Translation/Summary of Oral history interview with Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz

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Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz (to be referred in this document as K.) was born on January 22, 1923. By profession he is a historian. He was a former prisoner of the Stutthoff concentration camp, where he spent nearly a year. In addition, he was a soldier of the *Armia Krajowa* (AK, Home Army), member of *Opór* (Resistance), member of the Youth Socialist Organization, a Socialist activist and a social scientist. His latest book was entitled: *Historia i trochę polityki* (*History and a Little Politics*)

Interviewer (I): Dear Professor**,** we visited with you a few months ago when you told us about your stay in the Stutthoff concentration camp**.** We have come again this time with a video camera, to record our conversation, but also to broaden the subject of our conversation to focus on your activity in Żegota. What were you doing when the war broke out and how were you drawn to the activities of Żegota?

K. first provides some basic characteristics about his family. K. comes from an intellectual family with some roots in Polish nobility. The family never displayed or expressed any antisemitism nor did it have any links with Polish nationalism. Parents were supporters of Piłsudski with a leftist leaning. His father was a journalist by profession. He often extended help to his Jewish friends who were hiding on the Aryan side. And that's how the assistance to Jews by the entire family began. Very soon after the start of the war, K. joined a military organization which became the Home Army and a Socialist organization in Lublin, linked to the Polish Socialist Party. [Timestamp: 00:03:50] His left leanings obviously excluded any nationalist leanings. He looked with terror at what was happening with the Jewish population. Already in 1942 he had an opportunity to actively join [Żegota? Actual name of the organization is undecipherable from the audio. L.W]. First of all, he met Władysław Bartoszewski (B), who was also a student at the secret university in Warsaw. K. was a student of history, while Bartoszewski was a student of Polish studies. They met in a bookstore. They quickly found common interest in conspiratorial work and action of assisting Jews. In the bookstore worked a Jew from Lwów, under the pseudonym Alexander Artymowicz. His real name was Maurice Gelbart. He was a member of the Bund—the Jewish Labor Party. Since the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) collaborated with Bund, K. wanted to help, since Gelbart was in desperate need of help. His physical appearance was a dead giveaway that he was Jewish, traits that Polish *szmalcowicy* [Polish blackmailers of Jews] and Germans readily recognized. K. turned to Władek B., who was already a member of Żegota. It was he who pulled K. into this organization. The initial way that K. helped Gelbart was to deliver money to him. His primary expense was rent for his hiding place. But that was complicated by the fact that one of his hiding places burned own. [Timestamp: 6:10]. Sometimes K. helped by obtaining false documents and at times psychological/moral support. As people in hiding, they were hungry for human conversation and an update as to what was going on in the worl. K. would bring him underground newspapers and flyers. Artymowicz ultimately survived. He left Warsaw after the Uprising with the civilian population. He ultimately made his way to France and ultimately to New Jersey, U.S.A.

K. had 3 other Jews under his care. One was named Taichorn. In Warsaw he used the name Motyka. He was from Dohobycz. He was also connected to the Bund. He lived in the Żoliborz

district of Warsaw. K. drew him into the military branch of the PPS. He very much wanted to be of use. Regrettably he was betrayed by a blackmailer. He was arrested by the Gestapo, and was never heard from again. Taichorn was married. His wife was attractive and also lived in Żoliborz on ul. Wojska Polskiego. [Polish Army Street]. She survived, but K. does not know what happened to her afterwards.

The 4th person was Leon Rubin, who also lived in Żoliborz. K. met him through Artymowicz. K. delivered money to him and found a safe house for him. He presumably survived the war and left Poland and most likely went to France.

