VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Zbigniew Gadomski

conducted by Martin W. Thomas

January 16, 2004

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Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on January 16, 2004, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Martin Thomas. I am speaking with Mr. Zbigniew Gadomski. Mr. Gadomski was born on October 30, 1930, in Bydgoszcz, Poland and now lives in Willowbrook, IL. He learned of the Library of Congress American Folklife Center Project through an article in the Indian Prairie Public Library's January - April 2004 newsletter regarding the Veterans History Project. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project.

Mr. Gadomski lived through a grim part of Europe's history during the period leading up to and including World War II, fighting as a 13 year old against Nazi German occupation forces, and ending up in a prisoner of war camp. This interview will cover those experiences and explore how they affected a boy barely in his teens who later came to the United States and became a US citizen. Here is his story:

Early Years:

Mr. Gadomski, your early years in Bydgoszcz - what memories do you have of those years, your preschool years?

My dad was a surgeon, gynecologist, in that town of Bydgoszcz. He was quite successful, and he was well known, and we were quite well off. He married my mother in the '20s, I believe. My mother was a stage actress, also a singer. And then, of course, she gave up all of that to be a full time mother, and wife to my dad.

How many siblings did you have?

There were a total of two: myself and my older sister, who is three years older than I am. She presently lives in Orlando, FL.

What was your house like? Who owned it?

We had an apartment. We did not have a house. In Europe most people lived in apartments. Not too many owned homes because it's quite expensive there. It was a good household. We had quite a large apartment. Also my dad had his office there, and a waiting room and all that stuff.

Right there in your set of apartments?

Yes.

What was your family life like, in those early years?

My family life was very, very happy. I had nothing but happy memories. My parents loved my sister and myself very dearly. My mother used to spend a lot of time with us, and so did Dad, whenever he could. If his schedule wasn't too busy taking care of patients, he was always home with us.

The town of Bydgoszcz - what was the town like, and what was your neighborhood like?

It was a town of about 300,000 people at that time. Industrywise, I'm not sure what was in there. However, there were a lot of Polish army, how should I say, not camps, but where they would be stationed.

Barracks?

Barracks. It was sort of a army town, you might say.

How old were you when you started school?

I was, let's see, I went to kindergarten when I was five, I believe, and I started my first grade at the age of six.

What was school like for you?

It was good. There were all public schools in Europe. There was not a private school. The kindergarten was run by nuns. Again, the school, it was a short lived adventure for me before the war broke out, because two years after I started going to school, the war broke out. So then things changed dramatically.

War Years:

How much awareness did you have during those years of the events before Germany's invasion of Poland?

Being only, what, six or seven years old, I wasn't too, too interested in politics or what was happening, except I knew that there were clouds on the horizon. That the war may be imminent. That Germany might attack Poland any day. Because my dad used to talk to us. He would kind of caution us, prepare us for the day.

So the adults did talk in your presence about what was going on?

The adults did talk to us. They kind of briefed us on what may happen. So we were aware of it, and yet being so young we didn't worry too much about it.

How did your family get its news of national and world events? I mean, did you have a radio in the apartment? Newspapers? Word of mouth?

Both. Newspapers and radio. Of course, there was no TV at that time, but most of the information I would say came through the airwaves, the radio.

To your recollection, before the actual invasion it really was on everybody's mind?

Yes, it was. The newspapers were full of the possible attack by the Germans, and what were the Allies doing meanwhile, the British and the French. Yes, there was a lot of talk about it.

When Germany attacked and occupied Poland in 1939 - September 1st?

September 1st, yes.

How much time passed before your town became occupied?

Prior to the outbreak of the war, my dad put us on a train to Warsaw, to stay with his family in Warsaw. He thought it would be safer there than it would be in Bydgoszcz. So when the war broke out September 1st we were in Warsaw already, and we went through all the bombardment and everything else that the Germans threw at us.

Did it turn out that you would have been safer back in Bydgoszcz?

It's hard to say at this time whether we would be or not. Those were the thoughts of my parents. They thought we would be safer in Warsaw, but somehow we survived, so chances are it was a good move.

Did your mother and father remain in Bydgoszcz?

My dad put us on a train, myself, my sister and my mother, to Warsaw. And then he stayed in Bydgoszcz. Now, he did visit us in Warsaw on September 8th, I believe, 1939, to say good bye to us because he was already called to active duty as a major, and surgeon of course. So he did come to say good-bye to us about September the 8th. And I remember very well where I would take off a little medallion, a religious medallion on my neck. I took it off and hung it over my dad's head, and I gave it to him. Which was found later on his body. But we'll get to that later. So we did say good-bye to him. That was the last time we saw him, was September the 8th, 1939.

How did you feel at that time? I mean, how aware were you of the magnitude of what was happening?

When my dad said that he has to go, and go fighting the Germans, I realized that there was going to be big problems. And I remember I even cried when my dad hugged us because he said that he wasn't sure if he was ever going see us or not. It was a moving experience for all of us.

What happened then, after this brief reunion on September 8th? How did your life evolve then?

My mother took care of my sister and myself in Warsaw the best way she could. She found a job as a saleslady for some wrapping paper. And I was going to school. My sister was too. It was tough going because the Germans were squeezing the news, so to speak, making things tougher and tougher for the Polish people. And they started to perform public executions of people. It was tough. It was really, really tough. After the bombing and everything took place, which, let's see, lasted about a month, all of September. That's when the Polish people, the army just gave up fighting, and the Germans took over as occupants.

So, immediately after you last saw your father, the attack on Warsaw, and that was aerial bombing or artillery or both?

Everything. Everything. Aerial and artillery and then of course the actual fighting between the soldiers.

This bombing was directed at civilian targets as well as military?

Absolutely, yes. The house where we were living with my dad's family got bombed a couple of times. It was hell on earth.

The house that you were staying in actually was hit?

Oh yes. Yes, it was. It was like a four or five story apartment building, and it got hit.

How severe was the damage?

The damage? Well, half the house was gone. The wing where our apartment was, was saved but the rest of it was just in ruins. Just gone.

After the month long bombardment, then there was fighting and they finally surrendered?

Finally surrendered at the end of September, and that's when the German soldiers and police and everything moved into Warsaw.

Now, do I have the date right? This was still 1939?

1939, yes.

And how soon after the surrender did the occupying forces and police move in?

Very shortly. If I remember correctly, again that was a long time ago, but they moved in almost immediately. The German police and the Gestapo and the SS and all the secret service Germans. They just took over the town and they started making new rules and new regulations and the food started to be rationed and from then on got tougher and tougher every year.

You mentioned there were public executions, and just now you referred to food shortages. What was day to day life like after they began to occupy your area? How did that change?

