

Were there any particular examples of sort of Russian brutality that you witnessed, or uncouth behavior that you could describe to us?

Well, there were many instances. And these could be attributed to the fact that Russian soldier, the front line soldier, at the end of the war was not trained-- or garrison or barracks-trained soldier. These were conscripted as army advanced. And they were completely undisciplined.

The only one name was to get a gun, and get shooting, and get ahead, go ahead, racing forward in tanks and destroying everything on the way. The brutalities could be counted as those which I perhaps didn't see and those which I saw myself. Instances which I saw was that German soldier was treated as a dolt, completely as an object. There was no feeling that other enemy could be a human being.

And I don't know if I mentioned before, but in one instant, in little town which we were passing through in Germany, there was a dead soldier which was shot, possibly during the battle, maybe two weeks, maybe 10 days ago. And the soldier was still lying in the street.

And his legs and his lower part of the body on the pavement, the upper body part of the body was lying on the highway. And I couldn't imagine how many tanks or trucks went over him. He was completely squashed and flat, like a piece of paper. And nobody bothered to pick him up or pull him away, out of the way.

And the other instant, one which I could sort of say I witnessed, although no actual act, but I saw tanks, Russian tanks, quite splashed with blood. And discussing this with my colleagues-- and in fact, they said, well, pity you didn't see it the other day a number of these tanks had German soldiers stuck on the guns.

Apparently, I was told that while advancing forward on the highway, hundreds and hundreds of German soldiers who were captured were marching back into Russia into prison camp. And apparently, it was a game and fun for Russian gunners, tank gunners, to swing the gun and pierce the oncoming soldier right through his body. And one who picked more than one or two Germans on the gun was regarded as a hero, or a better hero, or more clever.

How about the German women? How were they treated by the Russian troops as far as you know?

Well, very roughly, very rough, in fact. And again, the front Russian soldier was a hero, in his opinion. And he thought everything around him could be his property. And he treated everybody as an object, as a property. In fact, what most times-- at most times, they were drunk. And they knew only two questions-- where is vodka and who are women?

There is-- there was an incident when the-- I was involved in the latter aspect. Once, while on the quarters with the Polish Army, two Russians came to visit the unit, very friendly and very jovial. Each one had a bottle of vodka in the pocket. We were introduced as ex-prisoners.

So they said, oh, where you been? Have you been long in prison? How do you feel? Or that sort of questions. And they said, you must have lot of vodka with us. And they sort of pour this stuff into us. And then eventually, towards the end of the evening they said, well, what about visiting some German women? And that was odd question for us.

But they said, well, let's see what you can offer. Everything in a joking spoken language. We're taken to a house near Gross Born, a house which belonged to a Bäckermeister, which is-- I would think it's like mayor of the small town. It was one of the largest houses in this small town.

And we were led to a room where there was a Russian sentry on a guard. And in this room, there was a huge, old-fashioned bed. And all we saw-- curtains were drawn. And all we saw was there were two heads, women's heads, showing above the-- and it's not either down, neither a big cushion-like, filled with feathers, which is very common on continent.

And those two heads were sticking out. And then one appeared to be sleeping, the other one eyeing us in fright, rather

frightened. We were encouraged by Russians to become friendly. But the scenery and the atmosphere in this room was completely repugnant. And we were trying to get out of this mess as soon as possible.

Hearing that, or understanding what was going on, one of these women raised her head, and in German, obviously, started begging us to let her go. And she was yelled by a Russian to lie still. But she turned to us-- that means my colleague and myself-- and she said that next to her is her daughter, about 17, she said. And she's been in that room, in that bed for the last 10 days at least, while the whole Russian detachment was passing through.

And in fact, she was, to start with, missing. And her mother was the next person that went looking for her. And in fact, she approached Russian commandant of this area. And in fact, when she asked Russians to release her daughter, she was taken in the same room for the same purpose. How long they've been denied here-- because we walked out from that house and never let our eyes on it again.

