

## Transcript of the Shoah Interview with Jan Piwonski

Translation by Erica Booth - Volunteer – Visitor Services - May 2008

*Note:* This is a translation of the French transcript of the interview that Claude Lanzmann conducted with Mr. Piwonski for the film *Shoah*. The transcript is in an unedited format and includes segments that were used in Lanzmann's final film. Any segment that appears in the final film is NOT available at the USHMM. The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection at the USHMM contains only the outtakes from the film. Outtakes are sections of a movie that are filmed but not used in the final version.

### **CLAUDE LANZMANN – L'HOLOCAUSTE – tournage en POLOGNE : SOBIBOR**

#### **Page S1**

#### **BOBINE IMAGE**

#### **BOBINE SON**

#### **BOBINE no. 57**

SOB 1 CF

SOB 1 CF

*Quelques personnes attendent le train qui arrive peu après en gare de Sobibor; zoom arrière sur le train.*

SOB 2 CF

SOB 2 CF

*Le train en gare et son départ*

SOB 4 muet

*Plan intérieur gare Sobibor; salle d'attente; plan sur une vieille femme assise qui attend.*

SOB 5 CF

SOB 5 CF

*Les rails de la gare de Sobibor; une poule dans l'herbe picore entre les rails.*

*- Un plan muet non identifié sur les rails et la gare déserte*

SOB 6 CF (*début sonore, fin muette*)

*Arrivée d'un train, puis départ.*

*SONS SEULS : 3 ambiances gare Sobibor; coq présent dans la troisième.*

#### **BOBINE no. 58**

#### ***PLANS MUETS NON IDENTIFIES***

- Travelling forêt Sobibor*
- Plan de Lanzmann dans la voiture*
- Arrivée sur panneau Sobibor*

#### **BOBINE no. 52**

***SON SEUL: ambiance silence salle d'attente gare.***

SOB 7

SOB 7

*Interview de Jan PIWONSKI devant la gare de Sobibor.*

*On notera*

*L. pour Lanzmann*

*P.B. lorsque Barbara interprète ou traduit Piwonski*

*B. pour les interventions de Barbara.*

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*Piwonski Interview*

L.- Barbara asks Mr. Piwonski how he's doing.

P.B.- Good.

L.- You're okay?

P.B.- We can continue.

L.- He is not tired?

P.B.- No, no we can proceed.

L.- He has heart problems?

B.- He has stress, if I understand correctly.

L.- Stress... tell him that I have what he needs in the car.

P.B.- He will have it anyway; it's not new for him; he is prepared.

L. Okay... ask him then... this building at the Sobibor station, is it exactly the same as the one that existed in the Spring of 1942, when all of the history started here.

P.B.- It has been here since 1938.

L.- 1938...

P.B.- And the exterior has not changed at all.

L.- It has not changed?

P.B.- No.

L.- It was exactly like this?

P.B.- And the building... the little building right there and the red brick building that is over there, are identical, they are simply the same.

L.- And the old house over there in the trees?

P.B.- It's the same, maybe they changed the roof on it, that's it.

L.- And so, Mr. Piwonski worked in the building at the station in the Spring of 1942?

P.B.- At the very beginning he worked as a hand he wanted...to do track maintenance and other installations.

L.- Finally he became a railway man!

B.- Yes, he worked for the railway.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- By July 1942, I started work as assistant switchman.

L.- Where? In this building?

P.B.- Yes, I worked in this building, behind the window that you can see over there... On the other side of the window.

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L.- Well then, that would mean that he had the best place to see everything that was happening.

P.B.-Yes... my job as a hand, and then as an assistant switchman allowed me to see everything that happened here, that means what was happening at the station and some of what was happening inside the camp.

L.- Between the station and the camp... and the enclosure of the camp, there were how many meters?

P.B.- 20... 25 meters.

L.- 25 meters.

B.- Yes.

L.- It was not far.

P.B.- So I could see everything, that means the station, everything that was happening there, I could always see the main gate, and the insignia badges of the SS.

L.- Was there, was there "arbeit macht frei"?

B.- With the lettering "arbeit macht frei," yes.

L.- Okay can he tell us the beginning; when he started working there was nothing; and what happened at the beginning? How, how...

P.B.- Towards the end of February or the beginning of March 1942, there was a group of Germans that came to look at a post, soon after they brought a group of Jewish hands.

L.- Yes. Wait... cut

BOBINE no. 59

SOB 8

L.- Good, okay can Mr. Piwonski tell us how everything started in the Spring of 1942.

P.B.- Well, I never kept a diary, I never took notes, but based on my memory, towards the end of February or the beginning of March 1942, some Germans came and brought a group of Jewish workers, we housed them in one of the buildings, because the camps didn't exist yet.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- And a little bit later, train cars came from time to time with parts for the barracks.

P.B.- Yes.

BOBINE no. 53

SOB 8

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P.B.- And the Jews unloaded the cars and brought the material for the barracks over there by the camp.

L.- Had they already built the fences at that time?

P.B.- No, they had not...there was no wall, there were no fences, there was nothing at that time. So the Poles that were working there had no idea about what was going to be happening there, because there was absolutely no contact between the Germans, the Jews and the Poles that worked there. There was something that really stuck in our memories, it was the extremely brutal attitude that the German surveyors had towards the Jewish hands that worked there.

L.- Can he explain that?

P.B.- Okay; for example, all the unloading work had to be done while running because the Germans would beat the hands that worked there.

So there was no mode of transport, all the pieces had to be carried on the backs of the Jewish hands.

L.- They were what? They were Jewish Poles.

P.B.- He can not respond to that question, because they could not approach them.

L.- He never heard them talking?

P.B.- Me personally at that time, I had no contact with them; later yes, when I worked here, I could walk around more freely and I could hear them talking, but at that time I could not.

L.- Were they young?

P.B.- Yes; more or less young; that is to say they could have been between twenty something and forty.

L.- Yes; and so was Mr. Piwonski there when the first convoys of deported Jews began to arrive that were going to be killed... by gas?

P.B.- I was there, but that didn't happen until much later; because the arrival of the first convoy was followed by a very quick construction of the camp.

L.- Yes; but much later on; after the information that we had, the first convoy arrived in March of 1942.

P.B.- No. Then, no. The first convoys that were destined for death arrived much later and there was from time to time there were Jewish convoys that arrived, but we used them for the construction of the camp.

L.- Yes. Good... but in regards to the date, we are not arguing on the date, he can describe the arrival of the first convoy?

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B.- *Inaudible (some words)*...already, yes?

L.- Yes; what they were thinking at the exact moment; how did that happen.

P.B.- And before I tell you, I would like to say something on the construction of the camp.

L.- Okay.

P.B.- Okay then. Towards the end of March, maybe the beginning of April, we brought, we chased, large enough groups of Jews of about fifty to a hundred.

And at the same time, there were new trains that started to arrive, with posts, with barbed wire, and parts to make the barracks.

L.- The foundation for the barracks.

P.B.- ...elements of the barracks and at the same time there was a new personnel that was arriving.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- And so that is how we started building the barracks and the wall.

BOBINE no. 60

SOB 9

BOBINE no. 54

SOB 9

P.B.- So at the end of March, or the beginning of April, more trains began to arrive with the foundations of the barracks, with the posts, with barbed wire, with bricks, and we began the proper construction of the camp.

