INTRODUCTION TO THE TESTIMONY OF

Henryk Prajs

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Introduction

The leitmotif of the 1995 testimony of Henryk Prajs, stored in the Fortunoff Video Archive, is the town of Góra Kalwaria, where he was born, where he lived before the war, and to which he returned after it.[1] Today part of the Warsaw metropolis, before World War II it was a small town located on the west bank of the Vistula river, less than 30 kilometers south of Warsaw. In 1939 it was inhabited by 7,300 people, including 3,500 Jews.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Góra Kalwaria had been church property and only Catholics could live there, with as many as five monasteries and six churches in town. The Stations of the Cross were recreated in the town, based on a map of Jerusalem, and the small town was officially renamed Nowa Jerozolima (New Jerusalem). With the growing secularization of the early nineteenth century, the town returned to its original name, and Jews began to settle there.[2] In 1859 the Chassidic religious leader *tzaddik* Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg-Alter, the first of the Ger Chassidic dynasty, settled in Góra Kalwaria (Ger in Yiddish). He set up his court on Pijarska Street. The town soon became the most influential Chassidic center in the Kingdom of Poland. During the period discussed by Prajs, the Chassidic court of Ger was headed by Avraham Mordechai Alter (1864–1948).[3] Jewish pilgrimages to Góra Kalwaria were encouraged with the 1899 opening of the Góra Kalwaria-Warsaw narrow-gauge railway, colloquially called the 'rebbe railway.' Tzaddik Alter was its unofficial shareholder. Aside from

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[1] Henryk Prajs' testimony, May 6, 1995, interviewer Michel Sobelman, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, EAD ID mss.hvt.3171, Orbis Bib 4290908.

[2] Filip Sulimierski, Bronisław Chlebowski and Władysław Walewski (eds.), *Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich*, vol. 2. (Warsaw, 1881), 689-690; Stefan Krakowski, Abraham Juda Goldrat, "Gora Kalwaria," in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd. Thomson Gale, 2007), 760.

[3] Paweł Fijałkowski, "Alter Abraham Mordechaj," in *Żydzi polscy. Historie niezwykłe* (Warsaw: Demart, 2010), 7-9.

religious functions, the tzaddik's court was also an important social and political center – as evidenced by the fact that *Agudat Yisrael*, a party representing Orthodox Jews, had its seat in Góra Kalwaria.[4]

In his comments in the media and in his recollections elsewhere, Prajs provided information that is absent in this testimony. The Prajs family had lived in Góra Kalwaria at least since the mid-nineteenth century. Henryk's grandfather, Majer Bejer Prajs, purchased kosher food that he then sold in Warsaw. He and his wife Golda had six children, including Jankiel, Henryk's father. Jankiel Prajs married Estera Frydman from the village of Coniew, near Góra Kalwaria. He was a petty merchant without his own stall and she was a seamstress. Henryk's parents did not wear the traditional attire. His mother did not shave her head and went to the synagogue only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Jankiel went to the synagogue more often, but not every Saturday. The family spoke Yiddish at home, cooked kosher food, and celebrated religious holidays. There were two synagogues in Góra Kalwaria, one belonging to the *Alter tzaddik* dynasty and the other to the Reformed Jewish Community, and the Prajs family frequented the latter. They were a typical unorthodox, poor Jewish family of inter-war Poland.[5]

The testifier identifies himself as Henryk Prajs and does not mention his original first name even once. Born Abram Haim on December 30, 1916, he began to use the name Henryk in elementary school and later also called himself Awrum. Mentioned in the testimony, Henryk's older sister Golda was born in 1914. After completing seven grades of elementary school, she worked as a bookkeeper in the small Hirszhornams' soap factory at 12 Radzymińska Street in the Warsaw quarter of Praga. Henryk's younger brother Dawid was born in 1919 and, after completing six grades of elementary school, began to learn saddlery. In his testimony, Prajs states that he had been associated with the Zionist movement "from a very early age," though without specifying details. Prajs belonged to the anti-Zionist socialist SKIF from the age of 12 to 14,[6] at which point he and most members of the organization left and joined instead the Zionist organization Freedom (*Yidishe Socialistishe Arbeter Yungt Fraihait*).[7]

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[4] Henryk Prajs, "Żydzi z Góry Kalwarii," *Słowo Żydowskie* 7-8 (2002), 10-11; Małgorzata Szturmowska, "Podróż kolejką wąskotorową w 1989 r.," *Przegląd Piaseczański*, 25 May 2015, https://www.przegladpiaseczynski.pl/historia/podroz-kolejka-waskotorowa-w-roku-1899/.

[5] Henryk Prajs' testimony, recorded and edited by Aleksandra Bańkowska in January 2005, https://www.centropa.org/node/94911.

[6] *Sotsyalistishe Kinder Farband* (SKIF): the Socialist Children's Union was a childrens' organization established in 1920 on the initiative of the Bund's youth section, *Tsukunft*. It was responsible for training future party activists. The children were taken care of by parental committees and the organization conducted scouting activity. In the 1930s it operated in over 100 places in Poland.

[7] *Yidishe Socialistishe Arbeter Yungt Fraihait* (Jewish Socialist Labor Youth 'Freedom') – initially, the organization was affiliated with the socialist-Zionist Poale Zion Right. In the early 1930s the Freiheit branch in Góra Kalwaria, where

Because his family was poor, Prajs, like his siblings, attended a Polish public elementary school (better-off Jewish families enrolled their sons in private schools). Less importance was paid to the education – especially religious education – of daughters; hence the discrepancy emphasized in the testimony between the number of Jewish male and female pupils in Prajs' class (only three boys and "a lot" of girls). At the same time, Prajs attended a *cheder*, where he received a religious education and learned basic Hebrew. This is how he characterized his attitude to religion:

> I didn't observe Sabbath too rigorously, and later not at all. It made my Mom sad, but I was progressive, not a bit religious, I didn't even pray anymore. I didn't feel the need to. And I dined at Mrs. Wozniakowa's [a Polish neighbor], oh yes. I didn't observe the kashrut even in my early youth. Mom never knew it, God forbid, never, no one knew, it was unthinkable! They would separate my dishes right away, wouldn't use them at all. That's the rule, the Jewish rite.

After graduation, Prajs learned tailoring and began work as a tailor. A skilled craftsman, he became a member of the Tailors Trade Union, whose members included both Jews and Poles. He became the secretary of the organization's branch in Góra Kalwaria.

Brought up in a mixed neighborhood – Prajs' courtyard included three Jewish families and three Polish families – and having graduated from a Polish public elementary school, Henryk spoke Polish fluently and was familiar with basic Polish cultural codes. Tailoring was a particularly valuable occupation during crises and wars, and this skill proved an asset that greatly improved his chances of survival during the Holocaust.

Prajs' testimony mentions the Polish nationalists' attacks on Jewish stalls on June 13, 1936 and 1937, during the annual fair in Góra Kalwaria, when sellers and buyers from the surrounding area came to town. Members and supporters of the Falanga National Radical Camp came to the market square, overturned some stalls, and beat several men and women. Some of the Jews offered resistance.

The National Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR) was founded in 1934 in the wake of the pan-European radicalization of national movements caused by the Great Depression. Its founders were young nationalist activists convinced that the National Camp – the main right-wing party in Poland at that time – was insufficiently revolutionary. The ONR was anti-democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-communist, antisemitic, and radically nationalist. Declared illegal in the Second Republic of Poland after a few months' operation, the organization went underground. 1935 saw a split in the ONR between the 'moderate' ONR ABC and the 'radical'

Henryk Prajs was active, had approximately 50 members. In 1933 the organization had a total of 11,000 members throughout Poland, while by 1935 their number increased to as many as 30,000.

ONR Falanga, with the latter boasting up to 5,000 members. Falanga paramilitary groups made direct references to fascist ideology,[8] employed violence against left-wing organizations and Jews, and carried out terrorist attacks.[9] The attacks on Jewish merchants from Góra Kalwaria were among hundreds of such actions organized by radical nationalists in Poland at that time.

The local police commander, Janica, who according to Prajs was named Bolesław and died as a result of the Katyn order,[10] appears as a positive figure in this context. The Katyn victims indeed include a policeman with the surname Janica, although his given names are recorded as Jan Michał.[11] It remains unclear whether this is the same person. According to Prajs' other testimony, the police commander not only had a favorable attitude to Jews, but even convinced them to establish a self-defense organization, which associated "Zionists, communists, and Bundists: the entire Jewish youth. Particularly the laborers and waggoners – the tough ones. They formed a self-defense group and defended themselves against the attacks."[12]

In 1937, Prajs was drafted into the Polish Army and sent to the Jan Kozietulski 3rd Mazovian Light Cavalry Regiment in Suwałki. Considered elite units, light cavalry regiments received recruits who distinguished themselves in terms of physical fitness and reputation. The latter was particularly vital for national minorities. A German, Jew, Ukrainian, or Belorussian suspected of disloyalty to the Polish state could not join such a unit. Thus, Prajs must have been considered a trustworthy citizen. A squadron consisted of approximately a hundred soldiers, with four Jewish soldiers in each squadron. This means that the Jewish soldiers constituted four percent of the soldiers, while making up nine percent of the overall population of Poland. Prajs retained very fond memories of his military service. Public appearances in the *uhlan* uniform and horse-riding-shoes and with a saber by his side clearly impressed him. He spoke with pride about the impression he made on the inhabitants of his hometown when he visited on furlough.

According to Prajs' testimony, in September 1939 his 3rd Light Cavalry Regiment was the only unit of the Polish Army that entered the territory of the Third Reich when it made a sortie into Eastern Prussia. The regiment then fought against the Wehrmacht in the Białystok and Lublin

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[8] Szymon Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo Radykalny. Geneza i działalność* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1895), 291-293, 331.

[9] Antoni Dudek, Grzegorz Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki: Próba biografii politycznej* (London: Aneks, 1990), 58, 81.

[10] Henryk Prajs' testimony, 2005.

[11] Senior leader Jan Michał Janica, born in 1889, murdered in Tver in the spring of 1940; https://policjapanstwowa.pl/index-190.htm.

[12] Following the secret resolution of the Political Bureau of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), initiated by Joseph Stalin on March 5, 1940, the interned officers of the Polish Army, police officers, and political prisoners who were Polish citizens were deemed "sworn enemies of the Soviet authorities who held no promise of improvement," and executed. During the spring of 1940, NKVD officers murdered 22,000 Polish citizens.

regions and also against the Soviets. It surrendered on 5 October 1939, after the Battle of Kock, one of the last regiments to do so in the September Campaign, thus confirming its elite character.

On the night of 13-14 September, near the village of Olszewo in the Białystok region, the 3rd Light Cavalry Regiment encountered a detachment of the 3rd Panzer Division of the Wehrmacht. The cavalrymen attacked the surprised Germans, causing serious losses to the enemy. The latter called for backup and, supported by tanks and armored cars, fought off the Polish attack. The Wehrmacht lost a few dozen soldiers (according to presumably exaggerated estimates, as many as 100). Approximately 50 Polish cavalrymen perished and about 100 were injured, including Prajs. After the battle the Germans killed five wounded Polish soldiers, murdered 25 captive soldiers and 23 civilian inhabitants of Olszewo and nearby villages, and then burned Olszewo.[13] Seriously injured and unable to fight, Prajs was transported with other wounded soldiers to Szczuczyn near Grodno (now in Belarus). On September 17 the Red Army crossed the Polish-Soviet border without revoking the non-aggression pact. The Polish army was in a hopeless situation, and was ordered to retreat to Romania and Hungary while forbidden from fighting against the Bolsheviks unless the latter attacked them or tried to disarm them.[14] Prajs was one of the 230,000 Polish soldiers taken captive by the Soviets.

The subsequent fate of Prajs was determined by big politics. On September 28 the Third Reich and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation, followed on October 4 by a protocol outlining the new borders. One of the points of the protocol stipulated an exchange of populations, amending the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact concerning the division of Central Europe. The Germans received central Poland from the Soviets, while the Soviets received Lithuania from the Germans. This meant that Góra Kalwaria was now in the German sphere of influence. On October 12, Adolf Hitler's decree established the General Government, in which the town was now located.

The Soviet Union and the Third Reich considered Poland non-existent, leaving the problem of citizenship unresolved. The Kremlin was of the opinion that all inhabitants registered in the territories annexed by the Soviet Union automatically became Soviet citizens. Inhabitants of western and central Poland who found themselves in the east as a result of the war, had two options: apply for Soviet citizenship or return to the German occupation zone.

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[13] Waldemar Monkiewicz, "Pacyfikacje wsi w regionie białostockim (1939, 1941-1944)," *Białostocczyzna*, vol. 1, no. 9 (1988), 30. It is not clear from the description whether the 50 men killed on the Polish side included those executed after the fight.

[14] *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w II wojnie światowej*, vol. 1, *Kampania wrześniowa* (London: The General Sikorski Historical Institute, 1959), 521.

Lower-rank soldiers of the Polish Army in Soviet captivity were allowed to return home from central and western Poland (while Polish officers were interned and, in the spring of 1940, murdered in the Katyn Massacre). Prajs decided to return to Góra Kalwaria, thus becoming one of the 42,500 prisoners of war transferred to Germany by the Soviets under the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation.[15]

The testimony erroneously states that the ghetto in Góra Kalwaria was established in July 1940; in fact it was set it up in January 1940, one of the first created in the General Government. Apart from local Jews, the ghetto housed refugees and displaced persons from Alekandrów, Kalisz, Pabianiace, and Suwałki, as well as nearby villages.[16] Cramming 3,500 people in a small area led to major sanitation problems. In some cases, up to ten people lived in a single room. An anonymous testimony from the Ringelblum Archive reads:

> The needs of Jews from Góra Kalwaria were substantial. They immediately began to contact Warsaw and the Joint, and in July 1940 received the first 3,000 zlotys. The Jews immediately began to set up a soup kitchen. [...] Soon, the kitchen was ready and every day prepared up to 1,200 lunches at 10 groszes per lunch, and free of charge for the poor. The kitchen operated until June.[17]

The ghetto remained open until July 1940, at which point a German order forbade Jews from leaving the ghetto and the Christian population from entering it. This led to a rapid deterioration in the already critical food provision to the inhabitants. Prajs believed that the transformation of the open ghetto into a closed one signaled the true establishment of the ghetto. From his perspective, the closure of the ghetto meant the loss of his livelihood. Until July 1940, he had earned his living sewing clothes for Poles and had been aided by his Polish friends, who provided him with food and fuel. This is how Prajs described the conditions in the ghetto after its closure in testimony submitted to the Jewish Historical Institute: "The situation became even worse. The people started to suffer from hunger. Typhus began to enter Jewish homes. The Jews began to die from hunger, cold, and disease."[18]

Another incorrect detail of the current testimony concerns the moment when the tzaddik Avraham Mordechai Alter left Poland. Prajs dates this event to the fall of 1942, while Israel

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[15] Czesław Grzelak, *Wrzesień 1939. W szponach dwóch wrogów* (Warsaw: Rytm 2018), 361.

[16] Barbara Engelking, *"Życie codzienne Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego,"* in Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak and Dariusz Libionk (eds.), *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim* (Warsaw, 2007), 168.

[17] Aleksandra Bańkowska (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, t. 6, *Generalne Gubernatorstwo. Relacje i Dokumenty*, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012), 407.

[18] Testimonies of Awrum Prajs, archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Testimonies, 301/6488.

Gutman wrote: "The rabbi from Góra Kalwaria (Gerer rebe) left occupied Poland on the eve of Passover 1940 with his entourage, namely members of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party (as a result of a special operation)."[19]

In his Fotunoff Video Archive testimony, Prajs passes over the attempt to create a military underground organization in the ghetto. From his other testimony, we learn that 1940 saw the appearance in Góra Kalwaria of:

> Lajbl Frydman, Horowic, and a woman. Frydman was a Bund member, Horowic was from Poalei Zion, and as for the woman, I don't know. They wanted to organize a combat team consisting of those who had served in the army to fight in self-defense. We only admitted the people we trusted. The 25 of us gathered at Aron Nusbaum's. We didn't have any weapons but the spirit was there, that we will defend ourselves. But nothing happened.[20]

Prajs' testimony regarding the period from his escape from the ghetto in February 1941 to the end of 1943 is chaotic and littered with loose ends. It is impossible to reconstruct the narrator's experience using only this testimony, but events can be reconstructed using Prajs' other testimonies and the wider literature. The Germans decided that the liquidation of the ghetto in Góra Kalwaria would begin on February 25, 1941, and announced their intentions several days in advance. Prajs' mother and neighbors convinced Prajs to flee, exploiting his appearance – blond hair and 'Aryan' facial features. He probably managed to leave the ghetto on the evening of 24 February, 1941. He headed for Magnuszew. According to gossip then circulating among the Jews, the Jews of Magnuszew had avoided deportation. At least 100 other Jews fled at the same time as Prajs. On March 25 and 26, the residents of the Góra Kalwaria ghetto were resettled in the Warsaw ghetto, transported via the 'rebbe railway.'[21]

Formerly a town, at the beginning of the twentieth century Magnuszew was a village on the Vistula River, inhabited by approximately 1,500 people, half of whom were Jewish. The Germans set up the ghetto there as late as December 22, 1941, gathering inside it 1,200 Jews. The ghetto was an open one. Prajs rented a room and worked as a tailor. He sewed clothes for Jews and Christians, establishing many new contacts, for instance, befriending the Pole Jan Cwyl. The ghetto in Magnuszew was liquidated on 18-19 August 1942. The Germans murdered 120 Jews on the spot and drove the rest to the ghetto in nearby Kozienice, where a

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[19] Israel Gutman, *Walka bez cienia nadziei*, *Powstanie w getcie warszawskim* (Warsaw: Rytm, 1998), 30.