Why did these Jews seek a safe haven in Żoliborz? It was because Żoliborz was a unique district of Warsaw. It was a new neighborhood in which lived two groups of people—families of military officers and families of clerks in state and communal establishments. As it was known, Józef Piłsudski was a Polish statesman who served as the Chief of State (1918–1922) and was First Marshal of Poland, was not antisemitic. The Polish Army, until 1939, was not antisemitic either. Jews served as officers in all ranks of the officer corps. The ranks of state and communal clerks were mostly under the influence of the ideology of the PPS and a few Communists. Consequently, it stood to reason that both political groups fought against racism and nationalism, which provided a favorable locale for Jews looking for safe hiding places. It is suspected that some 2,000 Jews found refuge in this smallest neighborhood of Warsaw between 1942 and 1944. It also helped that the Germans rarely came to Żoliborz and there were few snitches and *szmalcowniks* among its residents. [Timestamp: 00:11:00]

K.'s mother also joined in these outreach activities. K.'s mother was a pedagogue and a social activist. Before the war, she was involved in social welfare work in a school in Żoliborz for children from officers' families. During the occupation she ran an NGO soup kitchen at 49 Czarniecki St. One day, Władek B. asked K.'s mother whether she would be willing to extend subsidies to Jews who were hiding in Żoliborz. K.'s mother was quite willing and proceeded to distribute envelopes with money to Jews who came to get gratis servings of dinner. Each envelope contained approximately 500 zł./month.

(I): What was the source of this money?

The funds came from Żegota, via parachute drops or other means of delivery, originating in London. Żegota supported a large number of Jews. In addition to financial support, it provided false documents for Jews and secured safe houses for them.

Here [Timestamp: 00:16:39] K. tells an interesting blackmailing incident that involved his mother. One day, some people who must have been tipped off, turned to her claiming that something wasn't right with the soup kitchen. That was followed by an anonymous letter accusing her of making money off of Jews and of giving money to Jews. In exchange for their silence she needed to agree to pay a bribe of 3,000 zł. (a huge sum of money for those days), the following day. It was quickly discovered who was behind this extortion—a Mr. Olszewski. He often came to the kitchen to watch what was going on. He was also known for dealing with the Germans. When K. learned of this, he turned to his commander in the AK, Ludwig Bergard [sp?] to ask him what is to be done. Ludwig had K. get in touch with a trained enforcer, Leszek

Czechniszek [sp?]. Leszek in turn, followed Olszewski home and emptied into his body a full pistol clip of bullets. This action silenced all subsequent denouncements.

There were a number of organizations that engaged in liquidation of traitors and collaborators, aka *szmalcowniks.* According to K., the AK was responsible for issuing a death sentence on some 60 *szmalcowniks* throughout Poland. Some were executed by Communists and some were also executed by Socialists. However, there were a lot more of them—mostly in Warsaw and in Kraków. From what strata of society did they come? [Timestamp: 00:20:21] Most of them were normal, ordinary criminals who were looking for some side income. Some were ideologues who subscribed to ideologies of the extreme right-wing elements of Poland, seeking to cleanse Polish society of Jews.

(I): I read and perhaps you, Professor, might be able to confirm this from your own research, that during the period immediately preceding the liquidation of the Ghetto there were particularly many active *szmalcowniks* in Warsaw.

K.: Definitely and that was quite natural. K. is unable to provide a specific number, but it was a few hundred. They were mostly concentrated in Śródmieście near the entrances to the Ghetto. There were some in the Wola district of Warsaw. But there were very few in Żoliborz.

(I): The AK is often reproached that, given that they knew where these *szmalcowniks* could be found, that the AK did not deal with them firmly enough.