It was, trying to survive, so to speak. By that I mean trying to get food on table, and while doing so you had to keep your eyes wide open, because the Germans would just grab people off the streets and put them against the wall and shoot them with machine guns.

For what types of infractions would they do that? Or was it just random?

No reason. Just for the heck of it.

Really.

Just for the heck of it.

They didn't like the way somebody looked so they...

Yes. Yes, you were walking on the street and, say the German didn't like the way you looked at

him, he would just get his pistol out and shoot you right on sight. It was horrible. Or if they didn't shoot you, they would drag you up and send you to Germany as slave laborers.

Did that happen to anybody that you knew at that time?

Well, it almost happened to us. I was on a streetcar, riding with my half brother. Whom I didn't mention earlier, but he was from my mother's former marriage. He was her son. And all of the sudden the streetcar got stopped by the Germans, the German soldiers. They told everybody to get out. "Raus" was the name in German. And they lined us up against the wall, facing the wall. And we could hear them setting up the machine guns. And my brother just said a couple of words. He said, "Be brave." And we thought that was it. But for some reason they changed their minds and they told us to go back on the streetcar. Maybe they were looking for somebody. I don't know. But it was a very, very close call. Those were the public executions which were taking place more and more frequently as the years went by.

Besides the constant fear of being pulled off a street car and executed on the spot, and the food shortages, were there any other hardships associated with the occupation?

Of course the radios were forbidden. You could not listen to the radio. If they did find a radio in an apartment or a home or something, they would shoot you on sight. Radio was a no-no. The newspapers were all under German jurisdiction. Well, it was tough going, because you didn't know what was going to happen to you once you went out of the apartment, whether you were going to get shot or caught and sent to Germany, or whether you were going to find any food to put on the table.

The next question on my list was to ask you if you continued to go to school, but I'll say that before we went on record you did show me a German issued identity card that allowed you to go to school. Would you tell me, then, what that experience was like? And how it was different from going to school before the occupation?

I'm glad you asked me that. The Germans allowed schooling for the Polish children up to a certain point. If I remember right, it was up to about maybe second grade or so. Maybe third, I'm not sure. After that there was no schooling allowed. So, what the Polish people did, they would organize classes in private homes. So we would just kind of, you know, hide our books, and go to an apartment of a family who agreed to do so. And the teacher would show up there too, and that was the way we would get our education. Again, if you were caught, if the Germans did catch us, they would shoot everybody. The people that owned the apartment, the teacher, the children, everyone would get shot if we were ever caught attending those secret classes.

The secret classes, how often would they meet?

If I remember correctly, again this was a long time ago, I believe, I think, it was like everyday. But at different locations.

So it was definitely clandestine.

Yes. So when one class was finished, say on a Monday, then the teacher said, "Well, you go to such and such an address the next day, and we'll meet you there," and we just kept changing, all the time.

From what we've talked about so far, the occupiers were very brutal. Was there any civility at all to their, the way they treated the people?

No. Not really. Because if you were willing to collaborate with the Germans, and work with them, yes, then they would give you special passes to go and buy food for yourself. Or you were rewarded getting another apartment or something. But those were the only exceptions, if you were willing to work with the Germans. If you were not, you were just a slave.

These conditions lasted up until the time of the uprising in 1944?

That is correct. Yes.

So it's virtually five years of this same type of life style.

Except it got progressively worse and worse every year.

And I imagine the food shortages became more severe.

Yes.

How else did it become worse over those five years?

Well, as far as meat was concerned, it got to the point where there was no pork, there was no beef. There was only horsemeat, was available. Or even dog meat. When things got desperate, you know, you were willing to eat almost anything just to survive. So the rations that the Germans imposed were gradually getting smaller and smaller and smaller, just to make things tough for the Polish people.

Do you think that their food supplies were short, or was it just sort of a punishment?

It was mostly punishment. Punishment for us being Polish and we were the oppressed people and they were the victors.

During the time before the uprising, was there any fighting in your area? Was there any armed conflict?

Yes, there were. I was too young to join the underground army at that time, but there were continuous shootings, fighting between the underground people, Polish people and German military. It would mostly consist of executions, so to speak. If the underground people, say, found out that certain Germans were extra, extra tough on some Polish people and they would torture them, et cetera, then the underground army would try and destroy them.

Was there any other military fighting in the area other than the underground?

No.

Do you know anything about the origins of the underground? When it was formed and how it was formed?

It was formed, I would say, shortly after the end of the fighting in 1939. It started out small and it got bigger and bigger. Some of the officers from the 1939 campaign would just join the underground army, and it was bigger and more and more successful against the Germans. And then, of course, the Germans were getting tougher and tougher, because the underground army was getting bigger and bigger.

You mentioned the 1939 campaign officers. They were actually in the military and they escaped rather than to surrender?

They escaped rather than to surrender. That is correct.

So they were the actual nucleus of this underground.

Yes. Yes, they were.

Uprising:

At the time of the uprising, the Resistance had been able to grow in numbers over the five years. How many members would you say they had?

All I can tell you is how many Polish fighters died in the uprising. Those are approximate figures, but from what I heard it was like 20,000 of them were killed in those two months of the uprising. Also, about 180,000 civilians were killed during those two months.

This is out of a town of 300,000?

I'm talking about Warsaw now.

Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, right. What was the population of Warsaw at the beginning of...?

I would say it was something like a million and a half at that time.

So 180,000 civilians...

Dead civilians, yes.

And as for the number participating in the Resistance, do you have any rough guess as to how many fighters and how many noncombatants were...

I'm guessing at this time that maybe there were 50,000 of them at the start of the uprising.

And that would be a total, or would that be just the actual fighting personnel?

That would be the actual fighters, the actual soldiers.

But it would not include nurses and people that helped with supplies?

I'm not sure. As I said, those figures are approximate.

If it's anywhere around 50,000, and 20,000 of them died for the cause, they were very determined.

Oh yes. Yes. (pause) It was tough.

The Resistance, how was it able to obtain the supplies it needed to actually fight? The weapons and the ammunition and medicines?

As far as the weapons is concerned, they came from different sources. A lot of it came from captured German weapons, and also some of it was made right in Poland. It was sort of home made weapons like machine guns, stuff like that. Also, there were drops by the Allies, and some by Russians, but that was very, very limited. But most of it was captured from the Germans.

When you say "made locally," did they actually fabricate the weapons from scratch?

Yes.

These weren't remanufactured....

Yes, they did. Now I'm talking about rifles and light machine guns. No artillery. There was no artillery on our side. No.

You had no artillery, not even captured or dropped?

No. No.

Strictly small arms?

Weapons that could be concealed. We also made some hand grenades, too. But again, a lot of it was captured from the Germans.

Did you participate in any of that manufacture yourself?

No. Not myself, no. I was just a young kid. (laughs)

How did they recruit people for the Resistance?

