

## **Summary of Oral History Interview with Bronislaw Durewicz July 1990**

Bronislaw Durewicz is a Polish national, born in Kalisch, Poland in 1920. He was on high school vacation when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939. At first, he fled to Warsaw, about 250 km (about 155 miles) away in the hope that the Polish army would stop the invasion. Kalisch was occupied on the 3rd or 4th day of the war. In Warsaw, he worked in the technical defense of the city (Red Cross, hospitals, checking buildings). He had no family in Warsaw and, after the city capitulated on September 22, started to work, mostly to replace broken windows. After he had saved 100 zloty, he returned to Kalisch and was successful in earning money on the black market.

He went to Zakopane where there was a chance to get to Hungary from where people tried to join the Polish army that was being formed. However, he was arrested by the Hungarians and sent back to Poland in the Winter of 1939-1940. He told the Gestapo that he had escaped from a Hungarian camp to return to Poland and was allowed to return to Kalisch. People were brutally treated by the Nazis and exposed to many indignities. In Kalisch, where the Jews made up about 30% of the population, they lost their businesses. At first, they managed to live on their possessions but gradually they were being taken away to bigger ghettos and concentration camps. He remembers seeing later as many as three trains with Jews waiting for gassing.

In 1941, he joined the Polish underground and mostly transported forged papers from Warsaw to Western Poland. While in the underground, he saw a priest being taken for execution because some weapons had been found nearby and shows a photograph of the priest being taken away and a later marker at the place of the execution. In 1943, he was arrested on a train; he jumped from the train, was chased and eventually caught and brought back to the station. The train had left and, fortunately, his papers were never found. He was in Gestapo prison for 6 weeks and beaten with sticks to get a confession from him but he succeeded in telling wrong stories and not give away any names.

Then he was sent to Auschwitz, where he stayed in a compound with other Polish prisoners and was tattooed for identification. A picture shows his tattoo. He worked in a vegetable garden. The camp food was very bad but after 6 or 8 weeks he received a food parcel from his parents. He knew that Jews were being gassed, in 1943, the trains went directly to the gas chambers. Some Polish prisoners also were gassed or shot. Once some Gypsies were brought in from another camp, they were told that they would be released but, as he found out later, they all were gassed.

In the Summer of 1944 he was taken to Peenemunde to unload cars. Later, as the Russians approached, he dismantled machinery used to make the V1 and V2 weapons and took it to Thuringen for hiding in the mountains. When the Allied armies came nearer, he was taken to the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. After liberation he saw a partially sunken ship in Bremerhaven. He shows documents from Auschwitz which he obtained during a 1976 visit.

After the war, he was in a displaced persons camp in Germany and trained to become a welder. After coming to Buffalo, he started as a welder but then took courses at Erie County College to get a better job and has been a lay-out inspector at Ford for many years.

He does not blame all Germans for the atrocities but many, particularly the SS, were like animals. He emphasizes that all free people should know what went on in Germany and hopes that such knowledge will prevent such events from ever happening again.