United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Steven Galezewski
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PREFACE

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STEVEN GALEZEWSKI
July 26, 1996

Q: I'd like you to begin by telling me your name, date of birth and where you were born.

A: And then continue?

Q: If you would.

A: My name is Steve Galezewski. I was born May 11th, 1923 in the Town of Inowroclaw in northwest Poland. The reason why I am talking today is I am a Pole who was born in a generation, the only generation really, in free Poland. Poland became a free country in 1918, and then was, of course, was attacked in 1939 by Nazi Germany. Being brought up in the climate of freedom, I probably am a little bit more patriotic than the Poles who were raised in the periods after the Second World War. In my childhood, I was very involved, as well as my father, in the Boy Scout movement. This is the reason why my father was arrested and eventually killed by gestapo, because he was a leader of the youth in the Town of Inowroclaw where we lived. My childhood was a very happy childhood until the year 1939. At that time, I was 16 years old, and almost, I could say, that at time I had to put the uniform and start my war days. So you can see that I missed all the high school proms and the fun most of the high school kids have in their last days of high school. On September 1 ...

Q: Could I just ask you to talk a little bit more about what life was like in this town and whether or not you had Jewish friends ...

A: Okay. Well, let's erase the last sentence I had. In the Town of Inowroclaw, the Jewish population was not very numerous like in other parts of Poland. However, there was a beautiful synagogue with the roof which we thought was gold, gold-leafed roof. One of the better buildings in town. In my high school, I did have a class of some 25, 30 people. I had two Jewish boys. I remember their names. One was Smalish (ph) and the other one was Zowagazski (ph). Two different people. Smalish was not very athletic. He was more or less a sedentary type. The other one, Zowagazski, was involved with us in all the school activities like soccer, basketball, and he quite often visited my home, so I was fairly close to him. I wish today I knew whether they still alive or what happened to either one of them. When the Germans actually came to Inowroclaw, I don't recall any activity against the Jewish people. I don't remember, because most probably they had moved away from the German Army as the German Army came in. The war started for us, the Second World War started for us September 1, 1939. Two, three days before the -- and I should probably also say that I was brought up in a soldier's family. My father was a professional soldier. And two, three days before his regiment, which was the 59th Infantry Regiment, moved to the defense line on the German border, he called me and gave me a pistol, which was a

Walther 7.65 millimeters and had a talk with me man-to-man. And said, "Look, I am leaving. I don't know when I will be back. You are the oldest boy out of three of you. You will assume the role of the head of the family. I want you to take good care of your mother and two brothers. And then, of course, he went to war. Already after the war ended, I learned a lot of things which happens to him during that war. For instance, he was in the Battle of Kura, which was one of the fiercest battles fought during that campaign. And when the entire army was surrounded by German panzer divisions near that River Kura, they were already after three days of fighting without ammunition, without support of any kind. And casualties were extremely heavy. Commanding officer of the regiment, according to the write-ups in the newspapers, called my father and asked him to preserve the regimental flag. Regimental flag for a Polish soldier is something very sacred. Still today, when I see an American flag, for instance, not necessarily Polish, something grabs my heart, and I am ready to take the hat off my head. That's part of the upbringing I grew in. He, according to the versions in the newspapers and accounts of those who survived the prisoner-of-war camp, he apparently broke through the encirclement of Germans and buried the flag in a forest. Of course, he subsequently in 1940 was arrested by gestapo, that's the last time we saw him, and nobody knew where the flag was. In 1985, someone with a metal detector was going through the woods and detected that there was something buried. They dug it out and it was a backpack and in that backpack was the regimental flag, half destroyed. It was restored and is today flying proudly in the Army Museum in Warsaw. When father -- when the father was arrested -- this is something which really sticks in my mind. Because the gestapo came in early in the morning, he was not home. He was not home, and they said, "You sit down. We wait for him here." And we waited until he got back from work at 5 o'clock in the evening. To me, it was a horrible because I wanted to warn him and yet, here were the gestapo bandits with a woman and three young boys. And I couldn't do anything about it. Father was accused of trying to break away that region of Poland from the Third Reich. Germans already considered Pomerania, that part of Poland, as their territory, and really, that's why the war started. Because they wanted a corridor from Germany to the Gdansk and to east Prussia. Poland, of course, refused to buckle under this trap, and that's how the war started. After arrest of father, we were given 15 minutes to pack belongings and were taken out of our apartment and put in a concentration camp in Inowroclaw, where we were for about two weeks. After that, we were put into the cattle train and shipped out of the Verdun, out of what Germany considered -- what Germans considered German territory and were taken to the Warsaw region and the Minsk-Suwatki (ph), the doors of the cattle wagons were opened and we were let out to start a new life.

Q: ... a few questions. _____ You've mentioned that you had Jewish personal friends. Were you aware of a general climate of anti-Semitism?

A: Well, occasionally in the newspaper, you would read that a Jewish shop was

demolished, and that something was going on. But not in the region of Poland where I come from, that's only from the newspaper I learned.

Q: But was it something that other boys talked about ...

A: No, that was never really discussed, because to us, a human being was a human being. Whether you are Jewish or -- well, frankly, they were Polish citizens anyway, all of them. So to ask, there was no difference.

Q: I'm also curious. Before September '39, what you knew about the activities of the Nazi Party ...

A: Well, that's -- again, we knew that inevitably something is going to happen. That's why in Poland our army was mobilized and we were somewhat prepared. To the extent that, for instance, my high school made donations from all the students, and we purchased a heavy machine gun for the 59th Regiment. It wasn't like you have here in the United States where you have millions of dollars for armament. Out there we had to scratch everything we could to arm ourselves. From my generation, there were some very heroic moves. We didn't have very many submarines, for instance, but we had what we called live torpedoes. And I was so proud of our house help, because she volunteered, 18-year-old girl who was helping my mother in household, she volunteered as a live torpedo. Germany, of course, we knew that was fully armed, was belligerent and that the trouble will come from there. Also, their treatment of Jews was giving us indication what will happen if they ever show up in Poland. As a matter of fact, somewhere from 1936, if I'm not wrong, we opened up pretty much for the Jewish people escaping from Germany or trying to get out of Germany. We opened up the Polish borders and let quite a few of them into Poland. I'm pretty sure that they -- except for the incidents of anti-Semitism here and there, I'm pretty sure that felt at home, because in Poland for 30 million population, we had some 3 million Jews. So this was a very big percentage. I don't know how many millions of Jews are in Israel, but I'm pretty sure not much more than 3 million or maybe even less. We being prepared for a war somewhat, in Boy Scouts on all the camps to which we went in 1939, we were trying to make them on the Polish/German border. And during our campfires, we, of course, sung the Boy Scouts' songs, patriotic songs, always trying to warn Hitler not to try us -- not to try because we would not behave like the other countries behaved when Hitler invaded them. We wanted him to know that we will fight. That fight came in finally on September 1, 1939, when 5 o'clock in the morning 21 Heinkels, 88 Stukas bombed the open town. This is the first time I saw dead bodies, not only of horses and animals, but of human beings. Up to that moment, I didn't ever even go to a funeral, so this was for me a very traumatic day. I also when I think about that day, I almost have to laugh at myself. Because the 7.65 millimeter pistol my father me, I was trying to shoot down the diving bombers, and, of course, it's a laughable thing. It

would be just like a fly going with an elephant. The families of military personnel were being evacuated on the fifth day of war, and I decided, although father designated me as the head of family, I decided to designate my younger brother and join the fight. So I gave the pistol to my brother, who was 13 years old. Gave him the same talk father gave me, and very promptly lied my age. I was 16, I had to say I was 18. And I joined the 59th Regiment, that is the unit which was being organized in the back of the fighting unit. Went through most of the fights on the road from Inowroclaw, Warsaw, Lublin, Kovel'. The humiliation of the villagers and population was unbelievable. They were simply machine-gunning women and children, bombing villages which had nothing to do with the military. In the eastern Poland where we got near Kovel', Ukrainians started their own fight and started burning Polish village, and started burning and killing Jews and Poles. No wonder that later on, Germans were able to organize SS Militia Division out of the Ukrainians and use them as guards in the concentration camps. The war was over basically in October 2nd, 1939, and I returned home in about November. Didn't get into the POW camp. Most of the Polish Army, of course, either crossed through Romania or Hungary, and eventually reorganized in France; or shed their uniforms with civilian clothing and returned home. When I came home, mother and my brothers were already there. Thank God they survived. Father came in later. He also, after saving the flag, returned home in civilian clothing. Of course, he did not talk about the flag at all, so I was unaware what was going on in that particular thing. When I was asked by the historians, I couldn't contribute much on that.

Q: Was he angry that you hadn't followed his directions?

A: No, no. Actually, we were all happy that everything finished and we were still together. Then, of course, after he was arrested and we were transported to the Minsk-Suwatki, we started a new chapter in our lives.

Q: I just wanted to ask you. You mentioned that you and your family was put in this concentration camp for a few months or ...

A: A couple of weeks.

Q: ... a couple of weeks. Who all was in there with your family?