It was mostly voluntary. The recommendation of a friend, would say, "Hey, listen, we could use you." So, it wasn't force, by any means. It was voluntary.

And, since we've already said that this was an underground resistance, did you have to be very careful to make sure that neighbors weren't aware of what you were doing?

You had to be very, very careful, because a lot of people, again, in order to get food on the table, they would snitch on you, to the Germans. So everybody had false papers, for instance, so that in case they were caught the Germans would not go after the families of those members of the underground. Whenever you had to transport weapons you had to conceal them on your body very, very carefully. And pray that you didn't get caught, or anything like that.

Did many people refuse to assist?

Yes, there were some people that were either afraid to assist because, you know, if they were caught they would be shot. Or people that just didn't want to get involved. Didn't want to be bothered.

Who in your family participated?

Well, it was my sister and myself.

Your sister was a participant?

Yes.

What was her role?

Her role, well, again I'm talking about the fighting, the actual fighting in the uprising now. During the occupation neither one of us were doing much, because we were just too young.

Oh, OK. So when we start talking about your role in this, it will be at the time of the uprising.

That is correct. Keep in mind, I was only, what, 12 or 13 years old. (both laugh)

Most kids at that age might be playing with toy guns.

Exactly. Exactly.

Before we start talking about your participation, which you already told me started at the time of the uprising, the almost five years that you lived under the occupation of the Nazi occupiers, what were some of the experiences that <u>you</u> had? What were some of the things that <u>you</u> witnessed during that time?

I witnessed several public executions. I have seen Polish people being hung off the streetcar lamps. There were just bodies hanging. It was getting more and more, progressively worse, and my hate for the occupiers grew bigger and bigger after seeing what I have seen. And, again, being ten, eleven, twelve year old, it was quite an experience for me when I saw people being shot before my eyes, and also where I also almost got shot myself, executed with my brother, which I mentioned earlier.

When you were pulled of the streetcar, yes. But you actually saw people being shot on the street?

Yes I did.

Unarmed civilians?

Yes. Unarmed civilians who were lined up against the wall, and there was a machine gun in the back of a pickup truck. And an order was given to shoot them, and that was it. Then, we were told to pick up the bodies, and they would go on someplace else and do the same thing all over again.

As an eleven or twelve year old you had to help...

Yes. Yes.

...pick up bodies of people freshly killed?

Yes. The Germans would round up people nearby to do so. I happened to be there, so I was told to help.

What was the date of the uprising?

August the 1st, 1944.

Did any specific incident spark that, or was it just planned ahead of time to begin on that date?

It was planned without any specific date. It was long in the making. Again, it was based on the presumption that the Russian front would get to Warsaw and free Warsaw at that time. It was supposed to be coordination between the Russian government and the Polish underground government, so that when the time came for us to start fighting the Germans out in the streets, it would only be for a few days, and then the Russian troops would move in and that would be it. But it didn't turn out to be that way.

Were the Russians already in Poland, heading toward Warsaw?

Yes. Yes. At the time when the uprising started, I would say maximum of a hundred miles, probably less, from Warsaw itself.

Were they in sufficient numbers to be a real threat to the German army?

Oh yes, absolutely. That was a front. Of course, you know Germany attacked Russia in 1941- 42, I'm not sure of the exact date. And they took, they conquered Russia quite extensively, and then, of course, everything turned around and the Russians started their own offensive and they pushed the Germans further and further west. And, as I said, the Russian front was quite close to Warsaw when the uprising started.

You already told me that you and your sister participated in the underground. How were you recruited? Who approached you? Or did you go to somebody and volunteer?

Let me backtrack a little bit, if I may. When my mother died in 1943, she died from cancer, my sister and I were left pretty much alone on our own, and my dad's family would sort of help us out. We would go to one house for a bowl of soup and to another house maybe for lunch, and that's how they kept us alive. One sister, my dad's sister, was very, very close to me and vice versa. She would, for instance, bake loaves of bread, and she would tell me to go and throw the bread over the wall to the Jewish ghetto. I used to do that quite often, under the threat of death because if the German guards would see me doing it they would just shoot me on sight, no questions asked. But again, I was very small for my age, so I was a small target. So it was to my advantage. All I could hear was the voice on the other side of the wall saying, "Thank you." I didn't even see who got that bread. And that's how I used to do that.

How old were you then?

Let's see, '42, '43.

Oh, it was 42, '43.

Yes, I was, what, eleven, twelve. Twelve years old.

When was the uprising in the Jewish Warsaw Ghetto?

It was in 1943. In May, I believe it was, 1943.

So you were already doing some underground type activities with the family, but not as a part of the Resistance?

Not as a part of the Resistance, no. Just helping out. And going back to your question, how did I get involved in the fighting during the uprising, it was a day, I believe it was a Tuesday, it was August the 1st, I believe, where I would go again to my aunt for a bowl of soup, and she said, "Listen, eat that soup fast because uprising's going to start," that afternoon. So she knew. I don't know how she knew, but she found out. So I ate my soup as fast as I could, and trying to get back home before the fighting and shooting started. Well, I didn't make it. The fighting was supposed to start at 5:00, the uprising, in the afternoon. And I was on a streetcar going home, and about a quarter to five, I would say halfway home, the shooting started in the street, and of course the streetcar stopped and everyone jumped out of the street car and tried hiding, and including myself. And the next day I went and signed up.

Well, first, how did you get home?

I didn't.

Oh, you never made it back home.

Never made it back home that time, no.

How did you know where to go to sign up?

There were, you know, the Resistance fighters. In the streets I said, "Hey, listen. I want to join up." They said, "Go to that house and..."

So this is all your initiative.

Yes. Yes it was.

And how about your sister? Where was she at this time?

My sister was at home. And she signed up at that other part of Warsaw.

Independently of you.

Independently of me. And she didn't know if I was alive. I didn't know if she was alive.

For how long?

For a month. All of a month.

What about your half brother?

My half brother was in the, he was also in the Resistance, in the Underground. But he was like outside of Warsaw. He was like a partisan. He joined the group someplace, I believe, north of Warsaw, I'm not sure. But we did not have, we were not in contact with him except for a few days before the uprising started. He was given orders to go and report to his commander someplace outside of Warsaw, and I lost track of him.

Did you ever see him again?

Yes, I saw him after the war. I went to Poland in '65. It was my first visit, and that's when I saw him since the occupation.

I have a lot of questions about your involvement in the Resistance...

Well, fire away.

...I'd like to find out what your role was, what your specific duties were, your weapon, how you were trained, and your daily life. Why don't you start out by describing the day that you went to this apartment to sign up?

