

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview of Salomon Cohen

October 23rd, 1995

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PREFACE

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Transcribed by George Staiduhar, National Court Reporters Association.

SALOMON COHEN

October 23, 1995

Question: This is Arwen Donahue. It is October 23rd, 1995. I am here at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum with Mr. Salomon Cohen, and Mr. Cohen, if you could begin by telling me the -- your date of birth, your name -- your place of birth and your name and birth again.

Answer: Okay. My name is Salomon Cohen. I am born 28 of July '37, and I born in Athens. And I spend my six years -- the first six years in Athens, and after Occupation when the Italian came to Athens, one of them was friend of my father, and he came to our house, and he told us about the German -- what they are doing in Europe, and they told to my father "Mr. Cohen, take your whole family away to the mountains with the partisans and save yourself." To continue?

Q: Just, first, would you tell me something --

A: Family.

Q: -- family background?

A: Okay. The name of my parents was Aaron and Buena Cohen. They born in Saranac. They have four children. I was the smallest one, and in the year of '33, my parents move from Saranac to Athens, and then I born in '37. And all my father families and mother families living in Saranac, and from there, they took them to Poland.

Q: I see. And the -- after the German Occupation of Greece?

A: It is not exactly the German because the Italian fests (ph) wants to occupy Greece, but they don't succeed, and then the German came from YugoslaviA: They occupied Greece, and then they give to the Italian the northern side of Greece, and then I told before came the Italian officer. His name is Collin Enorossi. He came to our house, and he told my father this and this what I told you before.

Q: Had your father known this person before this officer --

A: Because they have relationship in commercial transship (ph). They know each other.

Q: What was your father's profession?

A: He was a commission, an industrial man.

Q: Industrial man.

A: And then my father listen to this idea and also this Collin Enorossi told us about if we want something from Saranac to save our other family in Saranac, and he go to Saranac to the brothers of my father, and only one brother give permission to this man with a

soldier named Angelo. And they bring three sons of my father brother to Athens, and they survive with us.

Q: Did --

A: We go -- we escape to the mountains with the partisans. We spend there about six months, and we escape from the German soldiers. They are occupied also the south of Greece. It is a half island. Its name is Ogygia. There we escape from Athens, and from there with the help of the partisans, we pass by sea to Turkey, and from Turkey, we go to Syria, and the city name Halab. And there exactly the English troop defeated the Vischi Government, and they catch us like illegal immigrants and took us to the Gaza Strip in Army camp, and then come the Jewish agency, and we escape, and we came to Tel Aviv like illegal citizens.

Q: I am going to ask you to go back a little bit, and just give me a little bit more detail.

A: Okay. You ask me, and I can tell you.

Q: Okay. You -- do you remember the year it was that you left --

A: Greece.

Q: -- Athens?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: Will you?

A: It was February '43.

Q: February '43. And how did you get from there to the mountains where you had been staying for six months?

A: With help of the Greek people, we go to their houses, and they take us chance, and they -- we living these houses, other names, not the Jewish names, and only my father knows the places of the other -- where they are living, the other of the family. We don't know where is everyone live. Only my father knows the all others, and one day he take a cab, two cabs, and they take all the family with another Jewish family to the mountains. And then we met the partisans, and they guard us, and we live with them, and we eat with them till there is occasion to pass the road to the sea to Turkey.

Q: What was it like to be a child living in the mountains suddenly?

A: For me, it is like a picnic. The other family, my mother, my father suffer very much, and my biggest brothers, they have -- when you say you have no to eat.

Q: Hunger.

A: I have no shoes on my legs. I have not -- nothing. Only my father take some money and give to the partisans so we can buy food from monistares (ph) in the mountains, take about four months in the mountains. Then we can get to Turkey and then to go to Iran.

Q: Do you remember how many partisans were in this group?

A: Group, about 20.

Q: 20.

A: Yeah. And if you know, there are two kinds of partisans. In Greece, in this time, because they are fighting the lefts with the right, so the lefts are Communists, and the right are from Monarch, Monarch from the King. But during the war, they fight together against the Nazi enemy, but we are in the part of the Communists.

Q: And then, they saw the opportunity for you to pass to Turkey. Did you hear -- do you remember when you heard that you were going to be leaving?

A: I don't understand your question.

Q: Do you remember when you heard that you would be leaving this group of partisans and traveling to --

A: There is a ship -- there is a ship coming from Turkey to Greece. There is, you know, some who take Army for the partisans from Turkey. This is a small ship, and they passed over the German guards in the sea. So one day the ship came and bring us to partisans, and when they return back, the captain take us. Of course, we paying lot of money that my father and the other families have. We put the money here I remember, my mother make something here, and we put the gold coins inside.

Q: Inside of your trouser legs?