A: All the people like us who did not want to become _____. In that area, Germans considered that territory German, and they gave people an option to sign a German list. Yes, I am a German. And we considered ourselves Poles, and we did not want to become Germans. So all those people were simply taken out of their houses, put in concentration camps, and transported to what they considered Poland.

Q: And the Jews in your city were in this camp, as well?

A: I don't recall that. I don't recall specifically seeing Jews in that camp.

Q: What happened at this camp?

A: This was a camp from which you either landed eventually Mauthausen or some other big camp, or like in our case, being transported to the other part of Poland, move them away from the German part of Poland. We were called displaced persons, DPs as they called them, they called us after the war.

Q: Do you remember exactly what your family thought about what was going on, why you were being moved?

A: Well, father, of course, was gone. With mother, talking about things of that was -- well, it was not normal to talk to mother about things men talked about, let's put it this way. It doesn't mean that women were not treated equally in Poland, by any chance.

Q: Were you frightened?

A: No, at that age and from what I already went through, I wasn't frightened. Frankly, I wanted to fight. I wanted to revenge what they have done up to now from what I have seen. And remember one thing, that I was born in free Poland. I was brought as a free Pole, and I couldn't stand, for instance, things we were required in that town. Like at the entrance to the movie theater or to a restaurant or to a park where children play, a sign, "For Poles, Jews and dogs, entrance forbidden." Or when I see a German walking on the sidewalk, I'm supposed to step into the gutter, take my hat off, bow, and stay in that position until he moves away three paces from me. Those were not things compatible with freedom I enjoyed in Poland. Therefore, I was looking for a source where I could arm myself and fight. I thought about crossing the border and getting to France where Polish troops were being organized. Somehow that didn't happen, because when they let us out of in Minsk-Suwatki, we had absolutely no money. We had absolutely no time to take anything from our household, jewelry or anything. We were simply taken out. And incidentally, into our house or into our apartment, they put Germans whom they transferred from like where they are to other regions. So in one minute, you lost your entire life's assets.

Q: What was the _____?

A: That was like April, May 1940 -- I'm sorry, '41. Not so sure, not so sure. It's '40, '41, somewhere there. One thing I should also mention, the Jewish synagogue, incidentally, they burned it. But first, they took the golden leaves off.

Q: Who else would have been _____? Did they prevent you from going into Polish schools or ...

A: There were absolutely no Polish schools beyond the sixth grade. Germans considered us a race which was supposed to be eliminated after they eliminated the Jewish race. We were the number two in line. And, therefore, they said they don't have to be educated beyond the simple reading and arithmetics. Therefore, no high schools in Poland. Of course, immediately the underground high schools sprang up, and the former teachers, you know, they were meeting in groups of four, five, ten private homes and continuing the studies. Universities, of course, were nonexistent for Poles. In the area of Minsk-Suwatki, I was a stranger. I didn't know anybody. It took some time before I started to know who is who. I have joined, of course, first thing, the high school -- underground high school where I continued my studies. Out there among the boys, I found my first contact on the fighting underground.

Q: Let me change the tape. _____

A: Well, that was among these students in this underground high school. And after a while, I was asked to join an underground organization, fighting organization. And I was worn in; of course, I have to be certain that I was swearing the obedience to the right people and fortunately I did. Because this was the Polish government under the allies, which was at the time located in England, in London. I won't say much about the high school, but I will mention one thing. That my last year in that high school, the principal came in to me and said, "Look, you are in endangering the group. We will give you your high school certificate. You don't have to attend any more of the classes. We know you are engaged in the underground activities." And he did that to a couple of other boys from my group, so we basically did not finish the actual, listening to actual lectures. But we got the graduation on the merit of what we had done up to that point. And that was, of course, the second year. I was in this almost 18 months. The beginning, my beginning in -- also, general life conditions in Minsk-Suwatki at that time -- in 1940 when we arrived there, I think it was late 1940. The Jews already had to wear the Star of David on the arm band, but they were not in ghettos. They lived in their own homes like they did before. And I think late in 1940, I remember, the ghetto was organized in Minsk-Suwatki. This was a very unique ghetto because no wires or no barbed wires were put in. But they simply designated four main streets as the boundaries of the ghetto. Of course, the order of the day was that any Jew who was found outside of that was shot on the spot, and that happened quite often. I didn't see, personally, myself the shooting, but I've seen the bodies. Something happened maybe 15 minutes I arrived at that point. The ghetto I think was fairly loose and a lot of Jews from Minsk-Suwatki, I think managed to mingle with Poles and get away from the town, according to various villagers. And farmers, of course, it depends again on the personality of the farmer. Quite for money, quite often for humanitarian reasons, they would hide and save the Jews. This was very

dangerous for Poles because anytime you helped a Jew by giving him bread or milk or whatever, food or sheltering, you endangered your entire family and your village. It happened many, many times where a neighbor who didn't like his neighbor said, "Hey, my neighbor yesterday gave something to the Jews who came out of the woods, out of the forest." Well, that entire family was wiped out, and their house was burned to the ground. And the news all around was arriving, this happened in this village; this happened in that village. So population, Polish population basically was very frightened and very careful on it. This probably could be the reason why it was universally practiced. On the other hand, AK, which is the underground organization to which I belonged, and that means -- AK means Army Krajowa, which is home army. Had very specific orders to assist and help as much as possible by absorbing young Jews who were in the forest and wanted to join the guerrillas, they were welcomed with open arms. As a matter of fact, here in Los Angeles, we had an example of that. In my combat organization, Mr. Harter, who belongs to veteran's organization, veteran guerilla organization, was saved by Poles and survived the war by being in the guerilla unit. I heard of many, many instances of the same thing happening, but this is my personal involvement with Mr. Harter. My beginning in the underground was simply what they call small sabotage. We were putting placards on streets, anti-German, trying to change their morale, which at the time at the beginning, 1940, '41, was still pretty high. But we were trying to pass some messages to them by graffiti type, by placards, by all possible means that the war, the fighting is a hopeless war. They're not going to win. After a few months, I graduated from this small sabotage into the real fighting unit where we were, for instance, protecting the parachute drops from England. We also were protecting on other occasions the radio station which was communicating with the West. In 1941 there were still very few actual attacks on German compounds, but in 1942 the speed of the military involvement increased. And in that I took part, and oh, in 1942 in blowing up two trains. In 1943, ammunition train, we blew up and also took materials to support ourselves from various industrial complexes like a chocolate factory where we took tons and tons of sugar. We loaded them on the horse and buggies the peasants supplied. And then sold that for money to support the guerilla activities. Blew up a vodka distillery, other smaller activities wherein the villages -- in every village, Germans said you have to deliver so many horses, so many cows, so many tons of grain or potatoes for the Germany effort. And usually, there were designated people who were responsible for that. And those people knowing that they're working and they can be banished for it, they were very eager. We tried to dampen their enthusiasm and warn them not to do it in a too eager way. If someone like that didn't listen to us, next time we took him and publicly in that village, let's say, 50 lashes. We also watched women, that they wouldn't go with German soldiers or German civilians. If that happened and she didn't get the warning and continued, a unit would go shave her head to zero and put a finger on her that she was a prostitute. Smaller other things, and usually the boys 12, 13, girls even were involved in it. In the movie theater, there would be a German with a Polish prostitute in the mink coat. Well, they

would have the spray bottle with the strong acid, and very quietly would spray that acid on the fur coat of the girl. By the time the girl was leaving the movie theater, the fur coat was almost falling off her back. Those were the expressions of resistance from the youngest all the way up. We tried to liberate our prisoners. We attacked several prisons and liberated quite a few. What Germans in Warsaw, however, for every German killed, they tried to wipe out 25, 50 Poles. And what they would usually do, they would put a sign on all the visible places in Warsaw that today or yesterday a German soldier was attacked and killed. For that 50 Poles tomorrow will be executed, although they were listed as possible people to go free. So the terror was unbelievable, but by the year 1942, '43, we realized that if we were doing nothing as we were in 1940, let's say, the underground, we were dying. We were being hanged on the streets for no reason at all. The concentration camps were full of Poles, not only Jews, but Poles. Of course, those Jews from Poland were Poles anyway, so there's no distinction there. But in the Polish located camps, Germans, of course, brought Jews from other countries. From that you can see what the situation was developing in Poland. So we finally decided, hey, if we have to die, we might as well die taking some of them with us, and that's where this pace of resistance accelerated. And that's where more trains went up, more bridges were blown up. More attacks on the airfields and other military objectives happened. By 1942, I think it's July 1942, in July 1942 out of the ghetto I think they have taken some 220 people and in one day shot them at the cemetery, at the Jewish cemetery. Now, I have not witnessed that, but it was universally known. On August 1942, the Minsk ghetto was liquidated. What happened is the Germans, Latvians, Ukrainians with the assistance of the Jewish police, rounded all inhabitants of the ghetto into the marketplace. A few thousand people were in that marketplace, and they didn't know what is going to happen to them. They stayed there overnight. Some were trying to escape, and they were, of course, shot during the escape. Next day in a column -- they formed the columns and all the inhabitants of the ghetto were marched into the railroad station where numerous cattle wagons were waiting for them. They were loaded with the help again of Jewish police. The Jewish police, although not armed, they had baseball bats, all of them, and special hats and special arm bands. During that transport and during the gathering of the ghetto in the marketplace, the word was that about 1,000 of the Jews were shot. Where the trains went, I'm not sure whether they went to Majdanek or Auschwitz or some other camps. I have witnessed the march from a window on the street to which they were going, I have witnessed the march of the Jews to the trains. I have not seen personally anyone killed, because the region where I was was rather short visible from the window where I was. But I could hear the shots, and then the word came in the next day and the following day among Poles that about 1,000 were shot during that incident. So this was the finish and annihilation of the Jewish ghetto in Minsk. There were, of course, 500 craftsmen -- tailors, shoemakers, people who were taken out of ghetto before, and they were housed in the Copernicus (ph) School, and they were working for the German Army, working on the German uniforms. Working on producing shoes, doing things which