The pace of work that the Germans had imposed was very fast.

So the unloading and the lifting was happening very quickly and it was accompanied by yelling and orders in German, who yelled all the time.

L.- Yes, they were constantly under pressure.

B.- Yes.

P.B.- They saw how we unloaded the bricks on one platform. So all the Jews who were unloading the bricks took a few bricks and had to put them in a specific place and the Germans that were standing along their path were yelling and hitting them and it was an extreme... an extreme brutality, this provoked an enormous shock to the people that saw this happening.

L.- They were really shocked?

B.- Yes.

P.B.- So in April, right to the end of May construction continued, they worked right until the end of May, that is to say that the main part of the camp existed at that time,

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it existed right until the end of the camp, until the liquidation of the camp.

L.- But did they all see this, did they realize what was going to happen, did they understand the reason behind building the camp?

P.B.- In watching the extremely fast pace by which they worked, in watching the facility and the wall that nonetheless whose boundaries and acreage were big enough, myself and the others, that what the Germans were trying to build was not going to serve the workers.

Since I spoke Ukrainian and Russian, I made contact with the Ukrainians and the Russians that worked here.

L.- It was the Ukrainians that worked for the Germans.

B.- Yes, that is right.

P.B.- So besides the sentences that he threw around from time to time like that in the air, we are to understand that the building that was going on was going to serve to get rid of the Jews.

L.- They understood that.

B.- Yes.

P.B.- Furthermore myself and the others that were behind us saw during the construction of the camp, cases where the Germans killed Jews that were too exhausted, that had no more energy to work and follow the pace which the Germans had imposed.

L.- And these murders happened in front of them?

P.B.- Yes, yes they saw it.

So, at the beginning, the fence that we installed was not covered with branches and trees; so we could see relatively well what was happening on the other side.

L.- Through the...

B.- Through the barbed wire.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- So there, in the north part, when I was doing maintenance work on the railway, I could see very well what was going on far away in the inside of the camp, almost right into the gas chamber because the land was clear. So we could see the Germans, the Jews that were walking around over there, that were there, and we could also see the work that they were doing.

L.- Good, okay then, the arrival of the deports even.

P.B.- So, the first convoys that arrived, were cars,

### **Page S7**

he can't describe these cars, but there were also convoys of Jews that arrived before, they were Jews that arrived by foot, from the direction of Vlodawa.

L.- Were they Jews from Vlodawa?

P.B.- He cannot answer that question. We could not go anywhere near that group, we couldn't talk to them, because the guards that were watching over them were unknown.

L.- the guards.

B.- the guards, yes.

L.- But they were what, Germans, Ukrainians?

P.B.- They were... (*cut*).

### BOBINE no. 61

SOB 10

L.- Can Mr. Piwonski talk about the arrival of the first convoy?

P.B.- If I remember correctly, at the end of May or the beginning of June 1942, the first convoy arrived, there were maybe forty, or maybe even more than forty cars.

This happened in the afternoon, right until he finished working; the convoys were accompanied by guards in black uniforms, the SS; we divided them into two parts and directed one towards the camp. But he took his bike and went back home.

I thought that the people that arrived were there to work at the camp like the others had.

L.- But he just said... he explained what was going to happen, inside the camp, when the camp was under construction, that it wasn't for the good of those people; he said that, if I remember correctly, yes, when he thought that it was being built for the extermination of the Jews; it would seem to me that it's the opposite.

B.- No, because it was the first convoy by train.

P.B.- So the construction of the camp, this extreme brutality of the Jews that worked here, they must have heard that there was something that was going to happen here; but this convoy, they couldn't have known... that they were destined for...

L.- because it was the first yes...

P.B.- the first to be exterminated...

L.- Yes.

P.B.- Furthermore they couldn't have known that Sobibor was going to be the place where a mass extermination of the Jewish people was about to take place.

### BOBINE no. 55

SOB 10

### **Page S8**

L.- Yes.

P.B.- We could not have known that the convoy filled with men and women, was going, was destined for extermination, and that not far from here in the village of Ossawa there was a sister-camp where Jews worked on drainage.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- The next morning when I arrived here for work an ideal silence echoed through the station. And we understood, after the conversation with the camp personnel... the station personnel, that worked here, we understood that something incomprehensible had happened here.

So, at the beginning when they were building the camp, there were people who were upset, people who were running as they worked, there were screams, their were orders screamed in German, there was gunfire, and then there were forty cars that arrived and then there was nothing, there were no orders to work, a very idyllic silence; it was something very strange.

L.- Yes; it was the silence that made them understand...

B.- That's right.

L.- Can he describe this silence.

P.B.- Quit simply, it was silence, and nothing was happening inside the camp; we saw nothing, we heard nothing.

All we could see were the guards that were performing their daily duties, but inside the camp, we didn't see any groups, no commandos, we saw nothing; not one movement.

Then they started asking where did they put the Jews and they started to ask the question: "Where did we put the Jews?"

A couple of days later another convoy arrived, and bit by bit they began to realize what had happened to the people who were on the first convoy; that is to say a very troubling odor began to penetrate the entire region.

L.- After...

B.- the first convoy.

L.- the extermination of the first convoy.

P.B.- So, during the construction of the camp, they suspected that something inhumane was going to take place here, and so, there that is confirmed, they understood that Sobibor was going to be a place of extermination.

L.- But the gas chambers... (*cut*)

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BOBINE no. 62

SOB 11

BOBINE no. 56

SOB 11

L.- Yes then Mr. Piwonski says that they understood what was happening because of the silence and the odor...

P.B.- So, this happened at the beginning of summer and I remember quite well that there were big heat waves, sometimes hotter then thirty degrees and when the convoy disappeared, there was that silence and they..., and then that odor, me and my comrades began to ask ourselves how the extermination was happening, what were they using to exterminate the people.

When after a couple of days new convoys arrived, we already knew they were going to be exterminated here.

L.- But tell me, after every arrival of a convoy and then disappearance, were they hit in the same way that he described by the silence?

P.B.- So, for the other convoys, it didn't happen like that, the convoys arrived just as often in the day as night, and morning, and what hit them, it was surely the extremely brutal attitude the guards had towards the deportees.

L.- But did the unloading of the convoys happen here in the same station or was it further away inside the camp?

P.B.- Inside the camp.

Okay, so how did this happen: when the convoys arrived that had more than twenty cars, they had to be divided, because the capacity of the ramp inside the camp was limited.

L.- They were only twenty cars, like everywhere.

B.- That's it.

P.B.- So, when these transports arrived, the Polish rail workers, under German surveillance, were obligated to divide the trains in two and then the machinist would drive the trains a little bit further and then he would switch the train to another track that was already inside of the camp.

L.- The machinists, the conductors of the locomotives, were what, were they Polish as well?

P.B.- Yes, yes they were Polish; sometimes German as well.

So when the conductor..., the conductor was Polish and his assistant and him had already been switchers, they tried to see what was happening inside the camp, behind the door.

So when the conductor and his assistant were Polish, I sometimes tried to get on the part...

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L.- On the tender, yes...

P.B.- behind the locomotive on the tender and stayed there until the train got close to the main door to see what was happening inside the camp, and I couldn't go any further because Polish personnel didn't have the right to go inside the camp.

L.- Why did he do that?

B.- I think it was out of curiosity.

