

Interview with Michael M. Scislowski
August 19, 2002

Q: We can just start with your name.

A: My name is Michael Scislowski, Polish pronunciation Michal Schislowski. I was born in Siedlce, Poland. The town is located approximately 100 kilometers from Warsaw which is about 60 miles, east. In 1933...

Q: Let's just get your birth date also, your date of birth.

A: Date of birth, September 30, 1922. In 1933 I was a grammar school pupil going to school near Ruvna in Polish Ukraine area which was called in Polish Woin.

Q: This was public school?

A: That was public school, yes. I graduated from the school in 1935. I lived there with my father, my mother and sister. My father was a military career officer who had fantastic talent in organizing orchestra bands or amateur theaters anywhere we went and because of being military person he was rotated on his duty from one place to another, therefore we recognized and lived in many, many towns on the eastern Polish border. He was comparing with American organization was similar to FBI.

Q: So it was an investigative branch of the...

A: An investigative counterespionage, army counter-espionage intelligence service. So in 1935 after graduating from grammar school, my father was transferred to another town north of Ruvna by name of Kostopol which is now in Russian territory. And he didn't want me to waste time on learning Ukrainian language and therefore he brought me to my grandmother's place, back to Siedlce where I was born and I enrolled to gymnasium which is Polish high school.

Q: Was it a special gymnasium or just general studies?

A: No, it was general studies, right. And how different and how more informative Polish gymnasium was compared with American high school, then you know yourself. So I was in Siedlce in first and second year of high school and then I joined my father who requested transfer to area where he could have also high school in town and he received Wilno district, Vilna now is capitol of Lithuania but it was Polish and near Wilno was town by name of Wilaka, Wilaka Poyeto. So I completed high school, the third and fourth year in Wilaka..

Q: Your whole family was there?

A: And my family was there, right.

Q: Did you have a particular subject that was most interesting to you at the time?

A: All subjects were dictated by national education system and therefore the beauty of this was that no matter where anybody from military family or any other the child was transferred from one

town to another at this particular town you found exactly the same program in every subject. And we had twelve subjects including geography that in this country kids don't even know where Washington D.C. is.

Q: You took languages there and German?

A: In order to graduate from Polish high school you had to know two foreign languages and one classic. So I had German and French and Latin language as classic. So in 1939 I should have started Liceum. Liceum was approximately corresponding with American college, first year of college.

Q: That's a generic name, Liceum?

A: Liceum, L-I-C-E-U-M.

Q: Oh, like the French.

A: Like the French. So when war broke out, September 1, that was our first day of school. And immediately after the ceremony we started digging trenches.

Q: Did they tell you why?

A: Yeah, yeah, we knew immediately that war broke out and Germany attacked Poland, at four o'clock I understand in the morning.

Q: What were these trenches like that you were digging?

A: They were just like in the frontlines, any action, any military action in the front lines, trenches. They were about seven feet deep covered with some heavy materials and then covered with topsoil. So from the top, from the airplane you couldn't see it, camouflaged.

Q: This was still in the Wilno district you were in?

A: Yeah, in Wilaka where the high school was, on the high school territory. Well so you could see that we couldn't proceed with our lessons because the action, Germans, were approaching Warsaw almost every day.

Q: Where was your father, was he mobilized to go someplace else?

A: No, my father was still with us until September 17. On September 17 the Soviet Russia attacked Poland according to agreement with the Germans. Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement. And they gave us the final blow in the back. So we didn't know how they would behave entering Polish territory so my father took us, my sister, mother, myself, took us with him on the evacuation trip from Wilaka to Wilno. On our way there we have seen already preparations of Polish troops to fight the approaching Soviet tanks.

Q: But the Polish army was relatively weak.

A: Weak, yes, and it was already in very much in disastrous situation. Therefore, he left us in

Wilno with his friends and went with his group of agents he said to headquarter, I believe, to headquarter, and I have never seen him again until after war. So as I understand they crossed the Lithuanian border, Lithuania was for a few more days free, and when the Russians came, all these Polish military personnel was taken by the Russians and sent to various concentration camps.

Q: Who were you staying with in Wilno, you said they were friends of your father?

A: Friends of my father, yes.

Q: Military friends?

A: Military friends from World War 1. And then the Soviets ordered all people should return to their homes. So we went back to Wilaka. And after a few weeks they ordered all students return to their classes, but because of the extra-curriculum given by Russians in Russian language in Communist history, in party Communist history, we were taken one year back -- because they told us we complete our education as Communists after two years of indoctrination.

Q: So you were in classes learning Russian now and Soviet propaganda?

A: Yes and Soviet Communist Party history.

Q: How did you personally feel about this?

A: Well, you had absolutely nothing to say. You tolerated but you were definitely disgusted about this and we were trying to make some sort of ironic remarks all the time during the classes. But our teachers were army officers and they were Jewish.

Q: They pretty much replaced teachers that were there?

A: Yes.

Q: So all your other studies went by the wayside?

A: No, other studies, a few of our teachers escaped, and whoever escaped was replaced by the army teachers, Russian army teachers. Well I attended Communist classes until January 1st, 1940. That was if somebody still is alive could remember, we had the worst, the strongest, the coldest winter of my time. The temperature very often was dropped to minus 40 degrees. And during the night like that, with of course certain agreement with my mother, I decided to escape to Warsaw. So I took the train and I went to the last station before the borderline between Russian occupation zone of Poland and German occupation zone of Poland.

