

Alegre Tevet Video Testimony

My name is Alegre Tevet and before the war I, I was a young girl. I was a fam... and my mother and father and we was seven children in the family. I have four sisters and three brothers with myself – and very happy family. I was living in Drama, Greece, which is north of Greece – called Macedonia. It is close to Salonika. And I went to a Jewish school. They called them the School of Alliance, which was I learned the Hebrew and the Greek and the French. And I had a wonderful, happy life. My father was a shoemaker. My mother was a home... raising the family. And I live very, very happy life until the war broke out.

When the war broke in 1940, it was with the Italians and Albania which is in Italy. And then the Italians they was ruling Albania that time and they brought the war. And then in 1941 Hitler came to, the Germans came to, to Greece through Italy. Italy give their pass. We lost the war, and Italy give the pass to the Germans and the Germans capture all the Jewish people in Greece. And I was living in Drama that time.

And then we came the war with the Bulgarian – which is north of Greece. We are in the [unclear] of Bulgarian. And they came and a week my mother says we can't live in Drama because the Bulgarians they are so barbarian, you know. They really kind of... They take the people from their homes – especially young girls. And boys they kill them. They do lot of bad things. And so my sister was married, the oldest one, and was living in Salonika. So we took false identifications and we went to Salonika.

And Salonika, when I went the Germans was there. They already putted the Star of Davids – the yellow Star of Davids. And they tried to not to go to the main streets like Broadway. All the main streets. Not to go to the transportation – the train they are. So they are starting to, to forbid the Jewish people to have communication and the busy streets. So we came. The whole family was in Salonika. In 1941 we was in Salonika. In 1942 they took us. It was in August. They took us. They put us in a ghetto.

[Interviewer: Can you tell us what life in the ghetto was like?](#)

The ghetto... It was terrible. I cannot express with words. In one room to live, you know. A bread, they just - a piece of bread – like four ounces of bread they give you and a little soup – like a cabbage soup. You know, it was a hard time...very hard time. Still I was preferring to be in the ghetto and then they came. A lot of times, we tried to escape from the ghetto. They'll catch you. We don't start but my father tried to escape from the ghetto and they catch him. They took it back. They kick him. They beat him. It was a terrible.

But before I stay at the ghetto, I can tell you that, while in Salonika we was..you see “You Jew?” they shoot you and the sidewalks there was people dead. A lot of people – young kids, older people, older ladies, young womens. If they see you, you know, for nothing. Just

they kill like a bird they kill them. And people were starvation – no food to eat. And it was hard, hard, very hard. But at the ghetto it was kind of... How can I say? How can I tell you? It was a terrible experience. A terrible experience to come, to come from a family, happy home, and to big house and to be in one room and to share bathrooms, excuse me, with other people and everything. It was a hard and it was depressing. Depressing. A lot of people, they died just from depression for the starvation they died a lot of people before they took them to Birkenau.

Interviewer: Were you able to celebrate holidays and go to school in the ghetto? What was daily life...?

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. No. No. After the German occupied Greece, nothing we can do. All the synagogues were destroyed. All the Jewish store was they took possession – the Greek people. Not the Jewish – the Greek people, the Gentile. And it was a terrible experience.

In March of '43 they took us to Birkenau. They took us in trains. We stayed most for a week in the trains. The trains was like they put the animals. Not even the animals they are like this with a small little window with the bars. And over there you starve to death. You put a blanket in one corner and you do, go to bathroom over there and they... And a lot of people die inside the wagons - the smell, the starvation, the hard time. So, and when they, we say for water, they put the hose... They stopped the train and they put the hose in – the water – they spray everybody opened their mouth like this for to get water in the mouth. Just with the hose they spray to us. And then we arrive in Birkenau.

When we arrived in Birkenau they divided the separation – the women and the men and the young and the old. And if you carry a child, you go with the old people. And so I went with my two sisters. My other sister, she was carrying the little boy five-year-old. So she went with my mother. My brother, Josef, he was about 11 years old - he went with my mother. My father separate. And my two brothers went separate. One of my brothers was 15 and the other one was 16 and a half – Henri, Aaron and Menachem, and Josef went with my father – with my mother. And my sister, Matilda and my sister, Joullia –the one I survived with her – and I, we went three together. So we went and then they took us and we walked to Birkenau and walking a lot.

And they took us over there and then first of all, they would take all the clothes. They shaved us all there. And we went to take a shower. We took a shower and they gave us clothes – like prisoner clothes. They put the tattoo here – the number. My number is 39028. They put the number, and we took a shower, and we dress up clothes – prisoner clothes – and over here they put the number over there. And then we stay over there and changing and then another group. You know, the groups and groups they taken but they 50, 60 people take a shower see. And they was so depress at the beginning to see how we was treat like a animals. We never thought that's gonna happen that way.

Then they took us, they put is in the quarantine and barracks. When they took us to the barrack over there... We have to be for 40 days quarantine. We can't go out – only to take us

out to, to... they call them *zahl appell* – it means to count us, to count to us, you know. And they counted. When they call you up they call you by number. They don't call you by name.

