

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Frank Bleichman
February 10, 1992
RG-50.042*0006

PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Frank Bleichman, conducted on February 10, 1992 in Lloyd Harbor, New York on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

FRANK BLEICHMAN

February 10, 1992

Beep.

I want you to first describe for me how your everyday life changed when the Germans came into Poland, and, especially when they came to your area.

You mean 1939? In 1939, the Germans came into our town. For a few weeks, it was not bad, was normal. Then, they began harassing the Jews. Taking us to all kind of a labor, hard labor, in the area, and things like that. And then it became every day, life became harder for the Jews. We're not allowed to do, to do any business. My parents, my father could not make any business anymore, and I got involved to help out my family. So I used to go on my bicycle to the villages to buy food, to help out the families. And then there were a lot, many atrocities that later on used to command the gendarmes, once, twice a week, and killing some people when they found bread in the house, or fresh milk, or similar things like that, they shot them right on the spot. And they were making raids, capturing mostly intellectuals, at first, and taking them away to the camps. I remember they took away my Uncle Levin, he was a Hebrew teacher. Took him away 1940, and never came back. Then they killed my uncle, they found fresh meat in the house. They killed my cousin, and they found fresh bread in the house. And those things were going on, you know, from uh, let's see 1939 to 1942. And the worst part was, the Loisia (?) was in 1942 when we heard rumors that the Germans were deporting Jewish communities daily to the death camps. At that time in the summer of 1942, I was a young man then, and I realized I understood the fate awaiting me, that someday, we are next in line. So, I made up my mind that I will not go to any of those camps if I cannot, uh, can escape. And in October of 1942, when we heard rumors that our ghetto will be deported to another ghetto, so I managed to run away the night before. It's a protection. I run away, and I run to a uh, friendly, gentle farmer, who had promised me to help me hide. I was uh, by this farmer two days. They treated me very nice, couldn't be any better, they treated me like I would be, I lost my ----- family. On the second day, I found out that there were some Jews hiding in a forest nearby. So, I went to the forest, and I met some people like me, same age, older, younger, and after a few days, we saw what was happening, we were on the run all, all the time, they were hunting us, the German, Polish police and the Polish collaborators. So we, so there's no other way out, not too organized. One tried to acquire firearms and to fight back. So, after a week or so of being in the forest, when we heard our woman, Jewish woman, when they went to villages to buy food, they were intercepted from the Polish hoodlums, collaborators, some were killed. They were robbed, beaten, and called all kind of dirty, antisemitic names. When we heard this we

organized into a defense unit to defend ourselves against those Polish hoodlums. The only thing what we possessed at that time when we organized was the will and the courage. We had no firearms. It was very hard to get firearms at that time. So we began to look for firearms. Every day we were prowling by foot in different villages. Many miles were spent and it was no, no success. In meantime several weeks after, we were raided from the Germans with the help of the Polish collaborators, and 80% of our population was murdered. We were about 100 people there in this camp in the forest living in bunkers under very primitive conditions. There were no water, no lights, no sanitary facilities. But, we could, uh, survive, this way, in the forest if they would let us. We were raided, and after the raid, we managed to escape unharmed because when we organized every 2 of us, every day, went to fetch water on the edge of the forest. There was a guardhouse, one day, there went, two of us went to get water, and they overheard German-speaking voices. They came running back, woke us up, and we quickly got dressed because we always slipping in the -----, and, uh, we sent from our group a messenger to the campsite where the other people were living--we were separated ourselves to live near the edge of the forest in order to be able to see what's going on, if any undesirables coming into the forest. In the meantime shooting had erupted. They came running back with empty pails, they were hitting the pails on the trees, was still dawn, dark in the outside, and they came back, I said, "Follow me." I knew the area very well. And we began to run in the opposite direction. When we came to a crossing where was the road was cutting through the forest, we stopped, slowed down. We came luckily behind a German machine gun, 3 Germans were mounting a machine gun. We were behind them, and luckily the noises from the trees and the birds disguised our footsteps, so we managed to go around them, quietly, in uh, on our bellies, crawled over the main road, and we escaped unharmed. In the evening we came back, made it quietly during the midnight, and the whole campsite was quiet because all of them were dead. We just found many bodies scattered on the ground. All bunkers were blown up. We presumed that many were buried alive. The only thing what we could do then is to pick up those bodies, and bury them. After the burial, we said ----- . We swore that we will revenge for those murderous acts. Everybody, of us, each one looked around, looked each other's grimly, uh, very, you know, uh grimly faces. And we understood that someday, the same fate awaiting us, they're going to catch up with us. We were, we were unable to get firearms. So we left the campsite and began to wander around other part of the forest. After that, we next day we, we uh, found some more survivors who managed to escape--two girls with a few other men. And we were counting about 20 people that time. We wandered around the forest and this took us another 3 to 4 weeks. Struggling through. There was nowhere to go because (clears throat) we were hunted from all the sides every day. Finally one day in December of 1942, we managed to acquire firearms. And after we acquired firearms, we learned first how to use them. And about 10 days after, we were raided again from the Germans.

I want you to go back and tell me how did you get the firearms.

Oh, all right. In Dec of 1942, we were standing and warming ourselves around the circle, in in a fire in the forest. We were baking potatoes, and I don't know from where they get, the, uh one man came, you know, the name Chaim, I knew him from before. He came, he just was among the, us there. He came, says hello to me, and he start telling me, you know, he saw the situation we're in the first time I met him. He was from the neighbor town Mirof. And he says to me, "You know what? I was, uh, working as a carpenter in a village so and so, and the man's name is LeMergac, and he told me that he has hidden guns, that he can arm our company." When he told me that, a chill went through me overhead to the my knees. Mine ----- . I said, "Chaim, slowly, tell me again, how this, what, what about, who man ----." So he explained quietly, he says, "The colony was Michaloska Colona, the man has a new house built on the left side, so many houses in, and uh, that's it." So I went over to my group, and I says, you know, I told them the story, and we all felt that time, that tonight is the night we're going to get firearms. We were disappointed many times similar things, but somehow we all had a feeling. Came at nightfall, we took 2 slates, ----- slate because snow was underground, and we had to travel about 10 kilometers to the village.

We have to reload.

Beep.

Let's back up to how, having Chaim come into the camp, and meeting him for the first, and do the firearms story again.

Which one?

The firearms story, start with Chaim at camp.

How we got the firearms?

Well, you have the parts, you have the part where we travelling on, not yet?

No, just start it again. Just start that little story again.