[20] Henryk Prajs' testimony, 2005.

[21] Martin Dean, "Góra Kalwaria," in Geoffrey P. Megargee, Martin Dean, Mel Hacker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933-1945*, vol. II, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, Part A, (Bloomington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2012), 374-375.

selection took place.[22] Prajs was selected with a group of young men who were sent to the labor camp in Chmielewo near Magnuszew, where they dug drainage ditches. The Jews who remained in Kozienice died later in Treblinka.[23] In December 1942, when a column of Jewish laborers was passing through Magnuszew, Prajs was spotted by Jan Cwyl. Years later, Prajs recalled: "On our way back from Chmielewo a Polish friend, Janek Cwyl, pulled me out of the column while the policemen weren't paying attention. He took me with him, he saved me."[24] In his testimony to the Fotunoff Video Archive this event is erroneously dated December 1943.

The Pole sheltered Prajs for several weeks, after which Prajs returned to Góra Kalwaria, to his pre-war neighbor, Mrs. Wasilewska. His trip to Osieck to obtain an 'Aryan' birth certificate was her idea. Mrs. Wasilewska accompanied Prajs to the local parish, where the parish priest, most likely Father Ludwik Liponoga, issued the document, in which he included the personal information of the late Feliks Żołądek.[25] For almost all of 1943 Prajs hid in the homes of various Magnuszew inhabitants and in nearby localities. He used the survival strategy described by the scholar Alina Skibińska, who has investigated Jews' survival strategies: "Even if the roof over one's head was free of charge, one had to eat. Those in hiding who possessed some useful skills – as had tailors or cobblers – often made clothes for the entire family that sheltered them, thus paying back the help and food they received. They then moved to the next host – the Jews 'changed hands.'"[26] This was exactly Prajs' strategy, who in the meantime also obtained a falsified *Kenkarte* through his friends.

Over time, more and more people learned of Prajs' presence in the Magnuszew area, which made his continued hiding dangerous. In early 1944, Józef Wdowiak, one of the landlords who had sheltered him, drove him to the eastern bank of the Vistula, where people did not know him. Until January-February 1944, Prajs had been in hiding on the western bank of the Vistula as a Jew, but now on the eastern bank of the river he began to use the false *Kenkarte* and posed as a Pole – Feliks Żołądek. It remains unclear how he got to the house of Jan and Katarzyna Pokorski in Podwierzbie. In the Fortuna testimony, as in a few others, he claimed that it was the result of a

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[22] Stephan Lehnstaedt, "Magnuszew," in Geoffrey P. Megargee, Martin Dean and Mel Hacker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, vol II, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, part A (Bloomington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 2012), 255-256.

[23] *Obozy hitlerowskie na ziemiach polskich 1939-1945. Informator encyklopedyczny* (Warsaw: PWN, 1979), 248, 302.

[24] Henryk Prajs' testimony, 2005.

[25] Father Ludwik Liponoga was the Osieck parish priest during 1938-1946. Information received by email from the Osieck parish secretariat.

[26] Alina Skibińska, "Powiat biłgorajski," in B. Engelking and J. Grabowski (eds.), *Night Without an End: Fate of Jews in Selected Counties of Occupied Poland,* vol. 1 (Warsaw: Polish Center for Holocaust Research, 2018), 352.

chance meeting.[27] But in his most extensive and detailed testimony, in 2005, he said that the Pokorskis were his friends or relatives of his female neighbor, the aforementioned Mrs. Wasilewska of Góra Kalwaria.[28] It remains unknown which version is true.

Prajs remained at the Pokorskis' on 'Polish papers' until the arrival of the Soviets. His occupation helped him survive both in Podwierzbie, as earlier in Magnuszew, earning money making and repairing clothes. His meeting with Soviet soldiers on a levee by the Vistula River must have taken place on July 27 or 28 1944, since this was when the Red Army reached the Vistula.

The most dramatic event that occurred during Prajs' stay at the Pokorskis was the Polish underground's attempt to murder him. In his 2005 testimony, Prajs provided more details:

> I had to hide once, and from whom, from ours [Poles]. […] NSZ or WiN, I don't even know, sentenced me to death. And [I] had met them by chance, as a tailor. I'd sewn for them, they'd got to like me, we'd spent all the time together. I used to refashion what they'd stolen somewhere. One of them didn't agree with the sentence, hadn't said a word to them, but later told me: 'Heniek, be careful, hide, mister, 'cause it's so and so.' So NSZ's history has a not-so-exquisite [*sic*] chapter – their attitude towards the Jewish nation. When the Red Army took over the area, they [the NSZ soldiers] killed two or three Jews. They all came to me later and apologized, a couple of times. So I don't really want to get back to the subject, I've forgiven them and that's it.

Prajs knew not only of the danger he was in, but also the identities of the would-be attackers. Yet in all his post-war testimonies he kept their names a secret. Podwierzbie is less than 40 kilometers from Góra Kalwaria. After the war, Prajs lived in Podwierzbie for almost a year, after which he moved back to Góra Kalwaria. His decision not to disclose the aggressors' names was probably motivated by his desire to maintain a good relationship with the locals. If he had revealed their identity, he would have faced aversion and even open animosity on the part of the friends and relatives of his would-be assassins.

The Freedom and Independence Association (*Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość*, WiN) was founded in September 1945, that is about a year after this event. Thus, the attackers could not have been WiN members. It is more likely that they were from the National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ), which, however, was relatively weak in that area. One cannot exclude the possibility that Prajs was targeted by members of the strongest organization in the

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[27] Mateusz Wyrwich, "Henryk Prajs: Jeśli ktoś mi dzisiaj mówi, że polska wieś była antysemicka, to mówię mu, że kłamie," *Tygodnik Solidarność*, 27 January 2017, https://www.tysol.pl/a4239-Henryk-Prajs-Jesli-ktos-mi-dzisiaj-mowi-ze-polska-wies-byla-antysemicka-to-mowie-mu-ze-klamie.

[28] Henryk Prajs' testimony, 2005.

area, namely the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK), although it is impossible to determine this on the basis of the existing sources. It is telling, however, that Prajs accused the NSZ and WiN: 'NSZ and WiN reactionaries' was one of the most popular phrases used in the communist propaganda during 1946-1956, and Prajs echoes it.

Devoted to the post-war period, the last part of the testimony is more structured. Prajs discusses, for instance, how he learned that Jewish "emigrants from Russia" were returning to Góra Kalwaria. He is referring to a group of approximately 200,000 Jews who survived the war in the Soviet Union and returned to Poland between 1944 and 1946. This heterogenous group consisted of Jewish refugees who left the German-occupied territories of pre-war Poland in 1939 and fled to the territories annexed by the Soviet Union. 70,000 Jewish refugees (the *biezhentsy*) refused to accept Soviet citizenship. Deemed a 'socially hostile' element, they were deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1940. Another 20,000 Jews were detained in Soviet labor camps for "illegal crossing of the German-Soviet border" – and (paradoxically) were thereby saved. Another group was comprised of Jews evacuated by the Soviet authorities from the German-occupied areas in 1941, including members of the communist party, administrative staff, skilled workers, and men capable of military service. The last group was comprised of Jews returning from the east who had survived the German occupation in hiding. At the same time, Jewish survivors of German camps (about 50,000 people) were returning to their hometowns along with those who had survived the occupation in hiding or on Polish papers, like Prajs. Immediately after the war there were approximately 300,000 Jews in Poland – 10 percent of the pre-war Jewish population.[29]

Having learned about the Jews' return to Góra Kalwaria, Prajs also decided to return to his hometown. This must have been prior to August 12, 1945, which was when the local Jewish Committee was co-founded by Prajs, at that time using the name Awrum Prajs. The Committee was composed of 52 Jews from Góra Kalwaria and nearby towns, such as Warka, Grójec, and Baniocha.[30] In 1949 Prajs officially changed his name to Henryk and married Czesława Maria Wasilewska – a daughter of the neighbor who had helped him during the war. He worked as a tailor and after some time began to grow fruit. In 1945 he became a member of the Jewish Committee and in 1950 joined the Social and Cultural Society of Polish Jews (*Towarzystwo*

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[29] Dariusz Stola, "Jewish emigration from Communist Poland: The Decline of Polish Jewry in the Aftermath of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 47 (2017), 169-175.

[30] Alina Skibińska, "Powroty ocalałych," in Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak and D. Libionka (eds.), *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2007), 91. Aside from Prajs, the board was composed of Cypa Drajer, Chaim Hendel, Benzion Pelc, Marian Perel, Jakub Rawski, Maks Schwimmer, and Szymon Zinger.

Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ).[31] Thanks to his initiative, the Jewish cemetery in Góra Kalwaria was saved from total destruction immediately after the war. He also belonged to the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację,* ZBoWiD).[32]

Prajs did not leave Poland, neither after the 1946 Kielce pogrom,[33] nor during the 1956 thaw,[34] nor after the 1968 anti-Zionist campaign conducted by the Communist Party.[35] Asked about these events in his testimony, he discussed solely those of 1968. Highly emotional, he said that he had not suspected that the Communist Party could be anti-Semitic. He addressed the then bystanders directly:

> Shame on you if any of you from 1968 are still alive. Shame on you. You have disgraced yourselves, your regime, and your political agreement. Even if Moczar is gone, if anyone from his group is alive, they should be ashamed of themselves. You cannot imagine what we, Jews, went through in '68. If it had not been for Cardinal Wyszyński, there would have been a pogrom on Jews. Let me stress that. There would have been a pogrom. But [it was avoided] because Wyszyński said: 'Don't be fooled. The Jews are innocent in this case.'

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[31] The TSKŻ was established as a result of the merger of the Central Committee of Polish Jews and the Jewish Cultural Society, by order of the Communist authorities.

[32] Founded in 1949, the ZBoWiD associated veterans of the Polish Army, prisoners of German prisons and camps, and partisans of left-wing underground organizations operating under the German occupation. Until 1956 former members of the Home Army and non-communist underground organizations were not admitted to the ZBoWiD. Until 1989 the Union was subordinate to the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR, that is the Communist Party). In 1990 the ZBoWiD was transformed into the Union of Veterans of the Republic of Poland and Former Political Prisoners (*Związek Kombatantów RP i Byłych Więźniów Politycznych*).

[33] The pogrom in Kielce took place on June 4, 1946. The accusation that Jews had kidnapped a Polish boy for ritual slaughter led to a pogrom, as a result of which 42 people died and 40 were wounded. It also led to antisemitic incidents in several localities in the Kielce region and an intensification of Jewish emigration. During the three months following the pogrom, 60,000 Jews left the country. The total number of Jews who left Poland between 1945 and 1947 is estimated at 140,000. M. Semczyszyn, "Nielegalna emigracja Żydów z Polski 1944-1947 – kontekst międzynarodowy," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1 (2018), 113; M. Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga: Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Cracow, Wydawnitwo Znak, ISP PAN, 2012), 606-616.

[34] Approximately 50,000 Jews emigrated during 1956-1960, taking advantage of the liberalization connected with the post-Stalinist thaw. Dariusz Stola, "Jewish Emigration from Communist Poland: the Decline of Polish Jewry in the Aftermath of the Holocaust," *East European Jewish Affairs* 47 (2017), 175-179.

[35] Launched by the authorities of the Polish People's Republic, the antisemitic campaign led to the emigration of 13,000 people during 1968-1970. For more on this topic, see Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967–1968* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2000).

In Prajs' account, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński appears as a defender of the Jews persecuted by the Communists. A fragment of his sermon delivered at the Warsaw Cathedral on April 11, 1968 is sometimes quoted in the Polish Catholic press as proof of the Primate's objection to the anti-Zionist campaign. This is what Wyszyński said in his sermon: "…we are currently witnessing such painful experiences and such a painful spectacle that the heart is simply crunching from the pain felt when one looks at all this and hears about this. It seems as if a certain category of people in Poland lack love and a right to a heart."[36] He then called for the rejection of lies and hatred – but he did not use the words 'Jews,' 'Zionism,' etc. even once. If Wyszyński was indeed referring to the antisemitic campaign, he did so cryptically, and only a small percentage of those who heard him would have been able to decipher his meaning. What is more, his audience was limited to those then present inside the cathedral, as the sermon was not broadcast on radio, television or published in the press. Therefore, the impact of Wyszyński's words must have been minimal. The Primate did not send a letter to the faithful, publish a statement, or send any instructions to the clergy relating in any way to the anti-Zionist campaign conducted by the authorities. Historians agree that Wyszyński regarded the campaign as an internal game played within the Communist Party, in which the Catholic Church should not take part.[37] So what was the source of Prajs' belief in the pro-Jewish stance of the head of the Polish Church? Primate Wyszyński has been an icon of recent Polish history for several decades. He is presented as a great national and spiritual leader, a man of great courage, wisdom, shrewdness, and benevolence. Prajs internalized that view to such an extent that, in his eyes, Wyszyński, a positive hero in Polish history, must have opposed the Communist authorities in 1968 and must have defended the Jews. As one can see, Prajs' Jewishness and Polishness was a patchwork woven from different traditions, myths and beliefs. Prajs learned to ignore some of the threads threatening the integrity of the cloth, while other threads he rewove in such a way that they fitted the prevailing beliefs about the past among his Polish milieu.

A Bund member, Zionist, light cavalryman, Soviet POW, ghetto resident, prisoner of a labor camp, escapee hiding in Christian homes, a Jew on 'Aryan' papers, a tailor, a gardener, Polish Army veteran, Jewish social activist, husband of a Polish Catholic woman, after whose death he

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[36] Quoted in Tomasz Wiścicki, "Biskupi o Marcu 1969," 6 March 2018, eKAI, https://www.ekai.pl/biskupi-o-marcu-1968/. See also Jerzy Eisler, *"Polskie miesiące" czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw, IPN, 2008), 150; Antoni Dudek, "Rola Kościoła katolickiego w wydarzeniach marcowych 1969 r. w ocenie władz PRL," in B. Bankowicz and A. Dudek (eds.), *Ze studiów nad dziejami Kościoła i katolicyzmu w PRL* (Cracow: PiT, 1996); Jan Żaryn, "Państwo – Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1956-1989 (Wybrane zagadnienia)," 64-65, https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/13506?show=full.

[37] Jerzy Eisler, *"Polskie miesiące" czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw, IPN, 2008), 150; Antoni Dudek, "Rola Kościoła katolickiego w wydarzeniach marcowych 1969 r. w ocenie władz PRL," in B. Bankowicz and A. Dudek (eds.), *Ze studiów nad dziejami Kościoła i katolicyzmu w PRL* (Cracow: PiT, 1996); Jan Żaryn, "Państwo – Kościół katolicki w Polsce 1956-1989 (Wybrane zagadnienia)," 64-65, https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/13506?show=full.

entered into a relationship with a Jewish woman, witness to history sharing his recollections from the Holocaust period with Israeli and Polish youth – these are the roles that Henryk Prajs assumed. He died on April 25, 2018 at the age of 101 and was buried in the Jewish Cemetery on Okopowa Street in Warsaw.[38] His tombstone bears the following inscription: *Abram Henryk Prajs*.

[38] Announcement of Henryk Awrum Prajs' funeral, https://warszawa.jewish.org.pl/2018/04/z-wielkim-zalem-zawiadamiamy-ze-w-wieku-101-lat-zmarl-blogoslawionej-pamieci-henryk-awrum-prajs/.

Transcript

Part 1

Interviewer: [00:00:30] Good. So we can now talk freely.

Subject: [00:00:32] Right now?

Interviewer: [00:00:33] I mean no, it's just for...

Subject: [00:00:35] When they say so, I will speak normally, yes, obviously, I'm touched, there's no doubt, it's not on yet, I think…

Interviewer: [00:00:44] No, no.

Interviewer: [00:00:44] Here we go.

