

From the Testimony of Shmuel Beller on the Death March to Buchenwald

...Auschwitz they wouldn't bomb because Roosevelt, Roosevelt, he gave orders not to bomb Auschwitz. After the war I found it out. I didn't know then. This is something that the historian will tell. But in 1945, the Russians came from Warsaw, from the east, the British and the Americans were coming from the other side and we were like in the middle, so they started to evacuate from there. We went out about three thousand people from there. So they opened up all the "magazines" - they had cloth, they had food. Whatever they had there, they opened them up, and we went in there, whoever was able to grab was able to grab. Now, before, going out there, I had shoes which were wood shoes. On the bottom was wood and this was like a piece of rag or something. And we tried to go with this on the snow. We can't go, just a few steps, and it becomes full like you have to stop, you know, you take them off, otherwise you cannot walk. Luckily, by a miracle, I went into the magazine and I found a pair of leather shoes. I found three pairs of socks. So what I did, I threw away the old wood shoes and I put on these shoes. Now what I did is this, because when you walked at night, everything got wet, you know, the snow, January, bitter cold and snow. So what I did, I put on two pairs of socks and one pair of socks I kept...Next morning, I put the socks that I had with me, I put them on the top and the other pair of socks I put on the bottom - they were a little wet - and the other socks which were more wet, I took on my body and dried it out. So this way I had every day a pair of socks close to my feet, I should be able not to have wet socks. So when we started walking, we walked through fields of ice, snow and blizzards and unbelievable. In Europe, winter, January is very bad. We came every night, they put us....

Q: But this was not the "Death March"?

A: This was the "Death March". I'll explain you why it was the "Death March". As we started walking, at night they always looked for a barn, you know, where they keep straw in there, and they put there overnight so they should be able to rest, never mind us. And they gave us a little soup. What happened

is, there were some of our people, they wanted to escape, so they were hiding under the straw. You know, when they dig in on the bottom and they were hiding there. But the Germans, what they took, they took the bayonets and they went with the bayonets, digging with the bayonets through the straw to make sure that nobody is there in the bottom. But still a few escaped. This went on for about two weeks it went on like this. And whoever wasn't able to walk, he fell down, they shot him on the spot, on the street. You know, they were walking, they shot them right away. You know, everybody did the best he could to start moving as much as possible. Still there were people, they didn't have any more strength, finished, so they were shot on the spot. Now we went sometimes through villages, and I'll tell you what happened to me once. I went through a village, but we walked like a couple of thousand people and there were not too many of the Germans watching us, so they were spread out, the Germans, like, I would say, maybe sometime a hundred feet you didn't see nobody. And as we went by, I went around like a curve, we went around on a curve, you know, and we passed by and on the left side there was a bakery there. I ran into the bakery and I went behind the counter and I grabbed a few breads. The German women there, standing there, nobody said a word. And I ran out right away and this saved me a little time, you know, these few breads. And this went on for about two weeks, the same thing, in the barns. Each time was less because people couldn't make it, they couldn't walk, there was no food, no drinking, with the cold, no shoes. We had one shirt, one little jacket, a thin jacket, and one little coat, you know, with the stripes. To here, we had a scarf, so I put it over my ears. This went on for like two weeks. After this, they stopped us and they had wagons for us. You know, cattle wagons.

Q: Geographically it was where?

A: Geographically it was, I'll tell you exactly. It was between Breslau, Blechamer. It was someplace near Gross-Rosen. I would say about maybe fifty kilometers from Gross-Rosen where we were at this time. The reason why we had to walk because they didn't have any more of the wagons to move us, so we had to walk. Otherwise, they put us in wagons to move us. So somehow they got the wagons, cattle wagons. You see, like you have here,

the same cattle wagon, and that's how they moved us. We were there about eighty to a hundred people, this one wagon. So they moved us to Gross-Rosen. Now Gross-Rosen, if you heard of it, it was a death camp. It was unbelievable. As we arrived there, there was bitter cold, there was mud, there was snow high up and we had to stay in "appell"[roll call], we had to stay from four o'clock in the morning to maybe ten o'clock at night. If somebody moved, they shot him or they beat him. No food, no sleeping, no nothing. At night, they told us to go into like a big, open place that was there and then they started giving soup, but it was not enough, the soup, so whoever was lucky was able to get to the kettle of soup, to get a little soup was lucky. But a lot of them were not able to get, so how long can they survive? They were not able to survive. Next morning we had to get up again and the Germans were hitting and beating us. If anybody couldn't stay straight, there was murder. They shot us. Anything and everything they were able they did to us. This lasted for about two and a half weeks there. Then they took again on cattle trains and they transported us to Buchenwald and they gave us a "pine" of bread before leaving and that was it. To tell you, by the time we got to Buchenwald...before Buchenwald there was a place, a railway station, and we were bombed there, the British bombed us. The Germans, the Wehrmacht, whoever watched us, because we were watched by the Wehrmacht, not by the Gestapo. Under the bombing they escaped. As they escaped we ran out of the wagons and we ran out to the houses because all the houses were near there, the German houses. And I also went into one of the houses and I come already to...the house was all empty. Everybody was ahead of me. So I finally saw in a corner there a jar with sugar, with hard sugar and I grabbed this sugar and as I grabbed it, somebody else comes and wants to grab it out of me, but I was strong at that time, and this survived me for awhile because sugar gives strength...this I survived until I got to Buchenwald. They took us to Buchenwald. In Buchenwald we were also a couple of weeks.

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