In fact, it's-- it was quite common for women to make themselves as possibly as-- I mean unattractive as possible, as they could. In fact, they were wearing the worst rag they could put on. They were pretending they were lame. And they painted their face with coal just to make themselves look dirty and repugnant. And how successful that was, I don't know. But knowing Russians, that wasn't very discouraging for them.

The events you've been describing about how you went to search for your family, I believe they take us up to about February 1945, Jurek. When did you first decide that you wanted to leave Poland?

Well, this, in fact, happened in the middle of March '45. And while at home, I found that there were one-- or more than one reason why I shouldn't be around. The main reason, or the first reason, was that all my colleagues, all people of my age then were conscripted. And, in fact, they were in the army.

And there was I, appearing from nowhere and not having anything to do with the Polish Army. And many people were throwing questions-- what are you doing? How you managed? Where you came from?

And the solution-- immediate solution would be to join the army immediately. I wasn't very keen then for one-- for many reasons that war was finishing. And before I got through some sort of training, things would be well over. And there was not really a point.

The other reason was that many people were convinced that war will not finish upon defeat of Germany. And we are witnessing every day the Russian enthusiasm of marching west. And we saw the slogans on the lorries on the tanks, saying, this is biggest opportunity for the revolution. And next stop is Paris.

Well, obviously, if one side has that in mind, we didn't think Allies would allow Russians to go as far as west as Paris. Obviously, we thought there was going to be another war. So in these circumstances, personally, I would prefer to be on the west side.

In addition, I must say that-- here that I had my uncle in London, who was group captain in the air force. And my sister was still in Germany on the western side. And having discussed this with my parents, I decided to make my way to them.

Obviously, that-- I didn't know how to go about it. And I couldn't go west because I would have to cross at least two front lines-- was still a battle going on. So there was only one way-- to go east and find my way through Russia.

How to go about it? And how to find my way going through Russia, I had no idea. So I decided to go to the-- to Lublin, which was big town-- which is a big town in southern Poland, and then see if I could discuss with anybody or talk to anybody about any means of ways of making my way out of Poland. Right.

You perhaps remember. I think I mentioned that while in the camp in Germany, the Gross-Born camp, I met a number of British and American prisoners of war. These people were in Germany for quite a while-- in fact, most of them from the Dunkirk days. And in the British contingent, there were New Zealanders, South African people-- New Zealanders

and-- did I say?

New Zealanders, yes.

And the Australians-- we had many interesting talks and chats with them while in camp. We ate together, cooked together. And, in fact, a number of British soldiers went with us on these escapades to German barracks, where we were helping ourselves to food and provisions. One or two were especially friendly. And I think those who smoked-- and as I didn't, they used to get my cigarettes.

Well, it was a chance, I would say, 1 in 1,000,000 that while in Lublin, I met some of these British soldiers. Apparently, they were liberated from the German camp, the Gross Born by advancing Russian Army. And they were brought by Russian transport to Lublin, which, at the time, I thought it was a sort of transit camp for all prisoners of war who were liberated by Russian Army on German territory. They were French, they were Yugoslavs, Italians, all nationalities.

And while I met these chaps, in fact, they recognized me almost the same time as I recognized them. And in no time, I was asked questions-- say, what are you doing? And I must say, here, we conversed in German. I didn't speak English at all then.

Obviously, to that question, I said, well, I'm not doing anything. And I would do anything which is worthwhile doing, in fact, as I said, that situation looks to us now. And it would be much better if I was with you when you get back home. Well, they seem to be quite enthusiastic about that point. And they said, sure. You come with us.

Well, how little they realized, it was easier to say than actually arrange this. I had no grounds whatsoever to be with them. And anyway, all these returning POWs were listed and sorted out by Russians by names, ranks, and regiments. And how I would appear on this list?

Well, there was quite a lot of thinking going on. And I think I was chatting in contact with them for a day or two. And we decided to make a decision on this topic, on this point, a day before departure-- their departure from Lublin. Apparently, they were advised already that a train is being readied for them to be taken to Odesa on the Black Sea.

I think that was two days before the departure. We discussed this once more. And I decided then that if the opportunity arises, and the Russian surveillance and guards will not notice anything peculiar happening while they depart-- while they're departing from Lublin, I'll join them.