The next day, when I signed up, it was actually, I was lucky, because when the uprising started I wasn't too far away from the high command of the resistance. So, that's when they directed me to go there and see if I can sign up. It was like, you know, couple of blocks away. So I just went there and they gave me a identity card, and they asked me, "Well, what name would you like to use?" And I said, "Markiz." I just picked it up. And that's what it was on the copies.

I've seen that on your identity card, which we'd like to make a copy of, and add to the interview record.

Sure. I have all that. And, as far as training is concerned, training - nobody had any training to speak of. I mean, you know, you were given a weapon and you were told to go with a group of fighters and set up a barricade and try, you know, to keep the Germans away.

Had you ever fired a gun before?

Not before, but I did during the uprising.

But you had never handled a weapon before they handed you a weapon?

They handed me a weapon. They told me, "Now, this is a pistol. You load it up with ammunition at this point through the handle," and they would have me fire at a target in the courtyard or someplace, and they said, "You go with those people on a barricade and fight," and that was it.

You said "load it through the handle," so it was an automatic rather than a revolver?

Sure.

And that was the first weapon you were issued?

The first weapon (laughs) I was issued . That's kind of a long story, well not too long. I was given a handgun, because when we took over a large building where there were a lot of German soldiers, and they surrendered. So they brought them over to where I was stationed, and they told me, "Help us guard those people." So I said, "Fine, but give me something to keep." So they gave me pistol, which later on they took away from me because they said I was too young. But, anyway, I was guarding the German soldiers at that time. Together with other fighters, of course.

What kind of pistol did they give you?

If I remember correctly it was a revolver. It was a revolver. But, again, I had it for a short time. Then, the next time they gave me submachine gun, one of those light submachine guns, when they sent me to a barricade. But that was easy to use. I mean, you just pull the trigger and point, and then fire away. I was also helping to build barricades, like across streets. I was also a messenger, like with different orders. We didn't have any radios or anything. Everything had to be handled manually, by person. So I did that. I also delivered some newspapers that were printed. Whatever was necessary, I was doing. When they were shorthanded on the barricade they said, "Hey, go on the barricade."

So, the first weapon they issued you was this pistol...

Yes.

...and one of your first duties involving a weapon was to...

....guarding the prisoners of war. German prisoners.

...guard the prisoners. Whatever happened to those prisoners of war? Did you ever know?

If they were Wermacht, Wermacht was the regular army, we would keep them. If they were SS, we would do to them what they did to us. And they knew it. They didn't want to be taken prisoner because they knew they would be shot.

The machine gun you said you had, was that a captured German weapon or one of those locally manufactured...?

No, it was actually a British, it was called Sten gun, S-T-E-N, Sten gun. It had magazine on the side, and it was pretty accurate at close range. Further away, you couldn't shoot at anybody, but that's what I had.

What was your daily life like at the time of the uprising?

Trying to stay alive. At the beginning, the food was quite plentiful. There was enough for everybody. But gradually it gotten worse and worse. I remember we came across a large storage facility full of sugar. So we were eating sugar. There was not enough bread, so we were eating, like, you know those lumps of sugar? That was like our meal, everyday. Food was in short supply, so after the horses were gone we turned to eating dog meat. Which may sound obnoxious now, but, you know, when you're hungry you'll eat anything. And it didn't taste too bad, I must say (laughs), thanks to the chef. The cats were gone, you know, you ate whatever was available, whatever you could eat, to sustain.

Did you all stay together? I mean, did you stay with other Resistance fighters? Were you ever able to go home during that time?

Like I said, the first month of the uprising, neither my sister nor I knew where we were. So I sent word, there was like a local boy scout post office, was formed, where you would give a letter and the boy scout would go and deliver it by hand, manually. So that's what I did. I wrote a letter to my sister. Of course I knew my address where I lived, where my house was, and I sent it to her. I told her where I was at. So she came back and she asked my commander if it would be all right if I got transferred to the other part of Warsaw, where we lived during the occupation. And he said OK, so we went back there. That's where I stayed, at that house, which was still in halfway decent shape. And for the last month of the uprising, that's where I was at. And at that time too I was doing the same, fighting and delivering newspapers, delivering orders. Doing everything, building barricades, repairing barricades which were destroyed by the German tanks and bombs and everything else.

During the first month, before you were reassigned near your home, where did you sleep?

In a chair, (laughs) on the floor. I often think about those moments, how I survived. I mean, there was no water to wash, there was, you just tried to survive the best way you could. The clothes, well, I had a German belt that I took off a German prisoner, I had a German bayonet. I had German boots which were way too big for me, so I would stuff newspapers in those boots so I wouldn't lose them. For awhile I had a German helmet, but that thing, when I put it down over my head, you know, I couldn't see anything. And if I was running the helmet kept going up and down, so I discarded that. I figured "to heck with it." (interviewer laughs) You did, you improvised, basically. You improvised, and it's amazing, you know, when you need something, how easily you can improvise things, and that's what it was.

We ran out of tape, and I've changed the tape. What we missed was, I had asked you about your duties, including combat in firefights. In case that didn't get on record, you told me yes, you were in several... in <u>some</u> firefights. I'm going to ask you how many and what happened

during some of those, what memorable incidents you had there. Ted, how many firefights would you say you were in?

Offhand, I would say at least ten of them. Probably more. You know, I just didn't bother to count, but whenever I was asked or told to go with a group of the fighters on a patrol or go man a barricade, relieve the previous group, I would go, no questions asked, because I was a soldier. I was sworn in, and even though I was just a young kid, I was still, I considered myself a full-fledged soldier, and others considered me too.

Did anybody even informally attempt to train you? To teach you tactics? Teach you how to fire your weapon accurately? How to take cover so you don't get hit?

Yes. Common sense taught you.

(laughing) Common sense taught you? None of the older fighters tried to take you under their wing?

There was no time. There was no time, Marty. There was just practically continuous fighting. You would come back from patrol, you were so dead tired you just lie down on the floor and try and get some sleep before you were going back there again. As far as running across the street, which was under fire, well obviously, you know, you would crouch down and say "Hail Mary" and just run across the street, because there was a lot of sharpshooters, German sharpshooters, say on top of the church towers where they had a good view. And anything that moved they would shoot at, whether you were a civilian or you were a fighter with your armband, they would just shoot at them. So as I said, most of it was common sense. As far as using weapons, well again, they would tell you, "This is your trigger. You aim and you shoot." And pretty soon, you know, you got pretty good at it. I mean, you just learned by yourself.

To your knowledge, did you ever hit anyone?

I think I killed two Germans.

Would you describe those episodes and any other firefights that were particularly memorable to you?

