

Oral history interview with Yakov Gincherman
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Yakov Gincherman describes the massacre of Jews in Gahrtav (Nagartav) in 1941; his parents grew up in a small Jewish town in Ukraine; recalls the early years of his parents; lived through the Russian Civil War; parents were not able to leave for the United States due to a lack of resources; his parents moved from their hometown into Gahrtav because of all the violent crime in Ladizhin (?); his parents along with a lot of other Jews moved to Gahrtav; this exodus from their homes was because of a law passed by Empress Katherine II of Russia; these Jews were very highly qualified workers; they were also highly religious; the Civil War brought about a removal of territory from Christians and forcing them into factories; Gahrtav and Russia is general had it especially hard in 1933 because of the forced famine brought about by the Bolsheviks; the Russian government closed down the prominent Hebrew school in Gahrtav and instead built a Ukrainian school; explains his family dynamics; father worked as the first tractor worker; had no vacation; in the spring, he would work the fields and in the winter he would rebuild the tractor; mother spent much of her time in the house taking care of the kids and educating them; his sister currently lives in Israel; and his brother Mottle fought against the German occupants and was seriously injured; he currently lives in Germany with his family; recalls how when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, Yakov's mother, father and younger brother attempted to escape, but were caught; under penalty of death for disobedience, they were forced to return to their permanent residence; recalls how the Nazis and the local Ukrainian police forced all of the Jews in Gahrtav to register in the factory building where the old synagogue was; if anybody was not to show up, they would be shot; when the Jews arrived, they were told to put all the valuables they brought with them into the corner; after that, the Germans and local police force took the remainder of the valuables from the Jews they had rounded up; once all of the valuables were collected, the Germans and police would take groups of these Jews to the cliff on the edge of town and execute them; thousands of Jews would be indiscriminately killed; the witness to this event would not share his story until years to come; Once the Germans left their area, witnesses began coming out and asking Russian officials if they would be able to properly handle their murdered loved ones; only in 1956, the victims were able to properly bury their loved ones in a Jewish cemetery, as long as they were able to cover all of the costs; luckily they were able to do so; in the collective grave, there was a thousand bodies buried; this could be told by the amount of skulls; the Russian government had absolutely no part in the original ceremony; in 1981, the Soviets decided to cover the grave site in concrete and in its place erect a monument dedicated to those buried there; when the Soviet and Ukrainian government decided to take part in this memorial, they told the world that this Holocaust must be remembered for the tragedy that it was and must never be repeated; in 1941, Yakov was sent to training for the Red Army; by 1942, he was already being sent to the front in Stalingrad; explains the details of the Battle of Stalingrad and his experience there; the machine gun division he was part of was surrounded; he didn't have any radio communication; he was constantly bombarded and shot at by German planes and artillery; German planes would drop thousands of propaganda in the forms of fliers; these fliers would be filled with lies such as the head Russian government officials had left Moscow and Russian soldiers were killing their

own commanders; during the battle, Yakov was injured twice; was not able to leave the city; the river Volga would often be surrounded by a large amount of impenetrable flames from the broken oil barges that had caught fire; Yakov attempted to travel from one side to the other of the Volga, but were not able to; during the battle, the city was absolutely leveled; the walls would even kill the defenders of the city from the artillery; Yakov fought until the end of the battle; after Stalingrad, he was sent to the Battle of Kursk; towards the end of the conflict in July of 1943, Yakov was severely injured; after he was discharged from the hospital, he was honorably discharged from the army and given a hefty insurance claim from being injured and sent home; never felt any kind of anti-Semitism towards himself from his fellow soldiers; during the battle of Stalingrad, the other soldiers did notice that he was not being promoted like the others; they assumed it was because he had relatives who were enemies of the state; just as Yakov was about to leave Stalingrad, one of the commanders told Yakov that he could not be an officer only because of his Jewish heritage; after Kursk, Yakov was given two medals for his bravery in battle; in 1945, he enrolled in a technical institute in Odessa;