Q: Why did you want to escape? What was your goal?

A: Good question, because they started to arresting all Polish intelligent family members such as doctors, lawyers, former police department members.

Q: So clearly your father if he were there would have been a target.

A: Yeah, and I would be a target, definitely. So I decided to escape.

Q: That was in January?

A: That was January 1940. Taking advantage of -- they gave us two weeks vacation. So arriving to this last station I had to go about five miles on foot with a group of some people. They thought I know more about the location of the border line than themselves. And I led them directly to the guards building and when we started running away, they noticed us and they started shooting.

Q: These were the Russian guards?

A: Russian guards and I was caught first time when I tried to cross the border. And as penalty they placed us in the brick outhouse in the lower level where I had to stand in excrement, human excrement up to my knees. So I couldn't kneel. I couldn't relax, nothing. I had to stand there for three days before they took us out and they told us, now go back to Wilaka and you should study because you are a young student and you will be a good Consumer (?). Then I cried but I had to try again. So with my second try, instead of turning left, I turned right.

Q: Did you go all the way back to Wilaka?

A: NO, NO, NO, NO. Right after this maybe I went two kilometers towards the station and then I turned sideways when I noticed, because that was during the night, I noticed they couldn't see me anymore and I tried again, with the help, of course, of one guy who was also crossing not the first time. And he helped me out and I found myself on the other side in the morning. People on the borderline were very wonderful people. They fed me, they washed me a little bit, because I stunk like a beaver. And after a few hours I arrived to Siedlce because I thought my grandmother is still in my place where I was born, Siedlce. When I arrived there I only met my aunt. My grandmother was in Warsaw at that time. So between January of 1940 -- oh while reaching the destination, I sent a message to my mother in Wilaka a friend who was leaving for Wilno because he had a family over there.

Q: Was he crossing from the German side?

A: He was crossing from the German side to the Russian side. And I give him description how I crossed and I urged them also to try to come over. You see the difference between Russian occupational zone and German was that they were both death enemies of Poland. However, on the German side you could at least dress as a civilized people. You could use your tie, you could use your hat, you could use your nice shirt, versus looking like a peasant all the time and be completely as a savage looking. So this is, you should remember, this is the reason why so many people couldn't stand Communists because that was hypocrisy to the highest extent. Now what struck me first on my arrival to Siedlce that Jewish people, they were wearing the armbands with the Star of David and they had to take hats off and step aside before every German soldier. So you could see that that was horrible experience right from the start. And I was wondering right then how long I would be safe in this area.

Q: Did anybody ever check your documents at that time?

A: No, No, nobody...

Q: Once you were there they just assumed.....

A: Yeah, once you were there.....It took me one month to take bath, Turkish bath every day in order to get rid of the smell I absorbed sitting in that outhouse there. It was horrible. Well, I started working in Siedlce first at the construction to clean, because Siedlce was also bombed during the war and there were many masonry buildings that required removal. And the break was the price of gold so we were cleaning from the mortar, we were cleaning every brick and...

Q: How would you clean the mortar off?

A: With chisels, and once you cleaned a thousand bricks a day, you had good pay. And so I worked there, but it was too hard for me. So after two months, that was about March, in March I met one friend who suggested to me we should open photographic business because Germans were taking pictures of all the Polish ruins and Polish various monuments and everything.

Q: Had the Germans assigned you to that task of cleaning up the buildings?

A: No, no that was private. It was private Polish company.

Q: Did you have to clean a thousand a day to get paid?

A: No, no, no.

Q: But if you cleaned a thousand you would get reasonable pay?

A: Yeah, you could work two days or three days but you were paid for one thousand bricks. And I went in business developing pictures. I knew this because we had our own darkroom in Wilaka.

Q: In your home?

A: In my home, yeah, so I was photographing bugs since I was nine years old.

Q: You had a camera?

A: I had camera, yes. So it was easy for me and I was making good prints and everything. That's why we had fantastic business.

Q: Did you actually have a store?

A: We had a store, yeah, we had a store in a half demolished building, but it was okay.

Q: That's extraordinary. What about getting supplies? Was it relatively...

A: The Germans were giving you supplies. The Germans were bringing supplies to your store. Therefore, you were allowed to charge them just for your labor. They were giving you prices for every print, every enlargement, whatever.

Q: Do you remember developing anything especially interesting?

A: Oh we collected some nice, yeah, they were very fond of taking pictures of the hanging ceremony and we had quite a bit of collection of German photographers indicating the executions.

Q: Were these Jews mostly that they hung?

A: No, no, anybody who was against them who was caught doing something that they -- for everything, as you know maybe, everything was death penalty, no matter what you did, against the Reich it was death penalty. Now, my mother and sister arrived in Warsaw in May 1940. They had also tremendous, tremendous difficulties. They were separated for 48 hours during their trip and my mother thought that they kidnapped my sister because she was only, at that time, maybe twelve years old.

Q: Were you living with your aunt?

A: I was living with my aunt, yeah, in Siedlce.

Q: And that's where the store was, in Siedlce.