Subject: [00:01:03] I come from a small town situated to the south of Warsaw. It's called Gora Kalwaria[1]. Like in all small towns in Poland, there was a fairly large Jewish community living in Gora Kalwaria. One can say that Gora Kalwaria was inhabited by Catholics in 50% and Jews in 50%. However, Gora Kalwaria differed from other towns... small provincial towns in that it was where the famous tzaddik from the Alter family lived and where very large conventions took place. Especially for holidays such as Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, that is the New Year and Shavuot. Very many people would then come to Gora Kalwaria on a pilgrimage to see that tzaddik. That was precisely what distinguished Gora Kalwaria from other towns in Poland.

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[1] Gora Kalwaria [Góra Kalwaria], a small city located now part of but then near Warsaw on the left bank of the Vistula River and known in Yiddish as Ger. Gora Kalwaria was the seat of a well-known dynasty of *tzaddikim*, founded by Meir Rotemberg Alter (1789-1866), who stressed the importance of religious studies and promoted Orthodox religiosity, but were also active in the political sphere. Today the tzaddikim from Ger live in Israel and in the US.

Interviewer: [00:02:09] I'm very sorry. Can you tell us your name, please?

Subject: [00:02:14] Sure. My name is Henryk Prajs [Prais]. I was born in Gora Kalwaria. I am 78 as we speak.

Interviewer: [00:02:22] You were born in the year one thousand…

Subject: [00:02:26] In what year? One thousand nine hundred and sixteen, 30 December 1916. That's more or less it. I was born in a poor family. I cannot say we were rich because I didn't have a father at all. My father[2] was killed by bandits, specifically bandits. It was a mugging, in nineteen twenty-one, I think, or twenty-two. I was very young. How old could I have been at the time? Well [inaudible], I could have been two or three years old, no more than that. So this could have even been in 1918, yes. So I don't remember my father. I was raised. We were three children. Our mother was a seamstress. She tried very hard to give us any minimum education she could in the form of elementary school. At the time, it was called common school. I went to school as soon as I turned seven. I have very fond memories of my school time. Teachers were very friendly to us, in general to Jewish children. Overall, Gora Kalwaria was specific as there was no anti-Semitism during the pre-war period. The Polish and Jewish communities lived very well together.

Interviewer: [00:04:04] Do you come from a religious family?

Subject: [00:04:06] Myself? No. I come from a non-religious family. Mine was a progressive Jewish family. So it was.

Interviewer: [00:04:13] OK.

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[2] The father of Henryk Prajs was Jankiel Prajs.

Subject: [00:04:13] So I was not a Hasidic Jew. I was normal like any other Jewish child. I attended the Polish general [elementary] education school and at the same time I learned Jewish language at the Jewish school, the so-called heder. Simultaneously, I learned some Hebrew as it was called at the time and ivrit at present. It used to be called Hebrew. This is how I have come to know some Hebrew. I was a fairly good student as far as it was possible. I completed 6 grades of elementary... general education school. I could not continue schooling because my family did not have enough money. We did not have money so I learned... I learned the profession of a tailor. I studied it for a few years. Later...

Interviewer: [00:05:04] But where? Also in Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:05:06] Yes, in Gora Kalwaria. My master tailor's name was Cybula. Precisely Cybula, that was his name.

Interviewer: [00:05:12] He was a Pole?

Subject: [00:05:14] No, he was Jewish, yes. I learned the profession there, I worked as his apprentice for maybe three years. Afterwards, I worked for Gorecki who was a Catholic. Gorecki. I don't even recall his first name but his last name was Gorecki. I worked in his workshop for 2 years probably and I also worked for Jasinski for 2 years as a tailor. And then came the army period.

Interviewer: [00:05:43] Please tell me one more thing, you were talking about Gorka Kalwaria, how many residents were there when you were born and during your childhood?

Subject: [00:05:51] How many residents were there? Overall, Gora Kalwaria had approx. 7,000 residents. Of those, there were some 3,000 Jews and some 4,000 Poles. I mean in total Gora Kalwaria with the, how do you call them, sub....

Interviewer: [00:06:09] With peripheries?

Subject: [00:06:10] Yes yes but they are called, sub.. no, not an auberge, it's called, you know those, those, not just Gora Kalwaria but those

Interviewer: [00:06:18] Peripheries?

Subject: [00:06:19] Right, peripheries, no but

Interviewer: [00:06:20] Mountains

Subject: [00:06:21] may, may, may be [that could be it, maybe]

Interviewer: [00:06:21] Outskirts of Gora Kalwaria,

Subject: [00:06:23] Oh, yes, this is what I meant.

Interviewer: [00:06:24] So there were 3,000 Jewish residents?

Subject: [00:06:28] How many were there? That's correct.

Interviewer: [00:06:28] Three thousand. And what were theorientations among them? As far as I understand, there was, after all, a very strong Hasidic group.

Subject: [00:06:33] Well, there were very many craftsmen. Among other things, I wrote so in my memoirs. Predominantly Gora Kalwaria because there were no factories at the time, none. There were just small shops and craftsmen, namely tailoring, shoe-making, boot-making, knit cap making, saddle-making and such, as well as carpentry and baking. This is what the whole of Gora Kalwaria was made of because no other (...)

Interviewer: [00:07:00] How many religious Jews, Hasidic Jews, were there?

Subject: [00:07:00] Religious ones? When it comes to religious Jews, there were few. I mean there were more progressive Jews the way I described it, simple Jews. As our great writer, Sholom Aleichem,[3] once wrote: 'we come from folk'. Those Jews were religious, no doubt they were religious, but they were progressive. They did not wear those Orthodox clothes but dressed normally like Europeans. Jews, those Hasidic Jews could have been in Gora Kalwaria (...) if there were three thousand Jews, roughly 1,000 were followers but no, not followers of Gora, not followers of the tzaddik, let me stress that, but just regular followers of Hasidic Judaism.[4]

Interviewer: [00:07:44] Various orientations

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[3] Sholem Aleichem (pen name of Shalom Rabinovich, 1859-1916) was a Yiddish author and humorist, a prolific writer of novels, stories, feuilletons, critical reviews, and poems in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. He also contributed regularly to Yiddish dailies and weeklies. He founded a literary Yiddish annual called *Di Yidishe Folksbibliotek* (The Popular Jewish Library), with which he wanted both to raise the denigrated Yiddish literature from its low status and at the same time combat authors of trash literature, whom he saw as dragging the Yiddish literature down to the lowest popular level. His writings have been translated into most European languages.

[4] Prajs refers to the head of the Chassidic court of Ger, Avraham Mordechai Alter (1864–1948).

Subject: [00:07:45] Yes, yes, yes, different orientations because just like they were part of, they had their rabbi in Kozienice,[5] in Klodzko[6] and in Gora Kalwaria there were also, I mean there were supporters of that tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:07:57] And how many supporters were there of that tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria, more or less?

Subject: [00:08:01] Well, I can say that there were no more than five hundred.

Interviewer: [00:08:06] Five hundred.

Subject: [00:08:06] He did not have more than 500 followers in Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:08:11] Because you are aware that looking at it today, Gora Kalwaria Chasidism are undoubtedly among the main groups in Israel and America.

Subject: [00:08:19] Yes, one of the main groups, and that's because Jews, predominantly orthodox Jewscame to Gora Kalwaria from all over Poland. Actually, a lot of Jews from Lodz,[7] very many, from Krakow[8] and in general from all cities in Poland came to Gora Kalwaria to the tzaddik and that's where his greatness comes from. There is no doubt about that. He was a wise

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[5] Kozienice, a small town in the Radom region, Mazovia Province [*województwo mazowieckie*]. In 1939, the town had slightly less than 9,000 inhabitants, roughly half of whom were Jews. Geoffrey P. Megargee, Martin Dean and Mel Hacker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, vol. II, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, Part A (Bloomington: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2012), 249.

[6] Kock, a small town in Lublin Province [*województwo lubelskie*]. In 1937, its population of 4,463 residents included 2,213 Jews. Ibid, 527.

[7] Lodz [Łódź] lies 137 kilometers (85 miles) southwest of Warsaw. In 1931, its 604,629 residents included 356,987 Poles, 191,720 Jews, and 53,562 Germans. On the eve of World War II, its Jewish community, numbering around 235,000 members, was the second largest in Europe. Ibid, 75.

[8] Krakow [Kraków] is a city in south Poland. In 1931, the population of the city was approximately 250,000, including 56,800 Jews. Ibid, 527.

man because very many and even Catholics came to him with various questions, with different how to say it, how to define it

Interviewer: [00:08:52] Questions, kushiyot.

Subject: [00:08:56] How?

Interviewer: [00:08:56] Puzzles, questions, problems.

Subject: [00:08:58] No, no, questions but still you can say it differently, you can define it differently, guidance, sort of guidance, guidance in general they wanted to do this and that with his knowledge. Among others, there was that well known resident of Gora Kalwaria. His last name was Lech. I don't recall his first name. He never did anything without the approval of the tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria. Whether he wanted to build or buy something, he always had to come specifically to the tzaddik for advice, yes, advice.

Interviewer: [00:09:27] Did you meet that tzaddik in the street?

Subject: [00:09:29] Lech?

Interviewer: [00:09:30] No, the tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria, Elster [Alter]?

Subject: [00:09:31] The tzaddik, he never ventured out, he didn't make an appearance.

Interviewer: [00:09:33] He didn't go out.

Subject: [00:09:33] No, he did not walk around Gora Kalwaria. He did not come out. However, for his followers, he would stroll back and forth on his balcony for 10 or 15 minutes for his followers every Saturday at 3pm. He came out for them. He never spoke a word just made an appearance. His followers stood in the yard and watched him. Obviously, they were happy to be able to see the tzaddik

Interviewer: [00:09:59] And what did his house look like?

Subject: [00:10:01] Pardon?

Interviewer: [00:10:03] What did that tzaddik's house look like?

Subject: [00:10:04] What did his house look like? I hardly...

Interviewer: [00:10:07] What I meant is, from the outside, was the house large or small?

Subject: [00:10:09] Oh, you can see that house from the outside that house till the present day.

Interviewer: [00:10:12] Can you?

Subject: [00:10:12] Yes, There's no doubt that he lived a slightly better life than an average Jew from Gora Kalwaria. Before the war, if a Jewish resident lived in a room with a kitchen in Gora Kalwaria, he was considered successful. I must say that myself I grew up in one flat. There was a workshop in that flat and in general my mother did her sewing in the workshop.

Interviewer: [00:10:32] In a single room?

Subject: [00:10:33] In that room. I don't even want to talk about that. Compared to the present times, that was sad. As far as the tzaddik is concerned, he must have had a number of rooms. The synagogue, still in existence today, was fairly impressive. Nowadays, many pilgrims come from all over the world to see it. Obviously, his followers and not only his followers but Jews in general. This is, they say, proof of recognition of greatness of the tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:11:08] As the resident of Gora Kalwaria, were you proud that the famous tzaddik lived there? Did you care about it at all?

Subject: [00:11:14] As far as, as far as, not only me but, in general, it must be said that all residents of Gora Kalwaria, we were maybe not proud but we were all pleased because Gora Kalwaria during those holidays, as I stressed in the beginning, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and Shavuot, many people came to Gora Kalwaria. Please note that [the pilgrims] rented flats there from poorer people. Among others, even though it was a single room my mother rented it out to earn a little money. And, among other things, the town hall also made some money as those who came to Gora Kalwaria had to pay one zloty per head to the town hall. During that that time when, let's say that up to two thousand [pilgrims] arrived, the estimates would be larger. Not true. Because Gora Kalwaria had 7,000 residents and it could not accommodate more that than up to 2,000 persons. Because where would those people stay? [Inaudible] . They supplemented the state budget, that is the budget of Gora Kalwaria. The mayor was a very righteous man by the name of Dziejko [?] who was truly held in high esteem by all Jews, not only by us. He was also a philosemite. For instance, he insisted that Jews put forward their own candidates for councillors during the election to the town council. We also had a very good police chief, in the final years. His name was Janica. It needs to be said that he, unfortunately, Gora Kalwaria also went through different times when Falanga[9] [ultranationalist, patriotic and antisemitic political movement in Poland] was active in the years 1937-8. In 1939, the war psychosis was already there and such excesses were less common. But the Jewish stands at fairs were still being

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[9] ONR Falanga (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny Falanga*, ONR), the National Radical Camp, was founded in 1934 by young nationalist activists convinced that the platform and manner of operation of the National Camp – the main right-wing party in Poland at that time – was insufficiently revolutionary. The ONR was anti-democratic, anti-capitalist, anti-communist, antisemitic, and radically nationalist. Declared illegal by the Second Republic of Poland after a few months' operation, the organization went underground and continued its activities illegally with the support of extremist nationalist groups.1935 saw a split between the 'moderate' ONR, known as 'ABC,' and the 'radical' ONR known as 'Falanga.' The ONR exploited calls for an economic boycott during the severe economic crisis of the 1930s to drum up support among the masses and develop opposition to Pilsudski's government. The ONR drew most of its support from young urban residents and students. Szymon Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo Radykalny. Geneza i działalność* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1995), 291-293.

destroyed and [people were told] 'don't buy from a Jew'. And they came from nearby towns like Warka, Grojec, Karczew or Otwock.[10] The police chief stressed: 'Watch out Jews, you mustn't give in, defend yourselves by any means'. That police chief, he was just a very good man. Unfortunately, he died in Katyn.[11] The entire population deplored the fact that he had been killed there. We couldn't help him in any way because during that time who would... nobody even knew it. He had left Gora Kalwaria like all policemen who went east and died there, the poor soul. We mourn his death till the present day. Whoever remembers Janica, mourns his death. Now, as far as I'm concerned, well, at the time...

Interviewer: [00:13:56] Please tell us what were the relations between the local Jewish and Polish communities like in general?

Subject: [00:14:01] As regards those relations, like I stressed, they were very good. Very good. When it comes to anti-Semitism, Gora Kalwaria did not know... did not experience anti-Semitism at all. There was no such thing. No, in general, anti-Semitism was not present among the residents of Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:14:13] Was Polish spoken at your home?

Subject: [00:14:17] At our home?

Interviewer: [00:14:18] At home.

Subject: [00:14:19] Was Polish spoken? We spoke both Polish and Yiddish.

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[10] Warka, Grójec, Karczew and Otwock are small towns near Gora Kalwaria.

[11] The Katyn massacre was a series of mass executions of interned officers of the Polish Army, Polish Police, and Polish political prisoners. The executions were carried out by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the Soviet secret police) in April and May 1940. See Natalia Lebiediewa, *Zbrodnia katyńska: Proces odkrywania prawdy i jej upamiętniania,* in Adam D. Rodfeld and Anatolij W. Torkunow (eds.), *Białe plamy – czarne plamy: Sprawy trudne w polsko-rosyjskich stosunkach 1918-2008* (Warsaw: IPMS 2010), 333-361.

Interviewer: [00:14:23] And what was your first language?

Subject: [00:14:25] Yiddish, of course.

Interviewer: [00:14:26] Yiddish.

Subject: [00:14:26] Yiddish. No doubt about that. But afterward, as part of my upbringing, because a lot of persons lived in our immediate neighbourhood, almost 50 per cent of Poles and 50 per cent of Jews. So I had friends like Bronek Wozniak, Jozek, like Olek Rytko and, in general, Maniek Jarosz. As I underline with all respect due to those persons, when, for example, I came back from that misfortune, I mean, the area where I was kept in hiding, I went to Mr. Rytko first. His first name was Franciszek, a shoemaker. By the way, he kept various Jewish books safe. That was a big thing, really big. He even kept a photo of my grandfather. He stored things that nobody could even imagine. He was not afraid. He had kept them safe and he later returned everything to me and I, in turn, took them to Warsaw to the Religious Congregation in 1946.

Interviewer: [00:15:23] And in school? I understand that you said there were Polish and Jewish boys.

Subject: [00:15:31] Yes, yes, less, less.

Interviewer: [00:15:31] There were more Jews at that school?

Subject: [00:15:33] I cannot [inaudible]. There were less Jewish boys, very few. Of course, children from those progressive Jewish families went to the Polish school. But those from the Hasidic families did not really. Instead, teachers would go to their homes, teach them in Polish but [such pupils] were few. There were more girls, more girls went to the Polish elementary school.

Interviewer: [00:15:56] I see. Please tell us something about your siblings. You had a sister and a brother?

Subject: [00:15:59] I had a sister. Well, a sister. And my brother was shot dead.

Interviewer: [00:16:03] No but in the period before the war, they, you were the oldest child?

Subject: [00:16:05] My sister completed seven classes of elementary school in Gora Kalwaria before the war, just like me. I say elementary because I use the post-war language. It used to be called the common school. She was a very good pupil. She was very gifted because, in general, once she had graduated, she travelled to Warsaw. She worked at 14 Radzyminska Street. There was a small soap factory and she kept accounting ledgers for them. She was a diligent student. I was a mediocre pupil. I mean I had very good grades in Polish, history and German. I was not that good at maths but I never had to repeat a grade. I was no trouble at all. Yes.