were useful for the German Army. From that group, sometimes in 1943, '42, '43, some 200 were taken and shot again in the Jewish cemetery. The remaining 300 plus stayed and continued to work for the army. On January 6th, which happens to be a Polish Catholic holiday, that's why I remember the date, was the annihilation of the rest of the Jews from the Copernicus School. How did that happen? And that I personally witnessed. At that time I had the documents on my own name; however, they were documents very strong which I received from the underground channels, underground help. I was a fireman in a factory. There was a factory in Minsk where several of us from the underground were employed for the simple reason that those documents allowed us to be on the street after the curfew. Curfew in town was like 7 o'clock, and after 7 o'clock, no Jew, no Pole could be on the street. Only Germans were allowed to be after curfew on the streets. So with those documents, of course, we could go on our underground activities, gather for the job to be done somewhere. That very morning on the 6th of January, we noticed shooting. And looking outside we see a lot of smoke coming out. Being, of course, a fire brigade in a factory, our concern was supposed to be a factory, but we decided to go and see if we can help and put the fire out in town. So we all put the helmets on, jumped into the wagon, and went toward the smoke. Well, the smoke was coming in from the Copernicus School where the remnants of the Jewish population of Minsk were housed. On arrival, the entire building was in flames. The roof was on the verge of collapse. Outside one could see uniformed Latvians, Germans, Sicherheitspolizei, and Polish police shooting at the window and generally trying to finish whoever was trying to get out of the fire. I could see two piles of bodies some six, seven feet high, piled up next to the school. I could see on the ledges of windows half-burned bodies. I could a mother with a little child trying to throw the child out of the window when someone shot her and killed her. The thing which stayed with me for many, many, many years after the war, however, was an incident which happened a few steps from me. A gendarme, a German six-foot plus tall, because I am six foot so I can judge the height, some 250 pounds heavy takes a little Jewish girl by the hand. Leads her to the wall, sits her by that wall, corrects her posture even. Moves back a few steps and shoots her right in the head. Now, at a moment like that, one is ready, of course, to jump and do something, but what could one do? I could only pay back for happenings like that through my underground activities. Because anything on the spot out there would have meant death to all of us. I did not want this to be forgotten in case they do not have in the museum any records of what happened in Minsk-Suwatki. Two often one hears the Holocaust never happened. Well, here is one eyewitness who saw what was going on and what was happening. Where the Jews from Minsk were taken, I'm not sure. Whether this was Majdanek, whether this was Sachsenhausen or Auschwitz, but usually those three were the main sources of gathering the Jews from Polish ghettos in Poland.

Q: _____?

A: No. Frankly, we didn't hear much about it. Although I tell you one thing from reading after the war, we had a courier from Poland who is still alive, still lectures. Who went from Poland to London and reported to allies and to Roosevelt and Churchill what was going on in Poland. Because Germans were trying to say nothing is happening. Well, so the Jewish population in the United States through that should have known what is happening to their brothers and sisters in Poland. And yet, to my disappointment, they didn't do enough to do something about it.

Q: I was curious how and where you were at that time _____.

A: No, you were not aware. Your movements were so limited. You were not supposed to move from one town to another town, so the people who were aware that there was something going on were only the people who lived close by. In 1943, of course, as I said, the pace of the underground activities accelerated considerably, and also in 1944. The defeat of German was very apparent in 1944. One could see the things they had to do to sustain their fighting. For instance, an order would come in like winter 1943 to all the Polish women. Any fur coat you have you have to deliver to a pickup point. So they picked up all the fur coats any woman had in Poland. The next few months, you could see the Germans coming out of Russia on their tanks wearing women's fur coats. The winter was hitting them so badly in Russia, they were not prepared for it, that they had to be in Polish ladies' fur coats. Underground was prepared to the point that when the defeat of Germany was apparent and before the Soviets moved to Poland, liberate ourselves. There were at that time in the underground some 300,000 people. When that day came in, when the Soviet troops moved on the territory of Poland and the Warsaw uprising started on August 1, 1944 -- and incidentally, when I talk about Warsaw uprising, I'm talking about the Polish uprising. There was a Jewish uprising in Warsaw several months before that. It didn't last very long. Resistance was not very strong. Polish underground tried to help by delivering to the underground channel through the sewers a lot of arms to the fighters in the ghetto. But those few who were fighting were eliminated and that was liquidated totally.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: You know, I'm not sure whether something is -- we're starting a new tape. It might -- I wanted to learn a little bit more some of the specific risks you undertook in some of your underground activities. And I also want to ask you questions about general underground organization, but wherever you want to start.

A: Well, let's first talk about the organization of underground. In the early days of war, that means 1939, '40, there were multitudes of organizations, underground organizations, all eager to fight Germans. They ranged from the extreme left to the extreme right. In the extreme right, you had what probably what gave the rest of us the anti-Semitic, how you call it? The anti-Semitic, I'm fighting for a name, image. Those were the extreme right organization, Knesset, Natrilova Shevis Brenner (ph), where they considered that Poland is only for Poles. They were as close to the Nazi thinking that one could go, but they were soldiers; they were fighters, and they were supported from the West probably more than we were from England. Some of them when order came to consolidate all the fighting units, some of them didn't join and stayed separate, like in Knesset (ph) . Most of the unit except the branches of Knesset and except the Communists, Army _____, which were run by Stalin, by Moscow, joined together. And from that Army Krajowa emerged. Army Krajowa in 1943, '43, one could consider entire nation in the underground. It had all kinds of functions like medical/sanitary functions all over the country. It had underground court system all over the country. It was run from Warsaw. There was one head man, general, who was the head man of the Armia Krajowa, but in each region -- and Poland was divided into several regions. Like my region, Minsk-Suwatki, was called Varangia. That's a region between Minsk and Lublin. In each one of those regions, there were subdivisions where a small village would have an Ob Vood. Ob Vood was still subdivided into what they call platsuski (ph). That was the smallest possible underground unit, platsuski, which consisted usually of one or two platoons of the local peasant, local soldiers, who would train on weekends when they didn't work in the fields. They would go and train at night in the art of military fighting. There was a system of military schools. For instance, I am a graduate of the underground military officers' school, which I took for several months in 1942, '43. During that period, for instance, that gives you an idea to what extent we went during those several months, there were numerous instances where we fired live ammunition. Where we spent nights and nights in woods learning the survival techniques. Occasionally, on something like that there would be an action where you would blow up a bridge or a train or something. During the -- the aim was so well specified that in small towns, the military objectives in case the uprising, they're already designated for individual units, for individual platoons. To give you an example, in Minsk there is a police headquarters. That's a building which is three stories high. That three-story high building has only one entrance, so guards were put out there. You know, they pretty well controlled entry to it. Well, each window had a balcony. We had ladders

stored for months waiting for something to happen out there where we wouldn't have to look for ladders, that the ladders were already there. We took the ladders and attacked them from balcony, rather than through the doors. It was so well thought through, so well organized, that it's incomprehensible sometimes. Numerous -- for instance, I took part in a liberation of a prisoner who was caught by gestapo, was tortured and we were afraid he might break. We went -- and they kept him since he ...

Q: ... okay, you were trying to ... this prisoner who you thought might break.

A: Okay. And incidentally, his name is Tarchinski (ph), I remember still. And he was after being beaten, the doctors advised gestapo that he will die if he is not taken to hospital. So they took him to hospital with a gendarmes or gestapo man sitting by his bed. Well, we went to free him in German uniforms. We entered, nobody even stopped us. The man by the bed of our comrade didn't even lift himself off the chair when we entered the room. Several, several actions were performed in such a fashion that either German uniforms or gestapo uniforms were worn. I was myself in gestapo uniform two, three times on various actions. It's not universally known in the West, but some very, very high-ranking SS officers were executed in Poland. One of them was the head of the gestapo for the entire eastern region. His name was General Kiichira. If I remember, he was even son-in-law of Himmler. He was executed on Warsaw street. The death sentence was given to him for his activities against Poles and Jews, and he was executed. So you can see that we had the -- not only the judge, but we had also the executioners in the underground.

Q: First of all, how was the underground economy?

