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John Komski interview 2/9/95

slap

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: Umb, maybe I start this way, that I say that 29th of April in Dachau ..sniff..begin as a very quite day. Sniff..nothing in the surroundings and in the air indicated that there would be a drama this day. Inhale..Yeah. And there were several ..cough..days ...grumble...like that before when I came to Dachau from \_\_\_\_\_this was a sub-camp of a large camp of \_\_\_\_\_. I came to Dachau from in in a ..pause...evacuation \_\_\_\_\_that lasted about twenty days. When we came to Dachau I was lice infected, most of, all of us were in the same condition...inhale..and we were \_\_\_\_\_for several hours, almost the whole day before the we were received by Dachau, by the \_\_\_\_\_of Dachau. And it finally we have been put in our eh eh eh accepted eh eh eh and in our eh eh and signed-up or and given the numbers and taken to showers and after that I was completely naked. Everything has been taken from me, all of my belongings that I brought from eh eh \_\_\_\_\_elsbrook???? and eh my uniform, old uniform, inhale....and they and eh it was not an given anything that was eh that was eh eh used in Dachau. Instead, you know, instead, I had a blanket. I wrapped

around the blanket and I stay seven eh days this way. It has one good thing, because we did not have to go work, because we were naked, yeah, but we only had to participate in a roll-call three times a day. So umb ...cough..and there was eh quite days, and we lived in a area which was called a quarantine, several of us were completely separated from the rest of the camp by the eh eh ...pause...eh eh eh

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eh French and eh there was a guard that France \_\_\_\_\_couldn't get out of that area. But on 29th of April when I get up and went outside I saw that the gate was open and that there was nobody at the gate. So, I took a chance, and I went outside on the main eh street of the of the camp and I walked to ...cough...eh place before the kitchen where usually there were the role were held. I remember seeing when I arrived a big tent over there in which there were clothing, all kinds of thing, you know so I hoped to find that tent and I did find found it, but it was complete, almost empty. Inhale...but still I could find in it a pair of trousers and a jacket. And I took this under eh eh eh eh with me you know and I came back to camp, to the block and

by this time, everybody was already outside and there was suppose to a role call. And we assembled the role call and we stood there for two or three hours and nobody came. Usually there would be an \_\_\_\_\_who would come and count everybody and take the eh eh eh eh take that eh eh eh eh the m m m I mean the eh m the d\_\_\_\_\_eh to higher authorities. This time, he didn't come. Instead, we were order to go into the block and the block was closed and we were told that we had to sit inside locked indefinitely. So this is how the day started, and it really, and eh the only contact with the outside world was through the window. And when we see through the window a strange strange thing happening. Because all of a sudden there appeared a German Gestapo's with canes as a m as a guard. And they were stationed all around on all corners around this area. And, eh but there were no SS, eh guard of any kind. There were nothing in the area, usually, for many days there was always a eh British airplane hanging about the camp. Spying over over the camp. There were nothing there, absolutely quite. Inhale.. and when the five, five o'clock arrived, inhale...

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they were starting a dinner, you know a dinner which was one slice of bread and water too. And at that time, the the block shook, because eh fighting began. And it lasted about seven hours, terrifying fighting and the all the walls were were shaking and of course we immediately thought that probably this is it. You know that the Americans are coming because we know eh that the Americans are marching toward Dachau. We knew this even eh already when we were march ma marching from emb \_\_\_\_\_brook, that they were coming. Em the fighting eh lasted about seven hours and then it stopped. And nothing happened again. And it took about another twenty minutes before we heard a individual shot ba ba hear and there from all direction and then I look in the window and I see there are a lot of people running towards the fences, prisoners from other block which was not in the quarantine. And I see that some of them are caring guns! Rifles already, you know. So we eh eh broke through the window outside be because door was still locked you know, and we started running toward the fences and we see that this area was completely already demolished. It took only maybe five minutes, to demolish all the fences, all the defenses of Dachau. And then I see in the front and on the corner you know, American soldier. He was walking..beginning to cry...and eh eh behind him were eh eh eh other eh eh soldiers and he were commanding the guards that were on the Dachau, Germans, to step, to descend and to surrender. Those who were too slow to surrender were shot immediately, right on spot, you know. So, I saw this and eh

eh eh but I didn't venture outside. Some people were already tried to go through the broken fences to the outside. There was a ditch filled with water you know I didn't know, I was naturally \_\_\_\_\_Dachau \_\_\_\_\_how to how to go about. So, I went in the other direction. I