K. agrees with that criticism. In fact, he had a number of discussions on the subject with the AK after the war. K. is of the opinion that the AK was excessively formal in how it waged its struggle against *szmalcowniks*. First it felt that they had to conduct a thorough investigation. Then it had to conduct a court martial. The court martial would then issue a verdict. Only after he was found guilty, the order was given to execute him. In K.'s opinion, such a process was too long and it gave too many *szmalcowniks* an opportunity to flee and thus avoid liquidation. In K.'s case, he was able to get swifter results because he turned with the problem of his mother's blackmailer to a lower rung in the administrative structure of the AK—a commander of a unit in Żoliborz. The more complicated process was justified that it limited the chances for making mistakes. [Timestamp: 24:15]

At this juncture, K. proceeds to describe the structure of Żegota, in which he was a rank and file member. His main task was to forward the funds from Żegota, which he usually received through Władek B. Same was true of his mother. She received those funds in individual envelopes under the names of the Jews that were supported and sheltered by Żegota. BTW the soup kitchen operated until the Warsaw Uprising, but K.'s mother was arrested earlier, in April, 1944. She was involved in the actions of Żegota some 2 years.

(I): You mentioned that your work in Żegota involved delivery of false documents…

K. describes this as a supplementary function, since the Jews who came from Lwów and Dohobycz to hide in Warsaw came with false documents.

(I): How did it happen that a given Jew was taken under the care of Żegota?

It was mostly through recommendations from political parties. Most left wing parties had people who were responsible for maintaining contact with underground groups. Another

channel was the Church but not through its official intervention but in the form of individual priests. If it came to women with children, nuns in convents were the go-betweens. But the main ways for Jews to reach Żegota was through personal/political contact as well as through coincidence.

Obviously, Żegota did not extend help to all the Jews in hiding. It didn't have the resources for that. Still, even though it did not alter the basic fate of Jews, it helped a good few thousand. It was most instrumental in delivering financial assistance to them and locating hide-outs for them. Most of those hide-outs were in the form of rooms in homes of Polish families. But this was a major challenge since people were afraid of getting involved in this manner of assistance.

(I): You mentioned that among your responsibilities was to engage those Jews who were in hiding on the Aryan side, in conversation. Could you tell us about this? About what did they want to speak? About their experiences? About their plans?

K. There was a great need for news about the world situation. There was also a yearning for the underground press which provided some information about the progress of the war. Knowing that the war was ending lifted their spirit and their morale. There were also conversations of a practical nature: Where something could be bought? When to go out? Going out in Żoliborz in the evening was perfectly safe. Also, these Jews were very eager to help, to be active. That was especially true of young Jews.

For elder people this was difficult. They would sit in their basements or their rooms, learn foreign languages and read books.

(I): When the uprising in the Ghetto started, what was the reaction of the people under your care and what was the reaction of Żegota?

Żegota had an obligation to protect and save those Jews who fled from the Ghetto and they did that. The assertions that all Poles wanted to help the uprising was untrue. Only 20-25% of society was positively disposed and willing to help those fighting in the Ghetto. A large majority was totally passive. A small number of Poles collaborated and helped the Germans. A certain number of people took an active, conspiratorial and supportive role in the Ghetto. (It needs to be stressed that before the war, part of Polish society became infected with the ND [National Democratic] propaganda and to a large degree was unfamiliar with Jews was completely passive.)

Those involved in conspiratorial work in the Ghetto helped to lead some Ghetto fighters through sewers out into nearby forests to join the partisans. [Timestamp: 00:39:39].

(I): A personal question. Why did you decide to get involved in this? This was highly risky form of resistance. Not everyone was willing to take such a risk.

K. It's a psychological question whether someone wants to be involved in a certain action or not. If one has a predilection to a certain conspiratorial civil or armed action then one takes part in it. K. was raised in an atmosphere where such conduct was a moral obligation. It must be said that the youth of those days was quite willing to engage in conspiratorial work. The population in Żoliborz had also had many people who were activists.

(I): You parents were also involved in underground work. But weren't they afraid for you?

K. has been sentenced to death for his actions on many occasions, but didn't give it much thought at the time.

(I): Was your arrest and that of your mother connected with your work for Żegota?

K. Not at all. K. was betrayed by a colleague in his military unit. He gave up a few addresses, including his and that of his mother. His mother was released go from prison, since they had nothing on her. After three months in Pawiak, he, and his brother were sent to Stutthoff concentration camp. [Brief break during Part I at 00:41:50].

