

WAŁACHOWSKI, Zbigniew
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0198

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Zbigniew Wałachowski, a former fireman and member of the Polish resistance, talks about his wartime experiences during the time of the German occupation of his native town Otwock. He describes the local Jewish life before the war and comments on the fate of several Jewish and non-Jewish people. In addition, he discusses the establishment of the Otwock ghetto and a number of incidents around its subsequent liquidation. He also comments on his involvement in the Polish Home Army, "**Armia Krajowa**," (AK).

[01:] 00:47:09 – [01:] 09:04:59

He gives his full name, date and place of birth as June 19, 1923, in Otwock; talks about life in Otwock before the war; remembers the segregation of the town in two districts: the wealthy recreational district and the city center trade district; comments on the local Jews living in the trade district; adds that 70 percent out of 30,000 citizens of Otwock were Jews; discusses his being a fireman during the occupation; mentions his working for the Polish resistance movement, the Polish Home Army, "**Armia Krajowa**," (AK); remembers joining the Union for Armed Struggle, "**Związku Walki Zbrojnej**," (ZWZ) in 1940 and its becoming the AK in 1942; talks about Stanisław **Ruska [Russka]**, his cousin, who helped him get into the resistance; remembers the AK in Otwock being a strong organization under colonel Zygmunt **Migdalski**; comments on the presence of Jews in the AK; talks about the system that in the AK only five people knew each other personally; remembers a church mass on July 30, 1944, in which names of members of the AK were revealed; discusses his going into hiding for one month after that incident; mentions trying to save himself by joining the military on September 2, 1944.

[01:] 09:05:00 – [01:] 18:29:59

He focuses on the period of the German occupation; remembers the Germans entering the town; talks about Jews knowing that there was going to be a liquidation; describes big families living together in small apartments; mentions hearing Jews pray; describes the Germans dividing Otwock into an "Aryan" part and a ghetto; mentions his family's and his own deportation to the "Aryan" part, on Warszawska Street 27; mentions living there for two and a half years; describes the move; remembers his father's death in 1939; discusses his four brothers and two sisters; focuses on his family's and his own personal experiences in that period; comments on his going to the ghetto on his days off just to see his house; mentions that his profession as a fireman allowed him to do that; discusses life in a ghetto; describes the terrible living conditions of too many people in too little space, stands, trade, poverty, and starving people on the streets; mentions Jews trying to save themselves by looking for Poles who could help them get falsified documents; remembers an incident in which his brother-in-law successfully helped a Jew get out of the ghetto.

[01:] 18:30:00 – [01:] 26:59:59

He talks about the Jewish police in the ghetto (Ghettopolizei) and their orders; discusses other Jews being scared of the police; focuses on the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto on August 19, 1942; describes the Jewish police giving orders to Jews during the liquidation of the ghetto and digging graves for the Jews afterwards; comments on his and his family's relationship to the Jews of Otwock; discusses the local citizens and their relationship to the Jews; remembers an incident with Calel **Perechodnik**, a member of the Jewish police in the ghetto, and his having doubts after sending his parents (in reality, he sent his wife and daughter) to Treblinka, fearing he had sent them to death; mentions the Jewish police not trusting anyone; remembers a group of 20 Jews hiding in the attic of his house after the liquidation of the ghetto; talks about a Polish policeman, Mr. **Ratyński**, who knew of the Jewish hiding place; comments on **Ratyński** taking valuable items as a payment for not reporting the Jews; mentions the death of those Jews who finally decided to run away.