A: In Siedlce, yeah, before my mother and sister arrived. When my mother and sister arrived in Warsaw she sold everything what we had, possibly whatever was available and in their clothing and various pieces of undergarments she sewed in all the bank notes, high bank notes of one thousand zloty.

Q: So we collected, it was a very nice sum, when we tear off all these garment we found quite a nice sum of money. And that was the last day in Warsaw to exchange the old Polish money into the general government, they were called general government money. And we decided to open a business. And then between Warsaw and Siedlce is Minsk Mazowiecki and we decided to go back to our first family town when everybody knew us and we knew that if something goes wrong, we will get help. And therefore the first try was to open a regular general store in Minsk Mazowiecki. And since the only place for the building was in suburbs didn't go so well, so therefore my mother obtained somehow lease of the building on the main street. And she decided to change from general store to delicatessen. And we had fantastic business. We had fantastic business and I could start attending various classes and getting my education because as you know, once Germans occupied Poland, they liquidated all high schools, lyceums, colleges, and universities. Only the grammar schools were open because they told us that we are designated as labor force only.

Q: Right, so all you need is a certain level of education.

A: Right, they don't need Polish intellectuals anymore.

Q: Where were you able to take classes then?

A: No, no, they were secret instructions given to us by Polish professors. And I continued later on when I tell you after my first arrest. So I was in Minsk Mazowiecki till, no let's say this, at that time I also started learning English. There my first English classes were taking place. Maybe I

told you before I had nice big family, so my first cousins who lived in Warsaw were arrested and sent to Auschwitz. That was June of 1940. One of them is still alive and I now contact with him, so he promised to contribute something also to the museum in Washington.

Q: Why was he arrested? Was he in the underground?

A: No, no, they knew that all Polish youngsters, they like to work underground. They didn't realize yet that we already had certain first beginning of the underground organizations but they were trying to -- they started in 1940 in June arresting many youngsters. So I was even hiding in the attics, in the cellars, just not to be surprised during the night when they come and take you away.

Q: Were you actually working in the underground then or did they suspect any young person?

A: No, no, not yet, they suspected any young person, not yet.

Q: So just as a preventative, they figured they might as well arrest them before they start something.

A: That's right, correct. So in November of 1940 being located on the main street of Minsk Mazowiecki we noticed first movement of German troops toward the east. Okay, that's important fact. And we were wondering, what the hell for.

Q: Did several columns come through your town?

A: Yes.

Q: Mechanized columns?

A: Mechanized columns, yeah. And as you know Brazilitov which was the borderline between Germans and Russians, it was maybe another 150 miles. In January 1941 my friend started talking about underground organization to fight the Germans right here in Minsk Mazowiecki that was January 1941. In March of 1941 we noticed increased movement of German troops east and as you know in June of 1941 Germany attacked Soviet Russia. And that was end of their friendship and collaboration. During this time in Warsaw the first Wapanki, Wapanki, it was type of certain -- the idea of closing the streets and avenues in such a way that whoever is trapped in this four or six blocks together was led to one only exit and was identified and if they caught, few times they caught very important people of underground organizations and other Polish famous guys.

Q: So it was almost like rounding up cattle, livestock, getting into a smaller and smaller area?

A: Yes. And the same way there were hostages also selected from this kind of engagement. Now between June '41 and August '42 there were continuous Wapanki, continuous arrests, continuous, no matter where. Even Minsk Mazowiecki was no more safe anymore. And now one morning, at six o'clock in the morning when I was going to my uncle's house for certain information, I was passing by the Ukrainian SS troops who were stationed at the beginning on the east side of Minsk Mazowiecki borderline of the township and there were plenty of them, I would say about entire company, about 100 people. I was wondering what happened, and when

I was staying with my uncle because we had business together....

Q: He was part of the deli?

A: He was part of the deli, yah, he had his own business also. And what we learned that they came to liquidate Jewish section of Minsk Mazowiecki who were the market place was in front of the Catholic church.

Q: Was there a ghetto there?

A: No, no.

Q: Just a Jewish neighborhood?

A: Jewish neighborhood, yes. They took all of them into the marketplace. It was a nice area about 300 meters by 300 meters, that would be 900 feet by 900 feet. They concentrated them and the Ukrainians shot them dead. So the blood was floating all over the place.

Q: They shot women and children?

A: Everybody, yeah. I mean, some of them who were able to escape, they were escaping. Before that massacre they were forcing the Jewish gvina (?) rabbis to donate to commandateur, the commanding officer of the garrison of Minsk Mazowiecki about one kilogram of gold every two months or every three months I cannot tell. But we knew that they were forced because Jewish friends told us that they had to donate all gold. Once they stripped them with entire possessions, then they killed them.

Q: Did you see this massacre?

A: I saw only after massacre when they were using remaining Jewish people to load the bodies on the tracks and taking them away to some massive graves.

Q: Was that the first real atrocity you saw committed by the SS?

A: I would say so. Well, I saw hanging executions in Siedlce when I came. That was my first experience. That was my first experience of atrocities. And here I approached the end of my freedom for the first time in September of 1942. I was arrested and kept overnight by the Ukrainians in their SS garrison in Minsk Mazowiecki and then the very next morning I was sent together with a group of about thirty kids to Warsaw.

Q: Did they send you by truck or walk you or..?