Interviewer: [00:16:49] And your brother?

Subject: [00:16:51] My brother completed the same number of grades as me. My brother completed six grades, just like me. Till the seventh grade, the same as me, he went, I was already in the army at the time, he was a apprentice saddler. No, I wasn't in the army yet because I was still working as a apprentice tailor. And he was training to become a saddler. He was a saddler. With Poloniecki.

Interviewer: [00:17:16] I understand. Please tell me what year were you called up to join the army?

Subject: [00:17:21] In 1937.

Interviewer: [00:17:23] So you were 21 at the time?

Subject: [00:17:24] In nineteen [thirty-seven], yes, yes. Nineteen [thirty-seven], I joined the army on November 4th, I went to Suwalki.[12] It was, it was an elite regiment, 3rd Cavalry Regiment. There were only three such units in Poland. The 1st Cavalry Regiment was stationed in Szwolezerow Street in Warsaw, it was named, because this will not [inaudible] just like that after Jozef Pilsudski. The 2nd Cavalry Regiment was based in Starogard Gdanski, its commander was..., named after Dwernicki. And the 3rd Cavalry Regiment was in Suwalki, named after Jan Hipolit Kozietulski, the one who had captured the Somosierra mountain pass.

Interviewer: [00:18:10] Somosierra.

Subject: [00:18:11] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:18:11] And you were in Suwalki?

Subject: [00:18:13] That regiment was stationed in Suwalki. Of course, as I was a fairly capable soldier, I was selected to join a military academy for non-commissioned officers. I graduated from that academy. I completed an eight-month assignment in the same regiment. I was promoted to a corporal at the end of it. Afterward, instead of returning home in 1939... unfortunately, the war broke out in September. Then

Interviewer: [00:18:44] Before we get there, please tell me you were, I mean, you joined the cavalry regiment.

Subject: [00:18:47] Yes, I did.

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[12] Suwałki is a town in Podlasie Province (województwo podlaskie – Białystok region) on the pre-war Polish-German border.

Interviewer: [00:18:48] I mean you were one of few Jews in the unit? Or were there many?

Subject: [00:18:52] There were four of us, four Jews, yes, not four but in each squadron there were four persons of Jewish heritage.

Interviewer: [00:18:58] Why? Such were the guidelines?

Subject: [00:18:59] Well, that's how it was exactly, whether there was a limit in general or not, I wouldn't know that.

Interviewer: [00:19:02] It could have been a coincidence.

Subject: [00:19:03] That's how it was more or less. There were 4 squadrons and there were four Jews in each and every squadron. In my squadron, there was myself, Henryk Prajs [Prais], Jan Kylberg, Jakub Feldman and the fourth one was... I don't remember the fourth one.

Interviewer: [00:19:25] You don't remember. What were you relations with fellow soldiers?

Subject: [00:19:28] They were very good. I was much liked. I can stress it hundred per cent till the present day. Among others, I had a friend called Jozef Wolski during the war. When we were on the frontline, we would tell one another: 'Listen Heniek, if you make it through the war and I'm killed, let my family know'. He lived near the town of Sieradz.[13] He said: 'If I'm killed, let my family know'. Afterward, we split obviously because I followed the squadron in the direction in the direction in the south direction as we were told to go through Czerwony Bor.[14]

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[13] Sieradz is a town in Łódź Province.

[14] Czerwony Bór is a large forest in the Białystok region.

Interviewer: [00:20:08] But you're already talking about the war period, aren't you?

Subject: [00:20:10] The war period.

Interviewer: [00:20:10] So let's concentrate on your military service. When you came, for instance, home on leave, to Gora Kalwaria, did you stay for long and how was it?

Subject: [00:20:19] Yes, very much so. I was well respected and admired. [My uniform] would turn heads. I was a cavalryman and, as such, I stood out because soldiers from other formations would wear four-cornered caps and we were issued with round caps with yellow headbands. So, I was proudly carrying a sabre. Well, this is all I can say [inaudible]

Interviewer: [00:20:42] Was there a rabbi in these cavalry units?

Subject: [00:20:44] Yes, there was. There was a rabbi but he was one for the entire brigade, the Bialystok brigade or rather a garrison not a brigade because the brigade was the autonomous Suwalki brigade. No, it was just the Bialystok garrison. It was a rabbi with a grade of captain by the name of... I don't recall his surname. But he was there. He would come to our unit to hold religious, of course, but also social and even political discussions. He said that Jews had to be loyal to the state because the state came first, the army came first. He would celebrate a service every Sunday. Every Sunday, they would take us to a synagogue for a prayer with the rabbi.

Interviewer: [00:21:32] On Sunday and not on Saturday?

Subject: [00:21:34] Every Sunday, not Saturday, on Sunday only. Catholics were led to a Catholic church, Russian Orthodox soldiers to a Russian Orthodox church,[15] Protestants to a kirche,[16] and Jews to a synagogue.

Interviewer: [00:21:50] What do you mean by 'led'? You mean you walked?

Subject: [00:21:53] Yes, they led us, every unit had a senior officer who would lead the group. There were also four Germans only and four Protestants as well.

Interviewer: [00:22:03] And if you didn't want to go to the synagogue or...

Subject: [00:22:05] It was not compulsory, no.

Interviewer: [00:22:06] We were not coerced.

Subject: [00:22:07] No, no. That was not compulsory. The same during the morning prayer. If the 'Kiedy ranne wstają zorze' [When morning dawn is breaking] song was sung in the morning and the 'Wszystkie nasze dzienne sprawy…' [All our daily matters] song in the evening. The Jews were not obliged [to join in]. Whoever wished to join the ranks, could do so. If not, they could step out and step away. That was [inaudible][17]

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[15] The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (*Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny*) is one of the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox churches. The church was established in 1924. Members of this church were mainly ethnic Ukrainians and Belarusians.

[16] Prajs refers to the Evangelical Church Augsburg Confession in Poland (Polish: *Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*), the largest Protestant body in Poland. Members of this church were mainly ethnic Poles and Germans.

[17] Prajs refers to prayers sung morning and evening in the Polish Army in the pre-war period.

Interviewer: [00:22:23] As I understand it, the life of a Jewish soldier was very similar to the life of a Polish soldier.

Subject: [00:22:29] Very much so, very much so. There was no difference at all during the drills. Similarly, if you were capable, you would be distinguished in the same way as anybody else. In general, you did not feel any different in the military at all.

Interviewer: [00:22:42] How long was military service during that time? Two years?

Subject: [00:22:47] Two years.

Interviewer: [00:22:48] Two years. Because you enlisted in 1937. You were supposed to serve until...

Subject: [00:22:51] In 1937. I was twenty-one.

Interviewer: [00:22:54] Yes, you were.

Subject: [00:22:55] Almost 21 because I celebrate my anniversary on December 30th but this is irrelevant. Yes, what counts only is the month, the year counts.

Interviewer: [00:23:01] So you mean you were supposed to join the army reserve in 1939?

Subject: [00:23:05] I was meant to join the reserve as soon as 1939.

Interviewer: [00:23:08] Meaning that war caught you already...

Subject: [00:23:09] War caught me right away precisely in [inaudible] instead. From the very start, right away, our regiment

Interviewer: [00:23:14] You were a soldier when the war broke out?

Subject: [00:23:16] Yes, I was. I was in active duty. I held the rank of a corporal. Yes.

Interviewer: [00:23:19] What was the atmosphere like in the town of Kalwaria, in Gora Kalwaria before the war?

Subject: [00:23:25] It's hard to say because I was no longer there during that period. But the same psychosis was felt everywhere. Everybody was aware of it in general. When I returned to Gora Kalwaria during that period, in December [1939], everybody already thought that I had been killed. I could not let them know because I was in captivity, I was interned by the Russians in... in Russia.

Interviewer: [00:23:47] Am I to understand that people felt, well, it was clear to them since summer 1939 that the war would break out?

Subject: [00:23:54] Yes, we knew that too in our regiment because, as I wrote it in my memoirs, because we were surprised because when it comes to Beck's speech. I no longer recall if it was in March or when he said that [inaudible], we knew already. In the army, we felt that the mood was changing. We were already issued with helmets. Some of us went to dig those

Interviewer: [00:24:22] Trenches

Subject: [00:24:23] Trenches. We laid barbed wire so we felt it. And later, just as all over Poland, we, like everybody in the country, it was clear, we even I even mentioned that in my memoirs that Beck[18] [Polish minister of foreign affairs] had said that not only we would not give up Gdansk but we would not part with a button from our uniforms. But, unfortunately, during the war we learned that it was, how do you say it, that it was not real. I'm not going to talk about the other...

Interviewer: [00:24:57] As a Polish soldier, did you firmly believe in victory and in the great superiority of the Polish armed forces at the time?

Subject: [00:25:02] We did not believe in victory maybe but in [fighting] spirit, and each of us simply felt strong attachment to our homeland. At the time, we marched firmly convinced that we would defeat the enemy. Additionally, when England and France declared war on Germany, we actually thought that we would win and that we would not give in.[19] Well, it turned out otherwise later on. Well.

Interviewer: [00:25:33] What was primarily your and your fellow Jews' attitude [toward] Germans and what were your concerns? What I mean really is whether your and your fellow soldiers' attitude toward Germans was different from Poles' attitude toward Germans?

Subject: [00:25:48] In the regiment itself, I can confidently say that there was no difference in 100%. I had fellow soldiers who were Protestants: Bertold, Zoller, Pratz [?] and Mann. I recall their names clearly. We lived together very well.

Interviewer: [00:26:07] Yes, but...

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[18] Józef Beck (1894-1944) was the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1932 to 1939.

[19] The United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, two days after Germany invaded Poland.

Subject: [00:26:08] In the regiment, at the time when we were living in the barracks.

Interviewer: [00:26:10] It's not what I meant. In 1933, Hitler came to power.

Subject: [00:26:13] And one has to say that those Germans stayed [with the regiment] till the very end. No, no, they didn't betray us.

Interviewer: [00:26:17] I see.

Subject: [00:26:18] The Germans stayed with us till the very end, when Poland, we, our regiment surrendered. They stayed until the last moment. However, when we had moved east all Ukrainians and Belarusians deserted.

Interviewer: [00:26:33] I understand but today from the perspective of 50 and more years from the war's breakout, it's being said, firstly, when Hitler came to power in 1933…

Subject: [00:26:42] That's right.

Interviewer: [00:26:43] That all Jews, majority of Jews sort of knew what Hitler had in store for them. With that in mind, I would like to ask you whether… for instance, you were 17 in 1933, weren't you?

Subject: [00:26:56] Yes. No. Older.

Interviewer: [00:26:57] You were older: 16 or 17. After the Zbaszyn incident. After the Diamond Night, Kristallnacht, were your concerns about the Germans greater than those of your Polish friends?

Subject: [00:27:17] There's no doubt that at the time no Jews, I emphasize, nobody, imagined that something like that would happen, even in Germany. We knew about that night, we were aware of persecutions. We heard about Mein Kampf, the book he had published. And, in general, it needs to be said that many people were already emigrating back in 1930s and not only in Poland. There were kibbutzs in Gora Kalwaria, too. I myself belonged to Hapoel.[20] I was a member of Polaei Tziyon.[21] We were all thinking of emigrating but emigrating was not that easy. First of all, the certificate was hard to come by. It really was. Had we all known what was going to happen, there is no doubt whatsoever that we all would have emigrated to Israel or elsewhere. Maybe not all because older people would have probably stayed behind. But then who could have imagined that something like that would happen. This is what it's all about.

Interviewer: [00:28:17] I understand but you mentioned that you had sort of a Zionist orientation, you were a member of Hashomer Hatzair. Is that the worldview that you had from your teenage years?

Subject: [00:28:29] From my youngest years... since I was 13 I was part of it. I was first a scout and then a regular member.

Interviewer: [00:28:38] You mean Hatzair or?

Subject: [00:28:40] No, Poalei Tziyon.

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[20] Hapoel HaMizrachi was a political party formed in Jerusalem in 1922. It was a religious Zionist organization that supported the founding of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* (villages).

[21] Poale Zion (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party: Workers of Zion; Yiddish: *Yidishe Socialistish-Demokratishe Arbeiter Partei: Poale Syon*). A political party formed in 1905 in the Kingdom of Poland, and operating throughout the Polish state from 1918. The party's main aim was to create an independent socialist Jewish state in Palestine. In 1920, during a conference in Vienna, the party split, forming the Poale Zion Right (the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party of Zion), which became part of the Socialist Workers' International and the World Zionist Organization, and the radical Poale Zion Left (the Jewish Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Zion), which sympathized with the Bolsheviks. *Poalej Syjon* in *Polin: Wirtualny sztetl, https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/slownik/poalej-syjon*.

Interviewer: [00:28:41] Poalei Tziyon. Yes?

Subject: [00:28:41] The right wing of Poalei Tziyon. Right.

Interviewer: [00:28:43] Right?

Subject: [00:28:43] Yes, Ber Borochov's. A supporter of Ber Borochov.

Interviewer: [00:28:45] And that organization was large in Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:28:48] In general, there were various organizations in Gora Kalwaria. There was the Communist party, there was also Bund, Bund was the smallest party, and the Zionists were those, including the Mizrahi movement, who were part of the Orthodox Jews, there was Shomer Haleumi, Herzl's organization, right-wing Zionists and, effectively, Poalei Tziyon, just the right wing of Poalei Tziyon. There was no left wing of Poalei Tziyon.

Interviewer: [00:29:15] And you had been a member of that organization until the time you joined the army?

Subject: [00:29:17] I was a member of that organization. That's correct.

Interviewer: [00:29:19] Until, until you enlisted?

Subject: [00:29:20] Until I joined the army.

Interviewer: [00:29:21] Good. [inaudible]

Subject: [00:29:23] My friends even came out to send me off.

Interviewer: [00:29:26] Let's have a short break.

Part 2

Interviewer: [00:00:27] Do you remember your last leave from the military in Gora Kalwaria before the war?

Subject: [00:00:33] Yes, it was in 1938, at Christmas, in December. That's when I came to Gora Kalwaria on leave.

Interviewer: [00:00:43] Did you see your mother?

Subject: [00:00:44] Well, I got a 14-day leave from the army as a good soldier, a soldier's leave.

Interviewer: [00:00:53] Did you stay with your mother?

Subject: [00:00:54] I did, actually. My brother was there, too, and my sister; we were all there and they were very happy and not only them; in general, it needs to be said that 80 per cent of Jews were very happy because they were proud to have a chevau-léger, from Gora Kalwaria, because I was a cavalryman; in addition, I was a tailor by profession, a far cry from cavalry. However, I was a very capable soldier and, I must stress the fact that, during regimental field drills, the corporal said to other soldiers: 'Follow Prajs' example and see how well he has is riding his horse at the front of the formation'. I have to say it because I'm proud of myself.

Interviewer: [00:01:40] Obviously, you also carried a sabre, didn't you?

Subject: [00:01:42] Yes, I did. A sabre and a carbine, and I was a section leader because I had a section under my command, I had a machine gun; at the time, it was called RKM, a light machine gun, and I had one of those.

Interviewer: [00:02:00] As far as I understand that that was your last leave at Christmas before the start of the war?

Subject: [00:02:07] Yes, no soldier would be granted a leave later in 1939. Starting from March [1939], all leaves were cancelled because everyone, more or less, felt that the situation was not good.

Interviewer: [00:02:18] Did you write letters to your family?

Subject: [00:02:23] We exchanged letters with my family until the very last moment, until 1939; it's just that my family did not receive the letters I had sent to them in 1939 informing them I was on my way to the frontline with the regiment.

Interviewer: [00:02:36] I wanted to go back to that pre-war period or, you know, did your mother write anything to you about the atmosphere at the time?

Subject: [00:02:42] Yes, she did. Very much so.

Interviewer: [00:02:43] What I mean are the matters related, let's say, to a greater extent to the possible breakout of the war. Did she feel herself in any danger?

Subject: [00:02:48] Well, in general all Jews in 1939 were terrified by the prospect of a war. This is why a very large group of them had emigrated to Russia.[22] We need to state the truth, those who emigrated, whether it was right or not, they did, after all, stay alive. I do not mean to make political comments, about certain times, nobody supported Stalin's crimes, and nobody would support them, I don't want to get political, because it was a crime, a genocide. Those Jews who had emigrated to Russia, some of them did survive, whereas those here [did not], with the exception of myself who was kept in hiding by the Pokorski family, because my mother in law had referred me to those people and they had agreed to keep me safe and she had even risked her life for me, which I'm going to talk about later.

Interviewer: [00:03:53] You didn't get married before the war?

Subject: [00:03:56] No, I got married after the war. I did.

Interviewer: [00:03:59] I understand. You said that many had emigrated, also from Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:04:04] Yes, some 100 or 150 persons also emigrated from Gora Kalwaria and about 30 persons made it back alive from Russia.