Okay, good, uh huh, Oh God. All right. In Dec of 1942, we were standing in the forest, around

warming up in a, around a fire. We were baking potatoes there, and all of the sudden there is a man, like from heaven came down, a friend of mine, which I didn't see him since 1939. He was from the neighbor, neighboring town Mirof. And he saw what's happening, that we are chase around like dogs, without firearms, and, and uh, he says to me, "You know what? I was working by a farmer, as a carpenter. In Poland, a carpenter used to work by a farm, by a, in a place 3 or 4 months, you know, making windows, doors, something like that. And he said a man bragged to him that he has hidden harms, arms from the 39 war that he can arm whole company. When he told me that, my, the chill, my, a chill went through my head, forehead to my toes. I said, "Chaim, slowly please, tell me again, exactly what you know, what you're telling me." He says "Look, the man's name is Le Mergac. He lives on Mikaloske Cologna," he described to me the house exactly how it looks on each side (clears throat). After I heard this, and I felt, I had a feeling that tonight we're going to get firearms. I went over to my friends, and told them the same thing, and somehow we all had a feeling that tonight is the night. We had previous had many leads like that, but nothing materialized. So, came nightfall, we went and arranged us to transportation, transportation to sleighs with horses, and we went to this village. On the way going to the village, I was sitting with my commander on the same sleigh, and talking who is going to go into this farmer, and asking for firearms. And they picked me, that I should go in. And there was a name, by, a man by the name Shapsa, he was from Warsaw. He was a husky guy with a mu, mustache, had a dark complexion, he looked like a Russian. And they told me that he should go with Shapsa in. And I didn't know from here to there what I'm going to tell him, I go there. But on the way travelling, I had no choice, I couldn't say no, I was uh, speaking very fluent Polish, I also had a mustache, and I wore a uh, policeman, Polish policeman's overcoat, and I had also a badge on my lapel, I don't know where I got it from, was in a ski hat, called a ski hat. I said yes, so we went, came to the village, I found the house. I was armed with a flashlight and uh, a small caliber pistol with no bullets. The handle was falling apart off, we had a rubber band to put it on it. Was an old one. I knocked on the door. A man opened the door with his warm underwear, it was December, was cold, and I ask him, "Are you Mr. DeMergac?" He says, "Yes. Please come in." I came in, I had my flashlight illuminated on his face, and uh, when we came in there was one room and in the middle of the room was the bed, and near the bed he has his boots, he has his jacket, and to the right was a kitchen, you know, it's uh, has the uh, you know, built kitchen from the bricks or something like that. And he sat down, and I told him, "Mr. Lemergac, we are paratroopers from Russia. We came here to organize the ----- fighting unit against the Germans. We heard that you have firearms, and would like you should give us you free, of you free will. If you don't we have to use force. I don't know where I got this uh, uh speech from, but somehow this came to my mind. He didn't say nothing. He didn't say yes, he didn't say no. He just pulled up his pants, and he got dressed, put his boots on and his jacket, he says, "Come on." So we went, walked out with him. Our men, other men were

around the house. The only firearms at that time we had is make believe we organized ourselves pitchforks. We broke off all the teeth, one tooth left on, and put a strap on the handle, and over shoulder--from far away it looked like a rifle. So he walked out with us to the barn. In the barn, he opened the door. He put his hand around a bundle of straw, was a bundle of straw standing there. He picked up a rifle, gave it to me. Then he walked up the ladder, and they had a thatch, thatch roof, those straw roofs, walked up, put his hand in, picked up a gun, a handgun, with a bottle of ammunition and gave it to me. And then he said, "He has buried somewhere a gun, what was cold, wintertime, so I made up a -----, then when I illuminated the, the my flashlight, he would say, "Shto, shto" that's all he could knew, talk in Russian. So I said, "Listen, if you want to kill you, you have to find this rifle. I scared him off. So he made few steps, he took an ax with a shovel, made a few steps to the right, then to the left, he says, "Here it is." We started digging, we found it. Then he took us to the next door neighbor. His neighbor was Peter. He knocked at the door, and he said the speech for me. He said, "Peter, here are the paratroopers from Russia. They came to organize a ----- over here. Give him the gun." So he went also to the barn, picked up the same way, in the, in the thatch roof, picked up a gun and gave it to us. So to make it short, in the same night, we got from there, 6 firearms. Few rifles, few pistols, ammunition, everything. We went back fast to the forest because we couldn't afford to stay too long, we were afraid to travel during the day. We came, we test them out, we tried them out, we had some people, our men knew how to use those firearms, they were serving the polish army before the war. And a week after, a week later we went back again to the same village. We had already addresses to others. We came into a farmer, a rich farmer, his name was Dunik. I already had the courage, you know, uh after succeeded once, you know, and I told him the same speech. And Mr. Dunik says to me, "You know what, if you really, you are what you are, you should know me. My name is Dunik, and my brother is a communist, he is in Moscow now. And you're coming to me to get firearms? All of the sudden, I don't know from where, I had an answer for him, I said, "Look, we're not supposed to know who you are, and you're not supposed to know who we are. The only thing we know that you have firearms, please give those to us, and especially when you say you are communist, we are fighting the same cause." So he bought the story, went out, and picked up a new rifle, had a uh many those uh storage places, was a rich man, a new ----- with ammunition and everything else. And we got those firearms through this village, all we needed, and then we got more far-, addresses, whoever has guns. We went back, we were happy as could be. At that time a gun and a million dollars, a gun was worth more than a million dollars, because you could at least you could defend yourself with something. We came back, it took us about 2 weeks, we learned very quickly, how to operate, how to fight, you know, and everything else, and then about 10 days later, we were raided again from the Germans, and there were 3 Polish collaborators spearheading the raid. They were walking first with baskets, and make believe that they are looking for mushrooms or things like that

in the forest, and looking for Partisans. They didn't know that we have firearms. And the Germans were several hundred yards behind them. There would be contact with them, then they would go and surround us, or circle us around. AT that time, we had already our guard, armed, and we captured 2 out of 3, one escaped. He was running back and he was screaming "Jews! Jews!" In the back, the Germans opened fire, so we returned fire, and we captured those 2, tied them up, and we ran out, run away, we sneaked through some ravines there, terrain, we knew the area very well. We were luckily we took those 2 with us, we escaped. By the time they organized themselves, the Germans, they didn't know what's happening because they didn't expect that somebody going to shooting at them, them. And we escaped. At night we began to interrogate those guys, and we uncovered from them a gold mine of information. They told us everything what we wanted to know, what there was the truth. Those guys were recruited by the Germans, and put in place before prior to the deportations, and they were supposed to report to the Germans who is helping a Jew first, and then who is selling off illegal farm products from the Ger, the, the eh, Poles, the Peasants, and then, who's a communist. They were involved in everything. So they went undercover, they were walking around every day to the villages, and threatening people that anybody who will help a jew will be killed on the spot with whole family. They also gave us addresses for others who were working with them together.

(Sandy says something in background, cannot hear).

Beep

Well, why don't you tell me how as a partisan group, people helped you and didn't help you? Explain to me how much...

