

## **Andrzej Szalbot RG-50.028.0092**

### **Summary of Interview**

Andrzej Szalbot was born in Wisła-Malinka, Poland, in 1924. Father: Jan Szalbot. Mother: Eva Szalbot. Siblings: two brothers and two sisters.

Many families in Poland, including Andrzej's, were very poor after World War I. Andrzej's parents, Jan and Eva Szalbot, were Evangelists. His cousins, Andrzej and Jurek Pilch, were Jehovah's Witnesses. They often visited Jan at his home where he was frequently confined because of poor health. Andrzej would eavesdrop on the religious discussions and debates between his father and cousins. In 1941, Andrzej's older brother left home to serve in the army. When he returned home, after having discussions with his cousins, he also became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Andrzej also became interested in what his cousins taught, and he began to read the Bible and Witness publications. His cousin, Andrzej Pilch, was eventually arrested because of his religious beliefs and sent to Auschwitz, where he died in late 1941. Jan never regained his health after returning home from military service during World War I, and he died in 1942 when Andrzej was 18.

In February 1943, when Andrzej was 19, he received a draft notice. Although not yet baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, Andrzej refused to join the military because he had read in the Bible that he should not kill others. Andrzej was arrested and eventually taken to the Gestapo in Cieszyń and put with a group of other draftees awaiting basic training. Despite the threat of being shot, Andrzej refused to board the train with the other draftees. As a result, he was taken to prison and beaten. After two weeks in prison, the Gestapo gave Andrzej an opportunity to change his mind. When he did not, Andrzej was severely beaten almost to the point of losing consciousness and returned to Cieszyń prison.

After a month in prison, Andrzej and 19 political prisoners were taken to Auschwitz concentration camp by truck. Each morning, Andrzej would meet with other Jehovah's Witnesses so that they could exchange news and share the food packages that anyone of them might have received. In June 1944, Andrzej was transported to Ravensbrück concentration camp where there were a few barracks for male prisoners. After a two-week quarantine, he was sent to Świnoujście, a forced labour camp, where he worked unloading barges of concrete and bricks. In April 1945, Andrzej and other prisoners were transported from Świnoujście by barge and rail to Ellrich concentration camp. Andrzej found conditions at Ellrich to be even worse than at the other concentration camps. There was mud everywhere, and, in places, human body parts stuck out of the mud. Just before Ellrich was liberated, Andrzej had been loaded on a transport to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Conditions on the transport were very poor, so many prisoners died during the journey. Surviving prisoners were taken to barracks previously used for prisoners of war. Andrzej was there for four days and met other Jehovah's Witnesses.

As the war was ending, Germans fled east and the Gestapo abandoned the camps. Polish and Russian prisoners attacked and killed several remaining *kapos* and other barrack leaders. The military was ordered to feed the malnourished prisoners. They distributed rations of tinned meat. After eating the food, however, Andrzej and other emaciated prisoners developed severe diarrhea, and a large number of them died. In June, Andrzej was evacuated to Celle where he could recuperate.

Andrzej was overjoyed to finally return home to his family. He credits his faith for helping him to survive the concentration camps and was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses shortly after his

return. In Andrzej's hometown, about 100 Jehovah's Witnesses, including 30 children, had been arrested during the war and more than 30 of them had died.

Andrzej married in 1953 and raised his twins, Andrzej and Wanda, in the faith of Jehovah's Witnesses. Andrzej does not harbor a grudge against the people who operated the concentration camps. Rather, he prayed as Jesus did, asking God to show mercy to them since they did not know what they were doing.

### **Keywords**

Auschwitz (concentration camp) [Oswiecim (Poland)]  
Bergen-Belsen (concentration camp) [Lower Saxony (Germany)]  
Celle (Germany)  
Cieszyn (Poland)  
Diarrhea  
Ellrich concentration camp  
Conscientious objector  
Holocaust survivor  
Jehovah's Witnesses  
Ravensbrück (concentration camp) (Poland)  
Świnoujście labor camp