[Interview Continues].

(I): We paused because we are now turning our attention to your stay in Stutthoff. However, before doing so, I wanted to ask whether you have anything to add to matters pertaining to Żegota, be it a person or an event that stand out in your recollection?

K. feels that he completed his narrative regarding Żegota. Moreover, there are numerous books available on the subject that can fill in any missing material.

(I): That being the case, let's turn our attention to Stutthoff. You mentioned that you were deported with your brother. When was that?

K. was arrested on April 13, 1944. He was beaten in Szucha Gestapo Prison and then taken to Pawiak Prison. On May 24, he arrived in Stutthoff concentration camp, 22 miles east of Gdańsk. He was given the number 36,090, but that's not how many prisoners were held there. K. will focus on the Jewish population there. When K. arrived there with his brother, there were relatively few Jews in Stutthoff. Most of them were from Gdańsk. In June and July transports of Jews increased. They arrived from two directions: from the Baltic Republics, from the concentration camps Salaspils and Kaisers Wald, near Riga and Kaunas. These Jews came by sea. The second group came from Auschwitz by train. Those were Hungarian, Czech, Greek and a few Polish Jews. The Polish Jews came primarily from Łódz, where the Ghetto was being liquidated. One of them was the sister of Polish Professor Rakowski. Between June and October, the transports with Jews arrived every day. [Timestamp: 00:47:08]

(I): How did an arrival of a transport in Stutthoff look like?

K. With these transports, by winter 1945 the number of prisoners rose to 110,000. K. wants to remind us that when he arrived, he was given the number 36,090. These Jews were partly housed in blocks built to the north of the camp and partly they were sent to sub camps, which were labor camps, located mostly in Eastern Prussia, along the Gdańsk coastline and Mazury.

Upon arrival, all prisoners underwent selection. Those who were not suitable for work were sent to their death. Those who could work were sent to those sub-camps. K. proceeds to describe a selection process that he witnessed. [Timestamp: 00:48:51]

The selection was conducted by SS-men. It was mainly by the chief doctor Heidel (sp?) and the Oberscharführer Fotte (sp?). At that time, K. worked in the Statistical Bureau as a scribe. He kept arrival books and recorded deaths of the prisoner in the main camp and at sub camps. Reports were filed daily and delivered to the camp headquarters. The German bureaucracy was enormous. In addition to the Statistical Bureau, there was a separate Political Bureau, which

kept a card index that listed the reason for someone's arrival, whether it was political, criminal, etc.; and a Division of Labor that had a card index of professions. In all these offices, the work was done by Poles, since no Germans were available. There were German criminals and *Kapos,* but they were too stupid for such work. The Poles were intelligent and filled all these positions. This proved to be to their benefit; since this allowed them to save their friends and they became familiar with the camp's administrative structure.

One day, the head of the Statistical Bureau asked K. to follow him because a transport with Jewish women arrived. They went to the stop for the narrow-gauge train. A large transport of Jewish women arrived from Auschwitz—approx. 300 people. [Timestamp: 00:51:25]. The selection process by SS-men Heidel and Fotte began. They were separated the women into two groups: one of those fit for work and another one of those too sick and needing to go as if to the "hospital" (a euphemistic term for the gas chamber). Women that were pregnant didn't have a chance (of being assigned to work). Women who had signs of ailing feet and those who were exceedingly undernourished were assigned to the group destined for he "hospital, but they were gassed. The 300 people, who were primarily Hungarian Jews, ended up being nearly evenly split—half to work and the other extermination. K.'s function was to record the number that was assigned to each person. He escorted those who were selected for work to their camp barracks. These women he actually could tell that they would be going to work. To those that were allegedly going to the hospital, he couldn't bring himself to say anything. They were taken by Fotte to the gas chamber. And this would be a daily ritual, throughout September.

