were describing that you could see push carts with murdered bodies of the Jews pushed also by Jews. From what you saw, can you suspect how they died?

A: Well, you know, there were witnesses to this. People saw how they [Germans] were shooting at them. This I heard, I didn't see it personally, I only saw bodies, but there were people who witnessed it.

[01:]41:16:20 – [01:]45:35:13
40:52 – 45:12

Q: But from the way these bodies looked, was it visible that they were shot?

A: Yes. Yes. One could see it. There were simply bloodies, the blood was flowing. Even to this extent that on this route which the car was going there were blood marks.

Q: You also mentioned that this period when the carts were going through the streets lasted until the ghetto was created. Do you know when the ghetto in Dęblin was—

A: I don't know exactly. I don't know.

Q: I also wanted to ask you about this situation on the bridge, when you were biking and they shot a man who probably did not have documents.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you perhaps know him? This shot man?

A: No. No, I didn't know him. I only saw him.

Q: And was it at the time when the ghetto already existed, can you place in time, this incident?

A: Yes. But I am sure that he wasn't Jewish. It was just physical similarity.

Q: I also have a question concerning your work in the camp, next to the camp at the airport. Can you estimate how many Jews died in those barracks during the time when you were working there?

A: Well, I think that very many. It could even reach a thousand. Because there were a lot of transports.

Q: How often did these transports arrive?

A: Well, I don't know that, but I could tell, because more people were employed. And on this basis I can think that.

- Q: I also wanted to ask about this moment in Puławy when you were a victim of pacification, when people were taken from their homes to the streets. Do you know why it was done, why they ordered you to leave the house?
- A: I think that the point was to show this terror, this might of theirs. Just to do the pacification.
- Q: You didn't know about any specific reason? It was not known if it had something to do with some specific event.
- A: You know, sometimes it happened that if there was some action of the underground and some German was killed, especially a high official, so this was a reaction to it. Later on innocent people were dying.
- Q: I have one more question concerning Puławy. When the liquidation of the ghetto was about to happen, you were saying that the Judenrat was trying to bribe Germans.
- A: Yes. This is what I heard.
- Q: And whom did you hear it from?
- A: You know, I don't remember anymore, but this is what people were saying, that they were collecting money in the ghetto and they wanted to prolong the existence of this ghetto in Puławy.
- Q: Thank you very much for the conversation.
- A: You are very welcomed.

Conclusion of Interview

There are no restrictions on this interview.

Transcription and translation: Elizabeth Kosakowska

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