P.B.- The more I went back, I saw familiar scenes. Inside the camp you could see three lines of SS.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- And these SS, very often had dogs, they pointed their guns at the detainees, there were rail cars close by, and it was under these conditions that the Jews were unloaded.

L.- So that means that that he saw the ramp that was inside of the camp?

P.B.- Yes, yes, he could see it along the side of the tender; because from here for example, we cannot see it.

L.- Between where the gas chambers were and where we are standing now how far away were they.

P.B.- Maybe five hundred meters.

L.- Five hundred meters, that's not very far.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- But then when did they... they think that there was a mystery, they asked how these people were being killed, the way that they were being exterminated, when did they understand it? When did they know it? When did they understand it?

### BOBINE no. 63

SOB 12

L.- Okay, so from where we are standing now, how far away were the gas chambers?

P.B.- I think between five and six hundred meters, I never measured.

L.- Yes; that's not far.

P.B.- Yes; very close.

That is why often we could hear screaming, certainly it was the victims that were being chased over there.

L.- He heard screams...

### BOBINE no. 57

SOB 12

### **Page S11**

L.- They heard screams...

P.B.- Yes, not only me. When it was nice out, we could hear the screams in the village of Jwobek,

where I lived at the time.

L.- Jwobeck is... five hundred meters from here?

P.B.- About three kilometers to the west.

L.- Can Mr. Piwonski describe these screams?

P.B.- You can't describe them...you can't describe them, they were terrible and hideous screams, it was as if it was a clamor of noises, like the woodland screams of people being killed; they were screams of men and women, and the voices of children could be clearly distinguished as well.

L.- You could distinguish the voices of children...

P.B.- Of course we could distinguish the voices of the children, in another corner there were dogs barking, gun fire, and I believe that someone who heard that, even once, could never forget it.

L.- He didn't forget the screams?

P.B.- We could never forget them, like a scene you see everyday.

L.- Does he think about this?

P.B.- I don't think that I could ever liberate myself from it.

L.- Does he have nightmares?

P.B.- Yes.

L.- Yes; even today?

P.B.- Often even. These were the scenes that happened most often and could be seen, that he could see here.

L.- Yes; that he relives...

P.B.- That he relives in his nightmares.

L.- Which are... which are the scenes that he relives?

P.B.- For example, the shooting of the elderly, women and men, and then... he saw...

L.- Those that were shot... those that were not taken to the gas chamber, those that were shot because...

B.- Yes, they were shot.

L.- they walked slowly and held up the procession.

P.B.- a scene that he sees today is when children were crushed against tree trunks.

L.- the little children were...

B.- the children... the Germans crushed the kids against the tree trunks.

L.- He saw this?

## **Page S12**

P.B.- Yes, yes.

L.- Over there by the little chapel?

P.B.- They *..inaudible (one word)* heads.

Yes, no normal man would ever forget those scenes.

L.- And, how did he talk about the screams of children that were distinct... How can.. one distinguish the screams of children... compared to other ones?

P.B.- The screams of women and children ... were much more high pitched then those of men.

L.- And then... at what moment did they understand what the mode of extermination was, the system? Because it was certainly a mystery.

P.B.- I believe that in a very short period of time we began to link certain things that we saw together... At the beginning we heard screams; and I could not at this time say exactly how long the screams lasted... Then suddenly a silence fell...

and in this silence we could clearly hear the diesel motor.

L.- They heard the sound of a working motor.

P.B.- When there were no convoys, the diesel motor was not on... we heard nothing...

That is why we believed that the victims were being assassinated by exhaust gas.

L.- Because at Sobibor they used carbon monoxide from a diesel motor to kill them.



P.B.- Yes...

So, even at that time I knew that forty cars of people could not be killed here, with the help of ... well they couldn't be shot, because that would have required guns, that would have created barbaric noise; of course we heard gunfire here, but it was isolated, and very quickly we learned that they were killing individual people, or they were following commands.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- But not these large groups of people that were arriving here.

L.- And the diesel motor went in... was used how many times after the arrival of the convoys?

BOBINE no. 64

*- plans muets de coupe : champ, contre-champ sur Lanzmann, Piwonski, Barbara sure un banc, devant la gare de Sobibor, avec quelques personnes en arrière plan qui écoutent.*

*- Les trios ensem*

**Page S13**

*- Plans muets de tous les trios ensemble sur le banc; des gens accoudés sur une draine les écoutent.*

BOBINE no. 65

*- Plans muets vus de las draine.*

BOBINE no. 58

SOB 13

*Interview continues...*

*Travelling circulaire sur Lanzmann et Piwonski  
marchant en forêt*

SOB 13

L.- Do people still hunt in this forest at Sobibor?

P.B.- Yes, people still hunt here; there is a lot of game... there are a lot of animals of all types, so there are hunters who come from Austria, France.

L.- Are there French safaris?

P.B.- Not really; but a hunter, who is usually satisfied when he kills a deer

L.- Yes...

P.B.- or a big beast.

L.- But because of.. but because here there was... there was what...

well we are five hundred meters from the communal graves; we are in the confines of the camp.

P.B.- Yes, we are in the confines of the camp, but in the expanded confines of the camp, because they expanded the camp in 1943.

L.- During the second period.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- Yes. Did people hunt at that time?

P.B.-No; at that point in time, they only hunted people.

L.- So, the confines are here exactly, I mean fifty meters from where we are now?

P.B.- Yes, about fifty meters to the west.

L.- So then what was there? There were... I mean... the confines of the camp in the forest were marked how, I mean, were there fences or was it only barbed wire?

P.B.- Well there were..

L.- Yes.

P.B.- about two and a half meter posts, there were five lines of barbed wire, so it was practically impossible to escape.

L.- Yes. Were there mine fields as well?

P.B.- Yes; the Germans installed mine fields all around the camp.

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except near the station.

L.- Yes... And did the Jews try to escape?

P.B.- Yes, there were attempted escapes, but the victims didn't know the landscape very well, and the Germans would usually find them quite easily.

L.- Yes.. and they landed on the mines when they did successfully get over the barbed wire.

P.B.- So from time to time, they overheard the guards telling stories of when there were explosions, they went to go see... what the explosion was, and sometimes on the minefields they would find a deer and sometimes an unfortunate Jew who had tried to escape.

L.- A deer or a Jew...

### BOBINE no. 67

SOB 14

~~-Plan muet : Lanzman, Barbara, Piwonski dans la foret, s'avancent vers la camera.~~

~~-Plan muet : les memes marchant de profil.~~

~~-Plan muet : les memes de dos.~~

~~-Plan muet : Piwonski s'eloigne dans la foret.~~

### BOBINE no. 60

SOB 15

SOB 15

~~Lanzman, Barbara, Piwonski a la lisiere de la foret.~~

~~Inaudible au debut, quelques bribes~~

~~P.B.- ... that is to say, they were railings...~~

### [Insert BOBINE no. 66 (Pages 1 to 3)]

### Page 1

except near the station.

L.- Yes... and did the Jews try to escape?

~~P.B.- Yes there were attempted escapes, but the victims didn't know the landscape very well, and the Germans would usually find them quite easily.~~

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~~P.B.- So from time to time, they overheard the guards telling stories of when there were explosions, they went to go see... what the explosion was, and sometimes on the minefields they would find a deer and sometimes an unfortunate Jew who had tried to escape.~~

~~L.- A Jew or a deer...~~

### BOBINE no. 66

SOB 14

### BOBINE no. 59

SOB 14

L.- But today all that would seem absolutely unimaginable, the beauty of this place, the peace, the silence...