Interviewer: [00:04:12] So maybe let's now go over to the breakout of the war.

Subject: [00:04:17] OK.

Interviewer: [00:04:17] On September 1st, you were with your regiment in Suwalki. Is that right?

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[22] Prajs is referring to the situation after the Red Army attack against Poland on September 17, 1939. In the second half of September and the beginning of October 1939, about 100,000 Jews from western and central Poland fled from the German-occupied part of Poland to the Soviet-occupied part.

Subject: [00:04:22] My regiment, our regiment. We were mobilized back on August 23rd. After roll call, everybody was handed live ammunition and we set off in the direction of that village, the village of Raczki was its name, near Suwalki.[23] We stayed there for a few days. We cleaned our horses, there was the evening bugle call, as usual during military exercises.

Interviewer: [00:05:01] In the barracks?

Subject: [00:05:03] We usually slept at local farmhouses because we had left the regimental barracks on August 23rd.

Interviewer: [00:05:13] On horseback?

Subject: [00:05:14] On horseback, all on horseback. On the first, on the first of September in the morning we got up at five as usual and none of us, soldiers, knew at the time that the war had started.[24] During breakfast, it was not the regiment's commander but the squadron's commanding officer at the time, given that the regiment was divided into smaller units as was the usual practice for the maneuvers because we could not all be in one location, who said: 'Listen up soldiers! The war has started'. We were already hearing explosions because the railway station in Suwalki had been shelled in the morning. We knew what to do right away, we were advancing in battle formation from that moment onwards. We were told not to disperse. I mean we advanced in battle formation only. On the second [of September], during the night, two squadrons, the fourth and the second under the command of Major Witkowski, were given the order to advance in the direction of the East Prussia towards Koenigsberg, today's Kaliningrad, right? Koenigsberg. We set off at night in full [battle] formation, I mean, those two squadrons, horses and everything. We reached the village of Reuss, today's Cimochy. There, we entered the German land. We advanced, left the horses in the wood behind a hill, and went to battle on foot. We did not encounter any resistance when entering Reuss. I think that we penetrated 5 to 7 km deep [into the German territory]. Depending from which direction, from Grajewo it would be

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[23] Raczki, a village in Białystok region, was five kilometers (three miles) from the pre-war Polish-German border.

[24] On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, thus precipitating World War II.

some 7 km to the village of Reuss. We even went as far as..., I can't remember, and later we stopped because we actually entered, what do you call it, or else

Subject: [00:07:46] How do you say it, what do you call it, a bar not a bar, sort of a restaurant, no, something like that. People were even having a party there. We were surprised that there was no, that there were no guard posts at all, nobody was standing guard. At that point, we heard that one of our chevaux-légers had crawled up to that building where it [the party] was taking place. It must have been a club not a restaurant, not a bar, just a club because they were partying and dancing. And he threw in a grenade. There was havoc. I don't know. Szyciński [?] was the surname of that soldier who had thrown in the grenade, I remember it as if it were today, a senior chevau-leger. So, havoc ensued and panic spread at that point. We took two Germans captive. We did. Of course, I was already present at the time because I had been summoned by the commanding officer to interpret for him as I spoke some German and could act as an interpreter. So, we held them captive and later, we spent a few hours there, in the early hours the order came to retreat From that moment onward, the whole tragedy unfolded. In general, we could not stop anywhere during the day. We could not stop anywhere because planes were dropping bombs all the time. It was virtually impossible to... anywhere. We had to stick to woods, hide in woods and could only start marching in the evenings.

Interviewer: [00:09:16] What general direction did you take?

Subject: [00:09:18] Direction? We were all told to go east.

Interviewer: [00:09:22] East?

Subject: [00:09:22] East.

Interviewer: [00:09:23] It was already sort of the beginning of the retreat.

Subject: [00:09:25] Yes, the general retreat. Yes.

Interviewer: [00:09:27] When was it, more or less? What day?

Subject: [00:09:29] It was, more or less, well, we started retreating, not only withdrawing from the frontline, we were moving in the direction of Zambrow and in general through the surrounding area because everybody was marching, during the night, yes, I remember different locations, I remember Wisniewo, I remember those other locations [inaudible] and we reached Zambrow.[25]

Interviewer: [00:09:51] When was that?

Subject: [00:09:53] On the 11th or maybe on the 10th. There was also... because the Germans were already there in that..., there was a major skirmish there and one of our soldiers probably died. We did not take any prisoners because that group was stronger. The regiment held out, the regiment was still operating and did not disperse at that point.

Interviewer: [00:10:15] Did you keep your horses?

Subject: [00:10:16] We still had our horses, and everything, the regiment was still combat-ready, had its commander and all squadrons. It was not until September 13th, the night of September 12th to 13th that we arrived in Olszewo, a village situated between Bransk and Lapy.[26] It was there that we encountered fierce resistance from the Germans. Heavy fighting erupted and there was a major exchange of fire. Very many, very many of our soldiers died there, more than twenty. The commanding officer of our regiment was still with us, he was wounded near Olszewo and so was I, among others. My immediate commanding officer, cavalry cadet Glusek, that was his name, died two meters away from me. I was covering him with my machine gun. I don't know how it happened. Apparently, the Germans must have... a shrapnel exploded and I was wounded in my neck, leg and hand. I still have the scars. And he just collapsed and

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[25] Zambrów is a small town, Wiśniewo is a village, both are in the Białystok region.

[26] Brańsk and Łapy are small towns, Olszewo is a village, all in the Białystok region.

never got up. He was standing maybe two meters away from me. After that, I was no longer capable of fighting. They took me to, what was his..., no, no in [inaudible], his name was, his name was, I also forgot that but maybe I can recall it later.

Interviewer: [00:11:52] Well, it doesn't matter. Where did they take you? To a field hospital?

Subject: [00:11:54] No, no, to the encampment.

Interviewer: [00:11:55] Encampment?

Subject: [00:11:56] Enampment. Yes, to a physician, a standard procedure. I forgot the name of the orderly. And another one. They took me to a physician to..., at the time lieutenant Gerula was the head physician for our entire brigade. They took me to him. He tended to my wounds because they were not that horrific. Sure, I had multiple injuries but not life-threatening ones. He sent me back to the encampent. That was on September 13th or 14th. The encampment no longer followed the regiment. The regiment went more to the east, later reached Klodzko and engaged the enemy there. They fought until October 5th, until the end. I wasn't with the regiment during that period because I was wounded and we were sent in the direction of Grodno.[27] Our part of the unit went as far as Szczuczyn, Nowogrodzki. And there and there until [September] 17th. And we remained there, we were met by that army, we were disarmed by the Soviet Army and taken into captivity, no, I wasn't taken prisoner on that day yet.[28] But we were already... Major Diaczenko disbanded our unit.[29] Everybody was on their own and, as it was not possible to reach Warsaw, we went east.

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[27] Before World War II, Grodno was a city in Białystok Province. Today it is found in Belarus and called Hrodna.

[28] Prajs refers to the Soviet Army. He uses the terms 'Russia' and 'Russians' as equivalent with 'Soviet Union' and 'Soviets.'

[29] Petro Diaczenko (Ukr. Petro Dyachenko) (1895-1965): captain in the Russian Army (World War I), colonel in the Ukrainian People's Army (1917-1921), major in the Polish Army (1928-1939), officer in the a 31. Schutzmannschaft-Bataillon, commander of Panzerjagd-Brigade Vilna Ukraina (1945), colonel in the Ukrainian National Army (1945) and commander of the 2nd Division UNA.

Interviewer: [00:13:30] Please tell me: Was it the 17th?

Subject: [00:13:31] It was September 17th.

Interviewer: [00:13:32] September, the Soviet Union declared war, engaged in the war, yes, against Poland.

Subject: [00:13:36] Well, at the time I was already, I was no longer taking part [in combat] because I had been wounded.

Interviewer: [00:13:40] Did you know about it at all? But you knew?

Subject: [00:13:42] What do you mean?

Interviewer: [00:13:43] It was no surprise to you that suddenly the Soviet Army units...?

Subject: [00:13:45] Well, it was a surprise, surprise, we went out and heard right away that the army, that is the Soviet troops entered that..., crossed the border and were moving in that direction capturing the whole... They were approaching, they were supposed to reach the Vistula River. That was... at the time. Obviously, our commanding officer, Witkowski, told us that we were not to fight with the Russians but surrender to them. But I was wounded at the time so I was not armed any longer, but I was still in my uniform and they took us into captivity. I stayed there 2 or 3 days maybe.

Interviewer: [00:14:29] The Red Army, but where?

Subject: [00:14:31] The Red Army. In Szczuczyn, in Szczuczyn Nowogrodzki.[30]

Interviewer: [00:14:34] Did they set up camp in Szczuczyn?

Subject: [00:14:36] Szczuczyn Nowogrodzki.

Interviewer: [00:14:37] POW camp?

Subject: [00:14:38] Yes, not far from Liga. It was not a POW camp. They had just brought and, I mean, were bringing all that military personnel and took them away for internment because we were not far away, we were in... near Minsk,[31] Niehorele[32] or whatever this place is called. We were planting trees there and later the exchange of prisoners took place. Yes, and I at the time during that exchange... it was in December.

Interviewer: [00:15:04] Exchange of POWs?

Subject: [00:15:04] Exchange of POWs. I mean the Russians returned the Germans and the Poles wishing [to return to Poland], and they took back the Belarusians and the Ukrainians.[33]

Interviewer: [00:15:13] The exchange was between whom?

Subject: [00:15:15] The Russians, between the Russians and the Germans.

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[30] Before World War II, Szczuczyn Nowogródzki was a small town in Nowogródek Province. Today it is in Belarus.

[31] Minsk was the capital of Soviet Belarus; today it is the capital and the largest city of the Republic of Belarus.

[32] Location uncertain.

[33] The so-called exchange of prisoners was a result of the German-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Demarcation (September 28, 1939).

Interviewer: [00:15:16] That was in December.

Subject: [00:15:18] It was December.

Interviewer: [00:15:19] This means that you spent in fact a few months in captivity.

Subject: [00:15:21] Yes, I was interned those few months in Russia, behind Minsk, 40 kilometres beyond Minsk. We were clearing and planting forests there.

Interviewer: [00:15:30] And how was it? How did those Russians treat you?

Subject: [00:15:31] As far as their attitude goes, I will not, I will not say things that did not take place because as long as you did your allocated share of tree planting, so much and so much to plant, and logged it nicely, you were given, as far as possible, a portion of bread to live on, some 40 decagrams of bread, if I recall, and a soup. In the morning, we would get a cup of coffee and tinned food, tinned fish or other, nothing special but, being a prisoner, you could live on that.

Interviewer: [00:16:01] The Russians treated you in the same way as soldiers and civilians?

Subject: [00:16:06] No difference here. We were all prisoners; we were interned and we were not allowed to leave the area. A foreman, or whatever he was called, would take us into the wood in the morning and would walk us back to the camp in the evening, so much and so much, just like I told you. I could not manage my daily quota but there were two fellow soldiers from somewhere in Silesia or elsewhere.[34] I don't even remember their names, they helped me leave

[34] Before World War II, Silesia [Śląsk] was a region divided between Poland and Germany. Today it is in Poland.

captivity, so I managed to make that quota and was eligible to claim the lunch, that is the soup given to those who made the quotas.

Interviewer: [00:16:45] Did you know what was happening during the period leading up to December 1939?

Subject: [00:16:50] No, absolutely nothing.

Interviewer: [00:16:52] In Poland, family, nothing, Germany?

Subject: [00:16:54] I knew nothing but they, but they didn't know about me, and I didn't know about them. I didn't write any letters because there was no way to write them.

Interviewer: [00:17:04] Did you know that Warsaw had been captured, for instance, that the Germans…?

Interviewer: [00:17:07] Yes, we knew.

Interviewer: [00:17:08] How did you know? Because that…

Subject: [00:17:09] Because we could not get here.

Interviewer: [00:17:10] Were the Russians saying that? Or?

Subject: [00:17:12] The Russians told us that Warsaw had surrendered: 'Don't worry, we are taking you into captivity now and later we will fight the Germans together'. Those, in general, were their [inaudible]

Interviewer: [00:17:23] The prisoners were swapped in December, right?

Subject: [00:17:29] Yes, the swap was later. I returned here to, to Warsaw and, thereafter, to Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:00:16] But how did it happen? You mean you were given civilian clothing?

Subject: [00:17:37] No, yes, I received civilian clothing from an acquaintance. I simply got a plain jacket from an acquaintance back in Szczuczyn. Because I had my own pants and boots. He gave me a cap and a jacket, and I kept my army-issue sweater. I still had a blanket and so I managed somehow in the end.

Interviewer: [00:17:59] And you decided to return home to Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:18:01] To Gora Kalwaria. Of course, I later regretted that I had gone back after seeing what was going on.

Interviewer: [00:18:04] But how did you travel there? By train?

Subject: [00:18:07] I travelled normally, from Lapy. I got to Lapy from Bialystok and from there to Warsaw and from Warsaw to Gora Kalwaria, normally by train. When [I arrived] in December, everybody [inaudible] was baffled that I came back in one piece and was still alive. We had a meeting of various residents of Gora Kalwaria, the Jews and the Poles, right away. They asked me what the situation was like, and I told them my story and how things were in general.

Interviewer: [00:18:34] Were there any Germans in Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:18:36] There were. There were Volksdeutsche.[35]

Interviewer: [00:18:39] But were there…

Subject: [00:18:39] Rather large colonies.

Interviewer: [00:18:41] Were there any repressions against the Jews during that period?

Subject: [00:18:45] Not before the war, not before the war. After the war.

Interviewer: [00:18:46] No, I'm talking about that first period in 1939, let's say from September to December, when you came to be there?

Subject: [00:18:52] Where?

Interviewer: [00:18:52] In Gora Kalwaria, did the Jewish population or your mother tell you anything about the arrival of the Germans?

Subject: [00:18:57] Sure, they did. Volksdeutsche joined straightaway what do you call them… They joined the blue…, black police and were in that Schutzpolizei, whatever it was called, and the repressions began right away. The Jews had to report, those aged 16 to 60, had to report for work. I also wrote about that. That was was obligatory. And immediately one of those Jews, a young boy, Mojsze Cybula was his name, Moszek Cebula took a crumb of bread and was killed

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[35] In the Third Reich, ethnic Germans born outside the Reich were considered *Volksdeutsche*. In Nazi terminology, these were "people whose language and culture had German roots but did not have German citizenship." Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Polacy w Wehrmachcie* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), 52-54.

by a German. Thereafter, Pinio Rawski was also killed when leaving the synagogue by the Germans, too. That all happened during the period. And very many young persons fled Gora Kalwaria at that point. Still in Sept…, still in October.

Interviewer: [00:19:49] And tzaddik Elster [Alter] from Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:19:51] The tzaddik from Gora Kalwaria emigrated to Warsaw.

Interviewer: [00:19:55] You mean he fled, left for Warsaw and later moved to America?

Subject: [00:19:57] They took him to Warsaw. He was offered protection in Warsaw, and he could not be seen at all, in general.

Interviewer: [00:20:03] What do you mean… who took him? The Germans took him?

Subject: [00:20:05] No, he was taken by the Jews.

Interviewer: [00:20:08] The Jews? Yes?

Subject: [00:20:08] The Jews took him, yes, at the time.

Interviewer: [00:20:09] But what happened to him afterward?

Subject: [00:20:10] He later lived in Warsaw; I don't know where he lived in Warsaw.

Interviewer: [00:20:15] No, he left for America.

Subject: [00:20:16] He, no, he left for Warsaw in 1939. From Warsaw he was there in that..., he was probably in hiding in a shoemaker's workshop. When the Germans searched the premises, not specifically for the tzaddik but in general, they entered a room and saw him sitting on a stool holding a hammer. The Germans did not go after craftsmen, shoemakers etc. in the beginning. And he stayed there for some time. Thereafter, as far as his emigration, he didn't travel to America but was taken to Trieste. He was assisted by the Italian embassy, specifically by a Pole by the name of Stefan Porajski,[36] a cousin of our president Moscicki.[37] He worked at the Italian embassy and issued paperwork with the help of the Italian ambassador. They bribed the Gestapo or SS personnel. I don't recall whom exactly. In fall 1942, they ordered a whole train car to Rome. And, thus, thus the rabbi with his family got out of Warsaw.

Interviewer: [00:21:43] I see and...

Subject: [00:17:29] And he travelled to Trieste.

Interviewer: [00:21:45] And you, your family and in general all residents of Gora Kalwaria, Jewish residents, of course...

Subject: [00:21:49] We were forcibly relocated.

Interviewer: [00:21:50] But no, my question is whether you didn't feel betrayed given that your, sort of, spiritual leader...

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[36] Stefan Porayski (1885-1944), Polish diplomat and high-ranking state official.

[37] Ignacy Mościcki (1867-1946), President of Poland from 1926 to 1939.

