

Abe Gutovitz Testimony Transcript

My name is Abe Gutovitz. I was born in town Warka and then my father moved to the town in Poland that was about ten kilometers from that town to the other town. Bialobrzegi is the name from the other town. We lived there for quite a while.

Interviewer: How soon after Hitler came to power did you begin to think that the Jews were in trouble?

They took over Poland September 1, 1939. Three days, they was march here on our town. It was a terrible thing what was going on. You know, every night they killed in our town, even before they made the clear out from my town. They took out Jews - the richer Jews, you know, and killed them all. They took out my, our rabbi in our town.

Interviewer: What year was this when this started?

In our town, started 1942. Till 1942... From 1939 till 1942 everybody lived in his places. They took out a lot of people every day to work for them, you know. Some of them got beaten, but they didn't kill us during the work. I never worked for them outside. We had our, our - not a house, we had the whole *schlemiel*, you know. We was working for them. My father had 12 people working. We worked for them the officer boots and then they brought measurement for the wives and for the kids. You know, we had a lot of leather, you know. We had a small little factory what people was working for us before the Germans came over. We still had the same 12 people working because we had good business there – boots, you know, children's shoes, women's shoes, all kinds of shoes. And then, and then when they came over, they took us under their, under their..., to please them, to make for them everything. We couldn't sell anything. We couldn't... Just what we had, we had plenty of money, you know, stacked away and we lived on it. If they caught you with some money in your house or what, you already got shot.

That was in 1942 – yes, the year 1942. In September, about the 17th was it, from the SS came order to leave the town. It was still a very hot day. So, somebody knocked on my door, “Abe,” – my name is Abe, you know – “get up because we have to leave town.” So, my first thing, I went to my father and mother. It was about a block away. And then my oldest brother was, he had two nice boys already – one boy eight years, one boy nine years. And I waked them up and we went out to on a certain place, you know. It was called, like here is the City Market – you know, a round, big place, and we concentrate there. So, the SS men came out. My brothers, two brothers was working for them already. Barbers, you know, they was barbers - the younger brothers and me. So, I... Me, me and my father and my oldest brother, we produced them – the boots, you know, for the gendarmerie – you know what's gendarmerie is? For the SS.

And then they came out and looked at us because we still was in our homes, you know. Even they evacuated some people from the main street. But our street was not evacuated - mean like ghetto, it was not. The main street they evacuate and we was still living in our places. I was good fed and I was beautiful in that time, you know. I was in that time about 24 years old, and well-dressed. So, the SS picked us up – me and my two brothers - to work. So, they evacuate us from that town to Skarżysko-Kamienna. This was ammunition factory.

They didn't kill me or my brothers and take them to the gas chamber. That was to Treblinka. You heard about Treblinka and Auschwitz, that was the biggest in Poland – gas chambers. So, they took the whole town to Treblinka, I think, because one guy escaped from there when we was in that Skarżysko-Kamienna, in that ammunition factory. So, they tooked us out - one escaped and said that, from our town, they went to the gas chamber that day. And then after that we went to Skarżysko-Kamienna.

Then came out a big three officers from the SS. So, they picked us up to... They was called *Werk A*. *Werk* means in the factory – A. It was the second B factory and C. The factory A, we made the ammunition, but we didn't fill with throttle, throttle is the name of it -like the- what gives out the sound, you know, for kills. That was all powder. So this was the best factory, what we went, we three brothers. And then he want to separate us, the, the officer. So I knew a little *Deutsch*. I told him, “So and so, we are brothers from my whole family and I don't want to be separated with them.” He looked at me like with the big eyes. He didn't answer me one word. That was it, he tooked us together in that *Werk A*. That mean A. That was the best and the nicest factory. You couldn't die so quick there, you know. Because C, C was not so bad – no, after A is B – B was not so bad but hundred percent worse than B was. C was the worse-est. You couldn't live there more than three months from that food what they gave you for seven people one small loaf bread and a cup water, you couldn't live long working very hard.

We stayed, in that ammunition factory we stayed from 1942 to 1944. Then my one brother worked night shift. He was the middle one next to me. They couldn't take him out because, the Russians was bombarding, you know, all the way around. They couldn't take him out because he worked in day shift he was in the factory. We worked in the night shift. We was sleeping in the barracks, you know. So, me and my youngest brother, they tooked us and sent us to Buchenwald.

In Buchenwald that train was going approximately, but not quite a month. I remember the date when they tooked us out. It not quite a month and when we went into that train. They gave us a loaf bread for each person. It was about 700 or 800 people on that train. We arrived to Buchenwald, we was about 260. And then they died a lot of them there too from one loaf bread. You know they couldn't move the trains because the Russians was bombarding all the way around. So, can you imagine, took about two hours, we went in that train not quite a month and people was dying and dying they throw them out. Dying and dying, you know, not water, not food.

I arrived to Buchenwald was December, December 14, 1944 and I was liberated April 11 in Buchenwald 1945. So, I was there a few days less than four months. And my weight got down to 51 pounds – not kilos – pound. You know at the doctor buildings sometime you see these skele..., you know just skin and bones? That’s how I looked in that time. But I was always strong. I had a heart like steel. I can say it today, that’s what how I survived.