A: This is all entire nation underground. Schooling system, medical system, court system and then army. When the Warsaw uprising started on August 1, the so-called what we call code name Buja (ph), which is tempest. Tempest was declared, and out of the underground some 300,000 underground people came out in various parts of Poland and started hitting the German units. How the uprising in Warsaw started, 5 o'clock in the afternoon -- and again, every unit had objective. This unit was taking the powerhouse, this unit was taking post office. Some other unit was taking the railroad station or whatever it is. On 5 o'clock, August 1, 1944, windows suddenly opened and any German on the street was just killed from the window by people like you and me. Warsaw uprising was ready and was supposed to last four, five days at the most. And we had enough ammunition and supplies for that. By that time it was universally assumed by all of us that there will be landings in Vilna and Gdansk from England, that Marines will be in Poland. The Polish forces, the paratroop brigades that we had, will be dropped on Warsaw. Instead, what they did they took and annihilated that part of brigade in Arnheim. That was incidentally, under the leadership of General Sasaboski (ph). When you look at the movie theater "Bridge Afar," Sasaboski is mentioned and the paratroopers are mentioned in it. The Warsaw

uprising lasted 62 days instead of those four, five days. And I would say that almost everybody was involved in that fighting. Civilian people were digging the trenches, were putting the barricades on every street. Young children were used to take messages in between. Kitchens were set up my housewives all over. It was unbelievable. In first days, almost entire Warsaw was in our hands. After those five, six days when there was no ammunition, only that ammunition we had which we took from Germans, was taken. Germans used some unusual techniques. For instance, to give you an example. Barricaded, they cannot take. Any tanks they use gets burned by the Molotov cocktails from windows all over. Tank on narrow streets is not a good weapon to use. But they had armor, so the people were protected out there. As long as they stayed away from the area approaching the barricade, they could fire that cannon and then machine gun at will. And we couldn't do much because all we had is the rifles and then the pistols. What they did in a couple of instances in Warsaw, they surrounded the wives, mothers and children, put them in front of the tanks, and moved them toward the barricades. And the people behind the barricade see the mother, see their sister, maybe. They know what to do. You shoot your own or you let them break your barricade and make a breach into your defense line. Well, you're faced with decisions like that. I won't tell you what happened in those instances, but you figure out what you would do in a case like that. They also invented, I would say, what we call the Goliath. It's a little tank, small one, maybe one meter long. And they put on it half a ton, two- or three-quarter of a ton of dynamite, and this was electrically controlled and they could direct it. Here is a building which we're defending for two weeks, they cannot take it. They direct that right at the building and they explode it right at the building. Of course, not only this building but buildings around go with -- just like what you've seen here in the United States in car bombs. Warsaw finally fell after 62 days of furies, out of AK, some 17,000 died. Total population loss in Warsaw was over 300,000 in 62 days. If you look at it from the perspective of Vietnam War where in some dozen years our casualties were approaching 60,000, here it would give you an idea of the ferocity of the fighting. In 62 days, you have over 300,000 casualties. Of course, Warsaw negotiated the surrender with the German Army. The German Army was pulled from the eastern front, was pulled from wherever they could find them to just defeat Warsaw because that was their road from Russia to Berlin. At that time in other parts of Poland -- and incidentally, during the negotiations the Warsaw commander negotiated with Germans that the AK guerrillas and the fighters of Warsaw will be considered under the Geneva Convention. Up to that moment, they considered us bandits. In other words, anybody could shoot us without getting any responsibility for it, taking responsibility for it. The surrender conditions were that they all will be treated under the Geneva Convention. That means they will go to the regular prisoner of war camp, and that, they lived up to that, one must say. The rest of Poland continued fighting. The rest of Poland continued fighting and was fighting -- Soviet troops, of course, came in through treachery by inviting the Polish officers for the joint strategy sessions, the Russians invited them and those officers never came back.

They landed all in Siberia. The troops without the officers were surrounded by Soviet troops, were disarmed and forcibly forced into a Polish Army under the Soviet command, which had an obedience to a Soviet puppet government in Moscow. They created a Polish government in Moscow consisting of some hard-nosed Polish Communists. I found myself in that army eventually, and in that army, incidentally, that army was being organized east of Lublin between Homel' and Lublin. In Lublin, on the outskirts of Lublin is Majdanek, and that's where my unit was stationed, in Majdanek. We had out of Majdanek five guards, which were put into this time, not an underground anymore, but a formal court. The court found them guilty of atrocities against the Polish and Jewish population, and they were sentenced to death. And the execution of the guards was performed in Majdanek itself. My company was assigned to put a barrier between the witnesses, the hundreds and thousands even of population, and the place of execution. The place of execution was very simple, the gallows was put up and the trucks came in with the open back. The guardsmen with their hands tied and their legs tied were stationed on the beds of the trucks. And on command, the trucks moved and they simply dropped and were hanged. We only hanged four of them because one of them hanged himself in the cell. In the unit, I was a company commander as a second lieutenant. That unit was training for battlefront activities, and after a few weeks, I discovered that most of the soldiers in the unit are the Polish guerrillas, AK. Officers like me who were commanding different companies, they were also AK. Well, we got together; we got together, and we have decided that we have to organize something within this brigade, when the allies finally show up in Poland, that we as a unit can then arrest all the Soviet officers in the unit and all the political officers in the unit and simply fully armed cross into the allied side. Well, after a few weeks, we accomplished that, and we had underground army within the Soviet Army. We made contact on the commander officer of the AK for the Lublin region, which was still operating. He was underground, he was not arrested by the Russians and gave himself under his command. This is probably silly to say at this point, but I will mention it. We made a proposal to this particular head of the underground for that region that in October when there was a big parade was going to be held in Lublin. And in that parade the entire Polish government formed in Moscow plus Marshal Orkorsowski (ph) and some Soviet generals were supposed to on the tribune receiving the parade of all the Polish troops, which were ready to go into battle. This is October/November 1944 at that time. We made a proposal that we give our soldiers live ammunition for that parade, and the moment we are in front of the tribunes, we open fire at the government and show the world that Poland does not want what Soviets are bringing, and that that government created by Soviets in Poland means nothing to us. We are obeying the government inland at that time which was cooperating fully with the United States, England and allies. Well, supposedly, the message was sent to them and came back saying, "Forget about what you're proposing because Stalin would then make out of Poland simply a Soviet Republic like he made it out of Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia." So we promptly forgot it.

Q: I'm going to ask you stop at this point. When you were talking about the hanging of the guards at Majdanek, is this the period when you and the Soviet Army liberated Majdanek there?

A: No, no. That was already four, six weeks after. Majdanek was liberated I believe in July somewhere, and this was happening July, August, September; end of September somewhere.

Q: Were you part of the group that went in and liberated Majdanek?

A: No, no. At that time I was still in the Polish underground in the area of Minsk.

Q: And when you were speaking about the Warsaw rising and how people were fighting all over the country in the summer of '44, where were you at that time?

A: Okay, a week before the Warsaw uprising started, we pretty much knew that the end was nearing. Because you could see on the major highways from east to west chaos. It reminded us of 1939, where you could civilians, you could see German soldiers individually, on bicycles, on foot, on horseback, on military vehicle, civilian cars. You could see that the panic was setting and that they were running from Russia. So a week before uprising started, we went to destroy all the communications between the east and west. That meant all the telephone lines, all the railroad lines going to Minsk to Warsaw. I was assigned the region between Minsk and Warsaw, and we simply blew up the rails. Somebody else did the telephone poles and got them down. Somebody else in the different regions west -- I mean east of Minsk did the same thing. Then we had a concentration of our entire area ordered for a certain time and certain date. And after accomplishing our blowing up of the rails, we decided to move to the concentration point. At that concentration point, there was supposed to be 22nd Infantry Regiment and _____ Brigade Calvary which is the Mazovian Calvary Brigade. One of my boys said, "Well, inside of walking, how about getting a car and riding there?" Well, we decided that that was not a bad idea, and took the fire engine from the fire station in Minsk. We put our guns under the blankets. Put the helmets on, and drove out of town, not directly to the concentration point, but on the secondary roads we stayed overnight in a village. Next day, we still stayed in that village because to get to concentration point, we had to cross the main highway, and by that time, the front was already nearing. You could see the entire sky red, you could hear the guns. You could hear the _____, which were the Soviet rockets. So at the -- in the evening when it was just about dark, we started moving, and we got to the main highway in total darkness without lights, without anything. It seemed to be absolutely empty. We got on the major road. Suddenly I see somebody striking a match, and my heart stopped. I see an SS helmet, and I see unshaven faces of several SS soldiers.

Q: I hate to do this, but we're out of tape. It's a bad point to stop. Okay, let me just do something for a second. When we unfortunately stopped you, you saw the SS helmets.