Subject: [00:21:56] It's hard to say. It depends on your point of view. It depends what they thought, what their point of view was. If somebody is a believer, if somebody in general thinks that it, that it was actually divine retribution or something else, I myself...

Interviewer: [00:22:12] No, I'm talking about something else, you know, because, for instance, part of the Jewish leadership.

Subject: [00:22:15] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:22:17] When the war had started, they fled east.

Subject: [00:22:20] Yes, some of them, some of them did.

Interviewer: [00:22:21] Revisionists, Begin... the rabbi from Gora Kalwaria was an example of somebody who, sort of, fled, abandoned... But there were cases of people who returned, for example, Antek Cukierman.

Subject: [00:22:30] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:22:30] Who returned from Vilnius to Warsaw.

Subject: [00:22:31] Yes, he did.

Interviewer: [00:22:32] And the question is whether, whether the Jewish community from Gora Kalwaria did not feel abandoned by their leader when in need, whether there was no [inaudible]

Subject: [00:22:42] I'm not going to say what I don't know but there is no doubt that a portion of the Jewish population was certainly upset that the tzaddik was leaving. I mean that he was leaving Gora Kalwaria at all. But others…, it needs to be said that he left via the Vistula River. He reached the river and got to Warsaw somehow on a timber float, not by train but by the Vistula River. His followers and, specifically, that that that entourage of his, decided to evacuate him, right. And he, the rabbi, even wanted to say himself as I read in his memoirs that he wasn't exactly pleased that he was leaving. But he was right to leave because when the Germans arrived, they went looking for him immediately.

Interviewer: [00:00:29] Good. So, tell me now: you return to Gora Kalwaria in December. Is that right?

Subject: [00:23:33] Yes, it is.

Interviewer: [00:23:34] It was December. What did you see in Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:23:37] What did I see? It was a tragedy. Because Germans in general, like I said, among other things, I was made to clear roads. I had to remove snow from roads for free. I had to go to work and, in general, carry out various dirty jobs like many other people.

Interviewer: [00:23:58] Tell me, when you went back to Gora Kalwaria, were there armbands already? Or not yet?

Subject: [00:24:03] Yes, there were armbands already.

Interviewer: [00:24:04] There were? And you put on an armband?

Subject: [00:24:06] Sure I did.

Interviewer: [00:24:07] Because everybody knew you?

Subject: [00:24:08] Well, yes.

Interviewer: [00:24:10] What did your mother and fam… and your brother and sister say?

Subject: [00:24:12] The same as everybody else.

Interviewer: [00:24:13] What did they tell you about the first period?

Subject: [00:24:16] My mother was rather unhappy. She kept saying: 'Pity you didn't tell me you were coming, you should have stayed where you were because now you can see what is awaiting us here'. But we stayed almost the whole year in Gora Kalwaria, and it wasn't until February 25th or 26th that the general forced relocation took place.

Interviewer: [00:24:38] 1941?

Subject: [00:24:40] 1941. February 25th or 26th, 1941. The order came that all Jews were to leave the town.

Interviewer: [00:24:48] And until then?

Subject: [00:24:50] To the Warsaw ghetto.

Interviewer: [00:24:52] No, I mean until February 1941. How was it?

Subject: [00:24:54] By February, Germans had set up the ghetto in Gora Kalwaria in July 1940. They were setting up the ghetto. The Polish population had to move into the Jewish flats and the Jews had to move into the Polish flats where the ghetto was.

Interviewer: [00:25:15] Because residents, I understand, the Polish and Jewish residents mixed in general?

Subject: [00:25:21] They were mixed so some had to leave, and others came.

Interviewer: [00:25:24] In July?

Subject: [00:25:25] In July.

Interviewer: [00:25:26] The ghetto was set up in July 1940.

Subject: [00:25:28] Starting from July, from July onward.

Interviewer: [00:25:29] And what was it like until July?

Subject: [00:25:31] The Jews could still go outside the town, when possible, they could buy food until July. Only work was compulsory. They had to report for work: 60, 100 or 50 persons, as many as requested by the Germans.

Interviewer: [00:25:49] But who?

Subject: [00:25:49] Aged 16 to thir... to 60.

Interviewer: [00:25:51] Who decided about the persons going to work?

Subject: [00:25:53] Well, the mayor. The mayor of the town of Gora Kalwaria. At the time, it was a German called Janke.

Interviewer: [00:25:59] There was no Judenrat [Jewish Council] in Gora Kalwaria?[38]

Subject: [00:26:02] There was and the Judenrat designated the people for work.

Interviewer: [00:26:04] Designated.

Subject: [00:26:05] Yes, the Judenrat.

Interviewer: [00:26:06] Who were the members [of the Judenrat]?

Subject: [00:26:07] Members of the Judenrat?

Interviewer: [00:26:09] Yes, who were they?

Subject: [00:26:10] Well, there were the Orthodox Jews... there were the Hasidic Jews and the progressive Jews, the same leaders that were there before

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[38] The *Judenrat* was an administrative body imposed by Nazi Germany within the ghettos. The Germans required Jews to form a Judenrat in every community in the occupied territories.

Interviewer: [00:26:15] Meaning those were...

Subject: [00:26:17] It was a Jewish community, so it was the leadership of the community, still activelater.

Interviewer: [00:26:21] Were they relatively known activists?

Subject: [00:26:23] Activists, known activists from every organization. The majority were the Orthodox Jews because they were the largest group.

Interviewer: [00:26:30] Did it happen in the same way as in other towns and cities? When the Germans arrived in Gora Kalwaria, they summoned one of the Jewish elders?

Subject: [00:26:36] Yes, yes, yes, just the same, [they summoned] the elder and said that the Jews were to comply with all orders and regulations issued by the Germans. Otherwise, there was death penalty even though the ghetto was not in place yet.

Interviewer: [00:26:49] And compulsory work.

Subject: [00:26:51] Compulsory. Work was compulsory, compulsory.

Interviewer: [00:26:55] You mean 60 persons? Were all involved in that work?

Subject: [00:26:57] Everybody, there was no difference. Everybody, each person designated [inaudible] by the Judenrat had to report... for work in front of the town hall starting from 7 am.

The Germans would then come and take them to perform various onerous jobs. It was predominantly dirty work such as cleaning toilets, stables etc.

Interviewer: [00:27:22] It is not... Did the Judenrat designate all persons or were there some people who did not work?

Subject: [00:27:29] In rare cases. Probably the sick and the elderly.

Interviewer: [00:27:33] Did you have any permanent job at the time?

Subject: [00:27:35] Did I have a permanent job? Well, as as...

Interviewer: [00:27:37] In addition to forced labor assignments.

Subject: [00:27:38] A tailor, I sewed in my free time because customers would come to me. The Catholics came to me as long as they were allowed. I sewed for them whenever I could. Of course, I charged very low rates but at least I could sew.

Interviewer: [00:27:50] And where did you...

Subject: [00:27:52] During that period.

Interviewer: [00:27:53] During that period.

Subject: [00:27:54] Yes, yes.

Interviewer: [00:27:54] Were you also involved in that forced labor assignments?

Subject: [00:27:57] Well, of course. When I was designated for work, I had to report at 7 am and work until 4 or 5 pm. I still had some free time so I could, I had to do something.

Interviewer: [00:28:09] And how was it?

Subject: [00:28:10] It was hard, believe me.

Interviewer: [00:28:12] What kind of work did you do?

Subject: [00:28:13] I had to go and clear snow from roads. I once had to go to the barracks and take out some garbage. One time they took me to the stables because they knew that I had been in the army and that I am familiar with the job. I was told to clean those... I had to remove horse manure from stables. Well, I did all that. Obviously, later on they took us into the ghetto, then from the ghetto...

Interviewer: [00:28:41] How about your mother?

Subject: [00:28:43] My mother was an elderly woman. She was suffering from poor health, so they didn't take her to work. She stayed at home as far as possible. When she felt well enough, she continued to sew as long as she was allowed to. And later she couldn't sew, the customers stopped coming because it was forbidden.

Interviewer: [00:28:58] During that period until July 1940, was there hunger, for example?

Subject: [00:29:03] We were hungry from day one.

Interviewer: [00:29:04] From day one.

Subject: [00:29:05] From day one. In Gora Kalwaria, 80% of the Jewish population were poor. Just poor people. Those 20% were, more or less, craftsmen and merchants and such. They were slightly better off. You could count rich people on the fingers of your hands only. There were maybe five or six rich persons.

Interviewer: [00:29:23] Did the Judenrat organize any help for the poor? Did they hand out [food]?

Subject: [00:29:27] Well, they arranged lunches.

Interviewer: [00:29:28] Lunches?

Subject: [00:29:29] From the moment they had organized themselves, the Judenrat was established, and they started offering lunches but what difference would those lunches make? What that lunch, that little soup, could change for those poor?

Interviewer: [00:29:44] For all?

Subject: [00:29:45] Whoever wanted could get that lunch.

Part 3

Interviewer: [00:00:02] So in July 1940 you moved to the ghetto?

Subject: [00:00:07] We were already inside the ghetto in July 1940. The surroundings of the ghetto and the ghetto itself were sealed off completely.

Interviewer: [00:00:16] But how was it in your case?

Subject: [00:00:20] Well, normal.

Interviewer: [00:00:21] Because you were living at home?

Subject: [00:00:23] I liv… I continued to live in the same place because the ghetto was located where I lived.

Interviewer: [00:00:27] I see.

Subject: [00:00:28] Yes, it was.

Interviewer: [00:00:29] That's good.

Subject: [00:00:30] I didn't have to move anywhere. Nonetheless, it was a tragedy. Others came. We had to take them in.

Interviewer: [00:00:36] Whom?

Subject: [00:00:37] Well, other… Jews.

Interviewer: [00:00:38] From Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:00:40] Yes, only from Gora Kalwaria. They came from the neighboring villages. There was a number of families, they lived in Czersk, Potycz, they all travelled to Gora Kalwaria, and we had to take them all in.[39]

Interviewer: [00:00:53] What did the ghetto look like?

Subject: [00:00:55] The ghetto... You would have to see for yourselves what it looked like. Because the whole area was fenced... that dedicated part [of the town]. It was in Gora Kalwaria, an area made of a section of Dominikanska Street, the market square, the whole market square, Strazacka Street as well as a short section of Pijarska Street. It had a shape of a wedge, more or less, and Kalwaryjska Street. Yes, the Jews were not allowed to go any further, they could just get to that point [inaudible] and it was not locked up at all, only fenced, with barbed wire in one place, and where the street was, that street was passable, open. However, you were not allowed to venture out. If you did, you paid with your life.

Interviewer: [00:01:43] Well, was there a gate to be crossed?

Subject: [00:01:46] No gate, there was no gate because it was impossible to build a gate there. After all, it was Gora Kalwaria with open streets.

Interviewer: [00:01:54] Well, you said there was a fence?

Subject: [00:01:55] The area was fenced off in one place only, in Strazacka Street so that you could not go in the direction of the Vistula River. This is why the fence was there. That's correct.

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[39] Czersk and Potocz are villages near Gora Kalvaria.

Interviewer: [00:02:06] But you said that you were living in which street at the time, Dominikanska Street?

Subject: [00:02:10] I used to live, no, I lived in Pilsudskiego Street.

Interviewer: [00:02:12] OK.

Subject: [00:02:13] That's right. And that is precisely where the ghetto was. Poles lived in my neighborhood, for instance, Catholics, not Poles but Catholics. Wozniak, Rytko and Jarosz lived there. And they and they had to move to other Jewish flats and the Jews moved into their flats instead.

Interviewer: [00:02:33] Was anyone moved also into your flat?

Subject: [00:02:36] One person from the countryside was also placed in my flat as an additional resident.

Interviewer: [00:02:41] So there were already four of you, right?

Subject: [00:02:44] Yes, four, four.

Interviewer: [00:02:46] I mean, your family?

Subject: [00:02:48] Five persons.

Interviewer: [00:02:48] There were five of you already there, right?

Subject: [00:02:49] We were five in that one small flat. The flat was probably a 6 to 5 meter room. And so, we had to squeeze in there until the 25th, 25 February 1941.

Interviewer: [00:02:59] What was that period of seven months like?

Subject: [00:03:02] Dreadful. In general, that period was... With 10 persons squeezed into every single flat, people started to [inaudible] from a severe illness. Typhoid fever came and there were no medications. In general, there was very little food. Poor people could only go to the kitchen in the commune and eat a meal, they would get a small piece of bread. And that's how they got by. There was no help. Those better off Jews had to make contr... contributions because they had to build a bath house for those, for not, for the Jewish population even, they had to build it and had to allocate their own money toward the construction. Once the bath house was built and ready, Jews were forcibly relocated. They were forced to relocate.

Interviewer: [00:04:01] Was there also a Jewish police force in the ghetto or was it set up?[40]

Subject: [00:04:04] There was a Jewish police force. Yes, there was. They could hardly be called the police. It wasn't exactly the police. They more more like security staff.

Interviewer: [00:04:14] Responsible for keeping order.

Subject: [00:04:15] Right. But they did not beat anyone. They normally designated people [for work] and came to flats and summoned people to work. That was their task. They were appointed by the Jewish commune.

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[40] The Jewish Ghetto Police (*Jüdische Ghetto-Polizei*) or Jewish Police Service (*Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*) were auxiliary police units organized within the ghettos by the local Judenrat.

Interviewer: [00:04:28] Please tell me one thing, in your case personally or possibly in the case of your family, what was the change between the period before the ghetto and the period after the ghetto? Because you lived in the same flat, didn't you?

Subject: [00:04:39] In the same flat.

Interviewer: [00:04:41] Even though they placed an additional person in your flat.

Subject: [00:04:44] That's right. That man had to live with us. There was a storage unit next to our flat. We made a room out of that storage unit so that the man could live there. That's how it was, unfortunately.

Interviewer: [00:04:57] In what sense did the situation take a turn for the worse?

Subject: [00:05:01] The situation deteriorated by full 100%. We could not go out. We were not allowed to. Nobody, no one could come to see us. We couldn't do anything. Hunger got to the point, how do you say it, it got to the point that was unimaginable. So people started dying. A lot of people died during that period. Very many people. They could still be buried. That was not forbidden by the Germans. When someone died, they still allowed for him to be taken to the cemetery. So, the conditions were dire.

Interviewer: [00:05:34] I understand that you were in contact with your friends, with the Poles? With Catholics?

Subject: [00:05:40] With the Poles no. If only... if they could give us bread, they would do so during the night and even then, in total secrecy.

Interviewer: [00:05:47] But when you went back to Kalwaria, Gora Kalwaria...

Subject: [00:05:51] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:05:52] You obviously turned to your friends, colleagues and so on in December 1939.

Subject: [00:05:56] Yes, I did. Very much so, I was was very... we are still friends very much. Many persons felt sorry for me, after all, and they would come to me even during that period, for instance, Jozek Lewandowski would come and bring me firewood. He brought me firewood. Already somewhere during 1939.

Interviewer: [00:06:17] I understand. And that was until July?

Subject: [00:06:19] As late as July. And they brought firewood even in 1940. The people we knew brought us potatoes. They gave them to us. As far as hunger is concerned, my family had everything they needed, together with me. We did not experience hunger. We did not have any delicacies but no hunger either, there was no situation where we would have nothing to eat, no potatoes or some groats to put into the pot. We had those. We could even support that man living next to us.

Interviewer: [00:06:46] With the help of your friends?

Subject: [00:06:48] Well, with the help of my Catholic friends, the Poles.

Interviewer: [00:06:54] And in July 1941 you felt you were cut off from them?

Subject: [00:06:57] Back in 1940, any contact was out of the question. The Poles were not allowed into the ghetto and we had completely different conditions in general. It was bad already.

Interviewer: [00:07:06] So you were sort of isolated at the time, right?

Subject: [00:07:10] We were already cut off from the outside world. Exiting the ghetto was punishable by death in general. And some paid with their life. Some who escaped altogether and did not even go out [of the ghetto] to seek help from friends. Those who did not manage to return, as we used to say, on time, were shot dead in the street.

Interviewer: [00:07:31] Were the Germans wandering through the ghetto also?

Subject: [00:07:34] The Germans did not venture into the ghetto at all because they were afraid of typhoid fever. But they did go round the ghetto. There was usually the blue police inside the ghetto.

Interviewer: [00:07:44] Did you have any family outside Gora Kalwaria? In Warsaw, for instance?

Subject: [00:07:47] What did it look like?

Interviewer: [00:07:48] No, did you have any family in Warsaw, for instance?

Subject: [00:07:50] I had family in Warsaw. I had an uncle.

Interviewer: [00:07:52] And there were contacts?

Subject: [00:07:54] No.

Interviewer: [00:07:54] There was absolutely nothing?

Subject: [00:07:56] No, there was no contact already. We could write but at the time [inaudible] there was no more contact.