I would like to finish this part, now that we get into it. Okay? So after those 2 revealed to us what they're involved in, and gave us the names, they were very tired at that time, but we didn't, couldn't wait, we went the same night, and captured those others. In 2 places when we came in, they had passwords to those people, in the villages who worked with them together. And we said the passwords, they fainted on the spot. They saw that we know what's going on. And we captured that time as many as 8. 6 plus those 2. And we interrogate them, and we found that they all were involved in those raids, and capturing Jews, and killing Jews, and we punished them, accordingly. And from that day on, the whole, changed, the whole neighborhood had changed, the whole area. We got a, we sent a message to those uh killers, that they cannot escape without being punished what they were doing. There was a mixed reaction among the people because the Poles knew exactly who those guys were. But they were handicapped, they couldn't do nothing. They were afraid for German reprisals and things like that. We

had no choice. We had to do what we had to do in order to stay alive. And then we learned from this here, what's truly happening among the population. Before, when we, after we escaped, our escape, and we were in the forest, we really couldn't understand what happening. The people were chasing us away like dogs. We went to buy food in the villages, they sounded an alarm, with pots and pans, screaming with axes and ----- pitchforks, whatever they could grab at. And we were running, then uh, then we understood why these things happening because those people were threatening all the time, from those collaborators, and that's why they were afraid. After that, they opened up, people started to talk, start to be open more, and helping us. Now who helped us was, the first who helped us were the Pep-, the Polish Workers Party. After our successful mission, they got in touch with us and congratulate us, what we did, because we helped them as well. Because the same guys, the same collaborators, were against them, they were against the whole population. They were reporting to the police, to the Germans, everything what's there going on, what's going on in the villages. Like anybody sold some illegal products, farm products, or helped a Jew, whatever, and they start breathing easily. What we did, whoever we caught, arrest, went in hiding, and they were underground. So we also disrupted the German spy ring. The Germans could only know where we are hiding and who's a Jew because they were told from those collaborators. The Germans would never know, they could never recognize a Jew, except if he would be dressed like a Jew, or act like a Jew. Otherwise, a Pole could recognize a Jew among thousand gentiles. And this was the biggest uh problem. And from that day on, our lives had changed, and everything had changed in the area. When the Polish eh Worker's Party got in touch with us, they told us that they would like to, we should join their ranks, we should work together. Uh we tempted for their help, for the offer, and we told them that we are, have other obligations to our own people, which are in hiding. First we didn't trust them. We didn't accept to join the ranks. We told them we want to work together. We sit down, we start working together with them, and they supplied us with all kinds of information about movements of the Germans and things like that, and they also assigned to us loyal members of their party, who were used for reconnaissance or for messenger service and so on. And from this, uh, from this day on, we uh, contact other Jewish groups which were organized nearby, like from Makushu, and so on, and we began to work together, and that's how things had developed.

So, explain to me, this was all Jewish Partisans?

All Jewish, yeah.

And explain to me what the whole group was like and how big it was.

You see, my ----- group was 12. Other groups were 30, 40, and then we joined together. My first

group must have been got killed around the beginning of 43. And the, all those things happened by, because, we did, had no experience, how to operate, how to behave, how to uh, secure ourselves by travelling and things like that. All happened by mistakes which we learned later on. And then we joined with other uh, groups with a ----- group, and there were about over 50, something like that, and then we joined with the Gruler's Group, which, they were POWs from Lublin who had escaped, and in general we later grouped together, not one group, just we worked together because it was impossible to make a huge group in our area to stay together. We were in contact, we performed all kinds of missions together, uh, plans and things like that, and we were separate, we're not, we're not too far away like 15, 20 miles away from each other. And we got stronger every day. We had, con, later on we, we uh, got into fight with the German gendarmes, and uh, 1943 we began already, start making sabotage acts. Uh, we went uh, to disarm a group of Germans in a estate. They were staying about 2 dozen Germans, and we went to disarm them. We did not succeed, but we went there, and we had a shootout with them for several hours, and we had to pull away because we could not get reinforcements they could get. And this was, I mean uh, we did not sit hiding but we look for action. And then we had a lot of fights with the fascist groups. After, later on, what happened when we got our firearms, established our bases, we found we had another enemy. This was the Polish fascist groups. They in the beginning were thinking that the Germans and their collaborators will do the job, which they did mostly, they killed about 90% of our population. But once we got firearms, they had a hard time to, to kill us anymore because, number one, we changed our way of living. We saw the for-our forest was not big enough to stay in the forest. We ran out of fighting places. So we moved in into the villages, and stayed with the farmers, and uh, they couldn't do nothing about it. First of all, we, uh, while we did that we accomplished 2 things, first of all, this was a, like public relations, good public relations. We were labeled from the public fascist groups that we a bunch of bandits, robbers, killers, nothing just whatever, is alive. So when we start to go out to the villages to stay there, we went to the, the biggest enemies like, the fascist groups--came in, stayed there, ate and drank, behaved like gentlemen, and they, they saw, later on they saw, they're not the same Jews or the same people they're labeling as, they're nice guys, and they began to understand. With the leadership worked very hard to destroy us, so they ambushed us once or twice, we captured some of them, killed some of them, and uh, we got from them the names of the leaders. We went up to the leaders. They already were, were notified that we looking for them. So they understood, we told them, "Look, we know where you live. If you want to go after us, you want to kill us, we kill you. As simple as that." And they had no choice, and stopped making ambushes, they stopped killing Jews because they saw that we are there to take reprisal for it, and the whole thing, one thing with the other, lead to the other, we gain more courage, get stronger, more people came in, firearms we had no problem to get, and we organized ourselves, soph, sophisticated system where we could live. First of all, we kept tight security. Every day we were stationed in another place. 20 km. this way, 20 km. south, north. Never stayed longer than one day in one place. And we

came into a farmhouse, we didn't trap nobody, we didn't have to. Said, "Good evening," We were as gentlemen, "How can we help you?" Of course, we said we wanted food. "What can we prepare?" I said "What do you have?" I mean we couldn't demand something they didn't have. And those farmers, they had plenty of food, the potatoes, they have enough, bread, whatever they could do it, made us dinner, we stayed over with there, o-over day, over the day, night and day, and whoever came in there had to stay with us until we left. This was our policy. And later on they got accustomed to it.

We have to reload.

beep.

Beep.

Can you just summarize for me the complexity of how it was, the situation without choices for the peasants who were threatened and who, maybe they wanted help, maybe some couldn't help.

Okay (clears throat). After, uh, our first mission against those collaborators, things had changed. People were less afraid to talk to us. There were some who were helping us, risking their lives, keeping our wounded and disabled people in bunkers for the 2 years that we existed. They risked their lives for not, not paid, get paid for, a penny for it. And other people who were really against us were not any more open to be against us. The reason what happened before, why the situations created such was that there was no laws against harassing or killing Jews. Everything was free. Those hoodlums collaborators, jumped on the bandwagon, everyone wanted to be in the act. What happened, ----, they became heroes to their people against unarmed Jewish people. You understand? And they were getting rewards for it. There was no threat. They were getting rewards, became heroes, and that's why everything was, when we came into being, and they saw that somebody is there to defend Jewish life, became too expensive for them to go on and do those things. So this was there to pay a price for their own life. There was no questions asked. If somebody killed a Jew, he was killed. No question about it. And that's why the whole situation changed. Even those who were at heart antisemitic, which mostly were, they didn't show because it's funny, let's say several weeks prior we got firearms, we used to go to a village, we were chased like dogs. Show them money, we want to buy food, well, we came into some isolated places, uh, the peasants had colonies, so they sold us food, some of them didn't want to take money. There were all kind of people. No question about it. Without their help, we could not succeed, let me tell you. So what happened, even we came into the biggest enemy, we knew who the enemy is now. The only way why we succeeded in doing all those things, and protecting ourselves, is we knew exactly who is what. Understand? We did our homework. So we came into the biggest antisemite.

