

Victor Sullaper

Wartime Experience: Participated in the Resistance

I was born in Poland on January 19, 1921. The family of which I was a part, chose to leave the pogroms and humiliations of the Russian empire and of Poland. My father, Simon Szulklaper, was born in 1882 in the Janov shtetel. My mother Ryfka Léa Butnick was born in 1886 at Pilica. My mother spoke to me often of Pilica. Her parents were bakers in the village near the edge of a river. A primitive tannery was nearby, and filled the air with a disagreeable odor, which has never left my memory. I also remember my grandparents farm where I played in the summer between the barrels full of cornichons floating in brine.

After their marriage my parents lived in Sonovice, in Polish Silesia. At that time, Poland was undergoing some industrial development and had many factories. To get and capture the maximum of light, when the usage of electricity wasn't yet widespread, the roofs of the factories were tilted and arranged by a large glassmaker. My father worked as a glassmaker, installing, and repairing windows and was able to support the needs of a family of six children. Rachel, Rachmil, who was six years older than me, Jeanette, myself and my younger sisters Hélène and Fanny.

At school, there were groups of young Polish hooligans who daily made the lives of the Jewish students miserable. Their hatred was reinforced in the churches where they were taught that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. In 1930, my parents decided to leave Poland because of the violent anti-Semitism. Twenty years before, my father's brother, Maurice and his family of six children had emigrated to Paris where he worked as a tailor. His sister Hélène, her husband and their son, cousin Rachmil, had also joined Uncle Maurice in Paris.

The family of my parents and that of Rachel, my older sister, her husband and their two boys remained in Poland during the Second World War. My older brother, Rachmil, remained in Poland to fulfill his military obligations, and so was able to provide the tourist visa which enabled us to go to France. Our stay was provisional as this visa had to be renewed frequently and did not permit us to work.

At that time life in Paris was very difficult. There was no help from anyone or any agency. My mother started to organize the household and was able to work at home, sewing glove linings for a factory. Unfortunately, she was denounced and we were ordered to leave. But thanks to some money my parents borrowed, the expulsion was halted and then annulled. It was in this climate of insecurity that we lived during that time.

I went to school and learned to speak French quickly. I was able to help my parents in their dealings with the Prefecture of Police. Life in France was better than in Poland, but we still experienced a lot of anti-Semitism. At school I resented being called a dirty Pole because I never considered myself as Polish. My first contacts with Jewish friends were within the youth

movements. We were already dreaming of the Jewish country in Palestine where we would be free.

Excited by that idea in 1935 I joined a group ready to leave for Palestine with the aid of the group Young Aliyah, composed mainly of Jews from Germany. We had to work for a month on a French farm to prepare us for agricultural work that we would be doing. We felt an immense joy when we arrived at the port in Haifa. We went to a settlement composed of families who were mostly from Russia and whose spirit was that of true pioneers. Each family cultivated their own land, but business and sales were done collectively. Our time was divided into the study of Jewish culture and farm work transporting milk from the farm to the collective dairy. But there was a sense of insecurity created by bands of armies which attacked people especially Jews. Fields of wheat were frequently burned, cattle stolen, and transports shot at. A friend was badly hurt and hospitalized in Haifa.

News from France was not good. My parents were often hungry. My mother was hit by a car while crossing the street and needed an eye operation. She bought me a ticket so I could come home to help and talk to the surgeons. I couldn't refuse her and left Palestine fully intending to return. The sight of my brother, Rachmil, who had come to Paris, added to the joy of seeing my family. I was finally able to get to know him after a long separation. The two of us were now in charge of improving the lives of our parents.

When hostilities began in 1939, like most of the young Jews, we decided to volunteer for the army. My knowledge of French was valuable to the Military Police. Along with my friend Norbet, I was captured and became a prisoner of war in Switzerland. We escaped but were arrested at the Swiss border and taken to prison. We were released with assistance from the French delegation in Switzerland and were taken back to France. I had to join a guard of soldiers supporting the government of Petain. It wasn't long before I decided to get out of that.

