

Translation/Summary of Oral History Interview with Bolesław Wolski

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Bolesław Wolski (to be referred to in this document as **BW**), was born in Wyszaków, a town near Warsaw, on March 2, 1927. At the time of this interview he lived in Olsztyn. By profession he was an architect.

Interviewer: Patrycja Bukalska. (PB): We visited with you a few months ago. Then we spoke with you about your recollection of World War II. We are back to record your memories on a video tape. Can you please tell us what was happening in Wyszaków at the start of the war?

(BW): Wyszaków found itself very early in the center of battles surrounding Warsaw. Before being totally destroyed by the German troops, the town was subjected to a round-the-clock bombardment by the Luftwaffe, from 6:00 AM until sundown. This was an easy mission for them, since they used the airport near Olsztyn to launch the bombing sorties. That airport was a few minutes flight time from Wyszaków.

The population of the town fled in fear. The commotion was further complicated by the many refugees from Eastern Prussia who sought refuge in the town, since the Polish border was nearby. People were fleeing in every which direction, not knowing that the situation was the same everywhere.

BW's family also decided to leave town. His father, as the Mayor of Wyszaków was ordered to evacuate together with his municipal administration to Włodawa, located on the present Polish border with Belarus and Ukraine on the River Bug. The entourage never made it to Włodawa since on September 17, 1939 they were overtaken by the wave from the east, namely by the invading Soviet Army. They made it as far as Brześć and turned back home to Wyszaków. Alas, there was nothing waiting for them there. Their house had been burned down.

(PB): During your evacuation, did you see any victims of the bombing?

(BW): Of course. The German Luftwaffe focused its energy on the evacuation routes. And the evacuation was massive. Most people hoped that by heading east things would be better. However, no one expected the Bolshevik surprise. It had a major impact on the chaos that ensued. There was a total vacuum of authority and order. And wherever there was a convergence of large roads, the Luftwaffe would bomb them most intensely. The situation was macabre.

BW did not encounter any German troops until they were on the road back from Brześć. He witnessed the first acts of repression by the Germans against Jews in Wyszaków.

(PB): Can you tell us what you saw in Wyszaków?

(BW): They returned to Wyszaków on or about September 20, [1939]. Upon his return, BW did not encounter any Jews. He did notice some air aid bunkers, which the Poles had dug earlier, but this time they were filled with an undetermined number of corpses, buried in a helter-skelter manner with parts of the corpses still visible. That these were bodies of executed Jews was conveyed to him by Wyszaków residents who did not flee the town during the outbreak of the war. Later on, these residents were evacuated for a few days, because there rumors that

Hitler was supposed to land at the Wyszaków Airport on a visit of the German troops. In anticipation of that, to pretend that this was a site of heavy fighting, the Wehrmacht evacuated the remaining residents and destroyed whatever was still left of the town. And that provided an opportunity to kill off the town's Jewish population.

(PB): How close did you come to the place where these bodies were buried?

(BW): Quite close. BW could actually see what they wore.

(PB): Do you have any idea how many people might have been buried there?

(BW): BW had no idea. But ever since, he has been telling the city authorities who have their offices on 3rd May Prospect, that their location is the site of a mass grave. But to date, the bodies in that grave have not been exhumed.

(PB): Later, have you witnessed any incidents of killings of someone from the civilian population?

(BW): Yes, once, when he was living in the park [BTW, BW does not elaborate on the location of this residence.], very near that very grave that he described above, BW witnessed a shooting. First, he heard some shots that were fired in the direction of his home. Then he saw a man running through the gates into the park. Upon entering the park, he fell. When the shooting was over, the fallen man was approached by 3 Germans and 1 Blue Polish policeman. BW noticed that the mysterious man's palm was shot away and he was barefoot. He also overheard the Blue policeman say that they had caught a Jew. To simplify things, they encouraged him to run so that then they could report that he was shot while trying to escape.

BW witnessed another incident at the intersection of November 11th Street and Póltuzka. A German officer was escorting a Jewish woman wearing an elegant fur. She must have started to run. The German escort drew his gun and fired. The young and attractive woman instantly fell. BW assumes that she was discovered in a hiding place and was being taken to the gendarmerie that happened to be a little further on Póltuzka Street. This simplified the escort's task. Once she was shot, he didn't have to escort anyone.

(PB): I'd like to return to that incident where that man was shot. Do you know from where he was running? And do you recall when this happened?