A: Almost automatically without thinking, I hit the bell on the fire engine, and we kept going on the road. And the Germans either because they are so disciplined, and to them it was very logical that somebody was driving -- that the fire engine was going towards the fire, didn't even think. We passed that turnoff where we were supposed to turn off and disappeared. What happened there, it was an SS Hermann Göring panzer division. Four days later when we went through the battlefield out there, we could see the remnants of some of the tanks who took part in that battle, mostly German tanks. On the concentration point, we had some 3,000 people concentrated, which was this regiment and the calvary brigade I mentioned before. The defensive lines were -- on several villages, we took our defensive lines and stayed on the defensive line awaiting the front somehow to roll over us. Because the front was still east of us, and they were withdrawing west. So that night I see planes very high, flying from west to east. One of them burns, comes down like a meteor, and that's it. The next morning, I'm going on a patrol with a group of soldiers to penetrate the woods to see if anything is going out which were like few hundred yards from us. In the woods, we see movement. We see uniforms which don't look German. That's where Soviet paratroopers with a radio station, they were dropped behind the German line. Well, we kind of waved at each other, the white thing. Started talking. From them we learned that they were parachuted behind. We told them we are the Polish guerrillas. We also told them that -- that morning, we found incidentally from that burning plane, we found one man with half-burned parachute. So we told them where buried the man. On the radio station, they passed that to their headquarters. Their headquarter wanted to know our strength, our location, where we were. Well, I wasn't going to give it to them, but I gave them a guide and sent them to the headquarters. They wanted information, headquarters could give it to them. Four days later, we were withdrawing -- and incidentally, our involvement at that time was very simple. We didn't get into any major fight. All we were doing was disarming single or two, three German soldiers running away. So it wasn't the war I was really trained for. Four days after that, we're passing through the area where we met this SS Hermann Göring division. And the burned bodies in tanks and the tanks were really telling us that that big tank battle between the Soviet tanks and German tanks took place there, and that the German tanks were waiting to jump on the moving Soviets. Most of our officers, as I mentioned, were invited for a strategy session. Never came back from that strategy session. The next time we heard from them was Ruzyne on Siberia. Soldiers were surrounded, disarmed and put in -- we made a proposal to them. Leave us as we are, arm us a little bit better and we go right now today with you for Warsaw, to liberate Warsaw. Well, how naive I was as a young boy, it was all preprogrammed what would happen to Warsaw. Stalin simply

wanted that to last until Germany finishes Warsaw, because he knew that all the fighters in Warsaw were anti-Communist. So he wanted Hitler to wipe out the anti-Communists for him, and that's precisely what happened. We as the faithful allies of America, England and the Western world, we were really let down and left to fend for ourself. I don't think we deserved that. We were the most faithful friends the West had at the time, but that's how the war sometimes ends. Lesson from it from my own personal experience is don't let the war ever happen on you own soil; fight it somewhere else. You fight it in Vietnam or some remote place, at least your mothers, your sisters are not being raped and then murdered and houses burned. So let's fight it somewhere else, not at home.

Q: Where your family? What happened to your family.

A: My family, my younger brother found himself with -- he was at that time -- well, let's see, this was 1944. He was 17, I found him in the same concentration where I was. And, as a matter of fact, he was the first one who put Polish flag in Minsk-Suwatki on the ratush (ph) of Minsk-Suwatki. The younger brother and mother stayed in a village where they were settled after being kicked out of our own home in Inowroclaw. And that village, the fight took place in that village. Some of that village was burned, and they stayed in the cellar and survived. I was -- my unit after -- first of all, my unit was taken in the liberation of Warsaw, which was not much of a fight. Germans already were running. What I found, however, and never forget is the ruins and the rats. Rats fed on the bodies, human bodies, were so fat and so numerous it was unbelievable. And the houses, I couldn't find one single house unscratched. Everything was burned and finished, to the ground. My unit was ordered to stay in Warsaw in garrison. The other went east towards Berlin. We in Warsaw, we were supposed to pick up from cellars remnants of Germans, individuals or still a small unit which was hiding somewhere. They were not problems for us, the Germans out there because, you know, my entire unit were former underground guerrillas. Each one had some kind of a casualty, so right there that was for them the opportunity to even the score a little bit. So we didn't take any prisoners. The problem we had was with Soviets. Soviet troops, before they entered Poland, they were told by Stalin, by their commanders, "After you cross the border, do whatever you want. Just pay them for what they did in Russia." And they really started in Poland already that. So they were raping Polish women, for instance. We being on patrol duty because the being in the garrison involved patrolling the streets, you come on incidents where there are some drunken Soviet soldiers. Well, you want to disarm them; they don't want to be disarmed. What do you do? Well, in most cases, we had to shoot them. Sometimes, you know, a woman, for instance, reported every night a soldier, drunk soldier is trying to break into my house, my apartment. Apartment, whatever she rebuilds, wherever she was. Well, we left a couple of men there for a night with her one night, and sure enough, 11, 12 o'clock _____. Russians want that she open the door. Well, after he was insistent on it, the boys opened fire right through the door,

and sure enough, there was a Soviet soldier on the other side. So Poland was on the verge of getting rid of one occupant, Hitler and Nazis, but was at the beginning of another occupation, Red Terror, the Soviet, the MKVD. I was in Warsaw in Warsaw garrison till March 1945. March 1945, my commanding officer tells me, "They have something for you. You have go and report to another unit where they give you the instructions. You might be going to the front." Which I wanted to go to the front anyway. I wanted to pay Germany back for what they did in my country. I got in the car with two other officers. I didn't know they were not from my unit, and they pointed the door to me, "That's where the commanding officer is. You have to report to him." I entered the door and immediately the guns were pointed to me. Two Polish officers in Polish uniforms, none of them could speak. "_____," which means hands up. They took my lieutenant's stars out, took my eagle from my cap, took my sidearm and the belt and I landed in the cellar. For three days, nobody bothered about me out there. Then the interrogation started. I'm accused of organizing underground within the army, which I did, of course. But who would be talking? How do they know? How much do they know? So I totally denied everything till the very end. I finally learned that another Lieutenant Oliva, his name, was also arrested and that he is a couple of doors down from me. So seeing that they don't have much, I denied till the end that it's not true. That I'm a Pole who fights for Poland, and I had in July, after three months of interrogation -- I didn't sign anything. I had a court martial. In court martial, there were three officers, staff officers in Polish uniforms. None of them could speak Polish. They needed a translator for me. And I was stripped of citizenship, of my belongings. Whatever was mine was no longer mine and got six years hard labor, whatever. Then I was put in the infamous Rakayetska (ph) Prison in Warsaw. Mostly people in that prison were former AK. And what happened in the meantime after I was arrested in March, my second in command, Lieutenant Horoshevski (ph), -- and he doesn't appreciate my fighting stories, the peaceful Swiss.

Q: Okay, where we stopped, you weren't quite done. Your second in command. You were talking about being in prison in Warsaw and your second commander.

A: The second in command in my unit, Lieutenant Horoshevski, as I learned later, took whatever soldiers were in the garrison at the time and fully armed crossed into the guerrillas who were operating still in that region. They knew that there was something going on in this unit. So on account of their being smart, advised I guess to take all the soldiers remaining in the brigade and spread them throughout the Polish Army. So they took four, five, maybe ten soldiers, put them in this regiment; another 10, 20 in some other regiment. That way the entire brigade in which I was disappeared. So I landed in the Rakayetska Prison, which was the prison which held mostly the former AK accused of -- well, being AK was enough to go to jail. They were calling us at that time "spit-on midgets of reactionary forces." That's how they called, Russians. In that prison a lot of executions took place. By that time there were

no Jews there anymore, strictly Poles. There was a cell where they were torturing people. And we knew that because next to the cells, they kept always the, what do you call, you carry the wounded on them. Stretcher. There was always stretcher and we could kind of peek and see that on a stretcher, they were taking a body at night out. The cell in which we were was very small, and there were some 13 of us. One slept on the floor, and actually to turn around, it had to be on command. Everybody had to turn because there was not enough room. For urination and physical discharge, there was barrel kept inside, just covered. So the smell was horrible. After that prison, I was arrested in June -- I mean in March 1945. In July of 1945, I was half blind. Partial blindness from the lack of vitamins, I guess. I lost some 60 pounds during that period of time, and I peeked through the window and I see horse and buggy. But all I could see is maybe left leg of the horse and the right ear and maybe a head of the peasant who was running it. I couldn't see the full picture. One night in July, suddenly something unusual happened. They taking us for a shower and they shaved us totally to the ground. I mean head and everything. Well, the word went they taking us probably to Russia, Siberia. They don't want Polish insects out there in Russia, I guess. They have enough of their own. They washed us and the trucks, several trucks came in on the property of the prison inside. And they started loading people into the trucks. We didn't know what was going to happen. I suddenly looked and I see in one of the loys (ph) my company chief, Sergeant Shuper (ph). He just happened, just happened by miracle that the group of soldiers when they disbanded the brigade was put in the unit which was ordered to transport us somewhere. Now, Shuper recognized me immediately. Put his finger on his lips, and then when the trucks started moving, he jumped into the truck with me. That's when I learned that Horoshevski took the rest of our soldiers who were at the time in the barracks and took them into the German guerrillas. That's where I learned that the brigade was disbanded and Shuper is telling me that "Don't worry. When you ask to be taken to urinate out of the railroad car, just run. And the guard will shoot above your head, so you don't have to worry." And I told him, "No, either all of us or none." "You will be going to a territory where the guerrillas still operate, and I want you in every stop we make to pass the word that the AK prisoners are being transported to Russia." And, of course, wherever we stopped -- and we stopped many times because the Soviet war was still on. The Soviet troops -- no, the war over in May, but trains east/west with the military equipment and troops were having the priority. So we were stopped quite a few times. We were singing the songs of the Warsaw uprising, the patriotic songs. People ...