Said "Good evening." They took us in and gave us royalty. Everything we wanted. They asked us. And they gave us food, they gave us shelter. And later on they, what they did, they saw a way how not to give their quarters, or you know, the contribution to the Germans because every farmer had to give some percentage of their farm products to the Germans. So we gave them receipts. That we took so and so, and they showed to the Germans they were killing themselves pigs, cows, and selling things on the like, market. They gained on that. We really did not eat their food. We ate the food from the, what belongs to the Germans. And that's how things got organized that even those fascists got used to it, they didn't want to listen anymore to their leaders because their leaders had mind to kill everyone, Jew, not to stay alive, not to be able to testify, like I have to say testimony today. They got orders from London, from their uh, or, from their government in exile, because when we caught some of them, they told us the truth, what happened. So later on they saw they can do nothing. They tried to liquidate us, but they couldn't. They wanted to us, to get us in a one place, where they could, they had the means, we had outgunned, we were outgunned and outnumbered. Every peasant had arms, and they knew how to use it. And let me tell you a story once in a, in a June, May or June 1943, I went with a friend of mine, we went to a uh, a estate, named Lukov, and this estate there, one of the estates, uh, what do you call, the baron, they call it, we call it Fabia, he was give us, he used to give us money every month for the wounded, to pay, buy medicine things like that. And we came in, we announced who we are, and my friend of mine who I went, he was a commander from another Jewish group, from uh, Kushov, his name was Izzy, Issa Eisenberg, no, Rosenberg. And uh, there was a, uh, what do you call it, doorman, you know uh, locka, we called it, he went to announce us to the uh Fabia. He asked who we are, he came in, he knew him, he said, "Hey, hello," and he clapped him on his hand, "Come on in," he says, "I have a surprise for you." And we came in, and there about 24 from the AK group. 3 were officers dressed in uniform, Polish uniform. They were sitting at a nice dining room table, and they invited us, "Oh, hello, how are you boys? We were looking for you, we want to help you, we heard that you're good fighters, you're doing a good job. So we had a few drinks with them, they tried to make contacts, make us believe that they're friend of ours, and tried to take us in one time when they could liquidate us, they would do it. But the way we had a plan worked out to protect ourselves, we never went to the whole group in one place, one time. We split it up. And they knew that the group who stayed behind knows where we're going, and will take revenge. And this was all about. And they, what's the name, the uh, owner the Fabia gave us money in front of them, 100,000 flotas, that was, we were not afraid of that because we needed the money. And later on they tried very hard to try to get us in somehow, to make peace. And we knew a place was called Borof, was south of Lublin, in 1943, where were Jewish groups, ----- some group, 26 Jewish boys, were in contact with the AK, and they were naive, they trusted them, so they were good, in good conditions with them. One day, they came throwing grenades to their bunkers and killed them all. There was even a song that time that the ar, the uh, uh el, the People's Army made a song in Polish about this story. If he really, the way we operated is luckily that

we did not trust nobody--to us they were all enemies, even the French.

We have to reload.

Holocaust, -----, 60 cycle sync, 2/10/92, CR-4 is up, Sync tape 5 is up, Lloyd Harbor, NY.

Beep.

I want you to pick it up again by starting to talk about how the way you were successful was by not trusting anyone. And then I want you to tell me some of the things that your group accomplished in the big picture. How much of a difference did your group make?

What do mean difference?

What did you accomplish? -----

Oh okay. In Jan 1943, we ran into in a roadblock of gendarmes, a group of gendarmes in Kusluka, a village Kusluka. They were searching peasants, horse and wagon, they were going searching for, I don't know for what. And we had to make a turn to cross a main road, which was leading ----- . And we just came behind about 2-300 yds and we could not turn around. We saw the Germans, and uh, the road was situated on both sides, they had ditches. They dug, the ditches were serving as a run of water, ----- . So we made the driver to go close to the ditches, we slid off first into the ditches, and we were waiting. And many times towards that, you know, they're making raids, checking, and go away. In meantime, we're saying, saying, we said to the driver, "Turn around, slowly, we'll see what happens." While he was trying to turn around, the Germans, 2 Germans start to coming towards us and screaming, "Come here Schwein----," things like that. So we were laying in the ditches, and one German was, had a, had machine gun in his hand, high up in the air, the other had a rifle, they didn't expect that something like this will happen, but they came close enough to our range, we opened fire, and we shot them both. One with the machine gun, he just fell and the machine gun flew out his hand, and the other one we shot, and then others from there opened fire again on us. We returned fire, and they, they shooting about 10-15 minutes, then they quiet down. They had a, a car, and the other 2 disappeared. We grabbed the machine gun, with a rifle, and we got 2 pistols, with ammunition, and we turned around and we made it fast to, to our forest, which was about 5 kilometers away, and then they came with reinforcements and we were gone. The next time was (clears throat) we, around May, 1943, they

came into our house, staying overnight like it was normal. They came around 9 PM. We had dinner, we had a few drinks too. And about 8 o'clock in the morning, my cousin, Froim Levin, got me up. We were sleeping in the house, on straw, on the floor, and there was like here, you see, the windows around, there was a driveway come in in from the main road into the around the house. He say, "Germans are here." I had to, only had a chance to grab my rifle, and my pistol because it was everything nearby. And when I got up, and I saw the Germans walking, one window, the other window, I went behind the door, our men were going up the ladder to the attic, and a German came in, he was not prepared. He had his rifle upside down, I remember he had his uh finger against this here strap, you know, from the rifle. He was uh, redheaded, sergeant, and he walked in, he said, "Gendobra," in Polish. "Good Morning." I was behind the door. I had the uh, gun with the uh, you know with the barrel. I pulled up the 3 of them, and I shot them right in the head. He fell out. When he fell out the other guy officer had a sub machine gun. He start shooting. And one of our men on top, and the other got wounded. Uh, Shlome Eisenberg. At this, that moment, we all ran out on a ----- outside, and one of our men was, the name was uh, Dobresi, Micola we called him, a young fella. And he came right next to the officer, and the officer grabbed him by the neck, start to choke him. And my cousin came around with his rifle, point at him, he raised his hands, he said in Polish, "Brother, don't shoot." So he gave him one bullet, he got him right into the clasp of the belt. He collapsed like a tree. The other who I shoot, run out somehow back, back uh, back out, and we couldn't find him, he was somewhere in the weeds to hide himself, this commotion. We took away, his, their, their what you call, the ammunition they had, they had a car O-Olympia, nobody of us could drive. We broke it into pieces with axes and we left. Later on, the Germans came, about an hour later, this was near Scrobob. Scrobob had a uh, POW camp for Russian Soldiers, and one of our bullets from our rifle hit one of the ----- accidentally, and got killed there. So again we moved out fast to the forest because in the area where we were, we were about 5-6 kilometers close to the forest. They came later on with tanks and so on, but, the neighbors were saying the, that some of our men were speaking Russian. They didn't do nothing to the villages. You see, what happened later on, we discouraged them of coming to the villages. In the beginning there were gendarmes when, oh for food or for anything, went to make searches, and then they saw it's too risky. So for the people itself, we gained, made, we gained the prestige. They saw that we are really fighting the war for them. If they didn't come, they didn't collect their, you know, their quarters from them. A lot of people didn't want to give. So later on, near the end of 1943, no Germans there to come to the villages to collect their uh, whatever reason, they had to come with force. In April, 1943, they made a huge raid in our area. Well, we were tipped off at that time already. How we were tipped off? From the Poles. They saw that they have to protect us somehow. They couldn't liquidate us, they had to live with us. So what happened, if they came ex, unexpected, into a village, we many times had a shootout with them, so some of them, people