A: Sent by truck, by truck.

Q: Did they ever give a reason for arresting you?

A: No, no. They came -- I was with my mother and my sister in the store during the day and they took me from the store.

Q: The Ukrainian SS have a fairly bad reputation. Did you agree with that?

A: Oh, absolutely.

Q: That they were ruthless?

A: Ruthless, especially to Poles, because they were pushed by the Germans and the Germans were smart. They didn't do this biggest atrocities. They were always taking somebody who was serving them well. Okay, that's what happened. Now I was held in ?? I think that was warehouse or high school, I don't recall. There were many, many empty halls where they kept all these kids, few hundred kids were kept there. And checking my health, checking my structure, medical examination, they told me I would be send to main post office in Vienna to work. And I saw my mother for the last for the two weeks that I was there.

Q: You were held in this warehouse for two weeks?

A: Two weeks, yeah, and my mother was there every day crying so I tried to tell her, don't worry about me, don't worry about me. She said one of my uncles promised to help us. And really combining our money together because I believe she had to pay 7,000 zloty to the chief guard and he let me go. But I wouldn't dare to go back to Minsk Mazowiecki. Therefore, I remained in Warsaw and here I really joined the lyceum courses, that was confidential courses arranged by professors of colleges and universities for the kids who couldn't go to school any longer.

Q: What did they teach you?

A: They were teaching me everything, mathematics, all the courses that are necessary. I at that time already decided to become an architect. So History of Architecture.

Q: Where did they hold the classes?

A: The classes were held in each professor's private home. So we had to travel all over Warsaw. One class was held on Wilsa Street, another class on Dubra Street and from Dubra back again on Marshallkoska Street.

Q: How many students were with you at a time, usually?

A: Usually the complete was six kids in a class.

Q: And you paid the professors?

A: No, whoever was able to pay, he paid, whoever not they were all patriotically inclined. Nobody even thought about material gains. And also at that time I started taking lessons on piano, piano lessons.

Q: Where were you living?

A: I was living with my uncle who bought -- I contributed some of my money and some of my mother's money and we bought apartment on Dubra Street, 53, corner of Radna. So that was September of 1942. October more arrests, more hostages, more executions. That was the time

that Jewish ghetto was enclosed completely.

Q: You're caught within the Jewish ghetto at that time, that is within the area they designated? I know a lot of Poles who moved out.

A: No, no. I was not affected because I was closer to Vistula River area.

Q: You recall watching them build the wall, I suppose.

A: Yes, yes, I was passing on a streetcar many times through the ghetto. And at the beginning when I was there the life was normal. You couldn't recognize any differences only it looked very congested, looked very congested.

Q: This was the streetcar that actually went in the ghetto and out the other side?

A: Right, it had to pass by. What I would like to stress here, Kevin, please believe me this is not propaganda. Whoever wanted to leave or escape, he could. The Jewish gmina members, the highest instance in ghetto, that were ruling spiritually also and morally entire population, they never believed that the Germans would liquidate them and that was the biggest mistake because they had whoever wanted to go, he could.

Q: If they wanted to get out there they could try to get out?

A: Absolutely, even jumping at the stop, jumping into the tramway and wh -- t, you're out. You take off the band. The only thing is whoever was looking Jewish, he had no chance, that's true. That was Mother Nature's dirty trick. If you happened to look similar to other faces by all means you could save. And they were saved, many, many thousands, hundred thousands were saved.

Q: Did you ever hear of the group Jagoda?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: I know that they saved a lot of Jews in Warsaw.

A: Oh sure, and how many thousands were executed because they were trying to save. I know a few around the village in Minsk Mazowiecki. It was rough. So let's go because we never finish this.

Q: I won't ask more questions.

A: No, no, ask me, ask me, it's wonderful, ask me because I will supplement you immediately with my opinion if I have any. In 1942, Christmas time now, I took a chance. Came to Minsk Mazowiecki at night with my friend for Christmas Eve dinner. And that was the last time I saw my mother, grandmother and sister. Now 1943 January....

Q: Was that Christmas Eve meal or Christmas day meal or just around...?

A: Christmas Eve meal because Christmas Eve meal that just like Jewish holidays are falling

always at night like Friday night, like Shabbat Shalom. Well in January I was sworn into ZWZ, Zwiasek Walki Zbrojnej. That was the organization which was preceding AK, Armia Krajowa. And together with my friend, Stanchachowski and we two were sworn in by Bal-Komorowski himself.

Q: This was in Warsaw?

A: That was in Warsaw, yeah.

Q: I'm not familiar with him.

A: He was the commander-in-chief of all organizations at that time.

Q: Were you nervous about doing this?

A: Oh, sure, yeah. Now I received the first underground work in the railroad machine shop in Praga. Praga is on the other side of Warsaw. On one bank is called Warsaw and another side is Warsaw Praga, okay? And not a lot of fun because on March 19, 1943 hoping that my uncle is at the doors of my apartment at six o'clock in the morning, I opened the doors and that was Gestapo.

Q: They were knocking at the door?

A: Knocking on the door, yeah.

Q: What kind of work were you doing in the railroad machine shop?

A: Working as a carpenter. That's why I almost saved my life later on in the concentration camp because I declared myself a carpenter.