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ran toward the the area where I had been before to the to the eh eh big square in the front of the kitchen when we were, roll-calls were used to were held. And here I saw eh eh another row of eh eh eh defense and eh eh behind right behind the fence there were already about fifty Prisoners of War; Germans, officers and men, sitting in the ditch. And I saw the phony little jeeps, you know, cruising here and there, you know, and for \_\_\_\_\_ years for many eh years we always discussed eventual liberation. How this will happen. Inhale...and we always wished that there would be an Americans who would liberate us and .....inhale....in those \_\_\_\_\_the Americans grew up to giants. They looked like giant people themselves, the soldiers. And the trucks were tremendous \_\_\_\_\_like like eh eh eh like trains. And here I am seeing you know jeep....crying..laughing...This

was really funny, you know....sniff.. And of course...cough... I look around and I see...cough...thousands of people gathered under square and I see thousands of national flags, looks like everybody was prepared for that occasion and was carrying in the pocket a flag of some sort. Polish, and Russian, and Czechs, and French, and Italian...gasp...

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: yeah

reload

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: yeah yeah...So I came to that eh eh after after that a the the incident with jeeps. Right ok. So, eh I

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noticed all around me you know thousands, thousands of flags of all nation nationalities that were at that time present

at Dachau. And Poles, and Russians, and Czechs, Italians, and French. And when I took a walk around the main street, I saw many blocks decorated. It took probably a minute, you know, all the decoration must have been waiting in storage somewhere...inhale...eh in secret. It was drizzling, rain drizzling when during that eh eh hour of liberation, but half the time went by and it cleared-up. And eh sun began to set down and there was a glorious eh eh sun-setting but there there were also a very dark clouds on the East. Usual eh eh East that's Communism, that's where I always remember later on that this was a warning you know that this freedom is not complete. You know. This is only personal freedom and not the eh eh freedom of my country. cough.. When became dark in the in-between the \_\_\_\_\_there were hundreds of fire fires eh light up and all those who ventured outside re eh eh \_\_\_\_\_and who managed to bring some food stuff, were cooking supper because we didn't get anything to eat at that night. Gasp...And joyfully, we went to to \_\_\_\_\_around\_\_\_\_\_around 10 o'clock in the evening we went to blocks and went to sleep. But we couldn't em em maybe were about a half an hour later, inhale... again, a big eh detonations broke the silences eh above the eh Dachau. It was a SS Division that was marching from Munich to take back Dachau from the Americans. The Americans were only a small unit that were but patrolling in that area and when they found out that there is a Dachau in in the neighborhood, they took advantage, I mean they took on themselves the job of liberating the Dachau. You know

and they were not really equipped fully to protect eh them  
eh and the prisoners. So, I understand and we were told  
later on, the next day that all the orders were already

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given to wake us all up and send us up North where into you  
know the area where there were main American forces. Of  
course, they stopped, eh the advance of that eh SS eh eh  
division shortly before the Dachau and we could you know we  
eh eh eh stay in the camp until the next day. And it was  
several days later on that eh eh that eh eh make history  
some sort. First of all, eh the next day we were given too  
much food to eat. Everybody got a one pound a a pork  
conserve and a loaf of bread. Some people who ate that got  
immediately sick. Consequently, there was a \_\_\_\_\_in  
the camp, there was a a a other dead people. And and of  
course, typhus was among eh eh one one of the the the  
reasons for eh eh the I mean the the that the that decimated  
the the camp population. Eh I understand there were about  
sixteen thousand people died after the liberation, you know,  
this is tragic. I too got sick. I got typhus and when I  
get out of it there was no more prisoners in \_\_\_\_\_in the



camp. They were all moved to \_\_\_\_\_.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: Yeah, there there were. Those who resisted in any way were shot immediately, right on the spot. And there were corpses eh eh floating in the ditch I mentioned that was around the fence area. German soldiers and were dead. And eh and those \_\_\_\_\_all eh eh eh eh a lot a lot of German Gestapo were caught eh eh denounced by prisoners and caught by the MP immediately and arrested. There were tense moment eh eh from the very beginning, because became from the next day was under the authority of the of the Americans. And they eh considered us almost like a prisoners again. We couldn't eh get out. Because they was afraid that there were most of the prisoners are sick. That they will we will

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infect the population outside. So they kept us in. Yet they didn't know how to handle this eh population, therefore, so many people died.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: Yeah, I, they took me to the American hospital..cough.. And eh eh eh and eh eh the nurses were eh eh how do how do you call that they they are a special name. The the that unit that

SWB: Army Nurse

JOHN KOMSKI: Army Nurse, yeah. Army nurses...cough...and eh but there were a lot of people who died in that hospital. sigh.....pause..