Q: You know, I have to stop you. We have one second of tape ...

A: People would look at the cattle wagons with the barbed wire on the windows and look at our thin faces and listen to the song we're singing and they were crying and you know -- at least we knew we had the sympathy of the population. Nothing was happening. And then on one station, I noticed some younger people in the crowd.

And one of them kind of motioned and I see a gun, and I knew that somebody was observing us. Next day, shots are fired. Right away, I jumped to the window. Through the window I see, you know, a perfect performance of military tactic. A platoon coming out of the woods towards the train. The train stopped right there on the spot. There is no firing from the train to the people coming at the train, not one shot. The shots were guerrillas just warning. Actually, it was a shot for the engine man who stopped because he was AK also. And the railroad people throughout were notifying as the train was moving who it is and where it's going. That was a guerilla unit of a man with a code name Orelek (ph). He sustained his unit hiding Russians till 1938. The war was over in 1935, he was fighting still in 1938. He was finally shot by the Valitsia. But at that time we, of course, shouted, "Long live Poland. Long live comrades who liberated us." Disarmed the convoy, gave the Poles in the convoy -- because the commanding officer was Polish, the political officer, second in command, was Russian and he ran away. And the rest were all conscripts and some AK, so the Orelek say, "Do any of you want to stay in guerrillas?" A few of them did. The rest of them, we took their uniforms and let them go in their underwear. And that's how I joined Orelek's unit. And Orelek was basically protecting Polish population from the abuse of MKVD and Militia. The Militia particularly, and they were arresting AK or something like that. He made them pay for it. They concentrated so many troops, Russian and Polish, to get rid of him that it was not very comfortable anymore as a unit. So he went into the old technique of the underground. People went home and they were on call. They were coming out on call to do the job which had to be done. But I decided -- I had at the time a fiancée on the other side of Vistula River in Sopot. People, my family and people thought that I was dead because something I have not mentioned during this interview. I was taken by Russians in Minsk-Suwatki once and managed to run away from that situation -- and I have to catch my breath.

Q: Let's take a break.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

A: So the family thought that I was dead because there was an incident in Minsk-Suwatki from which they deducted that the MKVD shot me. What it was, myself and one of my soldiers, we were stopped by Soviet patrol and asked for the documents, who asked for documents. Well, we, of course, didn't have the documents because in the guerilla we didn't documents, but we were fully armed. So we clash and shoot. From that where the Soviet soldiers were killed and my soldier was killed also. And I was taken alive with the concussion by grenade because we jumped into a house and defended ourselves in the house. So they accused me of being a German with a radio station who's communicating with the German planes still attacking Soviet troops. Because Warsaw was still occupied by Germans at that time. I managed -- and it's a long story, I will not elaborate too much, but I escaped from that place. So as you can see, the family and friends and everybody thought I was really after that incident in Minsk, shot by MKVD. For that reason, when I decided to see my fiancée, when I showed up out there, it was a lot of joy. And at the same time, a lot of worry that something might happen to me. I stayed there for a few days, recuperated pretty well from the malnutrition I had in prison, and relaxed. And the girls talked me into going to the movie theater. Well, I went reluctantly to the movie theater. And at the end of the film, two _____, those are policemen, Polish policemen, come to me and say, "_____?" Which means "Are you citizen, and may I have your documents?" Well, my documents were very good. They were not in my name, but they were perfect. The underground had very, very good places to make them. And nothing was wrong with the documents, but they insisted I go with them to the police station. I say, "Why?" "Well, we'll explain to you when we get there." What could I do? I was not armed at that time. I left everything behind me. We go to the station, and I am accused because of my shaved head, I'm accused of being a deserter from the Polish Army. Well, all the recruits in Polish Army get shaved the moment they start the military, and they keep them that way. So here for the Militia man looking at my head shaven in prison, it was an indication that he could be a deserter. I stayed in that prison praying that they don't transfer me to Warsaw, because if they transferred me to Warsaw, that's the end of me. Managed to notify the girls of a contact in AK, and what they came up with is an ingenious solution. They have prepared documents calling Mr. Orovski (ph), which is me under that new name to military service. So the girls took that document to the prison, and explained to the commander down there that "How can you keep him for a desertion from the army? That's not true. He just got it today, the document calling him to report to the army." Well, I accepted the cigarette from the commander and from the commander even a little shot of vodka. And he wished me the glorious service in people's army, and I said to myself at that time, "This is it. There's no life for me in Poland anymore." I went back, covered my numbers with the Orelek's people, went back to Inowroclaw. Said good-bye to mother, put a pistol behind my belt and starting moving toward the Polish borders where we have Czechoslovakia. And at that time it was the closest to the

zone of American occupation because Vienna was in American hands.

Q: Let me stop you here because there was something that confused me earlier. When you said that your brother -- your mother and one brother was fighting in a village ...

A: Uh-huh.

Q: And where was your other brother?

A: He was -- I don't even know where he was because we were not in the same unit. He was totally separate from me, and I only noticed him that he was on the concentration. But he stayed in Warsaw and eventually was in uniform also. Then got of the uniform ...

Q: But he was part of the underground, as well?

A: Yeah.

Q: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that.

A: So I was moving towards the southern frontier of Poland, fully armed with good documents. Managed to get to kind of a railroad important point, _____. And at the railroad station I noticed some different uniforms, black uniforms and black beret. And when I came closer I hear French language being spoken. Well, it happened that those were the French Shasserdelpen (ph). Whoops, _____. In English, the Alpine Fusiliers or something like that. And they brought into Poland from the displaced person camps in Germany from the French occupation zone, they brought in Poles back to their own country. And then they were returning back to Germany. I, with my high school French, I told the soldier that I would like to have a word with his commanding officer. A young lieutenant came in, I started talking with him with my high school French. Told him that I am a Polish guerilla, that if I do not get into the allies in the West, I will be probably sooner or later caught and finished by MKVD. Would he help? Would he be a good soldier and help Polish brother? Well, he happens to be a French marquis also, so he understood the guerilla brotherhood. And after a while, he came in and I got a black uniform. Put on the black uniform, and with the French through several Russian controls, as a matter of fact, I got through Czechoslovakia to the American zone of occupation. And from there I was transferred to the Polish Army in Italy and attached -- or assigned to a Polish commander unit. And that was how I bailed out of Poland.

Q: What was the purpose of this Polish unit in Italy at this point?

A: Polish units in Italy, they went under British command as part of the Eighth British Army, all the way from the beginning of war almost. They took part in the -- there was entire corps, Polish corps consisting of some 60, 70,000 men. They went through the African campaign, they were fighting in Tobruk. Then they went on landing. They took, as a matter of fact, Monte Cassino, and when the war was over, they were occupying Italy. So I stayed, of course, in the unit all the time during the occupation of Italy, except for a few months I was sent to school for young officers, company commanders. And went through some commander training, additional. And then we were just waiting until we returned back home to Poland fully armed, kicked the Russians out of there sooner or later. And accomplish what we started in 1939, fighting. Well, it just didn't happen. It just didn't happen. The order came in in 1947 for us to leave in Italy all heavy equipment, all the tanks, all the armor, artillery, everything we had and were so proud of. And with short arms only to go to England where we were supposed to be demobilized. Well, that didn't go very well with some of the career officers. There were instances that they shot themselves. My school commander just couldn't see how we could be betrayed like that and left. All his dreams were shattered, so he shot himself. I was too young to do that, and I hoped that one day I will still come to the country of my fathers fully armed and that was to be. For 50 years Poland was given to the Soviet Union by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin by Yalta Agreement. And we suffered 50 years, and the country right now starts to recover. The best solution for Poland right now is to be admitted to the NATO. They're willing and ready and they won't shame anybody fighting.

Q: I want to backtrack for a little bit if you don't mind.

A: No.

Q: I have interrupted before, but the underground, I know that you said it was a mixture of people with many political organizations. Was that a problem?

A: No, not really. Not really. They still tried to -- well, like, for instance -- but that could happen to almost anybody. In my unit we had the night exercises, and we were shot at by the Akmechet and had two killed, two people killed from my unit. Because they were having their exercises separately, you know, without communicating properly with each other. And we just walked into their defensive position and walked out of there minus two people. But politically, we were not really involved at all. We were a fighting force. Politics for us, I didn't care what it was. I just wanted to defeat the Germans.

Q: Were there different approaches on how to go about that?

A: There might have been on the high level. On my level, which is the front, right there in the trenches almost with maybe a hundred men under my command, there were no

political problems whatsoever.

Q: Did you work with the partisans at all?

A: Well, it is partisans; I was one.

Q: How important was direction from the organization versus taking your own initiative?

A: To prevent chaos it had to be. I tell you sometimes it clashed. For instance, in my case, to give you an example. We had orders not to touch individual Germans because it was bringing retaliation. That was in the early days, '41, '42. Well, at that time me and a couple of high school friends, we disobeyed that order. We were waiting for drunk Germans to get arms, to arm ourselves. We just killed them and took their arms. But without direction from up above, you would have chaos.

Q: Were there certain cardinal rules? Were there certain things that you were taught when you were inducted?