Did you look like them? Were you wearing the same sort of clothes?

I would say similar, though my clothing then consisted of Italian overcoat, German Army long boots, and American wool-knitted little cap, which Americans used to wear in the winter under their helmets. That could be anything. as far as a soldier is concerned, I could be Italian, could be German-- sorry, could be Italian, French, or Yugoslav, or American, even.

Day before departure-- the day before departure, I was taken by the friend of mine to the commanding officer, British commanding officer who was in charge of the transport, which been in the-- is being formed. I think there were about 400 or 500 people involved. And the commanding officer was told who I was. And he was told that I would like to join them and leave Poland.

The-- he seemed to understand this and was quite friendly. Then he had talked with American colleague, who was in charge of American contingent. And they said to me, look, stand around in the area where we will be loaded on the train. And if you see a chance of jumping on the train, you do that. And we receive you. And from now-- from then onwards, we will take responsibility.

And as it happened, everything went quite smoothly. Few minutes before departure, I was amongst them already. And I got immediately new uniform. I don't know how that they happened to manage a battle dress and a beret for me. So in no time, I was looking exactly as a British soldier. And that-- we went to Kyiv and then to Odesa.

Were there any checks on the way of your cards, your papers?

No. No. All I was told-- not to lean out of train, not to look out or walk out of the train, makes myself less conspicuous. And food was brought to me during this journey, which I think lasted about three or four days. So I was really concealed within this transport. We arrive in Odesa.

And we marched from a station to a point which was next transit camp. It was a big school, disused big school, fairly near the harbor. And we found that there was already several hundred American and French soldiers in that school.

I remember, it was quite unusual because we marched as a detachment. Russians were leading us, but not a guard, but on a very friendly basis. In fact, march on the front of the column. We were not guard at all.

In the school, we were given rooms to-- as quarters, where we had beds, bunks-- in fact, army bunks. And in that school, we remained for about a week. And day-to-day life was rather not interesting. We were confined to this area, to this barrack, to this school. We were not allowed to leave it, to leave the school. There was a big yard where we could walk and exercise. Some were running, some were marching, some were walking about just to kill time.

And it was interesting to see that some prisoners received Red Cross parcels from American Red Cross. And in fact, people were making fires in the middle of the yard or somewhere against the wall to cook either coffee or stew plums, which were prunes in a box. And it was-- it looked like a gypsy camp, more or less, with fires all over the place and people busy cooking and boiling.

And I don't know what happened. But during this time, one of the walls collapsed, walls adjoining the school, and fell on a group of American soldiers who were cooking in the way I just described. And I think two were killed. And one or two on top of that were wounded. And I think that caused Russians to improve our food situation because they were not allowed to squat, and cook, and boil our own food in the yard. But I think we were given better food from Russians, as a Russian.

One day, towards the end of the week, there was news that the Canadian boat is coming to collect prisoners. And on this boat, there is a mission from Red Cross, bringing supply and medical care and a mission from American and British Army to negotiate release and transport of POWs. There was quite a commotion.

And I was asked to come to see the commanding officer. And I was told that everybody would be called in front of the members of the commission and be examined. And only after examination and acceptance as a prisoner, ex-prisoner of war, a permit will be given to a person or to WP to leave the country on this route.

And this made the situation quite tense for me. And obviously, only British and American were going to leave-- and those who had-- who could prove that they were members of Allied army. In fact, a questionnaire was handed out where you had to put your name, rank, army number, unit you served in, taken to-- taken prison date, and a release date, that sort of thing.

And that was to be examined by the mixed commission consisting of American, British, and Russian people-- Russian officers. I was in a predicament then because obviously, if I said who I was, I wouldn't go much further. And consequences would be possibly quite nasty for me. So there was quite a lot of thinking, I believe, on the side of officers who were in command of the group.

And in the end, I was told, don't worry, I think we found a way. Now, at the eve-- on the eve of the departure, we were told that we will be taken to a Russian circus. And the Russian circus was to be presented to us as our entertainment and farewell gift or entertainment to Allied prisoners.