[01:] 27:00:00 – [01:] 36:30:00

He focuses on August 19, 1942, the day of the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto; talks about a fire in the ghetto, in the building of pharmacist Mr. **Górewicz [Gurewicz]**; remembers **Górewicz** being a good, respected man; describes the fire, and their looking for anyone alive in the building; discusses finding five bodies lying on the beds; mentions **Górewicz** still being alive, but it was too late for him; assumes that the pharmacist poisoned his family, set the house on fire, and poisoned himself afterwards; talks about his friend Artek **Gelblum** hiding for two and a half years in a small basement of 2 meters x 1.8 meters; mentions eight people being in that basement, seven adults and one child; describes their wanting to kill the baby when it started coughing, so it would not give them away; remembers a couple, Mr. and Mrs. **Górscy**, who received a medal for saving Jews during the war; remembers their paying bribes to others to not give them away [?]; remembers their also saving the **Gelblum** family; describes seeing dead bodies on the streets of the ghetto after the liquidation; describes the liquidation and Jews being sent to Treblinka or being shot to death; comments on those responsible for shooting Jews to death as Germans, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Ukrainians; discusses the many burning buildings; mentions some Poles stealing what was left in the ghetto; comments on the town selling Jewish houses as firewood after the occupation was over.

[02:] 01:06:00 – [02:] 08:00:00

He describes the ghetto after the occupation; mentions the plundering; remembers Poles getting Jewish apartments and the land on which the property was located; mentions a Jewish noble family **Mokotowscy** and their being taken to Treblinka and perishing there; describes a Jewish girl bribing a policeman with some valuable items in hope to be saved from death; discusses her being taken to Treblinka; comments on the Polish police not taking part in the liquidation of the ghetto, but helping catch Jews in the "Aryan" district; talks again about the liquidation of the ghetto and the police taking out dead bodies from the ghetto.

[02:] 08:00:01 – [02:] 18:59:59

He remembers an incident from two to three days after the liquidation of the ghetto, in which his Jewish neighbors Łajka **Szurman**, who was between eight and nine years old, and **Malka [Mylka] Szurman**, who was between 13 and 14 years old, were shot to death while escaping;

describes seeing dead bodies, blood, and bullet holes in the walls; mentions again the story of Mr. **Perechodnik**, member of the Jewish police in the ghetto; focuses on the Jewish police in the ghetto; describes Jews thinking that joining the ghetto police would save them; comments on the Jewish police being needed only for two more weeks after the liquidation of the ghetto in order to catch thieves; mentions the disappearance of the Jewish police; discusses some Jews hiding in town instead of in the ghetto after the liquidation; talks about Bolek **Miodownik**, **Gelblum's** son-in-law and husband of Artek's sister **Beli [Belli] Gelblum**; describes finding out after the war about **Miodownik** hiding in the same house in which the AK was having theoretical exercises; remembers the AK hiding guns under the floor in that house; describes **Miodownik** taking a gun at night when going for water.

[02:] 19:00:00 – [02:] 26:59:59

He focuses on his duties in the AK; mentions that only five members knew each other personally; comments on the theoretical training in shooting in apartments and practical exercises with guns, but without shooting (in the woods of Teklin near Otwock); he remembers one particular exercise in which his younger brother was almost killed by accident; mentions that there was no political training; talks about night exercises near Międzyzlesie and the different divisions of about 3,000 men there; discusses working at the German casino enabling him to collect information about the Germans; describes stealing a gun from a German officer; mentions his brother being seen when taking a shirt out from the casino; talks about a German patrol making a search at his house; describes him getting out of the house and hiding the gun in a barrel; remembers him coming back and realizing that he knew one of the officers, which saved their lives; mentions him being called "Lucky" by others from the resistance.

[02:] 27:00:00 – [02:] 36:30:00

He talks about his oldest brother Stefan **Walachowski**, an AK officer, and his going to war in 1939, and fighting in East Prussia (present-day Polish lands of Warmia and Mazury and Russian Kaliningrad Oblast); mentions his brother being a part of the Independent Operational Group "Narew" (SGO Narew); mentions his brother going to Lithuania; remembers his family and himself being informed by the camp and the Red Cross that his brother was still alive and in an internment camp in Kalvarija (Kalwaria) near Kaunas (Kowno); talks about his corresponding with his brother in German; remembers his brother going missing; describes finding out about his brother being caught and shot by Lithuanians; discusses his finding out that his brother was tortured; comments on his brother being killed on February 18, 1943, at 8 o'clock after two and a half years in prison; talks about receiving a picture of a memorial plaque with his brother's name on it from Mr. **Przewoźnik**; comments on the identity of his brother's killer.