And so the next day over there was everything. Over there bathroom, no bathrooms. It was a big barrels of iron – very heavy. Over there you go and you, you have bathroom. And then the next day same ones too take those barrels and throw to the bathroom to go outside with the barrack. So and I was very... courage I should say. I wanna know what's happening, when I'm gonna see my mother. So I went out with the four other girls. They got handles on the barrels. Two girls on one side, two girls the other side. We carried the barrels to go to bathroom. And the bathroom was a big barrack, and they had the, the holes in wood, you do over there. And we take those barrels in to throw in. We saw a lot of girls over there – German Jews, French girls. And we told, “When can we see our mothers?” And you know what he say? Said, “See that chimney over there? That smoke? Over there they are our mothers. Don't you know this? All the mothers there and they burn 'em up.” So the next day when we went back to that barrack we start screaming and said what happened to our parents and everything.

So, for 40 days I was going back and forth carrying the barrels of the bathroom, going to the canteen to carry the barrels of soup, you know, and to give me a piece of... a little extra soup so I can give to my sisters extra. And then we they took us to work as a *auskommando*. *Auskommando* means outside - in the rain, in the snow. You know, just to break, you know those telephone poles – the big ones. They used to have handles and we used to push them – to break the walls. So the walls was a brick and then we take the bricks and we clean the cement out. So, that's what we did almost until 1940...the end of '43.

After that I went to, took us to Auschwitz. We used to walk - from Birkenau we used to walk to Auschwitz. Back and forth we used to walk, see? And if you do something wrong or you don't, you can't walk fast they shoot you. There was ditches on the side and they throw them. And they don't throw. They let you do the throwing. You know what I mean? You had to pick them up – the dead person – and throw them in the ditch. So we really gone [unclear].

I was walking back and forth, Birkenau and Auschwitz, and from Auschwitz. And then they say they want a shoe *kommando*. The shoes – from the transport they was bringing so many people. We have to take the shoes and clean the leather separate and the soles separate to tear them off everything, you know. And they send them to the factories in Germany. My sister, Matilda, she was very depressed and she was not eating enough. And I was working in the shoe *kommando* and I was having extra piece of bread. And then I was a *friseurka*¹ – and a *friseurka* means a beauty operator. And I used to go and the, the, the German... There was a lot of Germans prisoners over there, non-Jewish. And Ukrainian – non-Jewish Russia. They used to get packages from their own country. And I used to go and they used to call me to go to cut their hair. To fix their hair nice and they used to give me a piece extra bread or a cookie - whatever it

¹ Alegre mispronounces the word friseur – the German word for hair dresser.

is. And then there was a *blocksperr*e in the evening after I come from work. I used to go and do those to give me a piece of bread extra. And then in the night 8:00 or 9:00 is a *blocksperr*e – a *blocksperr*e is curfew. And I used to... I never walk. I used to do like the snake walks, you know? And I used to bring – for a piece of bread so I can give to my sister because she was so depressed. And she don't make it. And I used to work, my sister the one that's in Israel, she used to work, but the other one, Matilda, she never worked. She was so depressed she don't have the energy. She was skin and bone. So one time they made a big selection – they took her. She escaped. The second time she can't escape. There was a big selection. Selection means, you know, if they see you a little bruised or see a little scratch on your body you're not good enough for work. You are good enough to go to crematorium. And if the bones they see you - the bones come out from you skin, you are entitled to go to crematorium. So that's what happened to my sister.

And I was working in the, in a *kommando* that, to clean the bricks with my sister, Joullia, the one she lives in Israel. And I saw my two brothers, Ari and Menachem, and I saw them. So handsome, oh. He was so handsome. Tall young man. Young man. And he, he saw me. He saw my sister and he say, "Where's Matika – Matilda?" I said, "They took Matilda." I said, "Ari, are you hungry? I'm gonna put underneath the tree my bread. Please take it. You and Memick share it." And then my sister, Joullia say, "I'll give my bread too." So we give our portion of bread to my brothers. I saw two times him. He was carrying the bricks in a carriage and the boys was the horses – to, to pull the, the carriage, you know? And when I saw that break my heart. And that two times I saw them, my brothers, and I never saw more.

From Auschwitz they took us from there and we, we walk in the snow – walking in the snow. They give us some shoes with the wood – heavy. If you don't walk fast, they shoot you. They, they no have nothing for to shoot. They shoot you like a bird. Anyway so they took us from there. We walk one day and in the night they put us in a, in a barn, where the horses, the animals stay. We sit down over there in the hay for the night. In the morning they give us the soup and we went in a train – open train. And I was so thirsty when I was walking and I bend down, I took a little snow to put in my mouth, you know. So for a whole day walking, walking, walking and then the train was so open in the rain and the snow. So they took us over there at the Bergen-Bels(en).