A: Yes, yes. Then she open it and take the money out, give to the captain, and he take us to the Turkish border. The Turkish --

Q: This was a Turkish ship?

A: I don't know if it is a Turkish ship or another ship, but it was a small ship, and we go in between Greece and Turkey. It is about a journey of one night.

Q: Was yours the only family escaping?

A: No, no. All my family with three sons of my uncle from Saranac and the other family goes to Auschwitz.

Q: The other family hadn't come with you then to the mountains?

A: Yes.

Q: They weren't with you --

A: No.

Q: -- as partisans?

A: Only family. I told you before the Italian officer go to Saranac, and they ask for all the family to come with him to Athens, and they don't agree to go with him to Athens. So they send only three children. One of this children living in New York, and the other two of them live in Israel.

Q: So how many --

A: Survivors.

Q: -- again, altogether were there --

A: From --

Q: Leaving --

A: My family.

Q: -- on the ship?

A: On the ship, about 50 passengers.

Q: All related?

A: All related. No, my family and another four, five families, Greek families.

Q: Had the other four or five families been hiding in the mountains?

A: Yes.

Q: With the partisans as well?

A: -- we fast (ph), we fast. The name was Lenore. I know the families. Macarasso, Marillio, Capano.

Q: And where in Turkey -- how long --

A: We came to Izmere in Turkey, to Izmere, and from Izmere, we go to -- from Izmere, we go directly with train to Halab, and from Halab, I told you before, the English troops catch us like illegal residents because it was the white book, because the English doesn't give the Jewish come to Palestine. You must have some ticket that you can come, and we are not legal. We are illegal. So they catch us, and they put us in the camps, British camps in Gaza Strip, and from there, we escape with the help of the Jewish agency.

Q: Now, when the British caught you, did you have false identification of any sort?

A: No, no.

Q: Did you have false ID cards?

A: No.

Q: But you had been living under a false name earlier?

A: We have our names, yes, of course. Now they aren't really names. In Turkey, we was Metron. So we didn't afraid from anyone. So we attend to our names, and then we continue to go.

Q: How did the British catch you?

A: In Halab. We arrived to Halab. It is a city in Syria, and Syria was occupied by Vischi troops from French by marshal who pretend, and then the British defeated the French Vischi Army and take all of the land. So they take also Halab, and we are -- became a few days after the occupation of Halab by the British soldiers. So they ask who are you, and we say we are illegal citizen, that we came from Greece, and we want to go to Palestine, and they say okay. They take us, and they bring us to the Gaza Strip. It was a very big English camp there, and from there, we escape to Tel Aviv. It was June '44.

Q: How long were you in the camp?

A: I think ten days. It was a short period of staying in the English military camp.

Q: How did you escape?

A: The Jewish agency came and give some money to the guards, and they open the doors, and they have messenger inside the camp, and we escape by night, and we go to Tel Aviv.

Q: You lived in Tel Aviv for many years after or --

A: No. I live in Tel Aviv about '44 to '52, eight years in Tel Aviv, and then I -- my father, he goes to have a farm, a Rickacher (ph) farm, and then I go to the Army. And after the Army I pass to Haifa, and then I start my life. I marry, and I have three daughters. The biggest one is 30. The smallest one is 21.

Q: Were you drafted into the Army, or did you choose to enlist?

A: Oh, no. I must go to the Army. Israel you must go to the Army.

Q: Of course. What did you experience while you were in the Army?

A: I was a tank fighter.

Q: Where?

A: Tank fighter.

Q: Where were you?

A: I was in several wars once like in reserves. I was in the Syrian border and one with the Jordanians.

Q: Did you ever go back to Greece --

A: Yes.

Q: -- to visit?

A: Yes.

Q: When did you go?

A: First time in '60 and then honeymoon in '64 and then in '86, and three months ago, I go again cause I have some -- I go to this man who save me in the War. I go to visit him.

Q: The officer. The officer?

A: I am not an officer, no.

Q: No, no. Which man who saved you?

A: The Greek people who saved us in their homes, I go to visit them. Not them, they are dead; the sons and the grandsons. We have relationship between us. That's it. I can give you more details, but I don't think I have enough the time to do it.

Q: That's fine. Maybe just one more question?

A: Yeah, you can ask me.

Q: If you can reflect on the years that you spent in Greece, and have they been --

A: I remember that always I must keep myself to provide -- people to recognize me, look at you, I am not supposed to go and to go to the toilet with another people; always to stay near my parents because I was the smallest one ____.

Q: Your Jewish identity, were you aware that you were different from other people?

A: It is enough my name. It is Cohen. It is Cohen, a Hebrew name, a Jewish name, so they don't call me Salomon; they call me another name, MundA: This is my other name.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you.

Conclusion of Interview