Interviewer: [00:08:01] I see.

Subject: [00:08:04] When I came back from the army, I managed to visit my uncle. When I returned to Warsaw. I went to Gora Kalwaria on my way from his place.

Interviewer: [00:08:13] Did you know more or less what was happening in Warsaw during that period? Did you know?

Subject: [00:08:19] About what?

Interviewer: [00:08:20] What was happening in general, about the ghetto uprising?

Subject: [00:08:23] There was no ghetto in Warsaw yet. The ghetto was established starting from October.

Interviewer: [00:08:26] Right.

Subject: [00:08:27] Of course, we knew. What do you think? We still knew. The Jews were being persecuted from day one. Street arrests, homicides. In general, everybody knew from the very start. All sensible Jews were aware of that.

Interviewer: [00:08:42] Do you recall any direct contact with the Germans from that initial period, let's say until February 1941?

Subject: [00:08:51] Myself, direct [contact] with the Germans?

Interviewer: [00:08:53] Yes, when you encountered or saw a German for the first time?

Subject: [00:08:55] Not really, except went I went to work on the embankment. We were building an embankment there in that, Podleze. There, I came into contact with a German. When I arrived, [he would say] 'Nimm die Muetze ab' [Take your cap off]. [He told me] to take [my cap] off so I did. Other than that, I had no contact with them.

Interviewer: [00:09:17] They never came into your home?

Subject: [00:09:19] Not into ours. There were robberies. Rich Jews were robbed by the Volksdeutsche. I mean Polizeischutz, the Volksdeutsche, were the robbers. They stole everything: clothes, cash, cigarettes and valuables from rich Jews. Regular robbery. They would come... in horse-drawn carriages and they would take everything. And that was it. We experienced nothing of the kind because we had nothing.

Interviewer: [00:09:54] I understand.

Subject: [00:09:54] We had nothing but poverty and that one machine standing at home.

Interviewer: [00:10:00] Sewing machine?

Subject: [00:10:01] Sewing machine, a Singer.

Interviewer: [00:10:03] Did you use it?

Subject: [00:10:04] Yes, I still managed to use it. My mother took it to Warsaw if I am not mistaken.

Interviewer: [00:10:12] That was in February 1941.

Subject: [00:10:14] In 1941.

Interviewer: [00:10:15] Forced relocation to Warsaw.

Subject: [00:10:17] Yes, there was forced relocation to Warsaw.

Interviewer: [00:10:19] How did they announce that forced relocation?

Subject: [00:10:21] The usual way. There was an order from the Judenrat that all Jews, children, older persons and the sick alike, whoever it was, were to report in front of the town hall at 7 am on [February] 25th, their number specified, and on the 26th, their number specified again, and they were to take with them only a small package as hand luggage and were not permitted to carry anything else. People cried a lot. It was unimaginable. All those things happening at the time. But that was nothing. And it was the blue police, not the gendarmerie, that led the Jews to the train. It was the so-called ciuchcia [tank locomotive]. Jews boarded the train's cars and were taken to Warsaw. And from there they walked.

Interviewer: [00:11:04] Did everybody know that [the train was going] to Warsaw?

Subject: [00:11:06] To Warsaw.

Interviewer: [00:11:07] What were you thinking at the time? I mean not now but then?

Subject: [00:11:09] I wasn't there anymore. I ran away to Magnuszow probably two or three days earlier. Because there were still Jews in Magnuszow. The Jews were not relocated from Magnuszow until 1942.

Interviewer: [00:11:19] Why did you run away?

Subject: [00:11:22] Why did I run away? Because I felt that, maybe I knew that there were still Jews in Magnuszow. I was a tailor by profession so I thought that I could manage somehow to reach them and that was what actually happened. When travelling on foot from Gora Kalwaria, I stayed at some Polish flats. I have to admit that they offered me shelter because they were not yet threatened with death penalty at the time. They offered me shelter.

Interviewer: [00:11:54] You mean you ran away to Magnuszow?

Subject: [00:11:56] Yes, to Magnuszow. And I lived there, too.

Interviewer: [00:11:57] So as not to be forcibly relocated to Warsaw, right? It was that?

Subject: [00:11:59] No, I didn't want to end up in the ghetto because I felt that there are still some Jews out there and I can still manage.

Interviewer: [00:12:05] Because you had been told, your family had been told that the trip to Warsaw was in fact a trip to the ghetto, is that correct?

Subject: [00:12:10] That it was [a trip] to the ghetto. We all knew that it was a trip to the ghetto right from the start. The Warsaw ghetto had already been in place since October.[41] And the ghetto in Gora Kalwaria had been operating since July. We knew they were going to the ghetto. At the time, my sister, my brother and my mother went there. Me being slightly more..., how do you say. They were telling me that I didn't look like a Jew, that I could move freely and that I could escape. And that is what happened.

Interviewer: [00:12:39] Why didn't you run away earlier? You spoke Polish. You looked...

Subject: [00:12:42] How could I run away with my family around? Why would I run away when still [inaudible]?

Interviewer: [00:12:46] You felt responsible for your family?

Subject: [00:12:47] Well, it would have been a pity to leave my mother behind. I didn't want to leave my sister and my brother behind. It would have been a pity.

Interviewer: [00:12:54] How much younger than you was your brother?

Subject: [00:12:57] He was three years younger than me. My sister was two years older than me. She was born in 1914.

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[41] The Warsaw Ghetto was established on October 12, 1940. The ghetto was enclosed by a high wall topped with barbed wire, and closely guarded to prevent movement between the ghetto and the rest of Warsaw. The population of the ghetto, increased by Jews compelled to move in from nearby towns, was estimated to reach over 400,000.

Interviewer: [00:13:05] They couldn't escape?

Subject: [00:13:06] Golda and David, my brother. No, they couldn't. Where were they supposed to escape to? They could have run away to Russia in 1939.

Interviewer: [00:13:13] No, I'm talking about escaping from the ghetto.

Subject: [00:13:15] Oh, no. They couldn't escape. It was the same story everywhere. They were poor children. They didn't have money to escape. Their clothes were all they had. Running away wasn't that easy either. I could just only manage because I had that profession. I can say that I survived owing to the fact that I was a tailor by profession.

Interviewer: [00:13:36] So you ran away to Magnuszow?

Subject: [00:13:39] To Magnuszow.

Interviewer: [00:13:40] And what is that Magnuszow? Is it a town?

Subject: [00:13:44] It's, it's in the Radom province. It will probably be the Radom province right now.[42] It's situated 19 km to the south of Gora Kalwaria, near Kozienice.

Interviewer: [00:13:58] You said that you had decided to travel to Magnuszow because there were Jews there.

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[42] This information is inaccurate. Manguszew is not a town but a village in the Radom province [*województwo radomskie*] according to the administrative division during the years 1975-1999. Today it is in Mazovia province [*województwo mazowieckie*].

Subject: [00:14:01] Yes. I rented a little flat there from Wojtas. I lived there, I rented a flat from Edward Wojtas. He was a blacksmith and owned a small flat. I worked there as a tailor for a whole year until the forced relocation.

Interviewer: [00:14:16] As who? As a Pole, as a Catholic or as a Jew?

Subject: [00:14:19] As, no, normally still as a Jew. Because Jews were still there as before.

Interviewer: [00:14:24] I have to admit that there is one thing I don't understand. You were in the army. You said you were a cavalry man.

Subject: [00:14:30] Later, later, later, we will come to that.

Interviewer: [00:14:32] No, why didn't you choose to identify as a Pole?

Subject: [00:14:35] Well...

Interviewer: [00:14:36] Instead of choosing a Jewish identity? Why didn't you escape passing yourself for a Pole and not a Jew?

Subject: [00:14:40] At the time when I emigrated as a Jew, I even travelled from Gora Kalwaria to Magnuszow as a Jew. And I lived in Magnuszow, I lived there as a Jew.

Interviewer: [00:14:51] Why?

Subject: [00:14:51] Because, why was I supposed to run away from my people? Why would I do it at a time when they were still there? I stayed with them as long as they were alive. The subsequent period had just began, the one I will talk about.

Interviewer: [00:15:05] I understand. Good. Good.

Subject: [00:15:08] Yes. So I was living in the flat rented from Wojtas.

Interviewer: [00:15:12] Yes.

Subject: [00:15:14] People I knew would come to see me. I sewed pants, clothes and jackets for them until 1942. It went on until probably July or June. There was no ghetto there until July. Yes, in Magnuszow. In July...

Interviewer: [00:15:35] And were there armbands?

Subject: [00:15:36] Yes, there were armbands. Armbands were obligatory. The same as everywhere. They opened the ghetto in July. And the ghetto was in place for two months only in the whole of Magnuszow. That ghetto did not operate any longer.

Subject: [00:15:55] I had friends. I had friends. One of them was Jan [?] Cwyl, a Pole, a close friend of mine.

Subject: [00:16:09] He advised me to get a birth certificate. I went, what is the name of that place, to Osiecko to a Roman Catholic parish to see the priest and I asked for a birth certificate and the priest provided me with a birth certificate issued in the name of Feliks Zoladek. I had

draft registration cards and a Kennkarte issued[43]. Roman Szczedlinski from Magnuszow had it issued for me. He had the Kennkarte issued for me. With the help of that Kennkarte I pretended to be a Pole by the name of Feliks Zoladek. I managed to get… and Jan Cwyl kept me at his home for around a month during that period. Later, he suggest… a mov… and I stayed with Wdowiak in the same neighborhood near Magnuszow. At Wdowiak's place, I sewed for them as a Pole already. They were aware of my heritage but I was already living as a Pole.

Interviewer: [00:17:16] And on what basis did the priest issue a birth certificate to you?

Subject: [00:17:19] The priest didn't want anything.

Interviewer: [00:17:20] But on what bas… did the priest know that you were a Jew?

Subject: [00:17:22] Sure, I did tell him who I was. He gave me a blessing and, how do you say it, said Godspeed.

Interviewer: [00:17:29] And that Feliks Zoladek. Who was he?

Subject: [00:17:33] He was Polish.

Interviewer: [00:17:34] A Pole who was no longer alive?

Subject: [00:17:35] Yes, he was already dead and from that very parish. This is very characteristic.

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[43] The *kennkarte*, an identity card, confirmed the identity and place of residence of its holder. It bore a photograph, a thumbprint, and the address and signature of its holder. It was the only document of its type issued to citizens of Poland during the Nazi occupation.

Interviewer: [00:17:41] But you returned to the same, to the same place, to Magnuszew, didn't you?[44]

Subject: [00:17:46] I didn't know those people at all. Then, I returned here.

Interviewer: [00:17:50] Just with another surname?

Subject: [00:17:52] Well, the surname was of no use because when I arrived and lived among those people and I sewed for them whatever I could. They knew that I was Prajs [Prais], that I was Heniek, they knew it all. But that [adopted] surname was used with the Germans so that the Poles wouldn't get into trouble. After all, they were threatened with death penalty. So that they could not be held responsible for me [inaudible]. 'He's a Pole. He arrived, had a Kennkarte so we took him in'.

Interviewer: [00:18:21] And how many Jews were there in Magnuszow during that period?

Subject: [00:18:25] They had already been forcibly relocated to Kozienice.

Interviewer: [00:18:29] They had been relocated and you saved yourself because of your surname?

Subject: [00:18:31] Yes, yes, exactly. Later, from there, from Magnuszow I went to Podwie…, no, no, not just yet. From Magnuszew, I went to Chmielew. There was still a camp. There, the Germans set up a forced labor camp where people would dig ditches. The only difference being

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[44] Magnuszew, a village on the left bank of the Vistula River, was inhabited by approximately 1,500 people, half of whom were Jewish and the other half Polish. The Germans set up an 'open ghetto' there on December 22, 1941, gathering into it 1,200 Jews.

they would do it in exchange for food. The Germans took various young Jews. They took them from Magnuszow to Chmielew. They took them, just like that.

Interviewer: [00:18:59] They took you, too?

Subject: [00:19:00] Me too.

Interviewer: [00:19:00] But

Subject: [00:19:01] Already as, as, still as Prajs [Prais]. I didn't tell anybody about that, the Kennkarte. I didn't even tell the Jews.

Interviewer: [00:19:07] Despite the fact that you carried that forged Kennkarte?

Subject: [00:19:09] I already had it. But I didn't tell them anything, no way, because I thought maybe I could rescue myself somehow, just maybe because... Everybody counted on the war not lasting too long. Well, nobody thought that the war would last. People kept saying that at the time England and France were already in it together with them, what do you call it, in the state of war. There were fights here and there, there were fights going on. We knew about it. I reached Chmielew.[45] I worked in Chmielew until December 1943, no, 194... 3, we are already in 1943.

Interviewer: [00:19:43] You worked in that Chmielew as who?

Subject: [00:19:48] Normally, as a Jew.

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[45] Chmielew is a small village on the left bank of the Vistula river, close to Magnuszew.

Interviewer: [00:19:49] Was it a labor camp?

Subject: [00:19:51] Yes, it was. It was sort of, not necessarily a camp in the full meaning of the word, just a forced labor camp, and we lived at a fire station. In primitive conditions.

Interviewer: [00:20:03] Were there only Jews in that camp?

Subject: [00:20:06] Jews only, Jews only.

Interviewer: [00:20:08] How many, how many were there, more or less?

Subject: [00:20:09] We could have been about 100.

Interviewer: [00:20:13] Where did you hide your Kennkarte?

Subject: [00:20:14] Well, I had it hidden there. I had a shirt, pants and a sweater. So I didn't tell anybody about it, not even the Jews. When the Germans forcibly relocated Jews from Chmielew to Kozienice, I went to Magnuszow. I had that Kennkarte and Janek Cwyl said to me: 'Heniek, come to my place'. That's what happened. I spent around one month at Cwyl's home and Janek Cwyl later took me to the Wdowiak family. I spent a few months there, too. I wish to point out that Wdowiak, in turn, because there was a German colony where Germans lived, spoke highly of that Kultz [?] and told me to go to that German and work for him. I was apprehensive at first and Wdowiak told me: 'Don't be afraid, I guarantee that German would not do you any harm'. So I worked for three months for that German. His name was Ferdynand Kultz [?]. I have nothing but great respect for him. He lived through the war and was asking around to find out whether I made it. He treated me very well. He gave me food, he gave me food. I sewed for him and his wife. I sewed whatever I could. After that period, he just told me 'I cannot keep you any longer' and he sent me back to Wdowiak. Wdowiak was afraid, too, and he told me: 'Listen, I will take you to the other side of the Vistula river'. To the right bank.

Interviewer: [00:21:54] Tell me, please, did you stay in Chmielew until December 1943?

Subject: [00:21:59] Yes, I did.

Interviewer: [00:21:59] In that camp?

Subject: [00:22:00] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:22:00] There, you lived through the Warsaw ghetto uprising and those other forced relocations?

Subject: [00:22:04] Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: [00:22:05] And your mother and brother and sister were in Warsaw at the time?

Subject: [00:22:09] They were already in the ghetto.

Interviewer: [00:22:10] Was there any contact?

Subject: [00:22:12] No, no. I only knew for sure that my mother had died. Because my sister was also relocated, my sister was in Glowaczow. And she was tak... from there. I saw my sister afterward in that period because she was in Glowaczow near Magnuszow. There were still Jews there, too.

Interviewer: [00:22:27] Did she escape? Or?

Subject: [00:22:29] She escaped from the ghetto.

Interviewer: [00:22:30] From the ghetto.

Subject: [00:22:31] Yes, yes. And my brother was there, too, my brother, I saw my brother in January 1943.

Interviewer: [00:22:35] Were there any...

Subject: [00:22:37] He also escaped from the Warsaw ghetto. He travelled from one village to another. As a saddler. He had managed to survive over a longer period of time before he was handed over to the Germans. He was killed by the Germans at the cemetery in Gora Kalwaria in spring 1944 probably. He was buried there and I made a symbolic grave for him. It's there.

Interviewer: [00:23:05] So there was contact with your family in the ghetto?

Subject: [00:23:07] Yes, there was contact with my family later. With my sister but not with my mother. I didn't see my mother. When the relocation happened, once I left Gora Kalwaria two or three days before the relocation, I never saw my mother again.

Interviewer: [00:23:18] Were there any letters? Nothing?

Subject: [00:23:19] Nothing.

Interviewer: [00:23:19] There was nothing.

Subject: [00:23:20] Once I sent some groats to my mother to the ghetto by a courier. Because I knew she was there but I had no letters.

Interviewer: [00:23:29] I'm a bit lost here. You said you were in Chmielew until December and then you returned to Magnuszow.

Subject: [00:23:39] To Magnuszow. Then, I escaped from Magnuszew.

Interviewer: [00:23:41] Did you return to Magnuszow already as Feliks Zoladek?

Subject: [00:23:45] No.

Interviewer: [00:23:45] Still under your own name?