We went to circus. And it was quite enjoyable time, but I kept thinking, what's going to happen to me tomorrow? When we returned from circus, we were told that-- to participate to this gesture, this Russian gesture of circus-- offering a circus performance, the captain of-- [AUDIO OUT]

So the captain decided to give a party for the Russians, did he?

Yes. And the boat was Duchess of Richmond, Canadian Pacific. And the captain and Red Cross representatives invited Russians to a party at a-- at the school immediately before departure. I think the party was going to be mid-morning the following day.

And the commission was going to sit us from 6 o'clock in the morning the previous day. And all soldiers, all POWs were going to queue to go in front of the commission, when they will be briefly interrogated, in fact, repeating the information they provided on the form, which-- on that form was stamped and signed by the chief Russian officer of the commission. And that will mean you have your pass to go to the boat.

Well, a dilemma for me was that I couldn't say I was in British Army. I couldn't say, obviously, my rank, neither number. And I couldn't pretend to be British. And there was no reason whatsoever why I should go. In fact, quite a number of prisoners, particularly the French and Yugoslavs, they were not going to go on this boat at all. They were going to wait for another boat to come one of the following days.

And then this-- but on this particular transport, only American and British were allowed to. And there was no chance for me to try to go with French or other nationalities. I rather wouldn't go at all.

But I still have no idea how I managed to pass this commission. And in fact, I sort of thought myself, well, if that fails, I better finish myself because there's no point of going any further. And I would hate to be standing on some firing squad-- Russian firing squad. So eventually, I was told by Major Fulton, who was a New Zealander, that now, don't worry, we found a scheme. And I'm sure it will work.

He said, you will be a South Afrikaner, a Boer, who not necessarily has to speak English, and who lost all his documents. We have a real one here, chap from South Africa, who will be your interpreter. And he will stand in front of the commission with you, he said, because we chancing here that the Russians don't speak Afrikaner language. So they wouldn't be able to interrogate you direct.

This chap will be in front of you. And when he is finished, and you go up, he could turn around and say, I'm sorry, sir, this chap doesn't speak English. But I will interpret for him. In fact, they prepared a form for me with the information which was arranged beforehand.

And things happened exactly as I was told. I was in front of the commission. In front of me was this South Afrikaner. I never saw him before. I never saw him since. And there was the commission consisting of two Americans and two British, whom I knew, and two Russians.

When I appeared in front of them, and the Afrikaner turned and said, he will interpret for me, a Russian looked at each other. And they said, oh, well, if he is South African, he is not British and neither he is American. So he has to wait until the South African contingent will be formed. Well, that will be a disaster for me to wait because I wouldn't know anybody else.

So there was an argument or some discussion between my interpreter and Russians. And I couldn't understand this discussion because it was in English. But later on, I found that he was trying to persuade Russians that he is really British because he was saving the British Army. He was on the British paybook. And the South Africa-- South African army was fighting with the British Army.

How I found myself in prison camp and so on, I never-- I don't know because I wasn't told-- I didn't understand that I-- perhaps, I will never know exactly. But at that point, Russians started talking in Russian between themselves, which I then understood. And then I realized how difficult it was going to be.

In fact, the-- we reached the point where the members of the Russian commission were going to ask their superiors in maybe Moscow, I don't know where, what to do with this aspect. There's something which is not happened before and is

not a regular thing. So they had to clarify that and clear. And they said, all right, let him wait. In the meantime, we contact Moscow.

Well, my interpreter knew how important it is not to get any consultation with a superior. And the argument was going on. In the end, one of the Russians turned to the other one and said, well, let him go because if we upset British, there'll be no champagne tomorrow. And at that point, they signed my paper.

You were really saved by this captain's party then?

Exactly, yes, because of circumstances, because of the situation that if they object in a way, it may upset the Allied commission. They say, oh, let it go. It's something unusual, but if we do make difficulty, there will be no party or no champagne tomorrow. In fact, there was word they use champagne.

I was told by my colleagues to hide myself immediately in the darkest corner of the school. And in fact, was quite a relief for me because while standing in front of this commission and meditating what's going to happen to me, I almost decided that if they say no and stick to it, we were on the fifth floor, so I would go for the window, and that would be the end. But luckily, things happened quite smoothly.