My friend Norbert, whose parents were in Portugal, went to Sologne where they had a farm. But because of the anti-Jewish laws passed by the Commissariat for Jewish Questions, strangers had taken over the farm. Norbert was denounced and deported. At Lyon, I was able to save my family and many others, thanks to my clandestine actions and my ability to make false identity cards. I found my family in Paris. Only Rachmil was missing. After the demobilization he was found in Pau at the Basse-Pyrenees.

In every country, the anti-Jewish laws were rigorously applied. A census of Jews was done. I thought that because of my military service I would be exempt, but that was not true. Along with thousands of Jews, I was sent to a camp at Pithiviers, antechamber to deportation. Interned on May 14, 1941, I waited until September 2 to escape, volunteering to work on a farm. Because of my escape from Pithiviers, my parents and I were not able to remain in Paris.

My friend Henry Bulawko gave me a false identity card and I was able to eat some of the time and I was able to get around. Braving the German sentinels posted along the line of demarcation, I reentered the free zone. I had the luck to find work on a bicycle-taxi in which the

client sat in a seat pulled by a bicycle. It was necessary to pedal very hard, especially to get to the station in the center of town.

One day I decided to normalize my situation by renewing my false identity card. When the Commissaire of Police examined it with a loupe I thought I was done for. But he said, I recognize you, you drive a velo-taxi. He asked why I hadn't registered with the police. Finally he gave me a real identity card instead of the false one. That was my first victory. The second, and not the least, was to succeed in buying an official municipal stamp in bronze that had been ordered by a functionary but who had not claimed it. With that real stamp, I began to fabricate false identity papers.

In the interval, my parents had succeeded in paying for passage to Lyon where along with Rachmil we were all reunited. At the same period, the president of the Union of Jewish Students in France, Toto Giniewski, was gathering most of our friends in order to reunite the various Zionist movements under the single banner of the Movement of Young Zionists. Thanks to these people, we were able to save from deportation and death dozens of Jewish children who had already been given to the Nazis in the occupied zone.

After the invasion of the free zone, the Gestapo appeared in Lyon. Told without doubt about our activities of saving the Jews, they invaded on February 9, 1943. A lucky chance, and my false papers, allowed me to leave that place from which few escaped. Rachmil, who feared the effects of his accent was arrested and deported to Auschwitz. The return home was dramatic, and I decided to leave Lyon with my parents to go to Chambéry.

I was responsible for the Movement of Young Zionists, and I pursued my clandestine work. I succeeded in establishing contacts with many parts of the Resistance and found many hiding places for families and again was able to send Jewish children to Switzerland. Some that I worked with were arrested and never returned

I always insisted that the people for whom I made the false papers keep their own initials. As for me, I never abandoned my first name or Victor. Some friends of the Prefecture de Savoie warned me of the arrest of several Victors. They advised me to leave Chambéry to avoid the worst. Another time, thanks to some friends in the Resistance, I received a map and uniform of an officer of Chatiers de Jeunesse, created by the Vichy government. Thus, dressed and hidden, I was able to help several young comrades who were able to escape. My different contacts at the heart of the French Resistance permitted us to retire the false identity cards. Most of the people that we dispersed among the different villages were saved.

The situation in Savoy, which had been under the authority of the fourth Italian army became worrisome in August 1943 when the Germans systematically occupied the land abandoned by the Italians. The laws promulgated by the Vichy government made Jews foreigners, and not even the false papers could save them.

We were very worried by the numbers of Jews housed in the chalets, Fortunately, we were able to establish a contact with Angelo Donate, who promised to put the foreign Jews under his protection in Nice. We were apprehended after we arrived on September 11, in Nice by the Germans, who carried on continual roundups. At the time I was at Chambéry, we felt that our liberation by the allied troops was coming. The Resistance to which I had offered my services gave me the important post of Prevost Militaire.

My first mission was to stop the arrest of the General Commissariat on Jewish questions and to give up him to the police authorities. I was also in charge of interrogating the captured German soldiers. Knowing that the SS had a tattoo on their arms, I was able to discover which ones were hiding under the uniform of the regular soldier. My chief, who was a Savoyard, wanted me to reveal my Jewish identity, so we would see the spectacle of the SS humiliated.