Well, again, it was basically orders given to go and, say, relieve a group of people that were manning a barricade. We would go there. We would take our positions, and if we saw Germans moving at a distance or something, you would try and get them and try and kill them. As I said, I think I killed, shot at two of them, I'm not sure. We were also in close combat many times where there was like house to house combat, many times where there was like house to house fighting. We would use hand grenades. I had a hand grenade later on in the uprising. You tried to kill as many enemies as you could, with whatever you had available to do it with. I cannot describe exact moments because when a firefight starts, you know, you just do what you think is best. You don't analyze too much. You just try and stay alive, and try and kill your enemy.

What were your emotions, and what were you thinking? During the entire time, not just

during the firefight, but after a firefight or when you were going out to man a barricade where there was known to be a lot of action?

Of course, I was scared at times. I was afraid. So were the other guys too. But, once you start fighting the fear just kind of went away somehow, and you would, how should I say, you would just do what you thought was asked of you. I was defending my country. Even though I was a young kid, I still had it in my head that Germans were my enemies and if I didn't kill them they would most likely kill me. So, it was like a self preservation, whatever you want to call it.

I think you told me off record that your father was one of the Polish officers murdered in a forest in Russia, by the Russians. When did you find that out?

We found that out as a fact when Germany attacked Russia in 1941 I believe, or '42, I'm not sure. And they pushed the Russians further east**,** and they came across mass graves in a forest not too far from Moscow, I believe, called Katyn, K-A-T-Y-N, Katyn Forest. They uncovered mass graves of approximately 5,000 Polish officers who were taken prisoner of war, or "interned" as they used to call it. And they would take them to camps, and then one by one they would shoot them with a pistol in the back of their heads. The graves were all dug up, so you just stood there and you were shot, and they would cover you up. The Germans uncovered those, and they naturally - there was a great propaganda asset for the Germans that, "Here's your friends killing your own people." They would publish the names found on the bodies in the newspaper. That was 1943, I believe, when the names started appearing in the newspapers. And one of the names was my dad's name. Also a description of what was found on the body, so there was some photographs that they found (on) him. Also the little medallion that I gave my dad in September 1939, when I said goodbye to him. That medallion was found on the body, and that's how we knew for sure. Up to then we were hoping that my dad was still alive. And that sort of speeded up my mother's death, because although she had cancer she still was in fairly good shape, but when she saw the name of my dad in the newspaper, her condition got progressively worse and she died in May of 1943.

That information, you were aware of it at the time, I take it?

Yes.

Did that give you any suspicion that the Russians would really help you in this uprising?

Well, that was the agreement, verbal or whatever, written agreement, I don't know, between the Polish government in exile in London and the underground army in Warsaw, that if we started uprising at a certain time the Russians would move in and, you know, we were trying to work with them to destroy the enemy, the Germans. But, we did know at that time that they were not really our true friends, that they just killed the officers.

Before we actually get to that point where the Resistance collapsed because of lack of aid from the Russians, were you wounded or injured at all during your participation?

No. No, I was not.

How about your sister?

She survived too. She was not injured, no.

And your half brother?

My half brother, yes, he was OK. I believe, as I said I lost track of him until 1965 when I saw him again. But he was OK, yes.

The resistance, you told me off record, finally collapsed on October 2nd, 1944. What led up to the decision to stop fighting?

The Germans used everything against us. They used the bombers, the Stukas, dive bombers. They used the Tiger tanks, heavy tanks. They used the flame throwers. They used rockets. They used everything they had in their arsenal, including extra heavy artillery. The shells were about the size of a grownup man. They were huge, and ones that hit an apartment building, the whole building would be gone. So, having used all the weapons, gradually they were taking over all of Warsaw, and we were running out of ammunition, because the little drops that the British... you see, the British planes had a long way to fly, and some of them flew from Italy, that was liberated by the Allies, some of them flew from England...

Were these air drops only by the British? No American air drops?

Well, there were some American, yes, but mostly they were British. But unfortunately, you know those big heavy bombers, they were like sitting ducks in the air. The Germans would throw their guns and everything at them, so a lot of them got shot and the crew got killed. So it was pitifully small. The Russians did drop some, but what they did, they would drop ammunition that wouldn't fit our guns, or they dropped them without parachutes, so when that thing hit the ground it was all destroyed, so it was totally useless. And we just gave up because there was no weapons left for us to fight with and the Germans were just taking over Warsaw, and there was just no point fighting anymore because we couldn't do anything.

And I think you told me on the phone the other day that you expected the Russians to start fighting, but they stayed on the other side of the Vistula River and didn't move forward...

That's exactly what they did. I saw them from a tall building. I could see the Russian tanks and everything, moving back and forth on the other side of the river. But they sort of waited for us to be destroyed by the Germans. And they did not actually enter Warsaw 'til about the middle of January, 1945, I believe. So they sat there until January, from October when we saw them 'til January.

So, on October 2nd, 1944 the Resistance surrendered. What happened then? Specifically, what happened to you?

What happened then? We had to give up our weapons, and we marched out of Warsaw, as soldiers, as combatants, and they loaded us up into cattle cars and they sent us to prisoner of war camps in

Germany, the western part of Germany.

You say "cattle cars." Railroad cattle cars?

Railroad cars, yes.

How long did that trip last?

I would say like a couple of days.

This was in October. What was the weather like then?

It was getting bad. It was getting colder, and I might add that the winter of '44-'45 was unusually severe. Like some of the camps we were at when we first started getting located, there were no beds, there were no bunk beds, there was nothing. Even the glass in the windows was nonexistent. So they just put us in those barracks and that was it. Luckily, I had a blanket, and a friend of mine, about my age, had a heavy overcoat. So we would spread the blanket on the bare concrete floor and we would cover ourselves with his overcoat, and we would wake up in the morning covered with snow, because the snow was coming in the windows without glass.

When you were first taken prisoner and being transported, what were your emotions like then? What was going through your mind?

Well, again, being a young kid, for me it was an adventure. (interviewer laughs) Even during the uprising, you know, a lot of times when you're young you're not afraid so much, because you don't know what fear is. You don't realize how close you are to death, that's what I am trying to say. And that was the case too, and my sister and I, you know, we were both taken prisoner of war because she was a nurse, she was a soldier too. And it was, "Hey, we're going to see the world." (both laugh)

How were you personally treated, when you were captured and as time went on? Were you treated any differently because of your young age?

No. No different. No. At first, we were treated fairly well. Later on, as the war was kind of coming to an end slowly, the Allied forces were moving more and more into Germany, I was kind of, you know, mistreated, but not just myself. There were about 20 of us young kids like my age, and the Germans, when we gave up fighting, they rounded us all up, and we kind of stayed together. We were just like any other prisoner of war. Foodwise, well, we would get a slice of bread with some margarine on it, and occasionally parsnip....what do you call that? Oh, it was a vegetable that you would boil and make soup out of it...parsnip?

Turnip?

Turnip, that's it. Which, you know (laughs) the only good thing about it was that it was hot. It warmed you up.