I went back to my quarters, which were in one of the school rooms. And I stopped there until the time when, next morning, when we were marching out to the port, to harbor, we're marching out again as a detachment and four abreast, with Russian band on the front, everybody waving. In fact, some civil population living nearby school became quite friendly with us. And they led us in the port.

On the steps to the boat, everybody was giving up his pass. So did I. And once I was on the deck, I was told to go right down to the bottom, where the anchor chain drops in, and stay there until somebody comes and calls me out-- that means when we will be on the international waters.

On the 28th February, we passed Bosphorus and then two hours, later Constantinople. Then I was called out to the top deck. And the quartermaster, who issued us with new uniforms, shaving kit, and tensioning knot each-- well, as soon as I received that lot of money, my first purchase was chocolates.

And in fact, I spent a whole 10 shilling note on chocolates. Well, this meant that I was left without pocket money for the rest of the journey. But I never regretted having bought that lot of chocolate. I must say here that right through the occupation time-- I mean, since September 1939, I never tasted chocolate. So that was my feast to put to right that sort of deficiency.

And we passed Athens. And then our first call was Naples. In Naples, we stopped for three or four days. That was my first sight of Italy. But the harbor in Naples-- with Naples-- sorry, in Naples wasn't anything, really, to speak about but a destroyed city and the harbor.

In the harbor, we had fresh oranges, which was another surprise. And some troops came on the boat. And amongst those troops was a detachment of Polish officers from the Second Corps who fought under General Anders in Italy. They were going to UK. So they joined us, as well as about 500 of Canadian ATSEs.

Next call was at Gibraltar. We stopped there, I think, for about a week. And then it was quite a gay time on the boat. There was cinema, there was theater. And almost every second night, there was a dance. So I enjoyed myself. I sang for the first time since the beginning of the war, I would say.

How did the other soldiers treat you, the English soldiers, and the New Zealanders, and the Americans? Were you treated as one of them?

I was treated as one of them, indeed. But when the Polish contingent came on board in Naples, I was more or less given-- the British and American give me up under care of the Polish detachment. So that means I had to tell them, really, who I was, how I got on the boat, and so on. They do the story.

And something cropped up, which I didn't really understand at the time. But they said, if you arrive in the UK with that story which you just told us, you'll be promptly put in the displaced persons camp because you're arriving as a single person, more or less.

So it was then decided that, for the record, I was to be a member of the Polish forces in Italy. Now, on the way back to UK, together with that group which joined us at Naples-- and my name was put in addition to the list, which was given to captain. And from now on, I traveled as a member of General Anders' army.

Did you have to formally join the army? Did you take an oath or anything?

No, no.

This was just a pretense to get you?

That's right, just to straighten my journey to the UK and possibly the stay in the UK. Because when we arrived in Glasgow-- in fact, in Greenock, I was given a letter recommending me to the Polish headquarters in Edinburgh and a railway warrant covering the distance between Greenock and Edinburgh. Well, once I got to Polish forces headquarters and presented my papers, I was, in fact, formally enlisted in the Polish forces.

Were your family aware when you arrived safely in England?

Yes, eventually, not immediately, though. And I approached British Red Cross and ask them to convey message through Red Cross to Poland that I arrived safely and that I met my uncle. In fact, I met him within a week of arrival in the UK.

This is the uncle who was a group captain in the air force?

Yes. And in the meantime, I also had a message for Uncle-- I had a message from my sister, who was liberated in north of Germany, in northern part of Germany, by Canadian Army. And then she was taken to a transit camp under Allied command.

And in fact, she, in first instant, wrote to the Polish Red Cross in Germany to contact my uncle in London and tell him that she is there. Well, once that was established, my uncle was able to arrange for her to come to UK. And in fact, she joined WAAFs in Wilmslow, in Manchester. And that's where I first met her after all.

And so your parents received a message through the Red Cross that you were in England, am I right in thinking that?