P.B.- Yes; it's the charm of our forests, this... this silence, this beauty, it's what attracts people who come here, in our time where everything is so full of noise...

L.- Yes.

P.B.- Even the legal experts that came from...

L.- The legal experts?

P.B.- The legal experts that came from the tribunal at Frankfurt...

L.- Oh, okay... the...the judges!

P.B.- Yes, the judges that... that did the raid on this place, and even they noticed.

L.- The German judges?

P.B.- Yes; it was the German judges from the tribunal in Frankfurt.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- But I have to tell you that this silence, was not always here. There was a time that where we stand now, was full of cries, and gun fire...

L.- Yes.

P.B.- the barking and it was especially this period in particular that remained ingrained in the memories of the people that lived here at that time.

L.- And what did the German tribunal types say, when they came here.

P.B.- Well in fact, one of the old legal experts, one of the judges said that the scents were so idyllic, that it was romantic,

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and I asked him: “can you imagine what happened here, at this spot before, in the past?”, and he said: “listen to me, I understand the facts, I understand the enormity of the crimes that the Nazis committed, but unfortunately despite all I know, I cannot imagine that, I cannot reconstruct all that in my imagination.

L.- Yes; he was not in the wrong... Did the Poles who worked here at the station... was there a possibility for them to tell the Jews... to explain to them what was going to happen to them here?

P.B.- At Sobibor, no that was not a possibility, maybe there or at other stations...where the trains... the convoys stopped, where the trains stopped, maybe they had that possibility, but here, they did not.

L.- And did they have a rapport with the Ukrainians or the Germans at the camp?

P.B.- In reality the Poles that were here... did not have a rapport with the Ukrainians or the Germans that worked at this camp, except for the relations with the service people.

L.- Yes; but the Ukrainians didn't go to Sobibor, they didn't go into the village or into the houses, like they did at Treblinka for example; because at Treblinka, you told us that the Ukrainians came and that there were relations among the Ukrainians and... and the general population?

P.B.- So here, in this region, in the village of Sobibor, Sobibor is in the village of Jwobeck, there were many Ukrainian families...

L.- Yes;

P.B.- Whereas there were few Poles; and so the Ukrainians here knew the Ukrainians at the camp; they did business together, sometimes they were seen doing that... the Poles were completely discriminated against, and they resented them too, they didn't want to come in to contact with the Ukrainians or the Germans.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- It is difficult to talk about an amicable rapport envisioned between...

L.- I did not talk at all about an amicable rapport; that was not what I said.

P.B.- ...or social... but he said himself...

L.- Yes.

P.B.- ...between the Ukrainians and the Poles, because more then once they overheard the Ukrainian guards say “good, now we can

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finish up the Jews and start on you.”

L.- Yes. Did the Ukrainians attempt to do business, to do trafficking?

P.B.- Yes, it is very possible that they tried to sell precious objects and clothes stolen from the Jews, it is true that it happened similar to that.

So once there was a guard... a Ukrainian guard who came to see me about buying a bottle of vodka.

L.- He came to see you where?

P.B.- the man?

L.- Yes; where?

P.B.- He had permission to go...

L.- to the station.

P.B.- to the station.

L.- So?

P.B.- So, he said "do you want to sell me that bottle of vodka for what I have in this paper?" and they were gold filled teeth... so he threw them.

...was hate; even we couldn't touch them, it was so disturbing, so terrible.

L.- Why? Was there... Why... why... it was what? simply teeth?

P.B.- Teeth, false teeth with blood still on them...

L.- There was still blood? They had just been pulled...

P.B.- Yes, but it was supposed to have been taken from a dead body that was already decomposing... it stunk, it stunk... it had a terrible smell.

L.- Yes?

P.B.- very disagreeable.

L.- And so... They wanted what? they wanted vodka for that...

P.B.- Yes.

#### BOBINE no. 67

SOB 14

- *Plan muet : Lanzmann, Barbara, Piwonski dans la forêt, s'avancent vers la caméra.*

- *Plan muet : les mêmes marchant de profil.*

- *Plan muet : les mêmes de dos.*

- *Plan muet : Piwonski s'éloigne dans la forêt.*

#### BOBINE no. 60

SOB 15

SOB 15

*Lanzmann, Barbara, Piwonski à la lisière de la forêt.*

*Inaudible au début, quelques bribes*

P.B.- ...that is to say, they were railings...

#### **Page S15 (same as Page S16)**

L.- All... ask him... all the glade... all that glade, there where we were... (*two inaudible words*)  
monument, all of that was where the mass graves were?

P.B.- That should have been over there, because the first border of the camp was very close,...so..

L.- the first confines.

B.- The first confines... yes, yes... stopped there.

L.- So... the gas chambers were there, fifty meters behind that curtain there?

P.B.- Yes.

L.- But did that drapery of trees.. well.. did it exist at the time?

P.B.- When he came the first time in 1944, there were few trees further back, but here it was a uniform field everywhere.

And at this time... here at first glance in 1944, there was no doubt what happened here, because there were little saplings that were three of four years old, simply it was a young forest. You could not guess that those trees were hiding a concentration camp.

L.- Yes...but who planted those trees.

P.B.- The Germans.

L.- Oh... the Germans to camouflage it.

P.B.- So it looks as if... after the revolt... the Germans decided to liquidate the camp; and probably at the beginning of winter 1943, they planted these trees, because by 1944, they appeared to be about two or three years old.

L.- Yes... they planted them in yes... 1943.

B.- Yes; to camouflage all traces.

BOBINE no. 68

AU SON SUITE BOB. 60

*Plan muet : panoramique sur la forêt et sur la clairière.*

SOB 16

*Panoramique départ dépôt de bois, arrive sur Lanzmann, Barbara, Piwonski marchant vers la gare.*

L.- Tell me... here we are completely inside the camp.

SOB 17

*Les trois arrivant au tas de bois.*

L.- Did here, did this spot used to be completely wooded?

**Page S17**

SOB 18

*La même chose.*

L.- Did the area that we are in used to be forested or not?

*Response inaudible.*

SOB 20

*The three of them sit on a bench in front of a pile of wood facing the camera.*

L.- Did the...did the foreign Jews arrive here like they did at Treblinka in passenger cars.

P.B.- Not always.

Often...the richer Jews from Belgium, Holland, and France arrived in passenger cars and sometimes in Pullmans, and as a general rule they were treated better by the guards.

L.- How's that! That didn't stop them from going to the gas chamber, no?

P.B.- Yes.

The others, the German, Austrian, Czechoslovakian, and in particular, the Polish Jews arrived in supply cars and the Germans tried to profit from all the possibilities of transport... offered by the transport, that is to say the cars were completely loaded up.

Okay, now lets move to the convoys... the convoys of foreign Jews... more than once they saw scenes...like this one for example: there were women that were putting makeup on, at the station; they didn't know that in an hour they would meet there end in a gas chamber.

From their observations, the Germans profited in every which way they could in order that the victims wouldn't know that they were there to meet their end.

L.- But they for example knew what was happening; what did they think... when they saw that the train cars waiting in front of the station, knowing that in an hour they would be dead.