Were you in more than one prisoner of war camp?

Yes, I was. I was in, I would say, let's see (counts to himself)... I was in about five or six prisoner of war camps. The reason for that being is that when we were originally sent by train to the western part of Germany, as the Allied front was moving towards east, they were moving us towards east too. So that's why I was in so many camps. And finally I escaped, but that's...we might get to that later.

(laughs) Oh? I didn't know you escaped. I don't know if there's a point to going through each individual camp, but I will ask you, were any of the camps better or worse than other camps as far as treatment and..?

Yes. Yes, like I said, the first one was probably one of the worst because there was no heat, there was no windows and there was no bunkbeds. You just slept on the concrete floor and we didn't have anything to sleep on, well that was your problem.

What was the name of that camp?

Oberlangen. O-B-E-R-L-A-N-G-E-N.

And how long were you there?

About a month, I would say.

What was your daily routine there?

We didn't do anything. We just tried to exist. Since we were prisoners of war, they did not force us at that time to do any work.

Were you losing weight?

I suppose I was. I never thought of it.

After Oberlangen, then where did you move?

To a camp called Kustrin. K-U-S-T-R-I-N.

How long were you there?

Oh, God, (pause) I think short stay. Then I went to another camp called Sanbostel. S-A-N-B-O-S-T-E-L. Did I mention Niederlangen?

No.

(laughs) Then came Niederlangen. N-I-E-D-E-R-L-A-N-G-E-N, something like that. And there was another one called Northorn. N-O-R-T-H-O-R-N. And finally, the last one was called Bathorn. B-A-T-H-O-R-N. That was the one where we were forced to work

Now, the period of time we're covering is from October 4th of 1944 until when?

Until, I would say, about the middle of April, 1945.

And you just briefly (laughs) mentioned that you escaped, which I didn't know before. Before we get to that, all these camps that you were in, and you were constantly moving, I'll just ask you the questions in general, and if they were much better or worse at one or another you can mention that to me. But I would like to know about the food. You already told me about the turnip soup, which I would personally hate, I suppose.

It was horrible.

Housing? Heat? Sanitation? Daily routine? Exercise? And one other question I'm going to ask in general, did you ever receive any Red Cross aid?

Yes**.** The answer is yes. I don't remember which camp we first got our packages. American Red Cross. And that was a godsend. We had in those packages, I remember there was some chocolate, there was some cigarettes which we would exchange with the German guards for bread, there was cans of coffee, which that too we would, you know, trade with the Germans so we would get something decent to eat. I think there was some sugar, I believe, something like that, some crackers, some wafers, stuff like that. Yes, we did get those for awhile, but then they stopped. Why did they stop? I have no idea. Maybe the Germans just decided to keep them for themselves, I'm not sure.

How about the food? Was there any variety in the food from camp to camp?

No. No, there was no variety, except it got worse and worse. The food was bad. Again, the Red Cross packages helped us out a lot while they were arriving.

I know we'll talk specifically where they put you to work, but outside of that did you ever have any other daily routine other than existing? Exercise or anything like that?

In some of the camps there were like, you know, prisoners of war from the 1939 campaign. So, they were pretty much situated there, and we would talk to them over the barbed wire and they would help us out with food, and we would watch them exercise, so we would do a little exercise ourselves. But there was nothing organized as such where, say, the German guards would tell us, "Well, ten o'clock, time to exercise," stuff like that, no.

How about sanitation? Toilet facilities, showering and that sort of thing.

There was no showering as such. There were latrines, you know, like open toilets where you did whatever you had to do. Showers? I take that back, there was one camp which had showers. Yes, and that was a godsend. I remember one of the camps, I forget the name of it now, maybe it was one of these, I'm not sure. In order to get to the showers you had to walk a long distance through the whole barrack. And there were no lights, of course. And I would walk and I could feel the rats running around my bare feet, while I was walking to go to the bathroom or whatever. It was at night, so it was (laughs) pretty scary for me.

(laughs) Oh, yeah. During this time at the camp, what was your (pauses to look at notes) Sorry, I lost track. While you were in the camp, did you know where your sister was at the time?

Yes and no. Once in a while we would run into each other, believe it or not. The Germans would send us to a camp and, lo and behold, my sister was there.

Oh, so you actually got to see her?

Yes. But she was, like, stationed with other girls who were also taking part in the uprising. But then they would send us kids to another camp, so we would lose track with each other. But then we would come back together again, so it was sort of on and off.

So you did know that she was safe, and what kind of condition she was in.

We did know that she was safe, and was in one of the camps.

Did you have any means of correspondence? Any mail coming in and out? To any other relatives?

No. No, none whatsoever.

At that time in your life, besides your sister - your parents had both passed away - did you have any other family to care about or to care about you?

No, because once we left Warsaw, we lost complete track with everybody. We didn't know if they were alive or dead. Actually, it turned out later after the war, they were all killed by the Germans. Like my dad's family. My mother's family, I hardly knew them, but my dad's family, you know, we were all in Warsaw and they were all killed. Except for one aunt, my dad's... No, I take that back, let me backtrack. One brother survived the war, my dad's brother. And one sister survived the war, and I did see them in 1965 when I went back to Poland. When I went back for a visit, I did see them. Of course, they're gone now, but they did survive.

Before you went back in 1965 did you know that they did survive?

Yes, yes I did. I think I did. Through the Red Cross I found out where they were, and so it turned out that they were both in Warsaw. That's how I got to see them again in '65.

I think we've covered...we've covered everything that I was going to ask you about your time in the prisoner of war camp. Is there anything else you can think of that we should put on record that I haven't covered?

Yes, one amusing thing about my escaping.

I was going to come to that - how were you freed?

No, otherwise, Marty, I think we covered pretty much everything. Yes.

OK. How were you finally freed?

From the last camp where I was forced to work in those factories, the Germans, again they evacuated the camp. And in a column we were told to walk east. We were covering 30 miles a day, roughly, on foot. And then we could hear the Allied front, the heavy artillery. We could see at night the flames going up on the horizon and all that, so we knew they were not too far away from us. And here we are, the Germans are making us move away from the camp. So, again there were about 20 of us kids, so we thought, "Hey, hey, let's put an end to this," so (laughs) we all ran into a farmer's barn that was off the road, making sounds and noises, so the German guards kind of looked at us and a few minutes later they went back there and said, "Hey, come on guys! Get back..." (laughs)

But we didn't know. We just thought, "Hey, let's try it." That didn't work, but a couple of days later we figured, "Well, if we do it individually, the guards will not notice it." So me and my buddy, we just went off to the forest, and stayed in the forest for a couple of days. And then we knocked on a German farmer's door. We told them that we would like to see if we could work for them. Well, they knew by then that the war is almost over, so he didn't turn us in. So he just fed us, let us work, let us sleep in a horse barn. And then the British troops came in and we were liberated.