Little by little the different parts of the Resistance dissolved, and some were incorporated into the French army. Once free, it became possible to inquire about one another, not without certain worries. Wonderful was my joy at seeing that my brother had escaped Auschwitz. Sadness on learning about the last convoy with my uncle Maurice and the eight people of his family rounded up and sent to Auschwitz. The exception was his cousin Victor who was absent at the time of the round up in Lyon. Cousin Bernard also survived Auschwitz.

We were worried about the family that had remained in Poland. My uncle Joseph brother of my mother, escaped from the camps and came to France. From him we learned the terrible truth that even though my grandmother had been able to hide my sister Rachel, her husband and two children with some peasants that they had known since childhood, they were denounced to the Gestapo, and they were executed on the spot in the village. This was despite the money paid to the people for their lodging. At Janov, where the family of my father lived, tragedy was awaited my cousin Bloch. As the head of a company of partisans, he participated in the liberation of the village. The mayor officially recognized him as a hero. The following night he was stabbed to death.

The fact that I survived allowed me to compare the behavior of the Polish and those of the French that I knew during the German occupation. It is to the people of France that I want to pay homage to, who, overall, were not anti-Semitic. (The exceptions were the ones in the Milice and the collaborators) All the contacts that I had in the Resistance were always frank and human. An anecdote from Savoie illustrated my appreciation Two children who were in the house of a brave peasant, hoping for food, were given ham, but they refused to eat it. The peasant cried out in astonishment, "My God, so young and already Jews."

In 1947 I received my French citizenship. To make my name easier to pronounce the Z and the K were eliminated. The meaning of Szulklaper, was "the man who called the Jews to come to synagogue". After liberation, I didn't hope to return to a normal life. Rather the responsibilities of the head of a family, of an adult engaged in fighting to survive. And yet the fight to continue to live and help others against persecution seems to me to be the only life possible and

acceptable. When by chance I meet someone that I had aided, I have profound emotions that are worth more than any medal and are the best reward.

It was at Chambéry that we started commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Forty years later, during a reunion in Jerusalem of the members of the Jewish Resistance, I was stared at, then accosted by a man who had taken part in that ceremony. Hammer Ahron. He gave me a copy of the identity card that I had given him on October 18, 1943.

My brother was decorated with the Légion of Honor for his tireless and courageous efforts during the years. I was very happy that this high honor was given to him. In a certain way, the fact of his recognition, reflected on my life, and gave me honor.

Des dossiers du Mémorial de la Shoah–Paris

Victor SULLAPER

né le 19/01/1921 en POLOGNE de Simon SZULKLAPER et Ryfka Léa BUTNICK

Résistant

En 1930 mes parents quittent la POLOGNE pour s'installer à MONTREUIL puis à PARIS. Climat d'insécurité à cette époque. A l'école j'apprends la langue française. En 1935 je rejoins un groupe prêt à partir pour la PALESTINE pour travailler à NAHALAL, dans un mochav (différent d'un kibboutz). Chaque famille y cultive sons lopin de terre. Moshe DAYAN y était présent. 1937/38 j'aide à la création du kibboutz Hanita composé de baraques et d'un phare pour empêcher toute infiltration de pillards arabes. Peu après je rentre à PARIS à la demande de ma mère. Convoqué pour le recensement, je suis arrêté et interné au camp de PITHIVIERS le 14/05/1941. Le 02/09 je m'évade. Retour à PARIS, je peux circuler librement grâce aux faux papiers délivrés par Henri BULAWKO. Je rejoins la zone libre à LYON sous le nom de François Victor SORBIER. J'ai 20 ans. Le 09/02/1943 je suis arrêté par la GESTAPO dans le local de l'UGIF. Je sors de cette souricière grâce à mes faux-papiers. Avec mes parents, nous quittons LYON pour CHAMBERY. Août 1943, les Allemands occupent le terrain abandonné par les italiens. Je continue mon travail de résistant. En 1947, j'obtiens la nationalité française. Je me nomme maintenant SULLAPER.