P.B.- So we tried... especially the Polish rail workers tried to.. warn the victims, at certain stations where the convoys stopped about what awaited them where they were being transported.

L.- How.. how did they warn them?

P.B.- The Polish rail workers told them that they were going to Sobibor (*cut*)

L.- In which way did the Polish rail workers try to warn

**Page S18**

the Jews in the transit stations?

P.B.- Well, in the spots that the convoys stopped for long enough, for example, where the trains had to stop to get water like at Oehm(?), at another station that was even closer to Sobibor, the Polish rail workers tried sometimes, tried to talk in German to warn them that they were going to Sobibor.

L.- Did... they at Treblinka for example, I mean did the rail workers at Treblinka themselves, and the inhabitants say that they attempted this gesture as well.. (*end of sentence inaudible*).

P.B.- Well he cannot say the names of the rail workers who did this and he doesn't know how they warned them, but in any case the rail workers explained later that at Oehm for example, they tried to speak in German to warn the victims that they were going to Sobibor to be exterminated.

L.- Even at this station... when the cars were not sent immediately to the loading ramp, waiting in front of them, they were tempted to do something?

P.B.- At Sobibor, it was nearly impossible.

L.- They could do nothing... but, I am trying to understand this...How did they survive? Finally, there was a double passivity: there was the passivity of the Jews that... that knew nothing and then there was their passivity towards themselves who could do absolutely nothing, who knew nothing either... I want to say, for those who knew everything, how did they... how did they live that?

P.B.- It is hard now to talk about their emotions, but in any case, all of the people who because of their work, had to come in to contact with the convoys that arrived, anticipated bitterly the arrival of each convoy... very painfully.

L.- Were the arrivals of the convoys announced, did they know that the convoys were going to arrive?

P.B.- Usually, they knew, because within railway rules it is mandatory to announce all the trains that arrive.

L.- Did the convoys have a sign, or a special name?

P.B.- It was quite simple, it was done as we normally did it, we sent them a telegraph from one station that had the train number, and the Polish rail workers would try to call them and give them extra information about the train that was arriving.

L.- How did they know, how were they informed that it was a train of Jews that were going to be exterminated?

**Page S19**

P.B.- Yes, yes we knew...

So when the Polish rail workers called to give... to give all the information that they usually did, the train number, etc. they took advantage of the telephone call to explain that it was a train load of Jews; so given that the Polish rail workers knew why the convoys of Jews were arriving, they were sure that they were convoys destined for extermination camps.

L.- Was there during the same period, were there normal trains at Sobibor, I mean were there passenger trains that passed in front of the Jewish trains that were waiting?

P.B.- No; that situation happened so to speak never, because the passenger trains passed by this station and stopped here, when there were no Jewish convoys, don't forget that it was an obscure line, the line between Chelm and Wlodawa; so there were maybe two or three passenger trains that passed by a day.

L.- Yes, but it never happened?

P.B.- He does not remember.

L.- Because at Treblinka, it happened.

P.B.- While they were working here that situation never happened, that a passenger train crossed a

convoy of Jews.

L.- Did the Jews try to escape from the train?

P.B.- Yes.

Yes it happened most often with the Polish Jews who knew what it was... (cut)

## Page S20

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~~Yes it happened most often with the Polish Jews who knew what it was... (cut)~~

## BOBINE no. 70

SOB 22

L.- Did the Jews try to escape? Did Mr. Piwonski see that?

P.B.- Then... attempts were very frequent especially among Polish Jews, especially here when they got closer to the Sobibor station where there was marsh and forests.

L.- Why? because the Polish Jews knew what awaited them.

P.B.- So the Polish Jews were more informed than the others, they knew what awaited them at Sobibor, especially the Jews that lived in the region, and those that had attempted to escape unsuccessfully.

L.- Did Mr. Piwonski help in rounding up the Jews from small towns and villages around Sobibor, for deportation to Sobibor, for death.

## Page S21

P.B.- Well yes, he saw a row of Jews that were marching towards Sobibor, that had previously worked on the drainage system in Sovack(?) a village that is a few kilometers from Sobibor.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- Uh... at the end of autumn 1942, there was a group of Jews from Ossawa, certainly they had just finished drainage work there, so we chased them here near Sobibor, there was maybe 500 of them.

L.- Chased, how did you chase them?

P.B.- In rows.

L.- In rows, with guards

B.- Yes.

P.B.- So it was a column walking by foot, escorted by guards, who at the beginning numbered about five hundred and after, as told by the people who lived close to the path of these Jews, about half of them were killed en-route, because justifiably they were trying to escape.

## BOBINE no. 62

SOB 22

L.- Because they were trying to escape.

B.- Yes.

P.B.- So, justifiably, the Poles were very surprised at the total passivity of the Jews. Even if there was a group of five or six hundred Jews, they were escorted by twenty or thirty guards; so they could have tried to kill them; of course they didn't have weapons, but still they outnumbered them.

L. - That's a hell of a difference...

P.B.- Of course, that is what Mr. Piwonski said, given that they found themselves in the forests and marshes, they could have escaped from here much easier.

L.- But they said that they tried to escape, and that half of them were killed precisely because they had tried to escape.

P.B.- So, maybe I misunderstood, because he thinks that the half of the group that was killed, were elderly or too exhausted to continue the walk.

L.- So they didn't try to escape?

P.B.- He doesn't think so.

It is for this reason that for us, spectators, this extreme passivity is incomprehensible.

L.- But wait... I'd like to ask you a question... What according to Mr. Piwonski would five hundred non-Jewish Poles, escorted by thirty armed guards - that is a lot thirty armed guards - have done in the same case.

P.B.- I think that a group of Poles that had walked through these forests and marshes, whose numbers were similar to

## **Page S22**

the group of Jews, five hundred people would have naturally taken advantage of the situation and tried to escape, especially because death awaited them.

L.- Yes... did ...

P.B.- They know that Sobibor was really the final step...

L.- Good... but don't we also... we have to... does Mr. Piwonski not consider... after all these Jews were exhausted after two years of... persecution, of terror... starving etc... Doesn't that count for anything.

P.B.- So... it is true that the abusive exploitation by the Germans certainly subdued them, weakened them, but having worked here all summer, they knew the area, and they knew equally what was going on at Sobibor, because here everyone knew, and he is almost sure that they knew people that lived in the area and who were maybe prepared to help them.

L.- So then, in a general way, Mr. Piwonski was stricken by the general passivity of the Jews.

P.B.- *reel finished at the end of Piwonski's intervention*

## BOBINE no. 71

SOB 23

L.- But, if I understand correctly, Mr. Piwonski was stricken by the general passivity of the Jews.

P.B.- Not only me, but also the Poles that saw this, were stricken by the extreme and incomprehensible passivity of those deported here for certain extermination.

L.- And how, how does he explain this.

P.B.- So, up to this point I do not have a precise opinion on the passivity of the Jews, and I think that few people could explain the cause of this Jewish passivity.

L.- But does he think, I don't know, that there was a whole tradition, a whole history of non-violence amongst the Jews, a tradition of non-violence, for example among the Jews in Poland?

P.B.- Yes... maybe it is true the history of this tradition, but either way, in the extreme situation, me and the others, we all thought that there was no reason that could have bound our hands at the question of "live or don't live."