One thing you mentioned that I did forget to ask - at one of the camps they actually put you

to work. Which camp was that, and what did they have you do?

That was a camp called, it was the last one, it was...

Nordhorn?

Nordhorn, yes. It was a textile mill, and they were making cloth, I guess for the German uniforms. And there were long, long machines, and each one of us was given three machines to man, to sort of work them and feed the thread, the materials or whatever. And that's what we were doing, we were working there everyday, I would say probably for a couple of months. At least two months. There too, we did a little sabotage of our own.

(both laugh) Like what did you do?

We knew - the German head of the factory or whatever, he would teach us how to operate those machines, and he showed us underneath that there was one part which was crucial that was going to be greased at all times, because if it wasn't, it would overheat, and it would probably start a fire. (intermittent laughter from both through the remainder of this narrative) So I said, "Ah! Here's our chance! So we would wipe the grease off that machine, so it was bone dry, and we threw some old threads, whatever. And sure enough, the whole thing just caught on fire. Then we started hollering, "Fire! Fire! Fire!" So, we destroyed one machine.

He thought it was just incompetence rather than sabotage?

Just an accident, yes. But it was our doing.

So, you and your friend escaped and stayed in the woods for a couple of days, then found the farmer that took you in?

Yes, we stayed with the farmer, I believe it was a couple of weeks, maybe. We were helping him, you know, milk the cows and do whatever. Waiting for the Allied front to come in.

Your friend, was he your age?

Yes.

Did you have any contact with him afterward?

No. No, I lost track of him. In fact, all of them, I have no idea if they're alive or dead.

So, how did you finally get taken in by the British soldiers?

OK, well, when we heard the tanks and all that commotion going on, we just went to the road. We started waving and hollering and screaming that, "We're Polish, we're Polish," you know, so that they stopped. And it so happened that one of the trucks with the soldiers were Polish soldiers, fighting with the British. So they stopped the truck and they loaded us up on the truck and we went with them, wherever they were going, to a camp or something. And they rounded up, the Allied forces, rounded up most of us kids, about 20, 25, something like that. And they put us all in one camp, which had no barbed wire. It was like an open camp, because, you know, the war was over. So that's where we stayed from the time we were liberated in April. And they organized some schooling for us, and whoever wanted to go back to Poland, they could do so. Well, I didn't want to. I just wanted to see the rest of the world, I guess, whatever. So I stayed in the camp. And it so happened that an uncle, my dad's brother, who found his way to England during the 1939 campaign, I don't know if he found me and my sister or whether we found him, but somehow we got in touch and he came to Germany, like September, October, I believe, 1945. And he made arrangements for us to go to England and stay with him. And that's what we did. In late October we went to England.

So, were you in this liberation camp...what would you call that? And what was the name of it?

You know, I don't remember. I'll be honest with you, I don't remember.

But you were there roughly six months? April 'til October?

Yes, about that. Something like that. As I said, we were given a choice of either going back to Poland, because the war was over then, or just go to England, wherever, you know. They were trying to disperse us, to do something with us.

And you're 14, going on 15, and you have to make these decisions by yourself.

Oh, yes. Yes.

Emigration:

So you chose to go to England?

I chose to go to England, and my uncle made arrangements for me to go to England. And that's where I went back to school, trying to catch up on the years I missed out during the German occupation and fighting.

And during that time, did you get back into Poland at all?

Not at that time. My first visit was in 1965. And I stayed in England for six years, 'til 1951.

Did you finish your schooling in England?

Yes, I finished my high school in England, yes. And I did some work, and then it was time for me to move on, so I applied for the visa for the United States, and I came to the States in 1951.

What made you want to come to the United States?

Originally, on the application I put down that I wanted to join the US Army. But for some reason, I don't know how it happened, I did not join the Army. Whether they rejected me or, I think the Korean conflict was winding down in 1951, '52, they didn't need me so I just, you know...

What kind of work had you done in England?

In England I worked on a farm which was owned by a friend of my uncle's. Of course, the first two years I went to school. I finished school and caught polio there, but luckily I recovered, so I had to leave the school. It was a Catholic boarding school. So I had to leave the school and I finished my high school in London. And then I went to work. I worked in a shoe store, I worked in a fish store, smelled like a fisherman after a day's work, and that's it. Then I went to work on the farm that my uncle's friend owned. And from there I came to the States.

Life as a US Citizen:

So you were not quite 21 when you came to the United States.

Right. In fact, the day before we landed I turned 21 on the ship.

Did anyone accompany you on your trip to the United States?

No.

Was your sister here yet?

My sister got married in England in 1949. She married a navigator in one of the heavy bombers. He was Polish. They came to the States, to Chicago, about two or three months before I did. I came and stayed with them until I got married.

You arrived in the United States in 1951. My next question was going to be, did you speak English, but that was before I knew that you that you had already lived in England. Where and how did you learn English?

When I came to England from Germany, my uncle's wife, who was British, she just sent me to the boarding school without my knowing any English. The first semester I just sat there like a dummy. But then I had a choice of either learning, in order to study, to be able to study, or just doing nothing, so I made it my point to learn as much English as I could, so that I could continue my studies. And that's what happened. That's where I learned my English, at school.

When you came to the United States did you need a sponsor?

Yes. My arrival was sponsored by a Roman Catholic organization. I can't remember the name of it now, but yes, there was a sponsor.

When you first came to the United States where did you live?

I stayed with my sister and brother-in-law.

Oh yes, you did tell me that. In Chicago. What was your first year like after you arrived here?

Well, I went to the factory and worked at a factory. The next day I was able to find a job. And I, you know, I loved it.

You found a job right away?

Yes.

What were you doing?

I was an assembler, an inspector for some parts for jet engines, I believe, for the military.

What company?

Chicago Rawhide.

Rawhide?

Yes. R-A-W-H-I-D-E.

Odd name for a jet engine company.

Yes. They were making seals, gaskets, and also some small brass parts, if I remember right, for the jet engines.

And how long did you work there?

I worked there, I would say, at least a couple of years. Then I went to work for a tape recording company, also in Chicago, called Magnecord. M-A-G-N-E-C-O-R-D. They were making precision tape recorders, commercial, for radio stations, stuff like that. But I think they went broke or something, because they somehow disappeared. And I just worked wherever I could, going to school at night, college.

Where did you go to college?

I went to Illinois Institute of Technology. IIT. At night. And I went to Wright College.

Was it on Navy Pier?

No, the IIT, of course was on the south side. The Wright College was up on the north side of Chicago, around Belmont Avenue. I think it's still there. And I also went to Coyne, C-O-Y-N-E, which was like a electronics school. I was trying to learn how to repair TVs, they were just coming up. But I don't think I was very good at it, so... (laughs)

During your first years in Chicago, what was your biggest adjustment?

