

Anne-Michele Harrington

April 27, 1992

TITLE: Alfred Virski
I DATF: 7/10/90
80URCF: SFHOHP
~OUND QUALITY: poor
INA~F QUALITY: O.K.
DUR~TION: 1 hour
L~N~UA~E: English (slight accent)
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GBOGRAPHIC NANE:
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CORPORATE N~NE:
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CONTENTS:

Tape 1

- 1:01:06 Alfred was born in Craccw(ph), Poland in 1919. He went to the University there. His parents were from Cracow where his father ran a lumber concern in S. Poland. His Mother had a Ph.D. from Cracow University but was not working at the start of World War II. Alfred had one brother. His family lived in Cracow for 20 years, then Hitler came to power in 1939. At that time he volunteered for the Army despite his exemption for having been at the University where he studied Chemistry.
- 1:02:47 Pussiski(ph) died in 1935 before Alfred joined the army. Alfred claims that pre-war Poland was viewed as a Fascist country especially by the American Jews. He claims that this view is not accurate. He claims that Pussiski got bad press in America. After the war he encountered widespread belief among American Jews that since the concentration camps were in Poland the Polish people must have run them.
- 1:04:29 Alfred is not Jewish! He came to the United States in 1946 and encountered this misconceived notion that Poland was Fascist. Alfred was actually an officer in the Polish Army.
- 1:05:58 When he was attending thLe University there were special benches for the Jewish c,tudents but they didn't actually use them. He recalls there being some anti-Semitism. Usually the National Democratic Party sparked some for two or three days out of every year. He claims that anti-Semitism was everywhere.
- 1:08:10 Alfred had quite a few Jewish friends during his

childhood. He continually claims not to be an expert on Jewish affairs.

1:09:02 He claimed that he was captured by the Russian army but escaped soon after being captured. He claims that in 1939 Poland was divided between Hitler and Stalin.

1:09:40 Alfred escaped from a POW camp and went to Wroclaw in E. Poland. At the time Wroclaw was under Soviet Occupation. He got a job as a truck driver and supported fifteen people on his salary. Soon after the Russians took him and his father who was ill into the Red Army. He was forced to spend two years in the Red Army or else his family would have been beaten up. During the war he was wounded 3 times. After the third he escaped from the Red Army and rejoined the Polish Army on Russian territory.

05 After he was wounded a third time, Alfred escaped from the Russian hospital which was practically deserted. At this time he spoke Russian fluently with a very slight Polish accent. He spent the next five years in the Free Polish Army. During that time he was evacuated from Russia and sent to Iran then Iraq then to the territory which was then called Palestine. He participated in the end of the Egyptian Campaign. Then he spent two years in the Italian campaign invading Sicily in May of 1945.

1:12:10 100,000 independent Polish men joined the British Army and wore Polish uniforms. From 1942-1946 He studied at the University of Rome then he moved to the states to join his brother. He has lived in the US ever since. He hasn't been back to Poland and is not yet ready to return. In 1949 he wrote a book titled My Life in the Red Army.

1:14:15 Alfred was encouraged by American Journalists to write about his experiences. At the time his story was widely circulated. Occasionally he comes into contact with his companions from the Red Army and the British Army.

1:16:30 Alfred found himself on the front early during the war.

1:18:17 Alfred claims that his book was badly edited by McMillan. He claims that they took out all of his views, thoughts, political ideas, feelings, and impressions.

1:19:44 The editor didn't think his views contributed well to the action of the novel.

- 1:20:20 Alfred remembers there being some Jewish soldiers in the Polish and Red Armies. But there were not very many. He was not aware of any difference in the treatment of Jewish soldiers versus Polish Soldiers. He didn't recall the Jewish POW's trying to hide their religious identity. He said they were merely treated as POW's.
- 1:21:41 Alfred recalls General Mond a Jewish General in the Polish Army who was taken prisoner but survived the war. The Germans let him keep his Saber as an honorary gesture.
- 1:22:10 Prior to the war the Polish people generally felt that they could keep the Germans at bay. Alfred claims that he knew they didn't have a chance. The people generally felt that France and England would come to their rescue but they never did.
- 1:23:04 Alfred had been in Germany when he was 16 years old and it was under the rule of Peter the Great. He saw that Germany was a large military state and that Poland was a small country with a small military. While Poland had @ 800 planes Germany had @ 23,000 planes.
- 1:24:05 Alfred's father was evacuated by Polish authorities before the German invasion because he was one of the social leaders of Cracow. When Alfred escaped from the Russian army he was reunited with his father in Woo. They stayed together until Alfred was retaken into the army. His mother died in Cracow in 1943 of a heart attack. His brother was in the Polish Air Force. They were reunited in 1946.
- 1:25:35 His father was shot in 1941 by Germans or Russians as the Germans were crossing the border. The Germans were killing the educated Pol~es. When he was in Woo there were still a lot of Jews.
- 1:27:55 On September 1, 1939 Cra,~ow was invaded and bombed while Alfred and his family were still there. On Sept. 2nd his brother left. On Sept. 3rd his parents were evacuated. The Germans ,entered on the 4th and the 5th. There was not much action at the time. The people felt betrayed by France and England.
- 1:29:50 In 1941 The Russians forbid the soldiers to speak Polish to each other.
- 1:31:30 Alfred's Russian unit fought on the Rumanian front then retreated through the Ukraine. This took about 8 months. The Russian Arm~y was no match for the Germans. People were always deserting. The Ukraine was waiting

for the Germans to liberate them but that never happened.

- 1:32:39 Alfred requested a transfer from the Polish Army to the Free Polish Army. It was not granted so he defected.
- 1:33:42 The story of Alfred's defection. He was shot in both legs. He was in a cast and needed crutches to move. One of his colleagues got him fake papers and helped him get onto the train. He was on the run for 32 days. He finally met the Free Polish Army in Siberia. Most people knew he was a Russian dissenter but they didn't give him away.
- 1:37:04 He found a travelling companion who was a Russian officer and recognized his picture on a poster of dissenters.
- 1:37:40 His fake papers were helpful because most of the paper checkers were illiterate Asians. Many of them even held the forms upside down when inspecting them.
- 1:38:35 In the Polish medical unit in Russia everyone was on their last leg due to exile in the camps and Typhoid. Many of them died while they were being evacuated to Iran. The others became an Army unit.
- 1:39:54 He was in Iran for the lifting of the siege so he experienced no fighting there.
- 1:41:45 He was on the Rhine on September 17 when the Russians showed up. So he went into hiding with a Jewish Cobbler. The Russians took over the Polish troops and he was taken into their Army.
- 1:43:30 Alfred recalls that his parents were not very politically active.
- 1:44:25 Everyone knew Poland couldn't hold out alone. People travelled and so did news. Alfred viewed Russia's totalitarian regime and its economic trouble as hell on wheels.
- 1:48:15 He recalls meeting a woman who spent 16 years in a concentration camp because someone who wanted her job denounced her. He thinks that solidarity is a good idea. A good start towards the movement to free Europe. He has not yet decided whether or not he will ever go back to Poland.