accidentally got killed, or houses were burned down. They want to avoid that, so if from Lublin or Lubertof, big cities, Germans came to our area, we were notified. So if they came a few, we made an ambush on them. If we know there are more than that, we packed up and went away. We, we run away to the uh forest, make ----- . We always were combat-ready. In seconds we were ready to start a fight. And that's how, later on in uh, uh excuse me, 19, end of 1943, the Polish Partisans learned from us, they came in, came up in groups into the forest. In the beginning they were afraid, we showed them the example. They saw the Jews can do, why can't we do it. And we were uh, really connected under the umbrella of the Polish People's Army. In all the time, they gave us moral support, military support, everything what's needed. And later on, we got through them, firearms which came from Russia, and dropped from the planes. We got submachine guns, machine guns, ammunition, explosive, everything what we needed. And that's how we developed, we developed a relationship with them, that they even said to the AK group, or the fascist groups, "If you start doing against the Jewish groups, you, means, you're starting against us." They threatened them. And they uh, start to behave, and that's how we managed to stay, and later on in the end, let's say the beginning of 1944, things were different because there, in the area became many Russian Partisan units, and the Polish Partisan units, and we were, we were just walking around for weeks, staying in one village. And they didn't dare to come to us. Now, the next battle we had with, we had skirmishes like uh, with gendarmes many times. In uh May of uh 1944, no was June 1944, 43, we went into to our town Kumunka. We staying there about an hour. There were Polish police, there were the Germans, we also had an observation post on top of the school. No shot was fired. One shot was fired, we returned fire in the end, and they quiet down. We burned down the synagogue. They made, you know, from the synagogue they made an office for themselves, the Germans, and we were walking around in the town, in the middle of the town for almost an hour, and there was one collaborator, we were looking all the time. He ran into us accidentally. He was running , he was saying, "Jews! Jews! Jews!" He thought that some of his men are there. He fell into our hands. Then we also, we went, went to many times to the neighborhood uh town, town halls, which we consecrated, confiscated you know, the labor dept books, got orders to take away the labor dept books because from that they could know who was what, who was collaborating with the Germans. Then in 1943, we had

Wait. Have to reload.

Beep.

Quiet guys. You were starting with another thing...

Yes, in the end of 1943, August, September, we were involved with blowing up trains. Warsaw, Lublin and Lobowtov, Lukov. And in Dec of 1943, we were involved in Yami, it was a village where the Germans came, about almost 60 of them, and they were raiding, cleaning the area from Partisans. It so happened that we had a convention in a village named Buki. There were Russian Partisans, Polish Partisans, all officers there. And I happened to be there with some of my group and 2 peasants came in from the village, Yame, in the afternoon. At that time, we had a good time, we were drinking, eating, talking strategy, and they say that the Germans moved in to treehouses, took up quarters, and it's like they were instigating us to take care of them. So one many happened to be a Lietenant Korkel, he was Ukrainian, and he came from this village, he was born in this village. In the afternoon when it got a little dark, he took me and a friend of mine, Severumstan, and another man, and we went to this village to investigate reconnaissance to see where exactly they are. And we came back at midnight, took about 40 men all good armed with sub machine guns and so on, and we went to do, disarm them, and take them away. So, it was a, the moon was shining, it was a beautiful night, and we were walking alongside the back of the village. When we came, in the, about in the middle of the village, we heard a signal, "Haslo," a uh, pass, that we shoot a flare. Everyone knew exactly in groups where to attack, which, which house. And uh, the guards, what they had, in the edge of the village, they notice something, they opened fire. When they opened fire, the flare came up and took us maybe 5, 6 minutes, all the houses were surrounded. Those guys from the guards, run away, left their machine guns. They all had the Russian machine guns with the round disks. We knew the house, we surrounded the houses, and we told them to give up. Some of them who were guarding the houses, they killed right on the spot. It took, went, went, went so fast, was unbelievable. And they jumped out from the windows with their hands up, because we told them we're going to burn them alive. And one of our men got killed, a bullet in the head right when he walked into the machine gun in the window. And accidentally one man got killed. And we did, killed as many, maybe 20 or 30, some of them run away, and the officers we took with us. You know, in a place like this, when it's time to turn around was too late. We took the officers with us and we went, walked, went away from this village. They had maps and they showed us on the maps that they were a day before in another place. So we went to the place that they were yesterday. They came into, was a forest, a couple of houses near the forest, took up quarters, and around uh, nine o clock in the morning, we looked through our binoculars, and we saw that the Germans were about a few miles away surrounding the village of Yame. They came in with force, and uh, no shots were fired. They picked up all the bodies what we left, and those five, we had five, I think, five officers, took them out from the woods, and with silencers, we killed, because we couldn't wait any longer. They gave us all the information we needed. This was a big operation there. Then the other big operation, then we had skirmishes, like, every week. We had contacts with Germans here and there. They were making

huge raids, uh, I got to go back in uh, July, 1943, there were 2,000 men involved, Germans, -----, gendarmes, Polish Police, and regular army soldiers. What we were notified, like tipped off before, we slipped away. We could not afford to get into battles with them like that because we didn't have the equipment, and uh, then we could not get reinforcements. We, uh, our main objectives were to make hit and run attacks, to mine roads, bridges, and ambush ----- many times on the road from Warsaw, Lublin, or other places we, we got information, this was my, our main objective. And then in May of, yeah, in Ap-, in March of 1943, I was involved with a group with a Polish, with the RL Partisans, there was a special group formed, and we gave safe passage to the Polish government, first Polish government who came to Lublin after the area was liberated. We had to take them over to the East bank of the river, of the Buch River, and from there they took him to Moscow. And then later in July of 43, 1944, they came back and they became the first Polish govt. So I was involved in that, and this is a long story how I was ----- . And in May of 1944, Gen. Rolojemerski, he was the head of the Polish Partisan Support. He came to pay, pay us a visit in a village named Burki. Burki was a village near the Pasha Forest. I was at that meeting. The meeting lasted 3 days, and he gave us that time instructions. That we should remain for any cost in the Lublin area. He told us that the offensive crossing the Buch is coming, and we should do everything possible to stay in the area. At that time we were nominated some of our men to officer ranks. There was a Hilgresban was became also lieutenant. Sam Gruber was assistant to Grehengresban, also lieutenant. Marian Voretsky was platoon commander and I became platoon commander at that time also, the rank of a lieutenant. After he left the, the area, they start moving big units of the SS, -----SS, in the area of ----- . And we received orders to move out from the area to go South of Lublin to Yanov Forest. And my platoon was under the command of uh, Hoolot Batallion, which was the com-under the command of Zempster, Captain Zempster, his original name was Scrinitzky. And there were a group of Russian partisans, under the name Shapiga, and then Wandervaselevky's group, and the I, People's Army Group. We all marched up in March, in May, and going to uh, the area of Yanov, where we were about a thousand man force that time. We had about a hundred, over ahundred horses, a horse and wagon--the horse and wagon were carrying the heavy equipment like sub, big machine guns, ammunition, explosives and so forth. And we were in two places were interrupted, uh from uh, intercepted from the Germans, they tried to dislodge us and they couldn't. The last stop we had was May 11 or May 14 I think in a village named Romrof. And there, when we got into the village was around 4 AM in the morning, and we found no male at that time, no men, very few old men. And we got suspicious right there at what's happening, but, we had no choice, we had to go through the village to go to Yanov, but during the day we didn't travel, so we took up quarters there, all the horses and the wagons we put near the uh, there was a wooded area, small wooded area right near the village, and some of our, the officers took quarters in the village. I had my quarter there. Around 10 AM, I got a message