Q: When you were sworn in what was the philosophy of the underground? I'm sure they said that our goals are to

A: ...to free, free Poland of enemies, yeah, regardless of whether they were Germans or Russians.

Q: So since was the predecessor to the AK this was also an armed resistance group?

A: Yes.

Q: What did they have you build?

A: Have me build, what do you mean?

Q: As a carpenter what were you building for them?

A: Oh, no, that was some parts. You wouldn't know. You would never know what is the final item. So you had only parts, certain hundreds of pieces of lumber cut to certain piece. It was on various tact.

Q: Assembly line?

A: Assembly line, yes. So please remember they entered apartment at six o'clock in the morning and at seven o'clock, one hour later, I was in Poliak prison, shaved, undressed and thrown into the basement solitary compartment. And then I started crying. Because I said what the hell for honestly, what have I done, I didn't do anything yet so as to be locked up. So during my presence in Poliak I was interrupted by Gestapo three times on Alaya Shucha where the headquarters of Gestapo was. Alaya Shucha. And probably you heard about tramway we called the special room of the sizes about 25 by 12 or 25 by 15 rooms that people who were waiting to be interrogated had to wait with face the opposite dead wall. And the guard was behind you. If you turn only a little bit of degrees left or right, he calls you to the passage and you have to make one hundred sit-ups until you were exhausted.

Q: They call that the tramway, this corridor.....?

A: Each room. The tramway was each room. So shortly after that I was taken to the department five in the Pavia called Fifth Floor .I can remember now which was Transport floor and with our prayers because we didn't want to stay in Poliak on May 3 since that was famous Polish holiday and usually they were executing hostages.

Q: Those interrogations, what did they ask you or what did they say to you?

A: They were, first of all they were asking you are a member, we know that you are a member of underground. Tell us only who was with you and then we let you go. That was the famous statement, a very naïve one, so you had to have power, will power to tell them all the time that you don't belong to any other organization and you have never belonged to any organization. They were beating up with a stick from top of head to the end of your behind, entire back. You had red and purple when you came back to Poviak prison.

Q: So any time you didn't answer.....?

A: Correct, you got beating. So we arrived to....Oh I should mention that now, shortly before our departure, ghetto uprising took place and we saw through our windows how Germans were systematically going from one building to another dropping napalm bombs into the basement to be sure that entire building will catch flames. And whoever was hiding in the building, if he didn't come out, then he burned to death. There were some constant day and night machine guns and single shots fired. We couldn't sleep because of that and because of tremendous smoke that penetrated the windows of the prison.

Q: You had a window in the cell you were held in?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: This was a group cell?

A: Group cell on the top floor. I was already in the Transport floor so absorbed most of the smoke.

Q: Then you could see the ghetto from that window?

- A: Yes, you could see the streets also, the tanks on one hand and some individuals shooting at the tanks from another end of the street. So that was the end. The smoke was still on when they took us to a transport and we arrived to the Warsaw freight station and placed eighty prisoners in one freight car. Total of transport was 1,200 prisoners.
- Q: All from Poviak?
- A: From Poviak.
- Q: These were the cattle cars they put you in?
- A: Cattle cars, yeah. One more thing that I should mention because it was significant. Was adding to our tortures was the amount of bedbugs that was eating you alive during the night and you couldn't escape because when you even slept on the table providing every leg of the table into a pail of water, they were crawling on the wall and then on the ceiling and dropping on your body from the ceiling directly. It was amazing. It was completely impossible to fight them.
- Q: They give you some food within the prison?
- A: Yes, you were getting very small amount. Well now things were rolling very fast now because between Warsaw and Pajkovo the very next big station going west from Warsaw few guys who worked in Poviak in the machine shop, they somehow smuggled hand drill at their body so when I found myself with them in the same cattle car, with small holes they drill through a few planks, wooden planks, removed it from the top and you could slide down and upward between the channels, steel channels there were wooden planks.
- Q: This was the floor of the car?
- A: No, that was side, between the buffers, between the cars, parallel with the trucks. And they removed few planks, enough for human body to go through. They just placed themselves nicely under the buffers and one after another started escaping because the caboose where the soldiers were never expected first somebody might escape. They were playing cards or something, did not paying attention. So the first few, seven only, were able to escape. I was also in the line to escape but the first shot was fired as noticed them running away.
- Q: This was daytime?
- A: Daytime, yes. And their nice situation was that the machinist were appalled so he rode the engine for another maybe half a mile before he stopped. So they had enough area to be separated from the train so they didn't bother to chase them. But all the madness they concentrated on the car where we were in.
- Q: Right, somebody was going to suffer for this.
- A: Right, so when the train stopped, the first SS jumped on the buffer, taking advantage of this open spot through which they escaped and he emptied entire magazine of the machine gun. So he killed two guys and he wounded about five guys. I heard only whistle above my head so for the first time I had a barrel of the gun facing against me. That was the first time. Immediately they opened the doors and they took us all out and it was some small how to say, it's not village,

it's not town.

Q: It's the railroad siding?

