

**RG-50.407.0102**

**Oral History: Uldis Kurzem, September 12, 1996**

[Note: the usual basic details such as date/place of birth, home life, etc. are omitted as Mr. Kurzem goes directly into his story of trying escape the Nazis in the Minsk area.]

He describes: his earliest recollection, fleeing with his extended family but being caught with several other people; the Nazis shooting most of the men and sending the others back where they came from [possibly Kaunas, Lithuania]; taking his father and the rest of the men away; being told that his father had been killed; his mother telling him that they were to be shot the next day and that they should all be prepared to die together; telling her he didn't want to die and escaping into the night; from a hiding place the next morning, watching as his entire family was shot (along with many others); hiding wherever he could; being caught by someone who recognized him as a Jewish boy and being dragged to a school where people—partisans, not Jews—were being shot by Latvian soldiers; instead of being shot himself, being taken by the soldiers wherever they went and inexplicably cared for with kindness as a kind of “mascot”; the soldiers mission being to protect trains from partisan attacks; being taught by the Latvian soldiers to read and write and their Protestant religion; the soldiers being given SS uniforms and sent to fight Russians; to protect him, being sent away from the front, to Riga; being taken in by a prosperous family named Dzenis, who owned a chocolate factory, and being treated as a Latvian; estimating his age at the time at about ten; being sent to school; with the Dzenis family, fleeing the Russian advance and traveling by boat from Riga to Danzig; moving on to Essen and then Dresden, where they were present for the firebombing; going on to Schwerin but again having to flee the Russian advance; going to Hamburg; as the war ended, being placed in a Latvian DP camp, Geesthacht, near Hamburg, where he and the Dzenis family remained until 1949; emigrating to Australia; being treated by many, “falsely,” as a war hero based on his experience with the Latvian soldiers, but having had to hide his Jewish identity throughout; not being religious; witnessing many executions of partisans and White Russians by the Latvian soldiers, but none of Jews; marrying an Australian woman in 1956 and having three children; being unable to recall anything about his childhood prior to his family's murder and his flight [N.B. This in response to persistent questioning as well as suggestions from an unseen woman that his memory might benefit from seeing a psychiatrist].