Over there it was in 1945, you know in the winter. Over there, you know, you can, you don't work so hard. You work, of course, but you don't work so hard like you used to work. You work in the *auskommando* digging things, you know, throwing the dogs. And I... The girls, they wanna go to bathroom. There are a German soldier and the dog to guard you. You can't stay five seconds over there. If you stay five seconds, you come out, they shoot you. And I saw people in the ditches. Dead, no clothes. One morning, no the soldier he told me, "*Klein*, why you crying?" I say, "What I'm crying? My mother – *kaput*. My father – *kaput*. My *schwester*, my brothers – all *kaput*. *In die* [unclear]." I told him. He say, "You go home. You

gonna go home,” he says, “I’m kaput.” And the next day we, in the morning, we saw no more work. No more work.

Then in a week after, we went out and the girls was screaming and yelling and clapping, and singing. I say, “What happened?” And we saw white flags there was... Give up, how can I say?

Interviewer: Surrender.

Surrendered. We was surrendered – the, the Germans. And we saw some big commander Germans in the tanks, in the tanks with the English soldiers and we start throwing rocks to the Germans, you know. And that was the liberation. The liberation. And some girls they never saw the liberation because they die as soon as they heard. As soon as they heard we are free, they died – lot of girls – from starvation, from the excitement, from I don’t know. What can I say? You know.

And then they came the English and they took us to better dormitories. They give us clean clothes, they give us beds and nicer dormitory and then they give us food. And lot of people they ate right away the food. And you know when your stomach is so empty and you eat the heavy food you get sick. You die.

The liberation for me – it was happy and sad. I should say first sad – because I lost everybody. And then I saw some people from Greece I say, “Where is my brothers - alive?” “No they took them to crematoria.” I still don’t believe it. I still now It seems to me like I’m gonna here my brother’s voice gonna say, “Alegre, I’m alive.” I can’t believe that my brothers... I can’t. I can’t believe until now that my brothers are dead. It’s impossible. They was fighters. Young boys.

And then they... From there we was a little bit... They came the Red Cross. They came a lot of big organizations to talk to us – the prisoners. I should not say prisoners. The survivors. But we was prisoners anyway. They talked to the survivors and they, they wanna know if we have relatives in overseas. And I knew that from Greece I was in Salonika but I have lot of relatives in Drama where I was born. I have my father’s brothers, my sisters – my father’s sisters. I have my mother’s brother and another sister which was Macedonia. Who all those, they took them. Nobody survived from those people.

After the liberation I went to Athens. First, no. The liberation at first we went they took us from one place to another to recuperated. They took us up in the mountains in a Swiss place – Swedish. In the mountains we stayed in tents over there. After there, we went by busses, by bus we went to Brussels. They took us to Brussels and then in Brussels we stay over there almost a month. We had a beautiful place over there. It’s like a dormitory, you know, big, big, big place. The Red Cross and the English took care of everything of us. They give us clothes, nice food to eat, every day showers. And from there, from Brussels, we flew to Greece in a cargo plane. And

we went with the English – English plane. British. And I went back to Greece. And I still I would not believe from nobody told me that my brother was dead. I said to my sister, “We gonna go to Greece.” But the Red Cross said to me, “You wanna go to Israel? You wanna go to America? You wanna go to Paris? You wanna go to England? Wherever you wanna go, we’ll take you.” And I said, “I wanna go to Greece.”

Well, I went to, back to Greece. I went back to Greece and at the Jewish Community Center there was a big list for the survivors. And my cousins... my father’s niece - two nieces and nephew was in Athens. They hide in the mountains. And they, they saw the list of my name and my sister name. And they saw and they came, they came to the airport over there. They already knew what the day we gonna arrive. And we came to Athens and I remember very well it was a week before Rosh Hashanah. We went over there in 1945.

So I went to Athens and I stay over my cousins’ and they told me that Albert Tevet is alive – he survived. He was at the camp. He left Drama and he went back Salonika – he came to Salonika. He escaped from the ghetto twice, my husband, and twice they got him. He give some money to Greek people to save him. And he says, “I can’t afford to destroy Greece for one Jew. That’s how was antisemite Greek. And my husband was captured and took him to concentration camp. So when my sister, Lisa, told me that Albert Tevet is alive too and I knew him from my hometown.

I went back to Drama and I’m engaged, in two weeks I was married. And I had a very happy life. I have a happy life until... But there was a lot antisemitism, because after I went back to Greece – a lot of memories. I went to my hometown. I had two children in Greece and then my husband said to me, “They giving visa to go to America. You wanna go?” I told him, “Sell everything. Let’s go.” We used to have a happy life. Very comfortable life. Very, very comfortable life I had in Greece after I was married. But I don’t care. No future. Five families in Drama was Jewish. We have a Sefer Torah – we used to have services in one house, which everybody left now. Nobody’s over there now. Maybe two Jewish people they live in Drama. Nobody lives no more over there. And we sold the business. Sold everything, and we came to the United States.

Source: Alegre Tevet video testimony - <https://mchekc.org/portfolio-posts/tevetalegra/>