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: As I say, you know, I when I get out of the hospital I get in a phony attire, you know. I was given a pause.....a stretch jacket, prisoners trousers and \_\_\_\_\_hat you know...laugh..and a a Russian boots, winter I mean winter boots, you know. So, and and and the time was in the middle of June...laugh...I came out this way. And of course few days I stayed Dachau because I and also I sign-up to work for there was a lot of workers you know. There was a kitchen functioning, there were the the the block eh eh eh has to be kept in order but the day came when they rounded us up, all of us, and without much discussion and saying they loaded us into the military trucks and drove us into the country side toward DP camps. This is how I went to \_\_\_\_\_which was right in the

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in the in the boon docks. It it no where. No where, no roads, no railroads, nothing. Everything the the the \_\_\_\_\_railroad was about 10 kilometers from this place. It was absolutely in the fields and eh eh eh some of course we complain about it. Because other \_\_\_\_\_new destination was fine and this is where all my our my friends were were were all the em em prisoners from Dachau were. You know here eh in DP camp were the people who were gathered eh eh eh from the farms from the German farms brought you know those who were forced laborers. So, we ...

Cut

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: Ym, really you know, we were not doing anything because the whole camp was in process of organization, you know of building up. It was a former military eh Ger eh military eh eh barracks. And eh it got to be had to be adopted to house families and children and

eh there were a lot of childrens eh eh in that camp. So, there was some work has to be done in order to eh eh occupy the children, give them teach them. School has to be open. You know they got to be some eh eh eh eh eh eh eh distraction re\_\_\_\_\_how this this this whole business should conducted. You know so I was involved a little bit in those things, eh and while the others just sit and did didn't do anything. And the only excitement was to get a permission because I I all the movements were well controlled by the Army. There was a a d gate of the the of the that new camp. There was a MP sitting and he would not let out anybody unless you have a permission..sigh...that entitled you to go out you know so this was the only

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excitement to get permission in the office and then go and travel to Munich. \_\_\_\_\_you know which was about 15 kilometers, inhale, otherwise it was just a a any any government establishment where the people sit idle do do nothing.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: The children. Looks like the the children were the the came eh eh eh with the people who work for for the Ger German farms, you know. Looks like they were born in that time when they were ey brought from the countries like Poland, like Russia, like eh eh eh \_\_\_\_\_this camp was primarily Polish you know. But there were few other than Pole Poles too you know. But mostly were Poles. So they they just get all were born on German soil during that war times, you know, just the same way there were a lot of children who were who were born in concentration camps, in women camps. You know women always have a represent a special problem, problem that I I don't know much about it. But when I read the books of women's camps there were all kinds of specific problems because these were these were women. You know so them thousands of children they were born in concentration camps, so I imagine the same thing also happened when the situation when eh false labor.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: Cough...yeah. Not only that they were trying. They they were really forced to go to Poland. The policy was to eh eh repatriate all the people who were \_\_\_\_\_at that time on German soil. You know. The

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existence of the women on the camp was was for the purpose of repatriation. But, as the time went by, eh eh we were getting a strange messages for the camp of Poles eh eh were contacted by the government in exile, the guy in London, and they eh agents who use to come and talk to us. They were talking about the war, everybody in this times expect was expect that there would be war with the Russians. Because no body in their right mind eh after the liberation thought that that the Rus that this is the end of the war. You know half we expected war with the Communism. you know. And eh since this didn't account we started for eh eh places to go eh eh living. While the women are \_\_\_\_\_was trying to repatriate us to eh our countries of our eh eh Poland and eh eh and and Russia for example had to go you know to Russia you know and there were sent mostly to Siberia immediately by the Stalin and\_\_\_\_\_. So this was a dangerous thing about the issue. It went so far that eh \_\_\_\_\_the the the promised those who would go to eh eh back to the countries of origin, you know, extra food supplies. And they were really giving it, of course they were not giving \_\_\_\_\_anything worthwhile. We usually were you know some potatoes, flour and eh eh and eh no noth nothing like you know eh eh bread or something anything

butter no. Only you know some some you know food very primitive eh food stuffs. But anyway, they were giving people some supplies just to make the eh eh go to eh eh back to Poland.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: From eh..cough.. The reason one of the reasons why we had to move out from Dachau was that the American authorities were planning to bring to Dachau all the