uh, on a horseback, by the name Lonkafefakorum. He came with a message from Captain Zempster, and I was sleeping on the floor on straw, and I was set up, he came in, he gave me an order that I should take from my platoon, send a, an ambush in a close road just, described where they should take him there because Germans are approaching our area. While I was sitting reading this uh, message, a small plane, German plane, dived down, he saw the horse, white horse, and put a savo, a machine gun through the roof. He came about 2, 3 feet away, in the floor, almost, almost got killed, hit there. We ran out fast for the, to the outside, and he was closing around again, and uh, that's why they were following him all the time because it was a big group. And uh, I sent out the ambush, they were a group of 6, and then around 10, 11 o'clock, we saw the Germans coming closer and closer from all the sides, from Lublin from the South.

Beep.

Around 10:30 AM, we, there, were about 3 or 4 German planes cruising around the wooded area, make observations, and we decided to pull back all the road blocks back to our positions in the wooded area, we took our positions dug-in, and we prepared ourselves for a battle there, we had nowhere to run. And they start bombarding, shooting down with the they were guns although they, they always hit the trees like, and from the trees, falling trees, they bombed, light bombs, not heavy bombs, and machine gun fire, some of our people got wounded and killed. And this lasted about until 11:30. 11:30 from our headquarters were shooting 3 flares. One blue, one red, one white. And somehow, they got misled, they disappeared, the airplanes disappeared, and they began to attack us. We were in good positions. You only heard you know, music, the machine gun fire was just rolling continuously. And they began to attack. We were in good positions and killed many of them. Over there we killed over 300 Germans. We suffered about 20, over 20 killed, and there were 30 wounded. The battle lasted until about 12 PM. And then they decided to pull back. They pulled back and quiet down, and the night we found a weak spot, and we pulled out from there. The next day they came with armor, we were gone. And that time, from there, we dispersed, we could not, not all of us made it to, to the Yame Forest because we always had orders, something has happened, should go, wherever you can to get away from them. So, I went with my group back to the area where I come from which I knew the best, and we were travelling during the day, we came to the crossing, the railroad crossing, Lublin/Warsaw. There was a full train of Germans with tanks passing by. We jumped off the wagon into the weeds, and then we made it back to our area. In our area, we took a rest for 2, 3 days, and then went back to our destination, Pasha Forest, and then, I don't know how -----.

Let me ask you something else. What happened to your ghetto? What happened to the ghetto in

your town? Do you know what happened?

The ghetto they, the Germans came with the help of the Polish police, they chased all people out from the ghetto, who cannot run fast enough was killed on the spot, and they transported them to the Lobartov. In Lobartov, they're supposed to make a huge ghetto for all the Jewish in the area, which did never materialize. They put all those people on trains, and put destination unknown, sent it destination unknown. That's what happened.

So you...

You want to go back to the beginning a little bit?

Yeah, what happened to your family?

Oh. My family got to, went with this uh, the deportation. So what happened, when I ran away, I went to a place nearby the main road, a wooded area to find out what will happen to this deportation. Around 12 Noon, was on Friday, we learned what I just said, where they, the deportation went on. And matter fact, I was not alone there. There were many others, who'd run away and did the same thing. So we sat down in a circle, and when we heard that, what happened to the deportation, and start, they think what to do. I had my mind made up that I had some place to go, that a farmer promised me to hide. The name Klaus in a village named Koskufko. And I had another man with me, he was from Warsaw, a friend of mine, a neighbor. He wanted to go with me. When they were sitting and talking about it, and they all decided to go back to Lobartov, well some of them were the Polish -----Police. And they ask me, they said, "You sitting here, don't say nothing. Where you going?" I said, "Listen, I know one thing. If there's going to be a ghetto in Lobartov, I always have time to go in--have a chance to run in. But to run away, I'm afraid it's going to be too late. So I decided I have a place where to go, and I'm going to go there where they promised to hide me." And they start to talk us out of it, and took only 2 minutes, and they changed Yentl's mind, and I was left alone. So about 3 PM, they all got up to walk to Lobartov. I was alone. What I'm going to do? I got up too. We start walking, and from far away, I saw the church, the spire of the church, and I said to myself, "What did I promise myself? I'm not going to go freely. I said to Yentl, "Yentl, you want to come with me?" He says, "No." So I said to, goodbye to all of them, I said, eh, "Be healthy." "-----," in Yiddish, and I turned, turned around and I went back. And I went back to this farmer, he took me in very warmly, and treated me really couldn't be any nicer, and I was staying 2 days there, and then when I learned about the some Jews hiding in a forest, I went to the forest, I couldn't be in hiding to sit alone and just, you

know, and I had a good place. Somebody they told me later on, "You were crazy. Why couldn't you, didn't want to stay?" I said, "This is not me. I want to do something. To be first on the free fresh air," and I felt if I got, want to get killed, I wanted to ----- first, to do something about it. So I went to the forest, and I got used to it, and that's how we organized and did our own things. But there were about over 20 people which went to Lobartov...because they were, the thought was because the Germans made propaganda in the beginning that they gonna be just resettled to another ghetto, and I didn't trust them. I believed them what they were saying that they are to kill all the Jews. And I didn't take it for granted.

Did most Jews take it for granted? Can you talk about how difficult it was for most Jews to believe the Germans were going to kill everyone?

You see, most Jews, the majority were, let's say , people, older people, with families. Take a family man, it was not hard to decide what to do. Even he had the mind to do something, mostly were religious, they believed in God. Many times we talked about it, it was very hard for me to say, to argue with them. They say, "God will help. We will overcome things." And I saw what's happening, that maybe were hearing, not news, no newspapers, but rumors from the Poles who were travelling by trains or, you know, were telling us what's happening. That they're deporting Jewish communities, things like that. So, it's very hard to say, it was not hard, easy for them to leave the family or run away. With small children you could do nothing. My family were religious people, mannered people. Were, the, I had brothers and sisters were small, my family consisted of 9, my parents, were 3 brothers and 4 sisters. I'm the only one survivor. I took on my own that I am not responsible for nobody, just for myself. Prior to the deportation, I never wore any those, the armbands. I always travelling, was travelling with a bicycle to the cities. I once went to Warsaw, 1941, then to Lublin, I was travelling to Lobartov, almost daily, to buy food to help, you know, to do something. And I risked my life because I saw one think and I knew very well that if I get caught, I'm going to be killed. I accepted that. I didn't uh, I wasn't prepared to go through suffering. But I had the mind all the time, if I get killed like that, I have no choice, but to go to take you on a concentration camp, then, torture you, you know, abuse you, like we heard things, it didn't register to me, and I took all those risks. What I did, and luckily...I made it. And after I got into the Partisans, I don't know from where and how, I was just new things came to my mind, I don't know from where, like, uh, you put on a switch, and I knew the answer. And I was the youngest in my group. But, you know, I never tried to make somebody else do for me the work. I volunteered whatever I could do. I knew the area very well, which was very important at that time. And then I, somehow, my, I, my whole thinking changed. I was a different person. Like overnight I became an orphan, and I knew that I have to protect myself. Nobody will do anything for me. And as a

matter of fact, the way I became a partisan fighter in our old group, first, nobody did anything for us. We had to do it ourselves. That's, like I said, to get the, the uh, uh, firearms really was not hard. The way we got it was very easy, but you had to know how. In the beginning to buy, we want to buy for money, was no way we can get it, and we were chased like animals all the time. And all of the sudden they started to call us, the same people, and we were the same Jews, "Gentlemen, how can we help you?" And the...