Yes. They received the message. And I couldn't say exactly this-- was it three or four months later, we had a letter from them. We had a letter from parents that they were very, very pleased that we were together now and safe in the UK. And their wish is that we stay where we are.

How did your parents fare in Poland immediately after the war?

Well--

Did the fact that you had moved to England make any difference to their lives?

Oh, it did. And the fact that I left Poland made a tremendous difference to-- as far-- anyway, as Father was concerned because at that time, I'll say, within 10 to 12 months after my disappearance from Poland, politically, Polish situation was in a mess. Elections were coming.

And a member of the London Polish-- London government, Polish government in London, went back to Poland. His name was Mr. Mikolajczyk. And he was going to arrange a free election in Poland. So many people came to surface with their beliefs and their convictions. And there was a number of political parties which put forward candidates

forward to these elections.

And I'm not certain, but I believe from what I had seen, that Father was put forward as one of the National candidates. And there was possibly some sort of friction between their party and party which was supporting Russians, and communists, and so on.

And in the meantime, there was quite a number of incidents involving underground army, which was in existence at the time, and underground army, which was-- which activities were directed against Russians and, generally, Poles who were pro-Russians at the time. And I since learned that somebody denounced me in a way by saying that I've been seen in one of the detachments of the army at times fighting against Russians.

And Father was approached several times to verify where I was or to tell where I was. Obviously, he said, he's not at home. Possibly, Father didn't want to say, he's in England or went to England. So the story was that Father said, sorry, I have no idea where he is. But he wasn't believed that.

And several times, there was several incidents which led me to believe that there were people who were trying to provoke him and to make him outspoken against the Russians or do something which could be a pretext for the police to either arrest him or maybe worse. And in fact, something happened which I later learned from Mother. The police were trying to put a story that Father was aiding underground army by, I think, lending or selling horses to them-- something of that sort of. I'm not exactly clear on details.

And as a result, one night-- well, uniformed police arrived and asked Father to accompany them, apparently, for interrogation of some sort of. And they didn't go further than 500 yards, when he was shot at point-blank distance and, in fact, murdered there on the road leading to town-- and left there. So that was that.

Obviously, Mother was in terrific sort of despair and not knowing what to do or how to go about it. And my brother was then very young. And in fact, neighbors were very helpful. They helped her quite a lot. They probably had quite a number of friends who also aided Mother. But that wasn't the end, apparently.

About two or three months after his death, Mother was again approached by police. And she was again told that if she will not tell police where I was, she will follow her husband or her fate will be similar to my father. And I think that made her really worried because I had a cable already here. I had a cable from Poland from Mother asking me to supply a certificate confirmed by Russian embassy in London that I am a resident in UK at that date of my appearance at the embassy.

In that case, I had to go to the consulate in Glasgow, the Russian consulate in Glasgow, where I asked them to state my presence at that date. And they did, in fact. There was not much difficulty to obtain this paper, although it took about three or four hours waiting for it. And I had to pay 10 pounds stamp fee on it.

But I believe this letter, this certificate, and my letter, stating that I am resident in the UK saved my mother from further troubles. And I know she received that. And I know, also, that since that time, she was no more approached by Polish authorities on this matter.

Was your father helping the underground army, do you think?

Yes. Yes, he was, right throughout the war.

And was he at this particular time when he was murdered?

Well, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know. You see, AK, that means Home Army, aim was to serve as long as Poland was subdued-- doesn't matter by whom. Home Army was to be dissolved only on the date when Poland is 100% free.

So although Germans were defeated, Poland thought the presence of Russians is not as friendly as to be declared that Poland has complete freedom. So possibly, he had a tendency to-- I don't think he was actively, but his views and his



opinion perhaps was such that it aggravated.

Were you yourself surprised at what the Russians did in Poland after the war, that they made it a satellite of Russia?

Well, I was, though the-- this didn't make an impact on me of such magnitude as, perhaps, it would do today. I, in fact, thought right, the Russians are in Poland. But as soon as war is finished and there is the peace treaty between the Allies, the Russians will be either told or asked to go back where they were.

And you thought they would do that if they were told?

I thought they would. And if they didn't, I thought there'd be another war.