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arrested SS. And in few months, there were several thousands of SS eh eh as inmates in Dachau. And once a week we were brought by trucks to Dachau and we were seated in the the outside of the fence area and they were paraded in front of us in circle and eh eh eh whoever was lucky and then find the idiot \_\_\_\_\_be re-arrested the man that put him\_\_\_\_\_you know. Full trial, you know I was not able to identify anybody because you know I was not familiar with the with the SS that was in were in Dachau. They were the stretch peoples of but anyway I participated and it was

quite a shock. And it was once a week.

SWB:

JOHN KOMSKI: When I eh ...cough...get out of the the my biggest desire was go and see the Bavaria, especially mountains, alps. Because I come from the area near the mountains in Poland, so I understand mountains, and I love mountains. So eh eh very early eh eh still when I was still in Dachau, living in Dachau, I went by train to \_\_\_\_\_which is distance of about 101 kilometers and the first ride took me twelve hours. That was the situation where the train was so so overloaded that uphill we had to get out of the train and walk along the train..laugh...because she couldn't pull the the the the locomotive was too weak to...laugh...pull all the masses of people. You know. So when eh when I arrived eh in the \_\_\_\_\_I I right away went to this eh eh \_\_\_\_\_station, you know the highest mountain in Bavaria,\_\_\_\_\_, and there is a train that go up up the mountain. So I wanted to get eh to that eh train. And I was waiting for the tickets office eh eh I couldn't get a ticket because it was reserved for the Americans. And here

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they come, you know, truck loads, of the American soldiers and I noticed one soldier, he was a prisoner artist from Dachau from Auschwitz who instead of going through the evacuation landed eventually \_\_\_\_\_ camp was liberated in \_\_\_\_\_. And \_\_\_\_\_ was liberated two months before Dachau was. And he joined the Army, American Army and he was already eh eh in Trieste fighting and he was eh eh recuperating from dangers injured that he received in that fighting, yeah. So he bought a ticket for me and I went with him to the \_\_\_\_\_. This was a very \_\_\_\_\_ and I went back again in two more weeks and you know again eh eh to \_\_\_\_\_ and and and I made eh and I found a young lady. Finally later on I married. And I married her in an old church in \_\_\_\_\_. Consequently, I moved out from this DP camps and I tried to live privately. Receiving German eh eh food stamps you know. And you know it was very very difficult to live on but I began painting I I tried to do things, you know I started \_\_\_\_\_ I drew my first album drawings about the concentration camp which they still now they are fully popular. And they were exhibited many times here in this area and in New York area because because they were printed and those prints the people exhibit as the paintings. Eh eh so eh eh it was in \_\_\_\_\_ that I did that work yeah. But we couldn't left alone on that on German eh eh eh eh in eh because in the the situation Germany, so we moved

again to a camp which was all the the designed only for the  
the former prisoners family. It was in  
\_\_\_\_\_. This is where my daughter was born.  
I lived there \_\_\_\_\_the time came when I was a  
\_\_\_\_\_to go to the United States \_\_\_\_\_you know. So it  
was about one year we lived there. yeah.. It will be make a  
lot of travel, you know, when I saw the Hitler;s hid-out and

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in the area and places in Austria you know in  
\_\_\_\_\_and places where eh of course we still  
did the movements our movements were limited because we  
depended only on trains. You know and the train travel was  
rather slow and difficult and later it it in the later years  
you had to pay a ticket eh eh if you wanted to use the  
train. At the beginning, you know you you could travel for  
nothing. There was a situation right in 1945 when they  
conducted in \_\_\_\_\_afraid to walk into the car when they  
were former prisoners you know. You would do never do  
those, allow us to ride without ticket you know and this  
was.....

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