A: Well, one cardinal rule, and that's in the swearing, in the form of the swearing, even it's mentioned. That any cooperation with Germany or with the enemy will be punished by death. Any snitching, you know, against Pole to the enemy or taking Jewish, anything which you do against the Jews, same way. It was strictly -- and was very clear. There was no "if" and "but" on that. We were to help whenever we could.

Q: What about secrecy?

A: Well, secrecy how it worked, you had to keep the secrecy, and that's why to start with, you only knew four people besides you. The groups were five, five, five. So if anything happened, only five -- might be a thousand, only five would diminish because you didn't know anybody else. There were not very many traitors in Poland, not very many. And if they were, they were properly dealt with. Went into underground court, executed.

Q: Was the general population pretty supportive?

A: Without support of population, you cannot fight a guerilla war. You have to have a population on your side. The population, of course, in Poland was frightened, was beaten to the pulp sometimes. You had to do some convincing occasionally so that they would help you. For instance, we had some problems with getting horse and buggies to move from one area to another area. Either wounded or equipment or even go in a quick action where you wanted to be faster than just walking. Some farmers, you know, we approached. They said, oh, they would do anything not to do

it. Eventually, I think we took care of that.

Q: How did you know who to trust?

A: Well, you basically didn't trust anyone in those days. You really didn't know who it was. So you had to have either someone from your unit with whom you were for a long time or be on your alert with any newcomers you met.

Q: You were constantly on alert?

A: Yeah.

Q: Now, just in terms of sort of the logistics, of the difficulties in terms of getting -- how you got food, how you got information, how you got supplies, how you got directions, how did this work?

A: Okay. First of all, the communications. Girls, young Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts were used for that. They carried the messages between the towns and the commanders of the units. Usually the messages were coded. Couldn't use the radio stations because Germans had very good equipment to detect. As a matter of fact, in the early days we had a special unit which was protecting the radio station. That the unit got into clash several times, and we abandoned that and instead, we had three, four people unit moving the radio stations as many times as possible. As far as logistics, food, we tried as many times as we could to sleep in villages. We had permanent quarters in forests, deep in forests, but in my area the actions requested from us were such that they were in the different region of the region we operated. So quite often, you know, after one action, you had to almost the same night jump some 30 miles away somewhere else. So to do things like that, you had to have friendly villagers. And most of them were friendly. A few villages were burned because of that.

Q: By your people?

A: No, by Germans, because somebody said hey, maybe that's where they -- the partisans, as you call it. The Germans came in, get confirmation from somebody on that from somebody in the village and this entire village was wiped out.

Q: Did your people have to resort to violent tactics to get food ever?

A: No, no. Now, we, of course, had other sources besides being fed my villagers. Some of our actions were not of purely military nature, they were of kind of commercial industrial nature. Like taking, you know, thousands of liters of vodka or a hundred tons of sugar or the wagon of socks we took in Warsaw railroad station. And that was a very interesting one because it was in the middle of the German Army almost.

On one rail, there was a military transport standing. The other rails were occupied by the wagons which had the socks, army socks. An entire wagon. And there was a guard there. We came in and we managed to disarm that guard without harming him at all. Just took the bullets out of his gun, let him have the gun, and we told him, "You just keep walking the way you were walking before." And we were simply loading and unloading from the wagons into the horse and buggies. And one wagon after another full of socks went in next to a military train.

Q: Why were socks important?

A: Oh, you needed a lot of socks in partisans, in guerrillas. But you could also sell socks. When you sold them, you had money for food. We also had parachute drops from England and from Italy, because at that time allies were already in Italy. As a matter of fact, Warsaw during the uprising for some 40 days didn't get any assistance from anybody. When Warsaw was already failing -- the insurrection was failing, we got some supplies from Italy. The U.S. Air Force flew one sortie of supplies. And we, as a matter of fact, had American flyers whom we could identify decorated 50 years after Warsaw uprising.

Q: Were there women fighting with you in the partisans?

A: Yes. Women were mostly -- although they were not the fighting unit, but they were in the Red Cross Corps but with the partisans, with the guerrillas. They were in communications. All kinds of axillary situations.

Q: And you mentioned one man, but -- and there were also Jews with you in the partisans?

A: Not many, but there were.

Q: They had their own organizations as well, didn't they?

A: That, I never come across anyone like that.

Q: Now, the question about when you were in the underground, that you had a conventional job and you were back in Minsk?

A: Uh-huh.

Q: Were you in the factory where they had brought Jewish slave labor?

A: No.

Q: Oh.

A: No, no. Jews in Minsk at that time was -- they were ghetto and the craftsmen were in the Copernicus School. In that factory, it was maintaining the German cars coming from the eastern front, and that was a hell of a good supply for us of arms. Because behind the back seats, when you looked carefully there you found all kinds of treasures. The driver might have been dead. He might have forgotten what he put out there. But they had a lot of French slave labor there, and they were left leaning, Communist leaning. But we talked with them, and they were tipping us off to some things, no question about it.

Q: Was there sabotage in that factory?

A: There wasn't much to sabotage out there because those were maintenance of cars, and what can you sabotage there? There were other more important things to sabotage and they all were. I took part, for instance, in burning the supply depots, and in that we almost had a disaster. Because the engineer set up the carnotite bombs to fire at two hours, and somebody switched it to 20 minutes. And as I was cutting the barbed wire to get -- to enter into the supply depot, I see sparks coming out of the pocket, side pocket of a man next to me. And he managed to take that off and throw out, but got burned on his face, all over his body. And carnotite is a terrific, 3,000 Fahrenheit temperature.

Q: We need to change the tape. You were getting into specifics about what was involved in your close call, the sabotage.

A: Well, for instance, this particular one I was describing, the incident with a carnotite bomb. We were supposed to put it on the roofs of barracks where they were storing a lot of things, military supplies to go into the eastern front. Because of this carnotite incident, the action didn't work the way it was supposed to and we had to run. We had to run under fire because next to it was again German and Continental Guards. But not knowing what the problem with that thing is, I took my carnotite and since there was almost a mountain of the insulating material, like shavings from the wood, I took that and threw it in that direction. Threw it in that direction and got rid of it.

Q: Can we stop for a moment? All right.

A: So as we withdrawing from that action after about three, four kilometers, I suddenly see a red light in the direction or Minsk. But apparently the carnotite I threw ignited some of the shavings from that wood and started burning that big mountain which till morning. They had hay there, they had everything. So part of it was accomplished, but the barracks somehow survived. Also, on the same night, and we had to walk like -- and here I had a half-burned man with me, taking him -- we suddenly are stopped

in a village to which I was going. The village of Yakutsk. In a parabook military fashion stopping of someone at night, the military has certain commands and a certain way they do. So here is a man in a perfect military gives me "Stui, (ph)" which means stop. Then come closer to give the password. Again, we are coming closer. Then he's asking for passport. I don't have this passport. I say I don't who he is. I say, "We don't have your password, but report it to your commanding officer. This is Cabot Officer Grum," which is my code name, "and I would like a word with him." Then he orders us to lay down and spread, eagle spread. We lay down eagle spread. I took a gun and kind of keep it, not zeroed on him, but close so I can. And finally he managed to call his superior, they came in and it happened that that village was having the night exercises with a password, military. AK was training, preparing themselves. So we stayed in a barn that night. In the morning when I woke up, I was absolutely red. Trousers, skin, face. I look at my comrade, he is red absolutely from that carnotite, too, and burned. So they get a doctor for him out there, and I kept moving to another location.

Q: What do you consider some of your biggest accomplishments as a fighter with the AK?

A: Well, I don't -- I can't really tell you. The ones I would have been proud of were the failures really. Like we had in the Minsk-Suwatki, we had arrests of AK were 87 people who were arrested. They were all tortured in Warsaw by gestapo. Before they were moved to Warsaw, we attacked the place where they held them. We attacked them in such a way that it was not a surprise for them; they were prepared. And we just couldn't break to the inside. We lost a friend of mine right there, but did not accomplish what we went after. In my opinion the element of surprise was missing. What's my biggest accomplishment? I think it's a failure, I didn't get what I was fighting for. I was fighting for free Poland, for justice, didn't get that. I left the war really with the feeling of disgust. Looking at the Western politicians, at what happened in Yalta, Tehran. How can three persons like Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin on a piece of paper -- piece of newspaper actually, divide the spheres of their influence and divide Europe? We had to live with this Berlin Wall ever since. I did get some satisfaction for revenging my father because as a 16-year-old boy, I swore that I'll pay them hundredfold, and I think I did. But the main objective to free Poland, I didn't get that. Poland today among what you see happening out there, in my opinion is not free yet. All the oppressors who kept us in prison after Russians took over Poland are still walking the streets. They are still occupying positions of power. It's only on the surface that they're turning into democracy. It's not a democracy yet. What would turn them into true democracy really quick is the admission to NATO.

Q: As an underground fighter, as an effective underground fighter, are there certain personal traits that are important?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Reliance on somebody. You have to be absolutely sure that you can rely on whoever is on your left or whoever is on your right, and we had boys like that. There was nobody you wouldn't go into a battle with, in my unit anyway. Courage, how does courage come in? Courage, whoever says I'm not afraid is either lying or stupid. Going to any action, I was afraid, but somehow I overcame that and came out okay from that.