Based on K.'s estimates, 2,000 Jewish women were sent to the gas chamber. An even greater number of women died in the camp because of the appalling living conditions. Food rations were smaller than in the Polish part of the camp and because of frequent outbreak of typhus. They died like flies. The Polish rations were twice those of Jews. Also the Poles had a right to receive food packages. By October, the crematorium could not keep up with the burning of the corpses. In response, the Germans created wood piles which they would light with gasoline or naphtha and tossed the corpses onto the burning wood pile. The stench from this was terrible.

The greatest number of Jewish women died during the evacuation from camp, during January and February, 1945. Nearly all of the ones from those women from sub camps in Eastern Prussia were marched north to Baltic Sea coast. There, they were marched onto the ice, drowned and shot. Of those in this contingent, very few survived.

A good portion of Jewish women from Western Prussia survived. K. offers a provisional estimate that of the 110,000 women prisoners who came through Stutthoff, some 65,000 perished; a few dozen thousand were transferred to other camps. A few thousand survived. In any case, more Jews than Poles died.

(I): When you recorded a prisoner's death, did you record the cause of death?

K.: When it was a death caused by gassing, then he would write next to the date of death: S.B. Death by gassing rarely exceeded 150 per day, since each gassing could accommodate only 50 people. Those prisoners, who were publicly executed, would have an EX next to their death date. BTW. Books with all this information have been preserved. They are in the Stutthoff Museum.

The gas chamber operated before the arrival of Jewish women. Before them, the Germans gassed and cremated some Soviet invalids. They also cremated a group 12 Polish prisoners from Pawiak Prison.

Executions were as follows: 1. Executions from a sentence that was issued in the center, in Saxenhausen. These were mostly people who were accused of espionage. Among them were parachutists and radio broadcasters. 2. Public executions that were applied to a) camp runaways who were caught and during their escape had committed a crime against a German. They were hanged in front of camp prisoners at roll call. and b) any Polish prison laborer who had intimate relations with a German woman.

K. witnessed some 10 public executions. One was especially poignant. Two young Russians escaped from prison—one 18 years old, the other 14 years old. During their escape they assaulted a German. When they were returned to Stutthoff, they were hanged by German criminal prisoners. The younger Russian started to cry. The older one told him: "Don't cry! The Soviet Army will come and avenge our death. Comrades, don't give up!"

That created an immense impression. It was supposed to scare us. Instead, it brought us hope. The Russians held up very well in the concentration camp. They were psychologically tough and resistant.

[End of Part I]/Start of Part II]

(I): Before the break we were speaking about the relations between the inmates of Stutthoff? Were you witness to kindness or assistance among the inmates of Stutthoff?

K. wants to underline that he himself was a beneficiary of help extended to him by other inmates. His landing the job as a scribe in the Statistical Bureau was a result of collaboration with deportees from earlier transports, with whom he was friends in the movement Opór (Resistance). This job had its clear advantages by being indoors and the work could be accomplished while sitting. Many people were rescued by friends who secured for them less demanding or more favorable work positions in camp.

Other assistance came from packages that came from outside. K. recalls a package that he received from Warsaw before the Uprising. He also received several packages from relatives who lived along the Baltic coast. K. also earned a special benefit from his position in Stutthoff. For being a scribe, he was entitled to a supplement in his food ration—an extra slice of bread with some meat. This improved his food situation so much so that he could help the 40 women from the AK who happened to come to Stutthoff by error. These young women came from Warsaw, after the fall of Mokotów on the 29th of September, 1944, in a transport that carried prisoners who were participants in the Warsaw Uprising. They should have gone to a camp for prisoners of war, instead of a concentration camp. K. was able to contact them because they were held for an extended period of time in the women's camp, near K.'s place of work.

Friendship among inmates in camp did exist on a small scale, but mostly among the Polish prisoners. There was a difference between Stutthoff and camps like Buchenwald and Dachau that stemmed from the fact that in the latter two, most of the camp administrative positions were held by German Communists and German Social Democrats—namely political prisoners.