The plentiful of everything. Even in England, for the six years in England when I was there, everything was still rationed. The gasoline was rationed. The food was rationed. There was enough of it, there was no hardship as we knew in Poland, but everything was rationed. Here in the States you could get anything you wanted. So a year after I arrived here, I bought myself a used car, and I was like on top of the world.

(laughing) One year here and you're driving a car.

That's right.

Do you remember what car you bought?

It was a 1951 Ford, and I bought it in '52.

So it was barely used. How about citizenship? When did you apply for citizenship?

I applied for the citizenship in 1956, and I got it in 1957, I believe it was.

During your early years in Chicago, first of all was it a predominantly Polish community that you were living in?

Yes. Yes, it was all Polonia, the Polish area around Ashland and Division. Now it's Hispanic, I think, and it's changed quite a bit. Now the Poles are gone from there, but yes, I was there. And also that factory, Chicago Rawhide was there too.

Well, the reason I asked that, the next question I have, and living in a community that was predominantly Polish, this probably didn't affect you. But, during the, well, unfortunately longer than the '50s, Polish jokes were really popular here. And my question was going to be, how did you feel about them. Maybe you never really had to hear them, but for a while it seemed like half the jokes started with...

A Pollack, yes. I didn't like it. I was very, very much against it. So were most of the Polish people too, that arrived in the States. The ones that were born here, you know, they thought that it was funny. But I even got mad one time at work. There was a black girl, you know, she was rattling off Polish jokes. So I asked, I said, "Listen," whatever her name was, "Do you know why the Polish jokes are always so short?" She said "No." I said, "So dummies like you could understand them." (interviewer laughs) And after that she never said another Polish joke. I wasn't happy with that, but now it's gone, thank God. You don't hear it anymore, but you used to.

You applied for your citizenship in 1956 and became a citizen in 1957. What was that day like for you, when you were sworn in as a US citizen?

Well, I was very proud of it , of course, you know, being a US citizen. But I just worked and I did my thing everyday like everybody else, and here I am.

Over these years since then, I would like to find out what your working career was like, your family life, if you have children, and then I'll ask a couple of other questions, depending on your answers to that.

I got married in 1956. My wife and I had four children, but problems developed and we got divorced in 1968 (end of tape)

We ran out of tape again, and after the tape ran out, first I had asked you about your family life, and you told me that you were divorced in 1968, you had four children with your first wife, and then from there you started to tell me about meeting your present wife. Would you pick it up from there, please?

OK, my children kind of, you know, they drifted away from us. Of course, they're all grown up now. They're in their 40s. I don't stay much in touch with them because they chose to kind of, you know, be on their own, so I said, "OK, suit yourself." I have no children with my present wife. She's quite a bit younger than I am, and she has a dad, she has a father in Poland who's about 92 years old**.** You saw the picture of him now. But we're quite happy. We're very happy, we live here in Willowbrook. So, that's about it.

You mentioned I saw a picture. Is he the young man in uniform?

Yes.

Oh, OK. And that's your wife's father.

That's my wife's father. That picture was taken probably in 1942, '43, something like 50 some years ago or more.

Now you mentioned that you did make a trip back to Poland in 1965. What prompted you to go back then, and what did you see life being like there then, as compared to what you were experiencing here?

Well, you know, at that time the government was still communist government, didn't change 'til what, '89, '90. There were some restrictions but the Warsaw, the last time I saw it in 1944, it was completely destroyed. You saw some of the pictures in the book. Then it was rebuilt. And I did get to see my uncle that I mentioned earlier**,** and my aunt too. It was a pleasure seeing them. I also saw my half brother and a few friends that were still alive then. As far as the living conditions there, it wasn't all that bad. It was kind of a little tough going at times, but people survived. There was enough food on the table, although you had to wait in line to get that food, to buy the food, but you could get it. So it wasn't all that bad, no.

During your trip back there did you also go back to Bydgoszcz?

Yes. Yes, I did.

Did you remember...?

I remembered the apartment where we lived, although I did not go inside because it was owned-somebody else lived there. But, yes I did. It was quite a emotional visit to see all this, since 1939. Because that was the last time we lived in Bydgoszcz. It was quite a visit.

Did your sister go with you on that trip?

No. No, I went by myself. Although she did go in 1966, a year later. By herself, too.

I think I've asked you all the questions that I know to ask. And I'm about ready to close, but before I do is there anything that you can think of that we didn't touch on that you think would be good to have on the record?

You know, Marty, I think we covered more than I even dreamed we would cover. It's thanks to you, the questions that you were asking me that I didn't think of while we were being interviewed, and it's - you helped me out a lot by asking those questions which, you know, as I said, were great and I would say we covered just about close to 100%.

Well, thanks for the compliment. And it is good to have this all on record, which of course will go to the Library of Congress, and you'll have copies to share with anybody that you want to.

How is life for you today, and how do you think it would be different if you had never left Poland after the war?

First of all, I wouldn't have met my wife. Although maybe I would have there in Poland. I don't know. It's hard to say. I always enjoyed traveling, and chances are maybe I would have left Poland after the war to go to some other country. But how would my life be? Let me put it this way: I often wondered, how would my life be if the war did not break out?

That's a better question, actually.

As I said, we were quite well off before the war. And I had wonderful parents, and things were quite well set and adjusted. And most likely I would have gone to one of the best schools in Poland, because my dad was pretty well off. Life would have been quite different from what I experienced. How different it would be I have no way of knowing. Of course, nobody does. But I often thought about that, what would happen if Hitler did not attack Poland? But since he did, the whole world got changed and millions of people died, thanks to him. So, that's about all I can say, Marty. The war affected so many people in the world. And as far as I'm concerned, the war is still going on. It never stopped going on. When you stop and think, we had the Korean war, we had the Vietnamese war, and we got Iraq and the middle-east, I mean the fighting there since Israel was formed. I don't see if there is any solution. Those wars border on holy wars, and when you start saying, "This is a holy war. 'Allah' or 'God' is with us," then there's no end to it. And when we're gone, I think the war will just continue going on. Starting since 1939, September 1st.

Well, Ted, I thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview today. And I think the information you shared, and the experiences, will benefit the project greatly.

Well, I'm glad I was able to participate, and I enjoyed the interview too, Marty, because it brought back some memories that I just didn't think of and forgot about. I'm going to think about all these questions you gave me for a long time, questions that were long gone for my mind. I enjoyed it and hopefully it will benefit somebody or something. I don't know; time will tell.

Well, I'm sure it will. We just at this point don't know who. We don't know who will read these.

So thank you again for inviting me for the interview.

We are going off record.