A: Railroad siding, people who lived closed to railroad tracks. Put us against the fence with two machine guns right on both sides and the officer started telling us now who was the leader we want to know or you will all be shot. So people next to me already started giving certain smell away and everything physiological part of your body is very weak if you're under duress. And something was telling me all the time that this is not the place where you're going to die and I was kept so I went cool. Now we were lucky. In our group there was one fellow who spoke perfect German. We knew German language but not to such extent as could assume you are of German origin. But this guy was fantastic and he told with certain respect. You should know before you execute us he said that it was not our will. They had gun, they had instruments, everything ready for their escape and it was not our fault that you have not probably cleared them or caught them when you were loading us at the platform. And that was reason that he got mad but he realized that he was telling the truth. It is possible. That was not a story but possible to accept. And he opened next two cars, split the group in half and put additional guys on both cars and we quietly arrived to Auschwitz. That was eleven o'clock in the evening.

Q: So it was a full days journey?

A: Full day journey. And the soldiers were still mad at us and they were wounding people with bayonets pushing us between the platform, railroad platform and the main gate of the camp. It was also quite an area, maybe half a kilometer or so. So during this small distance they still had a chance to wound few prisoners with their bayonet. When we arrived there nothing happened. We were in such a disarray and tired. The very next morning they told us to undress.

Q: Where did they hold you overnight?

A: In one of the barracks -- get undressed, washed, and before we got cup of tea you might call. That was something -- combination of all kind of herbs collected from the fields dried and they were making tea out of this weeds, giving us to drink every morning. So I didn't drink, I only rinsed my mouth and brushed my teeth. The next thing was to be sure that everybody's name they have and we received a tattoo. And please mark the number, 119431

Q: So they issued you the uniforms also with the vinkel on it?

A: Oh no, not yet. Only the next day or so. So I was taken to one of the barracks and there were attendants checking twice. First time at six o'clock in the morning and second time at six o'clock at night. Since the entire area was still not completely adjusted the ground was mud so after rain, there were puddles. That was my first experience with the assistant to kapo. You're supposed to stand in a row that would be perfect horizontally, 90 degrees between rows and lines.

Q: This was the Appell?

A: Appell, yes. So when there was a puddle, huge puddle in front of me so I stood little bit off the line, the guy came to me and pushed me into the puddle with tremendous blow with a stick that they were carrying similar to the baseball stick, baseball bat, and he said, you SOB you are

afraid of what, are you gonna drink this water.. From now on don't forget that you are not a man you are only a number. And I think that was quite characteristic. I never forgot this because I realized that I was only a number from now on. After two weeks being in Birkenau..

Q: Were you pretty much idle at that time, they weren't working you?

A: Yeah, we were working on the Fraulager that means preparing the area to be occupied by women that's supposed to arrive to Birkenau. Birkenau is not Auschwitz. Please distinguish these two locations. One is apart from another approximately one mile. And all transports to Birkenau always, not to Auschwitz just like my transport. After two weeks I was transferred to Auschwitz thanks to my cousins because they were first in Auschwitz and they noticed from the list obtained from Schreibstuber that I was in transport and they took me under pretext that I am sick. They took me to Kreinkinbau, that means hospital in Auschwitz located -- buildings, number of buildings, I think 24 or 25 something like that.

Q: They told you to pretend you were sick?

A: Pretend I am sick, yeah. So one guard and me walked from Birkenau to Auschwitz and when I arrived I met immediately I saw my cousin but he told me pretend that we don't know each other. He placed me in the hospital and I was there for three days only and then remain in Auschwitz but still since I did not have two weeks quarantine that was required for all newcomers we were called Tzuganga. Tsugang is the new arrival.

Q: What did you say you were sick with?

A: Cold, cold, yeah, fever. I was there not quite two weeks as on quarantine because I fainted in the next week or so standing in line for Appell and when I was first time, I met these two gentlemen from my hometown. Their names just to record them I have to mention Jan Musdorf and Oleg Guretsky and they saved my life because when I went to hospital for the second time I really had pneumonia in full swing with pleurisy, water in my lungs, completely flooded, and if not for care of these two guys I wouldn't live today. Unfortunately I must tell you that one of them, Jan Musdorf, was executed as a member of the Underground. Somebody squealed when he was in camp in Auschwitz and he was executed together with other Polish patriots at the end of 1943.

Q: With pneumonia did you go back to the hospital?

A: No, I was recuperating and my friends since my cousin was an old prisoner, since June of 1940, he had many, many friends, and therefore they respected old prisoners. I was kept in this block where there were after illness you had to recuperate. Usually you were staying one week in hospital SS doctor was coming and sending you to gas chamber immediately as an Arbeit Shoy. Arbeit Shoy means afraid of work. So you had to be very careful. That's why I was always hiding, always hiding, lucky to have friends.

Q: You stayed in a barrack hidden.

A: Yeah, and now during my presence there, that was summer of '43, another atrocity occurred that could indicate what kind of inhuman treatment you could expect from the Nazis. They executed first thirteen members of the surveying group that one of them escaped. Thirteen were

executed at Black Wall on Block number eleventh and twelve remaining after one month just as an example that no one should even think about escaping, they hung them in front of all of us, twelve members of the surveying group.

Q: So one was shot and the rest were...?

A: Thirteen were shot and twelve were hung. That was July 17 of 1943, the execution took place.

Q: So they made all the other prisoners come out and watch this?