L.- Yes, but is this true, I am not sure that this was real because, after all, this happened in Western

## BOBINE no. 63

SOB 23



Europe, it happened here as well, there were non-Jewish Poles that were executed as well, that were hanged.. entire villages that were burned, and the people did not resist.

### Page S23

P.B.- So, of course we burnt the villages; but for example the Germans that wanted to do it, knew the Poles, wanted to act quickly; that is to say that when the Poles were not waiting they were attacking, and in general they used a lot more force, they committed a lot more men, in a word.. soldiers.

L.- Okay; but there is something else anyhow... they, my question is not controversial, they themselves say that there was nothing that they could have done, that they could not have helped the Jews, they stayed passive in a way in the face of this extermination... they saw what was happening, they knew it all, they saw it all, they heard it all, they all even smelt it...that odor that everyone talks about. My question is this: did they consider that the extermination of the Jews that was unfolding in front of their eyes, wasn't it equally their concern? Did it concern them or did it not concern them? Did they consider the Jews as the absolute Other... was it not... How did they see the Jews?

P.B.- Well here, in this region, at this time the Polish community was made up of several Ukrainians who, for example.. there were cases where these families had sons in the SS; but the majority of this community's solidarity lay with the victims.

L.- I want to say... what were the solidarities?

P.B.- Well, we had a lot of compassion for those people, so much as the scenes of terror here were very frequent, and those that concerned the inhabitants of this region and we could have easily waited until this population was equal and had their turn, in general everyone thought that we could not believe the Germans, that we could not have confidence in them.

L.- Go on translate.

P.B.- So this solidarity was not unique.. it did not express itself in words, but through acts, for example the inhabitants of this region would hide Jews in their homes, especially the Jews that lived here before the war, the Polish Jews, who thanks to this help were able to survive.

L.- But no...this I understand very well, I know that it helped a lot... this individual aide to the Jews... but what I want to say is... if the same thing happened under their eyes, for the Poles for example, if they saw these convoys going to the gas chambers for extermination, would they not have reacted in another way, I want to say, the bigger question is "how did the Poles see the Jews and... how

### Page S24

did they see them before the war?

P.B.- *end of the reel during Mr. Piwonski's response*

BOBINE no. 72

SOB 24

P.B.- So from what I remember before the war, there were quite a few Jews living in the area, it was predominantly craftsman, cobblers and in general the people were not antisemitic. The Polish community treated the Jews like an integral link of the organization that they belonged to.

L.- Yes, but I was not talking about antisemitism, I asked how...how they saw, okay; how old was Mr. Piwonski at the time.

B.- At the time, that is to say when?

L.- 42

B.- He was born in 1924. So 16, yes that's it?

L.- 42 uh...

B.- No, 18 years old.

L.- 18 years old.

B.- 18 years old.

BOBINE no. 64

SOB 24

P.B.- Okay.. so in any case he kept a fairly concise recollection, of the period preceding the war, for example he remembered a Jew that lived here, he was a cobbler named Yankelasawa that always made shoes for his father, and his father was always very happy with the shoes.

L.- Yes, he was a good cobbler?

P.B.- He was a very good cobbler and his father was always very, very happy with the shoes that were made by him.

L.- And what happened to this Yanke?

P.B.- He was killed here in Sobibor at the camp.

L.- By gas?

P.B.- Yes.

So in general when a society is not antisemitic, that does not mean that sometimes the Poles that were discontent with their relations with the Jews did not say “you are a Jew” something like that but it was more like a misunderstanding between neighbors.

L.- But, did they consider the Jews like a... they didn't consider the Jews the same as Poles?

P.B.- So they differentiated them by religion, by what they believed, so it was different, but in general they were considered an integral part of the Polish collective, a part of the community, like what Mr. Piwonski told us.

## Page S25

L.- Did the placement of the Jews in the ghettos, the creation of the ghettos by the Germans, I mean the isolation of the Jews, the segregation of the Jews, was it something that really surprised them, that outraged them, or did they consider that after all it was a bit natural, given the different character of the Jews?

P.B.- So he is sure, absolutely certain that the Polish community did not accept the forced isolation of the Jews in the confines of the ghettos; and even this organized help, we could say had to do with trade with the ghetto... is that a possible thought.

L.- No, but tell him that... I am sorry for all these questions, but it's because... it's so hard to ... to understand... because after all it was their neighbors that they saw being murdered, after all it was people that they knew, like the cobbler who lived in the village, and this happened twenty meters from them in the end...

B.- Yes.

L.- the unloading ramp was twenty meters away from the station... it's that that is so hard to... I'm not talking about the foreign Jews, I am talking about the Polish Jews.

P.B.- There were not very many Jews here, because Jews rarely settle down in villages; compared to Wlodawa; it's a little city, there were a lot more; but they were a part of the collective population, so...

L.- Wlodawa is ten kilometers from here.

B.- Yes but it's a little city, it's not a village.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- The Poles and the Ukrainians that came here were shocked by what the Germans were doing; they tried to help the Jews, or did illegal business transactions with the Jews, because it was forbidden, with the Jews that were confined to the ghetto.

L.- Was there a ghetto in Wlodawa?

P.B.- Yes.. or better people lost interest in the help, because this was happening as well.

L.- Okay, going back to the passivity of the Jews, did Mr. Piwonski not... was he surprised by the revolt at Sobibor, by the revolt at the concentration camp..., by the Jews at the concentration camp?

P.B.- Yes, because during the construction of the camp or during the running of the camp, we were assisting in a general passivity, *sauf des cas de fuite*(cannot read), but not of the camp, the convoys, and in general this passivity astonished the rest of the Polish community.

## Page S26

L.- It astonished them, but it was done; they became used to it, they saw it as part of the everyday.

P.B.- *End of reel during Piwonski interview.*

### BOBINE no. 73

SOB 25

L.- But they resigned to the passivity, they were used to it, they saw it as an everyday occurrence?

P.B.- So... this passivity of the Jews that were brought here to be exterminated was very surprising and strange at the time for the Polish community, and, after with conversations that I had with other Poles, I know that we all thought that the Jews could do better than that.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- We believed that this passivity was what allowed the Germans plan of genocide to be realized.

L.- He thinks that without the passivity six million Jews would not have been exterminated?

P.B.- I am absolutely convinced that, without that passivity, the waste of human life that the Jewish population underwent would not have been so bad.

L.- Does he believe that this passivity is part of Jewish nature?

P.B.- I never studied that problem, but it would seem that there is something real in it.

L.- Yes? And what for example does he think about Israel?

P.B.- It is a new *nation (cannot read)*.

L.- They are all Jews *de même (cannot read)* and many of them are Polish Jews.

P.B.- But the most active individuals that took power in Israel were successful in giving the society a renewed spirit.

L.- And the revolt at Sobibor, that was not something passive.. what I mean to say is that it doesn't fit into the notion of general passivity of all Jews.

P.B.- I can say what I felt, what kept in my memory until now.

L.- Yes...

P.B.- ...for me, and for many other Poles who worked on the railway at Sobibor, this revolt was a huge surprise.

L.- Okay... can he elaborate on that? The surprise, it was what?

## Page S27

P.B.- So, the Jews did that, did something, that is to say, they were not only trying to escape, but in escaping they equally killed the Germans.

L.- And that, that made them seem like something absolutely incredible?