BW doesn't know from where or from what he was running. But this happened either in 1942 or 1943. He was buried quite near where he fell. The park watchman was ordered to dig a grave for him. [Timestamp: 00:17:52]

(PB): During our previous visit you mentioned a Henryk Cichał.

(BW): He was a renegade whom one would be better off avoiding. He was especially vile.

(PW): You also mentioned a Eugeniusz Daszkowski. Who was that?

(BW): His mother came from the U.S. He wrote a booklet entitled Mój Wyszaków (My Wyszaków). In his book he mentions this Henryk Cichał, who would ride his horse and expect people to step down from the sidewalk while he passed as a sign of deference to him. Afterwards Daszkowski became a rector of a naval school in Szczecin

The conversation now turns to a Rubinowicz family with which BW and his family were well acquainted. The father was a furrier. He had 3 daughters—the oldest was Rachel, [BW does not mention the middle daughter] and Brucha (Bronia), the youngest. Both Rachel and Brucha survived the war. When the war broke out they were on the other shore of the River Bug and they were captured by the Germans and taken to the Wołomin Ghetto.

When the ghetto was being liquidated and all the Jews living there were being deported to Treblinka, Mrs. Rubinowicz decided to save Bronia and tossed her across the fence with instructions to make her way to Wyszaków and to find the house of the mayor of the town. At that time, Bronia was around 6 years old. [Bronia had a different version of how she made it out of the Wołomin Ghetto. BW provides this version further in his narrative.] The Wolski family took her in and proceeded to take care of her. The oldest daughter Rachel was also lucky to get out of the ghetto through a secret passage and managed to make her way to Wyszaków. She met with her youngest sister Bronia at BW's house. The father, mother and middle sister ended up being deported to Treblinka, where they all most likely perished.

Dealing with Rachel was easier, since she volunteered for work in Germany. And, because of her Mediterranean features she was likely to blend in with others. BW's mother made sure that before she left she had a prayer book, a Christian pendant and rosaries. She also taught her to recite some fragments of prayers. All of this proved very useful to Rachel later. She ended up working in a munitions factory in Lübeck (?). Later this factory was subject to Allied bombing which resulted in impairing Rachel's health. When she went to work in Germany she was about 17 years old. She left for Germany under the name of Aleksandra (Olesia) Karczmarszek. [An amusing footnote to this alias: Under that name Aleksandra was unable to receive war reparations after the war. Despite BW's intervention with all sorts of documentation, there was no proof of a Rachel Rubinowicz doing forced labor in Germany during the war.] Ultimately, a Lwa Wajchauser from Łódź met and married Rachel and they immigrated to Israel. There, their son became a high-ranking officer in the Israeli Army.

BW's family had different 'adventures' taking care of Bronia. She seemed to be in frequent need of changing her safe houses. Once in a Polish school in the suburbs of Warsaw that was being visited by a German official, she raised her hand when he asked whether there was anyone in class who knew German. The school officials quickly figured out that Bronia was Jewish and BW's family had to transfer her to other relatives for safekeeping. She ultimately finished her war days staying in Sulejówka with BW's cousins Janina Zakrzewska and Zbigniew Zakrzewski. BTW, Zbigniew was executed after the war by the Communists for membership in Wolność i Niezawisłość – (**WiN**) (in translation: Liberty and Independence). For his care for Bronia, Zbigniew was awarded a medal from Yad Vashem posthumously. [Timestamp: 00:33:34]

(PB): You mention that you and a friend belonged to an organization. What was that organization?

- **BW):** Before the war it was the Polish Boy Scouts. During the war it was renamed as *Szare Szeregi* (in translation: Gray Ranks--paramilitary Boy Scouts) and it became subservient to the AK. Early on during its existence, they established contact with the Battalion Zośka – a legendary clandestine military unit named after Tadeusz Zawadzki, *nom de guerre* Zośka. BW even attended the funeral of Tadeusz Zawadzki ("Zośka"), in

Sieczychy, where Zośka died on August 20, 1943 in an attack on the watchtower of Grenzschutzpolizei. (*Frontier protection police*).

During the last phase of the War, BW was a First Sargent in the 32nd Infantry Regiment. It was during his service in this regiment, on August 5, BW was wounded in the knee. He was then serving in, the Młochowski Forest. He mentions that in that forest there bunkers belonging to Jewish partisan groups. However, the Polish and the Jewish partisans had little contact with one another.