They tended to soften somewhat the living conditions for prisoners in those two camps and the prisoners were better able to survive. Stutthoff didn't have any political prisoners, only the "green" (professional) criminals, who actually made life much more difficult for everyone to endure.

K. is not ashamed to admit that he did reach out to help two Jews that he met in Stutthoff. Both of them, now deceased, were journalist after the war. K.'s help consisted of offering some of his soup ration, since he received some packages and a supplemental ration for his work as a scribe. Both of them were extremely undernourished

However, the attitude of the majority of the prisoners towards Jews in Stutthoff was indifferent at best. K. recalls that when he gave some soup to the Jews mentioned above, an old prisoner from Pomerania took him to task for extending even such a nominal bit of kindness towards Jews. This attitude by the local Kashubian population also made it very difficult for Jews to attempt escaping from the Stutthoff and other Pomeranian forced labor camps.

K. himself experienced how supportive and generous the Kashubian Poles were to other Poles who escaped from nearby forced labor camps.

(I): Before proceeding with the story of your escape, can you provide some examples of where inmates were harmful to one another? And if so, were there any means of isolating them from one another?

K. The *Kapo and blockältester* (the barrack leader) were the most harmful functionaries among inmates. It was one of them that beat K. into unconsciousness when K. asked him for the package that he received from his relatives. And even after that, this *Kapo* released to K. only half of the package and kept the other half. Such functionaries were primarily German criminal prisoners and only occasionally Polish criminal prisoners. After the war some of them were sentenced to death. During the occupation the *Kapos* did not need much of a pretext for beating prisoners. They were known for beating prisoners to death and for deriving pleasure from their sadistic ways. K. provides an example of a case where *Kapo* by the name Pabst actually killed his homosexual partner, for which he was actually executed. [Timestamp: 00:11:18].

(I): You mentioned the name of SS-man Fotte as the cruelest SS-man. How did he earn such an extreme reputation?

K. Fotte would beat or torment a prisoner whenever he could. But there were many more SS-men than he. Some 10 women guards and 11 SS-men from Stutthoff were sentenced to death in two post-war trials for war crimes. [Timestamp: 00:13:10].

(I): You mentioned about punishments meted out for escaping. Were there different punishments for other transgressions committed in the camp?

K. For more minor infractions, inmates were subjected to beatings with a whip—usually 25 lashes. But these were very sporadic occurrences.

(I): You mentioned that many people in Stutthoff died from exhaustion or hunger. How were the corpses brought to the crematorium?

K. There was a cart pulled by 10 prisoners. The corpses would be piled into the cart and brought to the crematorium. Towards the end, in November 1944, the crematorium could not keep up with the burning of corpses.

(I): A question that relates to the very beginning. Do you recall the impression that Stutthoff had on you when you first arrived?

K. expected to die in the Pawiak Prison. He was accused of many criminal acts. The fact that he ended up being deported was like a salvation, a chance for survival. The very deportation was a source of joy and curiosity. But throughout his stay, he felt a strong will to survive this ordeal. K. mentions that the stay in Stutthoff left him with a very positive impression of Russians. The hanging of the 2 young Russian boys, described above was one of the examples of their valor, stamina and courage.

(I): Based on many stories from camps, I heard that Russians were treated significantly worse than prisoners from other countries. Was that true in Stutthoff?

K. fully agrees with this observation. One must keep in mind that Russian did not have the privilege of receiving packages. Furthermore, many prisoner from other lands annexed or conquered by the Germans had professions which qualified them for work in the forced labor camps as furriers, upholsterers or shoemakers—professions that were performed inside, protected from the elements. There were very few Russians who qualified for such work. They were taken for outdoor work, to perform the worst tasks. So, if one were to describe the social hierarchy at the camp, Jews were on the lowest rung. They were destined for extinction. Then were the Russians, who were a bit better off than the Jews, but were worse off than the Poles. Next were the average Poles who received no packages and had no connection for securing preferential work assignment. This was a group that was destined for death. The fourth category was Poles like K., with packages and good connections. Those on the highest rung were the administration, consisting of German professional criminals and a few Poles with the same skills. To this group also belonged Norwegians who had package privileges.