P.B.- Yes, it was maybe not incredible, simply the Jews proved that in that situation, they could fight and even provoke loss to the Germans; there.. there was something very, very reassuring.

L.- Did that change the idea of what the Jews were doing?

P.B.- Yes, yes.

L.- How so?

P.B.- They saw, that in situations.. in favorable conditions, there was the possibility not only to defend their human dignity, but also to fight the Germans.

L.- And did they think that... that the Jews had no dignity?

P.B.- It is hard to believe the particular national sentiment of dignity, if before, they let millions be exterminated.

L.- Wait... a moment ago Mr. Piwonski was talking about the foreign Jewish girls who upon arriving would put on makeup; this proves that they were ignorant of everything; the Germans were masters of deception, they did everything to deceive them, even to the very last instant, they were at least ignorant of what their destiny was going to be, and in addition, there were elderly, there were children that they told they were going to break their heads against the trunks of trees. So what else were they supposed

to do because they were really absolutely innocent.

P.B.- Yes, as far as the foreign Jews who were arriving here were concerned, they were all oblivious to the destiny that was awaiting them here, that we can understand.

L.- And the youngsters?

P.B.- It was hard for us to understand **[that concerned the Polish Jews that much more well informed about what awaited them at Sobibor]** *Il nous était difficile de le comprendre en ce qui concerne les Juifs polonaise qui étaient bien renseignés sur ce qui les attendait à Sobibor.*

L.- Yes.. cut

BOBINE no. 74

SOB 26

L.- Did Mr. Piwonski know that they were tricking the Jews up to the time that they went in to the gas chambers.

P.B.- Yes I believe that that is true notably at the end of June and the beginning of July 1942 where the convoys from western

BOBINE no. 66

SOB 26

### **Page S28**

Europe became even more numerous, my comrades and I were witnesses, furthermore we observed them more than once, the events follow: so...when we worked in the northern part of the station, we heard something that sounded like an organized demonstration coming from inside the camp; in the northern part of the camp that was surrounded by dense fences braided with branches and trees, we heard something that sounded like a speech in German. In the group that I worked with one of my comrades named Tadaoutsetouk, certainly he is still living, knew German, and so, he tried to translate the speech. So... if I remember correctly the meaning of the speech was as follows, it was a person that was speaking in German, but I didn't know if it was a German or a Jew...

L.- He was talking with what, a mega-phone?

P.B.- No, I don't think he was. So this person was saying..., addressing the Jews, now you have arrived at Sobibor, this is a transit station; so now, you are going to pass through a series of high pressure sanitary systems, you will then be directed to areas where you will set yourselves up permanently and work.

L.- Yes it was the disinfection, the showers.

P.B.- As a general rule, after the speech, we heard cheering and, I don't know who was cheering because... we couldn't see the groups of people on the other side of the enclosure.

L.- It was the Jews that were cheering.

P.B.- We have to believe that, yes it was, because in that camp there was nothing but Jews, SS officers or guards of different nationalities; so it was either the Jews that were cheering or the camp personnel.

L.- We know, we know very well that it was the Jews...

For them it would have meant, that finally it was...

B.- good news.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- So after a speech of that nature, usually after about a half an hour or so, I couldn't say exactly, we heard screams, yelping, gun fire and we had the impression that the screams we being moved in another direction.

So the screams were being moved to the gas chambers, that is to say that they were following the hallway that existed in the interior of the camp, that could be seen from the northern part of the station. Then the screams stopped, and it became quiet again, and we could hear the diesel motor.

### **Page S29**

L.- Yes. Tell me... what did Mr. Piwonski think of the Germans? He considered them as what, like

ordinary men, like normal people, like... mad people?

P.B.- I believed and still believe that the Germans that worked here at this camp were abnormal.

L.- Abnormal... that was not the national expression of the Germans?

P.B.- It is hard to see the German nation as a nation of criminals.

It is impossible to believe that a nation full of so many poets could be criminal.

L.-Yes.

P.B.- I believe that they were more the rejects of the nation.

L.- Yes; that is a hard question. Isn't it?

P.B.- Because we Poles, those of us who lived near Sobibor, only had contact with those Germans..

those were men who could have given the impression that all Germans were like them, but personally I don't believe that to be true.

L.- Is that another point, did the Poles here have relationships with... once more very quickly and we're done, half a store.

### BOBINE no. 75

SOB 27

P.B.- Of this normal situation...

L.- Abnormal

P.B.- abnormal, the behavior of the guards that carried out the German orders ... the behavior of the Ukrainian guards who did the dirtiest work, who were real executioners, believe this too... I remember the following event , furthermore it was not the only one as my colleagues talked about it as well... it was this that happened in the second half of the summer of 1942, I had a permanent post at this building, that is to say...

L.- at the station?

B.- at the station, yes.

L.- In the building at the station.

B.- Yes.

B.P.- ...It was the afternoon, maybe a little bit later, I was alone, the head of the station was absent, there was someone who began knocking on the door, so I opened the door...

so I asked who what it was, nobody answered, I... I.., that.. that it was a guard from here... I asked him what he...

### BOBINE no. 67

SOB 27

### **Page S30**

L.- All that, in Polish?

P.B.- No, no in Russian.

L.- Because Mr. Piwonski speaks Russian.

P.B.- Yes; yes, he was speaking it, he spoke it... so the other responded to him: "I would like to buy some vodka."

Since I knew him by face and name, I was sure that he would not... -how Mr. Piwonski put it- would not beat me up or inform the Germans... so I responded: "Yes, I do have vodka, wait a minute, and I will give it to you."

So I took the key for railway stockroom, that was there and where I hid the vodka, I took a half liter and gave it to him.

L.- He went in, he let himself in?

P.B.- There was a little entrance in front of the desk, so he stood there. When I gave him the vodka, he said: "Yes but you know I don't have any money..."

So, instead of money I am going to give you something else...

I asked him: what?

He answered: "You know, it's probably better not to look."

He gave me a little package wrapped up in newspaper, it was... it was about the size of a hand... Of course I was curious and still being in his presence, I began to unwrap the package and I saw that they were human teeth...

They were bridges and crowns in gold they had certainly been taken from the dead victims who were in a state of decomposition... they were soaked in blood and they stank.

I was overcome with repulsion, I threw the package on the ground and I yelled, listen take that and go. Of course he picked it all up, he wrapped it up in the same package, and said to me: "idiot" and left. That was the only time that I had an offer like that from that guard, but I heard my older comrades saying that the same guard had made the same offer to them, that is to say that he wanted to buy vodka for jewels or gold teeth.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- Those are the scenes that in addition to the murders committed here, that we cannot forget, that are very hard to forget. Let's say that this proves that the people who committed these crimes were inhuman, who were not only capable of killing, but also of doing these acts, that even today provoke feelings of repulsion when we think about them.

L.- *You cut, Jimmy*

### **Page S31**

#### BOBINE no. 80

*Continuation of Mr. Piwonski's interview, in front of the station.*

SOB 31

SOB 31

L.- Barbara asks Mr. Piwonski; the building at the station, the tracks, the platforms, they are exactly the same as in 1942, nothing has changed since 1942?

P.B.- Nothing.

L.- But what is amazing is the proximity of the camp in comparison to the station... in short we see a mass killing establishment that is extremely efficient.