Okay, we have to reload.

Beep.

Okay, do you want to finish that off, that you were talking about. You were talking about how at one time the peasants chased you away like dogs, and then you came in and they said, "Gentlemen..."

Yeah. So it was like uh, we were chased around, want to buy food or get food, and later on, we came in, and they saying "Gentlemen, how can we help you?" We didn't threaten anybody. It's just, the gun, was the power. We didn't point it at anybody. Was carrying, you know, normal. And that's how, I, we, was very hard for us to understand what really happened because, you know uh, the atmosphere, the change of heart, nothing was there, that they really liked us, and want to help us, but the way we organized ourselves, situated ourselves, we know what we're dealing with, and that's how we have to go about it. We were nice to them, and they were nice to us. They helped us a lot later on because without their help, we could not exist. And matter of fact, after the area was liberated, I was working in Lobartov, which was nearby in the same area. They used to come, and you know, every week they had a market, they used to bring us presents, food, all kinds of things, we'd get a, we developed with some of them, a very good relationship.

Did you, in all these years, did you see the trains that were on their way to the concentration camps, and did you know what was happening?

To a certain extent. We did not know everything, no.

Well, describe what you thought, what you...

We're seeing, we didn't see it, you know, uh, we only heard through rumors because we were the last towns, the last ghettos to be deported in 1942. We heard from others the way they were deporting them and the Poles were saying they were deporting them to the death camps. Like Treblinka, Midonis, Sobibór, and things like that. But, we exactly didn't know the truth, or didn't see those things. I never, myself, imagined that something like this could happen. So you didn't, none of you knew that it was happening. No, there were some of them who escaped from Sobibór, there were 2 men escaped, who escaped came to our Partisans. One was Leo Lerner. He lives in Jerusalem. And there's another one, I forgot his name, can't recall it, there were 2 escaped from Sobibór, and they told us what's really happened there.

Do you feel that the Germans that you saw operating had, were just following orders or did they act on their own? How did you feel about that?

It's hard to really to say, of course, they can say they're following orders, but it depends how they want to follow the orders too. They just were killing Jews in random, they were brutally murdered them. Follow the orders, let's say they could arrest people, and take them away to a camp, or they shoot them just on the spot, so I don't think that it just was following orders.

Do you feel that the Jews had a lot of choices? How do you feel that people made choices in those years?

You see, it's very hard to say about choices. If I'm going to compare to myself, there were many others who had choices, they could do just the same thing as I did. I'm not talking about families. Families was very hard. Young boys, young people, if they would just take, and think about, the way I was thinking, I said, "I'm going to die, anyway. So why just die like that, like a coward, or be drag me, and torture me, abuse me, then put me to death." So I was thinking one way. I didn't expect that I'm going to survive, and I didn't know what I'm getting into it. Had no specific plan. But I made up my mind, when I can run away, I will run away, and look for another way, and I

found the other way, when I saw the opportunity with the men there, and we organized, I was to a certain extent, a big, big instigator, you know, certain things, but my mission, my way was, "Let's take revenge if we can." Because we had also now, met people, some of them were a little passive, I would say. Like, when we heard that some Jews were killed, and at that time there was no secret, because they didn't hide, the Poles didn't hide that they were killing Jews because they were proud of it. So, I said, there were some other young guys there, "Let's go and do it today because tomorrow may be, could be too late. Others were saying, "You know what, they didn't bother us. Why should we go after them?" I said, "Look, we are Jews. They didn't kill the people because they did something to them, they killed them because they're Jews. Tomorrow they know where we are, they're going to come after us. And this paid off later on. And there was another thing, you see, when we were looking for some killers, we came into a house, looking for son or father, whatever, we did not touch any innocent people. If he wasn't home, we said, "Okay, we come back," so we went. You understand? And this was a great thing people respected later on because they saw we had only those who were involved of killing Jews. And they stopped to a certain extent. You understand? Now, for the others, I would say the same group who were with me after the deportation ran away. They went to Lobartov, if they would think the same way, I wouldn't say all of them would survive, but some of them would survive. This way, they all went, and this was the end of it. So it's very hard for me to say because everyone, the same man, which I was saying, Yentl, he was from Warsaw, he was a refugee in our town, he ran away before, and he was living around the neighbors there, and he saw that I was driving around with a bicycle without a, a, you know, a armband, and I knew farmers, they used to come, he approached me, he said, "Look, what do you do when the -----, if you're going to hear about the deportation?" I said, "Listen, the only thing I can tell you I'm going to do, I'm not going to go freely to a deportation, I'm going to run away. He said, "I want to go with you." He made, he begs me. And then, he backed out. What happened to him, I don't know. So it's very hard to say, see, the problem was, what I think today, there was no organization. If there would be an organization to organize people, say, "Look, you're going to be killed regardless, so why don't you take a chance?" When I went into, when we got firearms, and I became a Partisan fighter, I was not afraid for anything. It didn't come into my mind to hide. Bullets were flying through my head right and left. I was lucky, I wasn't hit. But, you know, it never...came, came to my mind, they go, they hide, because hiding wasn't good, always the safest place. Let me tell you what happened. In 1943 we were like went into a farmer and had dinner, so we, we developed a relationship already, so he said to me, "You know, here, here this guy is by my neighbor, hiding," Leibish, was. This Leibish was a man, a Jew, who was almost 6 foot high, and he was serving the Polish army in the Cavalry. He had to be tall. I said, "Bring him over here." He went to brought him over here, sit down, we ate, we had Schnapps, we had vodka, were drinking, very good, no problem with food, he looked at us, and saw what's

happening, and I told him what we do, and that we live like normal people, like normal soldiers, the way it is. I said, "Come with us." He says, "Oh no, you're going to get killed." I said, "Listen, the same way you're going to get killed too. There's no guarantee here." He didn't want to come with us. And a week later we heard he was burned alive. He was sleeping in a haystack, you know, the farmers had haystacks on the fields, for the winter, you know, so, Germans came, somebody tipped them off because he probably had money. The money ran out, so they, somebody, one of the men who helped him, could, tipped off the Germans, they came, they put the things on fire, and he burned alive and that's it. So, it wasn't uh, not, I'm still alive. And others with me. And he was afraid to go with me, so, it's very hard to figure out. See, once you're in it, it's different. We changed completely. Before, if let's say, if somebody would give us a lesson, of what we're getting into it, maybe some of us would think, oh, how is it possible, it's really what I'm telling you here, if you would be a military man, you would say, "It's impossible," what I'm saying, but it was possible. Because we created, we learned from experience. Common sense. Instinct. How to stay alive. And everything worked out fine, to a point. Of course, many of us got killed, no question about it. Oh, but they got killed for a reason. They were not killed, be tortured, you know, for nothing.