A: And watch yeah, and they were hung in front of the kitchen. They were hung there for at least three days before the bodies were taken away and gallows was removed. And while I was on that -- I received a red point which meant in the distinction of the camp meant he's not allowed to work outside the camp because they called us Flukfergocht which means suspected of any escape. I received this probably because the Gestapo had me from the first, my first escape from the Skarasheska Street. And maybe all the guys who were with me in this car, the train that was carrying us from Warsaw to Auschwitz.

Q: This was that red triangle?

A: No, under, below the number and the red triangle I had red point on white piece of cloth, red point here on my left side of my chest under the number, then on the right side of my leg, right below the jacket and in the back I had also a red point and letters IL which meant in German "I'm Lager."

Q: In camp. You say a point. What did it look like?

A: It was approximately one- inch diameter that was red on white piece of cloth and here were letters IL.

Q: So it looked something like a Japanese flag?

A: Like a Japanese flag, yeah. So my cousin said to me, Michael, you will live about two weeks, that's all, because that was the approximate time elapsing between....they didn't want to keep the Im Lager, the Red Points in camp. You could be shot after six o'clock when you were walking. After working hours when you were walking in camp SS soldiers were trying to experiment or exercise their aim at the points and they were shooting at you like to a rabbit. So immediately after being discharged from quarantine I started working in the washroom. I was so good at folding the SS shirts that they gave me the storeroom to take care of, otherwise I had to keep every SS guys names inside my notebook and receiving the dirty clothes and giving them back already washed and cleaned and pressed and everything. So it was pretty good. That happened until December 1 of 1943. They decided to collect all the Red Point guys and put them to bunker. So I was taken to Block 11 which was known from the executions and that was the final stage of your -- like the death row or the final alley before they executed you. So you imagine how I felt. And that was the time when new commanding officer of Auschwitz arrived and this blood thirsty son-of-a-bitch was replaced by name of Liebehenstetshen (probably Arthur Liebehenschel) or something like that. He, would you believe, he said that during his presence there would be no more executions. So I was saved again but he concentrated all these guys who were on the black list and he sent us to another trip from

Auschwitz to Flossenburg in Bavaria, Germany.

Q: How long were you held in Block 11?

A: From December 1 to February 2. Arriving in Flossenburg, here in Auschwitz we had fantastic weather. There was no more than about 35, 38 degrees, no lower, and we arrived to the elevation of 900 meters which is over 2700 feet above sea level and with six feet of snow on the road, cold as hell, and we were only dressed in thin German prisoner uniforms.

Q: They took you by cattle car to Flossenburg?

A: Oh yes, the same thing, and we went through Kemnitz, I remember, station all the way around Czechoslovakia. They didn't go through Czechoslovakia, all the way around Czechoslovakia. Flossenburg is situated in Northern Bavaria close to town of Weiden and that was -- we didn't know why we are there but we started working on the Shtassenbau Commando, two mountains which we were about to cut to certain level and fill the gap in the valley to create a highway. A few guys died at that time. We had two Jewish friends, prisoners, with us. They killed one by name of Blum. He was famous in Jewish society in Poland. Plus two additional guys that they told us they would be transferred to camp where they have additional Jewish prisoners. In Flossenburg we had no Jewish prisoners. So I had, there were many stories I could tell you about my presence in Flossenburg camp but that was camp that I finally transferred to the Messerschmitt factory that they had in the mountain. We were not afraid of any air raids or anything because it was in the quarry.

Q: Isn't the salt mines?

A: No quarry, granite mountains. I was there till the end, which means till April of 1945.

Q: So most of your time there was spent working in the Messerschmitt factory? First you built the roads?

A: First we built the roads for the first two weeks and then they called all carpenters and good thing that I said that I am carpenter. He look at my hands and he slapped me and he says you son-of-a-bitch, you telling me that these are carpenter's hands and I said well I was a student before I was arrested and I didn't have hard work at Auschwitz so I couldn't have any calluses on my hands, however, I am acquainted with all the carpenter's tools. He says okay then we take you but if you show me any ignorance to handling the equipment I will kill you personally he says.

Q: Is this a kapo or an SS?

A: That was an SS officer. So I was directed to the Killer Fur Klidem for Messerschmitt which was a small aluminum box that my duty was -- it's on a conveyer -- and I had to make approximately sixty holes in one minute.

Q: You had to drill them in?

A: Drill them in, yeah, through the dzig. So many guys were afraid to break the bits. Once you broke the bit you got 25 lashes. So I became famous because I learned how to sharpen the bits

and to work enough to be allowed to break them. You had to perform already a certain work with every bit before you could break it. So after that on May first 1944 in Flossenburg they allowed us to play ball for the first time.

Q: Football?

A: That was like soccer, but only by hands. Instead of kicking the ball, since there was not enough room, we also had two goals operating with our hands. Would you please believe me that I became a star. Because of that, I received better position to be again in a store issuing the tools every morning and collecting them at the end of each shift. And that was also very good because I had one more dish of soup just to maintain my physical strength for the game. Germans were betting on me how many goals I will shoot. And we were only allowed to play Sunday afternoon.

Q: Did you throw the ball to one another?