Q: Was there something in your background, the way you were brought up, the way you were educated?

A: Probably. If you look at Poland, for 150 years Poland was nonexistent. Was divided between Russia, Germany and Austria. I am from the first generation born in free Poland. Poland became free in 1918. I was born in 1923. So I was brought in in schools where the patriotism and the country and the flag and the God, too, were the guiding lights, more or less. My father was a guerilla man in 1917 and '18, where that part of Poland that Germany thought was theirs said no, it's Polish. So there was an uprising, he was in this uprising. Then I was raised in the military compound. That had something to do probably with some of my behavior. Another thing which I think is of extreme importance, if you give a word to somebody, you have to live up to that word. Without that, nothing will work. If you say you're going to do this, do this no matter what.

Q: Is that something you learned from your family?

A: That's something I learned from not only family, but also from Boy Scouts. Boy Scouts was a good training for me, and I was physically very good. As a matter of fact, in 1939 I was in a pre-Olympic camp for Polish athletes who were promising for 1940 Olympic Games. I had a coach who was European champion at that time and spent like six weeks of camp with him. I played basketball for the University of London. Played basketball for the Polish Athletic Union. I played soccer on almost semi-pro. So I was always physically able, and usually in the able body there is an able mind, too. Till a couple of years ago, boy, I was climbing mountains. I was doing almost everything. Today, boom, hit me. And that's the irony of it. I was supposed be dead so many times in the war, I came out of it. And here everything hits me.

Q: Was there an excitement in your mission?

A: In those day, yes. Oh, I was eager, I did more stuff than what my region demanded. I was on the, as we called, _____ in Warsaw. I went for -- somebody else was doing something, but I knew somebody in that unit, and I was kind of drafted. Usually it amounted to oh, protecting them, approaches or as they were doing their

job inside. One example and that gives you the utmost fear in Warsaw you had in those days, the unit in Warsaw was liberating prisoners from the hospital, also. _____, which is a big hospital in Poland. And I had a friend in that unit, and he pulled me into it, and I got a pre-war machine gun, air-cooled Browning. Took it out. It's too big to cover, so the passersby could see it. Here is a town occupied by Germans. Only a kid 20 years old and stupid can do something like that, and that's what we were doing. I placed myself on the ruins of a house from 1939, I am looking at the walls of ghetto. It was next door to ghetto, also ghetto. And my assignment was don't let any German car or truck or anything past your position. Just wipe them out. That's my only thing in this very assignment. Here I am laying on it. At first people are passing by. After five minutes, then nobody passing by anymore. In Warsaw mouth by mouth, Warsaw people talking to each other say, "Hey, something is going on here. We better clear out." And that's precisely what was happening. I was praying there for a car to come in, and the damned thing didn't come. That's how young people reacted in those days.

Q: Any commanders that you had contact with who were well-known?

A: Most of them are dead. Most of them are dead. Of course, my commanding officer from the Commander Battalion from Italy is living in Chicago ...

Q: Not so much living, but I mean did you have contact with -- or a knowledge of any of these people that ...

A: Oh, well, I was in -- although on the level I was in, I was not in the high echelon. I was -- although second in command of a partisan unit, but that confines you to less than a hundred people. The people I was touch with was in prison, for instance. Colonel Chaska (ph), his code name, was in the same cell with me, and he was liberated with me. His name is Krefski. And when I visited Poland a few years ago, I reported to him. He was already in his '80s. He nearly had a heart attack when he saw me and we started talking. This man is one of the first Polish paratroopers dropped in Poland, and he was commander of the region Polisa, which is the southeastern part. That's where a lot of Jewish lived. A lot of Ukrainians, too. And Chaska was given a nomination to the rank of general by General Yurazowski (ph), the one who ran the Communist Poland. He sent him back that nomination and told him to stop it. From you, I don't want that, which is what any one of us would do.

Q: How did you decide to immigrate, to leave your ...

A: Well, frankly I had -- before I started studying in England, I had a notion, I don't like England. I cannot return to Poland. I have to go somewhere. And I had some distant relatives in Michigan. I started corresponding with them. They said, "Well, why don't you come to the United States?" Well, I filed for immigration visa in oh, '37 when

we moved to England, moved to the United States and promptly forgot about it. In the meantime, I decided, hey, enough soldiering. You better get yourself a job of some kind because we were going to stay in uniform, in the foreign uniform forever. So I decided that United States will probably be a place for me, but in the meantime -- and promptly forgot about it, that I ever even applied for that visa. In the meantime, I got into -- mobilized after leaving British Army because in between we Poles had an option to join British Army, which I did. Got a second lieutenant rank in the British Army. And then decided no, enough is enough and went into London University to study, to study engineering. I always wanted to be in diplomatic service, but I have no country anymore. So the next best thing was engineering, and went through London University for a couple of years, halfway through. Just about that time, I met my present wife. She came into England -- well, it was Olympic Games 1948. That's when we met, during that period. I proposed to her in Madame Trousseau Museum, as a matter of fact. And we got married -- well, actually I said, "Honey, I will go the United States." Because in late 1950 I got my visa, and I said, "Honey, I think I better to the United States rather than finishing my studies here, because is too slow of a country for me. I want to go where there is some action and there are opportunities, challenges to meet and so on." And I said, "I settle out there and then I bring you in, and we'll get married." And she said, "The hell you are. I'm going with you." So we got married in September 30th, 1950. In February on Queen Elizabeth we came to the United States. We Statue of Liberty after four or five days on the Atlantic. It was so rough that some days in the dining room, there was nobody there but captain and me. It didn't bother me, but all the people were so sick. And that was it, that's how I landed in the United States.

Q: What were your first impressions over here?

A: I was just about ready to go back to England. The little money I had was really going, and we were staying in a motel. Then I had an incident I'm lost on the street and asked a man can he tell me where such-and-such motel is, because I'm lost. He sized me up from bottom to the top, and said, "Yeah. Give me a dollar, I tell you." That was what made a Christian out of me really. It told me hey, you better learning a little bit more how, what makes it tick here. And that's where I started, realized that one has to use elbows. If you just sit and wait for something to drop into your lap, you never get it. You have to work for it, work hard. And if you do that, there's no other place on earth where you can do it but United States. This is the land of opportunity. I would not bring my brothers here because they are older, and without language it's tough. I was still fairly young, I was 27, I think. But for a young person with initiative, with drive, this is the place to be.

Q: You had a family and got your engineering degree?

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, I put aside enough money working in the factory to put me

through a semester, and I got admitted to Michigan State University in Lansing, East Lansing. Got my bachelor's degree there, and they offered me assistantship where I was practically teaching even, and I was working on my master's degree also in engineering. During that time, Claudine was pregnant with her first child. And as a matter of fact, it was a race between baby showing up or her finishing my thesis, typing my thesis. Well, she finished the thesis before the baby came in. We decided to move out of Michigan. The climate wasn't what I liked. And besides, I had an offer on the West Coast. Being one of the top students, the companies were fighting for me somehow. Which I wasn't used to, because in England I barely, barely, barely was writing a C grade. Here I was A, Bs. So Kellogg's out of New York and Fleur out of West Coast and Chesapeake and Ohio out of Richmond, Virginia -- those three outfits interviewed me, invited me to spend some time with them. I decided on Fleur because I thought it was close to skiing. I never imagined that I would be skiing somewhere else, rather than in California.

Q: Let me just ask you a quick question. Well, your answer doesn't have to be quick. These were pretty -- and I think we only have three minutes on this tape, but traumatic -- there was a pretty traumatic disruption of a normal life. Did it have a certain long-term impact on you, on the way you think, your values when you raised your family?

A: Oh, no question about it. No question about it. I tried and incur the same values in my children. They are the most wonderful kids you could have. We never had any problems with them. Stayed away from drugs. Stayed away from wild things. Each one has a profession. Happily married for many years each already. No problems at all. And when I became sick, they flew in immediately here. They wouldn't leave for a second. I was the number one for them. When I get letters from them on Father's Day or Valentine's, I close the door because I have to cry. They are so loving and so thankful for the way they were brought in.

Q: Why is that?

A: I wish I could put my finger on that. First of all, you concentrate on a family unit. Family is the number one. Job, other stuff has to come secondary. So for the kids, we always had time. How many times did I have to load the horses on Saturday and go to a show? You had to get up almost at midnight to do that and drive some 30 miles to be in a show, horse show. How many times can you go through the experience of teaching your kids how to drive? My second one reminds me still of how I got her on the freeway when she was barely starting.

Q: We just have like a half a minute left. Is there anything else that you want to ...

A: No, no. But I wish, I wish strongly from the bottom of my heart that something

happens to bring the Jewish and Polish people back together a little bit more. Poland, for centuries, had Jews. For centuries, there was a harmony, and somehow in the last periods with this problems developing by Auschwitz or problems I guess under Communist rule in Radom there was, I don't understand how those things can happen. And we have a lot in common. We have a lot in common, because Jewish people were without the country. They know what it is not be free, so do we. So I think -- one day I hope it might happen that we work hand in hand on everything.

Q: Thank you.

Conclusion of interview