(I): You mentioned that you escaped…

K. Yes, this was already during evacuation. Earlier escapes were rare and they were very difficult to pull off because Stutthoff was located in Żuławy Wiślane, an area populated by fanatical Danzig Germans, who handed over to the Gestapo any runaways they found. Fleeing east was impossible because of the Nogat, and swamps, so that even if one was to overcome these natural obstacles, they would be caught and turned over to the Gestapo. Escape from Stutthoff itself was rare. People attempted to flee more often from the sub camps, but not so often.

Massive number of escapes started during evacuation, across lands that are known as Kaszubia. This land starts with the left bank of the River Wisła and continues northwest overlapping with Western Pomerania up to Lębork. The Kashubians, who were actually Poles, were very helpful to fleeing Poles. All the Kashubian villages along the trail from Rybina on the River Wisła to Lębork, offered a variety of food to Polish passers-by during a period of two weeks. [Timestamp 00:20:42]. Among the people who fled were K. and his brother.

(I): Would you please be so kind to describe the evacuation of the camp?

K.: On January 25, 1945 the evacuation on foot began. Some 20,000+ people set out from Stutthoff, via Pomięczyno (west of Gdańsk and southwest of Gdynia) to Lębork. Along the way they were joined by prisoners from forced labor camps along the Bay of Gdańsk. Later, there were other evacuation by sea, after Stutthoff was surrounded by the advancing Russians.

(I): Was this forced march intense?

K. The march itself wasn't that intense, but other circumstances of the march were. Every 5 or 10 km the evacuees had to make way for retreating German military units and farmers with all their carts and farm implements, fleeing west from Eastern Prussia. As they let these multitudes pass, the evacuees had to stand in the snow. It was this standing in the cold, in the snow that resulted in many deaths. Also many people died during the final evacuation when they reached the vicinity of Lębork, (where K. and his brother escaped) and the remaining evacuees were redirected northeast in the direction of Gdynia. During this stage, the Germans executed many of the marching prisoners.

K., his brother and a number of their friends chose to escape at this juncture because they had contacts with their cousins in Gdynia. It turned out that K.'s and his brother's first cousin married a Kashubian woman. These cousins met them with a car in the vicinity of Wejherowo in a pre-arranged village. From there they were taken to Gdynia where they waited until Gdynia was liberated at the end of March 1945.

By K.'s estimate, 10 to 20% of the people who had set out on this march, died on the way. Then when they reached the town of Rybno (northeast of Lębork), there was an outbreak of typhus, resulting in many deaths. [Timestamp: 00:25:26]

(I): How were you provisioned before you all had set out on this evacuation march?

K. Everyone received a loaf of bread and a piece of margarine. During the march they were not given anything. Only the Kashubian villages along the road gave them food. Until this day K. was in awe of the Kashubian people for their kindness and generosity. Had it not been for the Kashubians, more would have died during this journey.

(I): A more personal question. Are you able to evaluate how your experiences in concentration camp influenced your life? How did they determine your life and profession?

K. Certainly in a negative way. As a consequence of beatings that he suffered in camp, especially around the head, for many years after being liberated K. suffered from epilepsy. Only through more recent, modern methods of treatment he recovered and has not suffered from epilepsy during the past 10 years. Because of this illness' unpredictability, his life was seriously impaired then. After liberation he decided that he wanted to be active and useful. Consequently, he attained all successive academic degrees, published a good number of books and wrote some 400 articles. With this, he thinks that he did make a contribution to the field of history.

(I): How did you react to being awarded the medal of Righteous Among the Nations? Did it have any special meaning?

K. derived considerable satisfaction from this acknowledgement, but it didn't come as a complete surprise since this award was more frequently being given in the 1980s.