A: Yeah, just the same thing. You operated with your hands the same as your feet and would you believe that this is something I never expected and we had definite knowledge that Germany is losing the war because for the first time they allowed us to have some kind of entertainment. Their national holiday, May 1, social what they call MS and they are pair, right? National Socialistic Deutsch Arbeit Bartai. And from this point on it was a little bit better. They added sugar to our morning tea so you can imagine, huh? Now two things happened. First, after unfortunate uprising in Warsaw the first prisoners arrived from Warsaw directly to Flossenburg. And second thing happened....

Q: This was after Polish uprising?

A: Polish uprising, yeah, so in September of.... Polish uprising was August 1, 1944 -- in September the first group arrived from the uprising, prisoners. And the second thing happened, the plague of typhus. So I experiences I mentioned to you, red box in Poviak forgot to tell you about fleas in hospital in Auschwitz. Tremendous fleas that you could cry because you couldn't catch them and they were biting you all night long. And here lice. To receive set of shorts and shirt you had to exchange these two items for one portion of bread. Bread was like money. You could buy anything with portion, daily portion, of the prisoner's daily portion of bread. I tell you what value of bread was, one Komisbrodt the German military shvartz brodt that was similar to our pumpernickel, you know black pumpernickel, it was also like square, so divided into four portions. One bread was one beautiful white-blue diamond, that was the corresponding value, okay. So after that I, not only Polish but also Czechs and German prisoners were dying. Germans in camp were always occupying some functions whether they were in charge of the barracks or in charge of your work commando or whatever. However there were also Czechs in Flossenburg. In Auschwitz, majority were Polish. About 80% were Polish. Here, however, we had about 40% of Czechs, maybe 35% of Poles and other nationalities, including Americans, the flyers who were shot down. They were there but very short period of time and they were immediately executed. Now to finish my story, I was there till April 21. We started moving in group of 5000 surrounded by again Ukrainian SS.

Q: You were being marched out?

A: Marched out. And they told us they would try to move us south towards Dachau. But because

Third Army, we later learned, Third Army was moving so fast and they were pushing us southeast from Flossenburg and therefore after passing about sixty miles in three days. Out of 30,000 prisoners they killed 15, 000. Whoever couldn't walk they were shot in the ditch with dum-dum bullets. They were all found after liberation by the Third Army members, General Patton's army. We had possibility of getting taken care of immediately by the American Red Cross hospital, field hospital, and I went with my friends, tried to go as far as possible west. We arrived to Erlangen near Nuremberg. Erlangen was not bombed, was academic city with a university there. First camp for refugees was formed by the US army.

Q: Were you liberated just one morning?

A: Yes I was liberated on the third day of our evacuation march. Was a beautiful, beautiful, never to forget situation, because we were concentrated on the mountain and we have seen on the other mountain, we have seen first American tanks and together with us there were Soviet army members who jumped on the Ukrainian SS guards. They shot them, killed them instantly and with the guns they were started moving toward the American troops. Since that was some kind of horseshoe area we were trying to go into the valley and then come up the mountain and making ourselves a short cut. And when we were, we were there three of us, we found a group of SS soldiers armed to their teeth and we almost got killed. It's unbelievable, right there. You sense you had freedom in the air and you could be killed at the last moment. That was my fourth time when I faced the gun. And good thing that my friend spoke German and then we said we are Germans from Silesia. We want to go home now. So he said only as Germans don't tell them that we are here. My luck was that when I arrived to the first group of the Yanks, the commanding officer I think of the first division of the Third Army and most of them were Poles from Buffalo, New York area and almost every second spoke Polish, broken Polish, but they knew Polish language. So I told him in Polish who we met on our way here. So he said okay you will see what's going to happen and they shot immediately first warning like a rocket down to the valley. After a few moments lower white flag arrived at the main building, just like city hall or something like that and he said look what's gonna happen now. And all these tanks maybe a dozen of them from all around the area they started shooting everything they could reach.

Q: So they were being held in a little town in the valley?

A: Yeah, so finally after that first salvo, finally white flag appeared on the steeple. And, therefore, that was the end of military action in this area. So later on as I mentioned to you before, I was able to join the American army and after five years of serving with Labor Service Company I arrived to New York.

Q: So five years employed by the US army?

A: Yes, from September 1945 to September 1950.

Q: So you were liberated what month?

A: I was liberated in end of April, April 24, 1945 near Ulm very close to the German Czechoslovakian border. I didn't tell you many, many details when I was in the bunker. I was facing the experimental Block number 10 to tell you but this is.....

Q: Do you want to tell me now or....?

A: Well I could mention only one detail we were witnessing how they took one prisoner and this happened to be one of the members of Polish Voskafala which was some ?? hour on Polish radio before the war. He was Jewish and he was fantastic comedian. He was a star on Polish radio before the war. He was taken one morning to this experimental block, Block 10 and they removed one testicle from him. When he came back we ask him what did they do to you. He said that first they had special machine to ejaculate him when he was normal person with two testicles and then after that they removed one testicle. After three weeks they called him for another ejaculation just to compare how human sperm can work, can be used with one and two. With women we have seen something they were working but this will be described in my book.

Q: You were able to see them doing the experiments?

A: Yes, before they closed the windows. They realized later that we were watching, we were witnesses, and they bricked up the windows. But for the first two weeks of December I could observe that and after two weeks the masons blocked the windows.

Q: Women they were doing similar kinds of experiments?

A: Yeah.

(TAPE ENDS ABRUPTLY)