And when we came to Buchenwald, they gave us everything, you know, the stripe suits with a pair of wooden shoes and that’s what we wore. The worse-est thing we had in Buchenwald – they waked us up at 5:00 in the morning. It was winter you know, it’s bitter cold there on that big hill it was Buchenwald. Buchenwald means in Germany *wald* is like a forest – a forest was around and around. Anyway, a week before the evacuation they start to evacuate the people. They start to evacuate, they saw that they losing the war, they start to evacuate from the barracks, you know. You know what the barracks what we was living in it. And then they start to pushing the people, you know farther and farther to go through the gate and after the gate they left the gate there was setting machine guns and killed them off, you know. They didn’t want the world to see what they did to the people.

So, I had my brother there – I told him Jack, his name was Israel in Jewish. So I talked to him and before we went to do something I talked him, “Jack, please do me one favor. I’m older than you, you better listen to me. If we survive, you will look for me and I will look for you till I find you, *if* we survive. Please don’t move. Don’t go through the gate ever. You hear the machine guns running with the bullets and they kill you. Don’t go.” So, I didn’t see him anymore in that place where we was standing and pushing. 11:50 He sneaked out to the barrack where he was. I was not in the same barrack with him. You couldn’t do that. They separate. So, somehow, under the ground in that barrack was a hole and he hid there. And that was after the war, what I found out.

But the worse-est thing what I remember from my concentration camp, it was not, I could survive everywhere, but in Buchenwald it was very hard to survive from one piece bread. And then when the SS men turned over in the other side, you know, it was hundreds of people, you know in the bunch there on that place. And he turned to the other end to pushing and beating the people, and pushing and beating. There was three of them – one in the middle, one in every edge, you know. When he went to the other edge, helping that other guy, something happened there. A guy was fall down or something or somebody beating, or I don’t - I didn’t see. I couldn’t hear because it was big, you know – a big territory. So, when he moved in other corner, I laid down on the ground and crawled on my knees and on my hand. It was laying hundreds of people in the left side, where I was – dead bodies, you know. And I covered me with the bodies and just leaved my nose with eyes, you know, a little bit to see. And I was there, and hear all the noises and beating and beating. So, finally, I don’t remember, when you asked me what I ate yesterday, but this I will remember all my life. I will never forget that. That was a Wednesday afternoon, about two o’clock, April 11, 1945. I saw the tanks, American, running in the streets. You know, in Buchenwald. But I couldn’t move away. I couldn’t push away. I didn’t feel my

right arm, I didn't feel my left arm. Everything was numb. I couldn't move my legs at all. I was seven nights and eight days covered with the bodies without a drop water. So help me God, I don't say one word, what it's not true. And I kept talking to me, "Oh my God. That's to be my end? I prayed all the years to live and see the end of that bastard and now I have to die." [Unclear] keep talking and talking. And I start to work with the fingers and I start to do everything in my power. I couldn't feel. I couldn't feel nothing in me. Everything was numb. Finally, my left arm start to wiggle one finger. I said, "Oh my gosh, maybe I can do something." And then I was working and working with that finger and then start the other and then start... I start with these two fingers work on my right arm, because my left arm, I couldn't lift up to see the tank, somebody to grab me or so help me. Finally, I got a miracle from God or something. It happened. I still believe in God. Said that happened to me. It start to work my right fingers too and I took my right arm because my left arm was much weaker and pushing and pushing and pushing and pushing. And wiggling with two fingers only, not all of them, and then start another finger – just three and pushing and pushing then passed through a tank. And so he said, "Somebody's alive there!" He stopped the tank and took me out.

They took me to the nearest town was Weimar. Nearest town from Buchenwald was called Weimar. It's in the map in Germany. They took me to a sanatorium that was... an American soldiers, you know, wounded. I stayed there not long. They sent me to Munich, in Germany, to a big sanatorium. And I remember one thing. It was standing above me on the whole body was standing bottles above me through my veins feeding, I don't know what they did. [Unclear] talking I could, but at that time I couldn't move and I couldn't yell. I couldn't catch up too fast and then I start looking for my brother.

When they took me out there, I said, "I'm not going to leave here." I'm going to... This is the barrack they pass through. And I said, "No, I don't want go down. I'm not going nowhere till I find my brother." You know, finally, in that tank was a major. In the tank was a major - a Pollock. He talk...he could talk Polish. So I start talking to him in Polish. He took me out, so help me God, from that tank, and I couldn't walk. They took me on those things what they taking the people what they cannot walk or they dead. How you call these?

Interviewer: Stretcher.

Huh?

Interviewer: A stretcher.

Yeah. Put me on and took two soldiers. So they took me to that barrack and I went to that barrack and I kept screaming, "Jack! Jack, I'm alive!" The vehicle, you know, that goes was heard far away, you know, because nothing was in that barrack was empty you know Was a funny voice that hearing. So, finally, he crawled out from that, from that hole there under the barracks and they tooked us both to the sanatorium.

I remember just one thing for three months. Then I start to get better and my brother, he recuperated a little earlier because he was about four years younger than me. And after six months they took me out from the conc... from the sanatorium and sent me to Föhrenwald. This was also a *wald*. It was a forest, like a forest all way around – with big houses, big barracks and only Polish people was there. So we stayed six weeks in that Föhrenwald. Then came UNRAA or UNRAA they called themselves. And whoever was a Jew, they tooked us to Landsberg am Lech. And we stayed in Landsberg am Lech for a while. Then over there we stayed, and stayed, and stayed, and finally my uncle find out – I had an uncle here. He found out that we are alive. He worked out papers through the government. He paid for everything. He tooked us all three brothers.

Interviewer: What year was that?

That was in 1949.

Source: Abe Gutovitz video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/gutovitzabe/>