P.B.- Yes the Germans tried to organize it in a rational manner to...

L.- To go quickly.

P.B.- to profit from the land, of the establishments that were already in existence; yes, to go quickly.

L.- To go very fast. Fine then, but where does the camp start exactly? Here, here where we are, there?

P.B.- To the north.

L.- So that... that is.. no; to the south I don't know, I don't understand anything. That is the fence of the camp. Okay, this is the fence and that is the angle (*inaudible*) ...Okay wait, wait, Mr. Piwonski's post was over there in the station's building; at Sobibor, right...

That means that he was exactly fifteen meters from the boundary of the camp.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- Okay, so wait.. I want to understand this thing; it is rather incredible. Here, the trains with the Jews on them arrived on this track; right?

P.B.- Yes.

L.- So they arrived from Chelmno as well... here, from Wlodava? They stopped here?

P.B.- Yes.

L.- So the convoys that had forty or sixty cars, we split them into groups of twenty cars, is that right?

P.B.- Yes. On these tracks.

So the trains to twenty cars, and then went towards Chelm by way of a switch.

L.- By way of the switch, and then to Bifurque, finally...

P.B.- Yes, yes.

L.- They took the two switches and... returned..

P.B.- ..yes.. and then started here.. on the tracks there.

L.- And then came back here, to the front... inside the camp.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- So, here, we are already inside the camp?

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P.B.- We are in the camp, now.

L.- So, this is exactly the same guardrail... this is the guardrail to the ramp, it hasn't changed?

P.B.- Yes, the guardrails, are identical to how they were when the camp existed.

L.- So there, the spot where we find ourselves right now... that is the ramp, that we are walking on... the spot where two hundred and fifty thousand Jews disembarked to... to be gassed one hour later?

P.B.- Yes, in the gas chamber.

L.- So there.. there.. there the ramp goes right to over there, right to the bumper guard.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- Good. And the barracks of the camp were three hundred and fifty or four hundred meters away from here?

P.B.- Yes; yes.

L.- Okay then, it took how much time... it took how much time... I mean to say: the cars that were not brought to the ramp immediately, waiting over there on what?

P.B.- Yes, yes, at the principal station.

L.- Absolutely, under their eyes. It was there that they saw the Jewish women putting makeup on?

P.B.- Yes. They didn't know...they didn't know what awaited them in a few minutes..

L.- Yes.

P.B.- Yes, we ... we could not inform them because the guards didn't let them come in to contact with the bureau of... (*inaudible*).

L.- No but if we compare Sobibor to Treblinka, it is much closer than Treblinka, finally the station was practically a part of the camp.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- But tell me, Sobibor, Sobibor...

P.B.- There, there was only the fence.

L.- Yes... but tell me, Sobibor, was very small, it was a very small camp.

P.B.- *Oui, la superficie était très petite, de ce camp.*

L.- Good, good I understood.

P.B.- Yes, it was terrible.

Yes, the people who saw those things, will never forget them until the end of their lives, they can't forget it.

L.- Okay, go, he's getting cold, he needs...

B.- Yes; we'll stop there.

L.- He is cold; he needs to get bundled up, he's cold.

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BOBINE no. 81

SOB 32

BOBINE no. 69

SOB 32

L.- Okay; I would like you to ask Mr. Piwonski this... the train station, the tracks, the platforms, these things are all exactly the same as they were in 1942?

P.B.- Yes it is exactly the same as it was when the camp was here in 1942.

L.- Nothing has changed?

P.B.- No, nothing.

L.- But what seems incredible is the proximity of the camp to the station.

P.B.- Yes, it was for efficiency, the Germans realized that first and foremost when they created

Sobibor.

L.- So what he is saying is that it was completely functional, that's it?

P.B.- Yes; it was certainly for functional reasons.

L.- So the camp started where exactly? The boundary of the camp?

P.B.- Well.. I will show you exactly. Here there was a fence that went all the way back to where those trees are over there...

L.- Yes.

P.B.- ..And then, there was another fence that goes back towards those trees that you can see back there....

So there.. there were two gates; there where we see that route was the principal door, and still there was another door, also always closed, that closed those rails when the train arrived.

L.- No, just wait.. I want to see.. here, there, I am in the belly of the camp? That's good? Inside the camp?

P.B.- Exactly.

L.- Good; and now here... there I am fifteen meters from the station, already, I am outside of the camp.

P.B.- Yes; the Poles...(inaudible).. for security.

L.- This is the Polish part and this is death.

P.B.- Yes.

L.- Okay then, where..., what platform, which track did the convoys that were arriving from either Chelm, or Wlodava arrive on?

P.B.- These trains always stopped on the main track; the one that we can see now.

L.- Here?

P.B.- Yes.

L.- It was here?

P.B.- Here exactly.

L.- So... this was the platform?

P.B.- Yes; it seemed a little bit lower than it is now, but

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it was exactly like this.

L.- So then, what would happen when a convoy of sixty cars for example, arrived here; what would happen?

P.B.- Well.. in following the orders of the Germans, the Polish rail workers would break the cars up, so that the train would take twenty cars at a time.

L.- Twenty wagons.

P.B.- ...twenty wagons, went towards Chelmno, there was a switch there.

L.- Over there, the switch is over there.

P.B.- We pushed the cars a little bit further, already in the interior of the camp, on the other platform that you can see over there, so it was there that the ramp started.

L.- Okay, okay, so if I understand correctly, right now we are in the exterior of the camp, if we come back here, we will penetrate the inside... and then here too...

P.B.- So, that line there, is inside of the camp.

L.- And it's exactly... it's exactly the same?

P.B.- Yes, it's there...it has not changed since then.

L.- So here, where we are crossing is what was called the ramp, is that right?

P.B.- Yes, it's the ramp where we discharged the victims that were going to be exterminated.

L.- So the spot where we are right now, is where 250,000 Jews got off before being gassed.

P.B.- So ...next the victims would undress in huts set up specially for those who were being gassed, and...



L.- Yes, yes I know.

P.B.- ...and they would start down the hallway of death, towards the gas chambers.

L.- Yes... and here we are about... the ramp that we are on now, we are about 350 meters away from the gas chambers?

P.B.- Yes, about 300-350 meters away.

L.- And Sobibor strictly speaking, was a fairly small camp?

P.B.- Yes, the actual size of the camp was relatively small, but the Germans got what they needed to get done with rational use of the space.

L.- Ah yes... rational. (*les mots s'éloignent*)

And so... the cars that were not taken immediately to the ramp... waited here, on the main track?

There's a train! Watch out!

P.B.- Yes, under guarded surveillance, the victims waited here, in their cars, to be directed to the camp.

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L.- So it was here, where we are now that the guards saw the girls putting on makeup?

P.B.- So.. yes, especially the Jewish convoys from western Europe, while waiting their turn. The Polish rail workers saw women putting on makeup and doing their hair... they were totally unaware of the end that was awaiting them in a few minutes.

L.- Yes.

P.B.- They were making themselves look pretty.

L.- They were making themselves look pretty.

P.B.- And the Polish rail workers couldn't say anything to them because the guards were watching the trains... banned... anyone from coming into contact with the future victims.

L.- Of course! And there were nice days, like today?

P.B.- Alas! yes, there were even nicer days than the one we are having today.

L.- Yes, yes...

*Okay, you cut.*

*End of interview*