Do you have anything that you particularly want to add?

What do you want me, I can add a lot of things, but you know, I suppose it depends, what do you want to know more about, you know? You want to know about after the liberation or things like that?

Sure.

Or no? Huh?

The liberation is important.

Now, we were involved in many fights with the Germans, with the Polish police, and with the collaborators all the time, so, you see, uh, I mean, uh, it's very hard to describe everything in detail because it will take a lot, long time, you know, but in general, the population later on helped us a lot, no question about it, because, they, without that, we could not survive. Because they saw the reality. Because before, they were, you know, the propaganda was so hard, you know, the Germans and those right wing groups, that we are really has to be extinct because not worthy of living or things like that, and they saw themselves, here we came with arms, we didn't harm nobody. What we ate, we drank, and we slept over, and we said goodbye in a nice way, and then

some of them later on were begging, "Why don't you come often to us?" This is the truth. And whatever we did, you see, the uh, ----- People's Army, they had to have, be responsible for us too, you understand, and they were not afraid to stand up whatever we did, you understand, there is nothing there that we did which was inhumane. We tried to protect us, and people in hiding, we had many people who were hiding in the forest, and many who, the people, the Polish people helped us to help, to keep them there with them.

We just ran out.

The end of that was ----, about the last minute of that was -----, the film ran out. All the, all the ones that were

beep.

hiding in the forest, they didn't go with us.

All right. We're rolling again, so why don't you talk a little bit about, if you want, either, the not harming anybody or the helping people hiding in the woods.

Okay. Now, what I would like to add is this. In the beginning that retreated, we lay there, when we got the power, and we acquired firearms, we were justified to go out and mostly kill anyone because the way they, we thought, that everybody's against us. When we caught those 2 collaborators, and we, they revealed to us why people were behaving the way they did, we couldn't see to harm anyone. Even we went to a village where they sounded an alarm and chased us with picks and shovels, and we, way down, we went into the same house, armed, said, "Good evening," and they says right away, "How can we help you?" We had dinner and then we asked him, "Why did you do those things before?" He says, "You must understand. Our lives were threatened because those guys were running around every day and threatening us if we gonna help Jews, we're going to be killed or from the Germans or from them. Now, the way we helped the uh, our people, some of them were in the forest, were healthy, and we helped them with food and so on, they helped themselves too, and our protection, the other groups didn't bother them, for one thing. And then we had those, we had wounded, and we had those who were disabled, woman or some children, so we found placed in the villages, people who willingly made bunkers, in their barns, and kept them all the time. We'd just provide them with food. So the food, sometimes, we brought is mostly from the estates, we had big estates in our area. So we went there, and took whatever we needed, and some of them, we gave it to some uh, peasants who could not afford, and then we used

to pass by and use the food and so on. And so in general, we created the atmosphere that was suitable for partisan operations. People understood more what's going on. And they saw themselves because every day for 2 years almost, we had to live in some of the places, we used a lot of places up, so this alone gave people an education. Because many were saying that our party has teaching us to uh, do everything possible to reveal you and things like that. They didn't listen because they felt that their lives are in danger, or the neighbors or some of their families, and they try, tried hard to avoid to report to the Germans. So, that's how we managed to, to operate in a nice way and uh really it was like a cat and mouse for the Germans. Many times somebody revealed, they came, we were gone. And many times they were disappointed. They felt that they didn't get the right information because overnight we made sure when we went into a place, nobody is following us, nobody sees us. And the next day, we're gone. If somebody, let's say from the family member, said to somebody, and the somebody was reporting to police, they came, we are gone. So, they couldn't do nothing to the people because they claimed we came with in force. We came with guns, they had no choice. They could not say no. Even we didn't threaten them, but they were saying, what they had to say, that we came with force, and what can they do?

Can you talk to me a little bit about what you think happened to most of the Jewish men who were, and women who were, say from 35 and older.

You see, what happened to them, I cannot say, those would say who went to the concentration camps or so far, those who were in the area, first of all, in our area, in Brachnik Forest, when I, when we first organized, the most of them got killed in the first raid. And uh, in the other forest, in the Parshif area, there were many who survived. Together when the Ger, Russian army joined up with our troops on July 23, 1944, and they were also liberated in the forest.

Some other partisans that I've talked to who were Jews who were in route of non Jews were threatened by the non Jews and had to conceal their Jewish identity.

Okay, yeah, let's we talk about it. You see, there were many partisans, Jewish partisans, in Poland and elsewhere. There were many Polish partisans and Russian Partisans, and they were groups like we were. Independent Jewish groups. The Polish, the Jewish who would find themselves Polish Partisans, they were many times abused or so on, they didn't feel comfortable. The ones who were in the AK, in the Fascist groups, they weren't a few, who didn't look like Jews, they were hiding their identity. The others in the Russian partisans, they were not discriminated. We, as an independent Jewish Partisan fighting unit, and, under the umbrella of the Polish partisans, we didn't feel any discrimination against us. They were treating us very well, all the time, they, we were

treated with respect and honor and so on. There was one antisemite, you know, was Ukrainian, he showed his uh, the way he was uh feeling bad, but, it didn't mean anything to them, they were just being...So in general speaking, I mean uh, that's the way the set-up was. We did not want to be together, infiltrated with them together because we had our obligations, and we felt what we're going to do, we're going to get credit for, and otherwise we would be sweeping floors or shining shoes with them. We showed them that we could fight as good or sometimes as better than they are. And the reason was that we had nowhere to go. Our direction was to fight. Or to kill or be killed. They had homes intact, they had families, they had somewhere to go back to. We did not have that. So our, we could not even surrender. You see, the beginning what we thought why they trusting us, they were trusting us, the people's army, people, you know, the Polocks, Polish Partisans, better than their own because they knew that we cannot surrender, because surrender meant dead by torture. We had nowhere to go, just that one direction, fight. Fight. Everybody who was in our path, our enemy, we didn't care, we had to defend ourselves. And that's the way we remained, they let us because not in all the areas, some areas SE of the uh Buch River, they didn't let uh, Jewish, uh Partisans to be independent. They tried right away to disperse them, you know around among them. So we tried hard and we showed them that we can do our job. When they gave us missions, we fulfilled, and we remained like this. And they later on, you know, through the ranks, they tried to uh, reward us for it because they saw during the times what we did, and everything else. We got, you know, nominated some of us to officer ranks, and we were uh, happy altogether now. After the liberation, all of us, the Jewish Partisans, the Polish Partisans were integrated into Polish govt. Everyone received a job according to his ability, so we were treated very fairly, I couldn't say that we had any discrimination whatsoever.

Okay, thank you. That's all my questions. So we have to just sit here for 30 seconds.

30 seconds of room tone from previous interview.

End of room tone. End of Sound Roll.