Subject: [00:23:48] Yes. Still because nobody knew. It was neither Zoladek nor Prajs [Prais]. I returned with all Jews to Magnuszow on foot. From there, Jews were taken to Kozienice, also on foot. Jews were walking all the time.

Interviewer: [00:24:00] And where to? Kozienice, right?

Subject: [00:24:01] There was still some sort of a camp or such in Kozienice. And from there, they took Jews, I don't know where, whether to Treblinka or Majdanek.

Interviewer: [00:24:12] And you yourself?

Subject: [00:24:13] Many of us escaped in Magnuszow. I had a friend called Cwyl.

Interviewer: [00:24:22] Right.

Subject: [00:24:22] Yes. He helped me a little. He took me to a village and those who had no [friends] went wherever they could and those who could, escaped. Those who couldn't, were taken to Kozienice. I don't know at all what happened to them afterward. Whether they ever went to... Because there was also a camp in Kozienice and they merged them, or maybe deported Jews to Majdanek or Treblinka, one of those places, probably to Majdanek. They rather went to Majdanek from there.

Interviewer: [00:24:48] Yes.

Subject: [00:24:49] Yes. It was then, as I later said, that Cwyl passed me over to Wdowiak and Wdowiak passed me over to that German, that German, in turn...

Interviewer: [00:24:55] He was German? He was a Volksdeutsche?

Subject: [00:24:57] Yes, he was a Volksdeutsche and lived not far from Wdowiak. That's correct.

Interviewer: [00:25:02] He knew you from before the war?

Subject: [00:25:04] He, no, he didn't know me. Neither did Wdowiak. Only Cwyl knew me. Well, Cwyl didn't know me either. They only knew me from Magnuszow.

Interviewer: [00:25:12] They knew you as whom? As a Jew?

Subject: [00:25:16] They knew me as a Jew. Yes, as a Jew. And only later when I had my Kennkarte issued also in Magnuszow, Roman Szczudlinski also learned that I was a Jew because he had to, he had to take a picture of me. And then when he, you understand, I just pretended to be Zoladek on the other side, on the right bank of the Vistula river. There, they didn't know about me at all. They were guessing but did not know. No one knew I was a Jew because I was no longer in hiding there. I moved freely and went to a [Catholic] church.

Interviewer: [00:25:48] But that was later.

Interviewer: [00:25:50] Yes, that was later.

Interviewer: [00:25:51] Please tell me, did you stay with that German?

Subject: [00:25:53] Yes, I stayed for three months with that German.

Interviewer: [00:25:55] But you were a tailor?

Subject: [00:25:56] A tailor, I sewed for them.

Interviewer: [00:25:57] For everybody? Or just for that German?

Subject: [00:25:59] Just for that German. And there was another one who knew about me. His name was Arn… Arnbrandt [?] or something like that. He also knew about me that I'm there but I didn't sew for him. I just did pants for his son. Arnbrandt [?]. This seems to me was his name.

Interviewer: [00:26:12] Did you feel safe?

Subject: [00:26:16] I did at their house. I felt safe at their place.

Interviewer: [00:26:19] Did you also go to the town's center?

Subject: [00:26:21] No. No way. Absolutely not.

Interviewer: [00:26:23] But why not?

Subject: [00:26:23] How could I go out?

Interviewer: [00:26:24] Did everybody know you?

Subject: [00:26:25] After all, we were in the countryside. This was no town. In the countryside.

Interviewer: [00:26:27] In the countryside.

Subject: [00:26:28] In the countryside, yes. That was in Ostrów.[46] Ostrów.

Interviewer: [00:26:30] Were you known there?

Subject: [00:26:31] No. I was known only at Wdowiak's place and Cwyl's place but nobody knew me in that village and nobody betrayed me.

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[46] Ostrów is a village on the right bank of the Vistula River, today in the Mazovia Province [*województwo mazowieckie*]. Prajs refers here to the events of 1944.

Interviewer: [00:26:39] Let me tell you why I'm asking.

Subject: [00:26:41] Yes. It's characteristic that nobody betrayed me. I guess they liked me.

Interviewer: [00:26:46] There is one thing I don't understand.

Subject: [00:26:50] I'm one in a million who is lucky to have survived. One in a a million because some others survived because they were in hiding.I didn't go to great lengths to hide.

Interviewer: [00:27:00] You know when I talked, for instance in Israel, in Yad Vashem and in other places, to people who had survived the Holocaust, they would tell me, among other things, that they simply couldn't escape and they couldn't go to the countryside because they claimed they didn't 'look right' or their Polish was poor. But you served in the Polish army, 'looked right' and spoke good Polish without an accent. So why were you afraid to walk in the village, for example?

Subject: [00:27:27] Well, that was later, later I will talk about it toward the end. Later, Wdowiak knew... saw that people knew me in Ostrow, knew me from Magnuszow, as it is very close. They were apprehensive because terrible repressions were already in place and not only Jews but also many Poles were shot dead in 1943 and at the start of the year 1944 in Magnuszow. So Wdowiak told me: 'Listen Heniek, I would be better if you moved on. You can go to the other side [of the river] and find your way around there'. Right. As a Pole already, not any longer as Prajs [Prais] but Zoladek.

Interviewer: [00:28:01] But when? Was it already in 1943?

Subject: [00:28:05] It was, it was probably in 1943 or 1944, toward the end of 1943 in fall or or at the start of 1944 in January. It was probably already in January or February 1944.

Interviewer: [00:28:18] Right. And where did you go?

Subject: [00:28:22] I was generally in hiding at the time. I crossed the Vistula river and started hiding in bushes. I had no idea where to go. It was already spring, I think. I met a woman. Initially, she was scared when she saw me. I told her: 'Don't be afraid of me. I am..., I escaped from Warsaw. My name's so and so. Could you give me shelter somewhere, please?' At the beginning, she was afraid but later she started talking to me and said: 'Listen, I'm very poor, I live very modestly but I have a good heart so I'll take you home. Come, come to my place'.

Part 4

Interviewer: [00:00:01] You were talking about the meeting with that woman.

Subject: [00:00:05] Yes. she asked me. I mean I asked her, I begged her. And she said to me: 'Listen, I will go first. Just make sure that nobody sees you. You will come', she says, 'to my place in the evening and we will help you somehow'. So when I got to her place in the evening, there were many children. A poor household, a very poor household. But she took pity on me as we talked. I told her about it, I didn't hide my..., well, the fact that I was a Jew. I told her: 'Don't be afraid because I have a Kennkarte issued for such and such surname so not my real surname. You are not taking any risk here. You are just giving me refuge'. She was very pleased. Although they were poor, they happened to have a sewing machine at home. So I told her: 'Mrs Pokorska, that's very well. I'm a tailor by profession. When you walk home through the village and visit good friends that you have nothing to fear from, don't tell them that I'm a Jew. Tell them that a Pole from Warsaw is staying with you who is in hiding because he is a member of the resistance movement. Tell them that he can sew clothes and they can bring him clothes to sew. And we will make ends meet somehow'. She was very happy and she did as I told her to do. One day, the Germans came to the flat whether acting on a tip or by sheer chance. There was no way out. I couldn't escape. It was so unexpected. When the Germans came in, I cannot say at present whether it was divine power or it just happened like that but I wasn't afraid. I had no fear in me. I was bold with them. And I talked to them. They came in and looked at me. 'Who are you? I said: I'm that lady's son. 'Really?' 'Yes, I am'. I took my photo and put it on the table. I said: 'Look, I was supposed to go to Garwolin to have an ID card issued but I have no money at the moment and that's it'. He stared at me and saw that my face did not fit in with that place because, after all, it was a... So he turned to Mrs Pokorska and asked: 'Is this your son?'. And she replied: 'Yes, it is. And children, there are so many children at home'. Somehow I kept my cool.

In general, I just wasn't afraid. I was absolutely in no fear at all. But the German didn't seem to believe us. He asked once again what I was doing there. I said 'yes' because he noticed that I had been sewing something for somebody. A coat on a hanger. And that German says in German to the other: 'How come such coat is in this flat?' [Kuk was so ein schoen Mantel ist in so ein Haus].

Subject: [00:03:50] And I replied: 'The coat is not mine'. 'Was? Verstehen Sie Deutsch? [What? Do you understand German?]. And I play possum [?]. 'The children are not mine. The children are not mine'. And he asked me again: 'Was? Verstehen Sie Deutsch?' And I said: 'Father, my father is ill'. 'Ah, verdummter Mann' [Man, damn it!]. I knew already that I was safe. Those thoughts rash through your head. It's unbelievable. But he didn't pay attention to what I was saying but instead addressed that woman. And he asked the question in Polish because he was from Silesia. 'Is this your son?'. She replied: 'Yes, it is'. So he asked me what I did for a living. In Polish, too. So I told him: 'In summer, [he imitates the sounds made by drivers of horse-drawn carts] and in winter [he pretends to be flailing]'.

Subject: [00:18:57] 'Ah... A farmer?' 'A farmer'. Given that he talks to me, just talks to me, I know already that I'm safe. And I keep my cool throughout. I'm very much of control of myself. At the time, we were moonshining like every poor household during the Nazi occupation. From beetroot. They came close to me and one said to the other 'kuck, kuck' [Look, look]. And I said: 'Moonshine, beetroot, red beet juice, red beet juice, red beet juice'. 'Ah, verdummter Mann' Then, they left the flat and as they were leaving I realized I could be denounced as a Jew here because people said different thingsin the village, he didn't quite look like a Jew, he does go to church but nobody visits him and he doesn't really fit with the Pokorskis, their poor house. So maybe he is a Jew in hiding. And others would say 'how could he be a Jew if he goes to church?'. And that was the version [of the story] that the people in the village believed. But whether or not I might get denounced, I said to myself if they had showed interest in me, then I could no longer live in the flat. If they were to come in again, I'd better be out... I went outside and started stacking the firewood I chopped [inaudible] for winter. While doing so I watched them. At that point, one of them came back and asked [Mrs. Pokorska] once again: 'Is this really your son?' And she replied: 'Yes, he's my son'. Then I told her: 'If he comes back again, I'll try to run away, let him kill me then instead of….

Subject: [00:06:26] But they never returned. When it was over, my hair stood on end. This is very characteristic. Only after they were gone did I feel fear. After everything. That was

everything already but not quite. And I have to say something. Shame on them! After all that, one month later, more or less, they came for me at night. I suspect the people from the local NSZ [National Armed Forces][47] or WiN [Freedom and Independence, Polish right-wing anti-Communist underground military] unit.[48] [They asked] where I was. And Mrs. Pokorska told them I was not there. 'What do you mean he is not there? He was here today'. She said: 'He was but he is not here at the moment'. 'Don't tell him anything. We'll be back later'. It turned out that they had wanted to kill me. They got the order. I don't know from whom, whether it was from their... Let them hear it. Let them know it. I have nothing to hide here. I also had good friends in that village. They simply didn't care who I was.

Interviewer: [00:07:47] You mean your friends from before the war?

Subject: [00:07:49] No.

Interviewer: [00:07:49] From that period?

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[47] The National Armed Forces (*Nardowe Siły Zbrojne,* NSZ) was a conspiratorial military organization founded in Poland in 1942. The main goal of the NSZ was to fight for the independence of Poland and for new western borders along the Oder-Neisse line. The NSZ defined Polishness in cultural and racial terms, which could be passed down solely genetically, 'by blood.' The movement was particularly anti-Jewish, not only for cultural and religious reasons, but also because it perceived Jews as having taken jobs from Poles in the pre-war period. The primary goal of the NSZ was to build national and Catholic power in a one-party dictatorship state. The state proposed by the National Radicals was fascist. At the beginning of 1944 the NSZ had some 40,000 to 50,000 members. Rafał Wnuk and Sławomir Poleszak, *Zarys dziejów polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego*, in Sławomir Poleszak (ed.), *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944-1956* (Warsaw-Lublin: IPN 2020), xxv-xxviii.

[48]The Freedom and Independence Association (*Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość,* WiN) was a conspiratorial organization founded in September 1945 after the dissolving of the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*]. WiN was to be a social and political movement defending the rights of Polish citizens and Poland's independence. It called for free national elections and the restitution of the freedom of the press and of association. At the end of 1945 it had 60,000 members. WiN had a liberal-democratic conception of the state, although on socio-economic matters it adhered to Social Democratic traditions and to Catholic social teaching, and on some ownership issues to the National Democratic programme. The communist authorities fought it fiercely, with arrests gradually diminishing the organization. WiN conducted various activities: intelligence and counter- intelligence (collecting information on the army, the UB [Security Office, the secret police], and so on), information and propaganda, self-defense (including liberating political prisoners), and guerrilla warfare. The organization ceased to function at the end of 1947. Rafał Wnuk and Sławomir Poleszak, *Zarys dziejów polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego* in Sławomir Poleszak (eds.), *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944-1956* (Warsaw-Lublin: IPN 2020), xxii-xxiv.

Subject: [00:07:51] From that period. The liberation was to take place in a month or two. It was in April or May, and the Red Army came in July. They said: 'Heniek, be careful because they want to liquidate you'. During that period, two men came with a gun. Me and Mrs. Pokorska, we thought hard. There was a high bed. With a wooden board on the side. The bed had no straw mattress just straw. And she told me: 'You know what, Heniek, get into the bed and cover yourself with straw and I'll put the children on top of you'. And that's what we did. They came in and started asking questions and I could hear everything that was being said. They asked about this and that. They told Mrs. Pokorska: 'Listen, you're not to tell him anything. We'll be back. He'd better be there'. She didn't say a word. 'You're lying to us, bring a shovel because you'll be digging up your own grave'. They said that to Mrs. Pokorska. She took the shovel and went out with them [inaudible]. When they saw her grab the shovel, they might actually have thought that I wasn't there. This is typical. Let the whole world know that three or four small children were there. They didn't betray me, they didn't shout: 'He's here!' and they were not afraid. As soon as they had left, I went into hiding. I no longer hid in that flat. I wandered through fields and bushes, here and there. Mrs. Pokorska only brought me food. And so I was hiding for a few months wherever I could until the arrival of the Red Army. The Red Army entered the village of Podwierzbie[49] either in late July, on July 29th or 30th or on August 1st. At the time, I was lying on a levee nearby. I saw their reconnaissance unit, the so-called *razvedka*. They were armed and they looked at me. I wasn't unshaven because Mrs. Pokorska bought razor blades for me whenever she could. I shaved.

Subject: [00:10:05] I looked like a man. Even though malnourished and frail, I looked like a man. They asked me: 'Who are you?' And somehow I couldn't say a word either in Polish, Yiddish or Russian. After all, I had been there for a few months and I could speak some Russian. In the end, I said: 'I hid here, hid, here, I hid here'. And there happened to be a lieutenant who understood something. He was a Jew. He had an idea and he asked me: 'Who are you? Who are you?' And I said to him: 'I'm Yevrey'. The lieutenant stopped right away and told his soldiers to put down their weapons, not to keep them pointed at me. He said that they would come the following day and take me to their military commander. Bubnov [?], Major Bubnov [?], their military commander was nearby. And, true to their word, they came the following day and took me to Bubnov. Bubnov enlisted me in the Red Army as a *volnonayomniy*, a non-military volunteer. I sewed for them over a longer period of time. It was, let's say, in August, September and the offensive started in January. They kept me by their side until January, I wore an army

[49] Podwierzebie is a village on the right bank of the Vistula River, today in the Mazovia Province [*województwo mazowieckie*].

uniform but carried no weapon, nothing, and I just sewed uniforms and clothes and everything for them.

Interviewer: [00:11:47] In that village, right? In Podwierzbie?

Subject: [00:11:50] Yes, in Podwierzbie. Yes, in Podwierzbie and Podleze, Podwierzbie and Podleze, a neighboring village. And I stayed there until the end, they went to the... they went, I mean, the frontline advanced and I remained in that village with Mrs. Pokorska. I lived there over a longer period of time because I didn't know, because Gora Kalwaria was still occupied, Gora Kalwaria was still under occupation so I was in no hurry. I spent a few more months there and young people from Podwierzbie were very friendly to me. They really loved me. No, I'm using that word on purpose - they loved me. Girls were in love with me, literally. They liked me very much, I walked with them until I learned that the Jews from Russia had returned to Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:12:40] One more thing, you said that those people from NSZ [National Armed Forces] or WiN [Freedom and Independence] [Polish right-wing anti-Communist underground military] organizations were looking for you. Which means, however, that the residents of that village either knew or suspected that you were of Jewish heritage, didn't they?

Subject: [00:12:52] Yes, they did. Like I said, the village was divided. Of course, they knew. How could they not know? What I mean is that some said this and others said that. People are not dumb. They were aware that the holidays would come, the New Year's Eve or such and I would not go anywhere and I would always stay put. After all, I was there and Mrs. Pokorska had never mentioned that she had a cousin. But overall they liked me and treated me well. This is the sad truth. Truth must be told about how things were. There were such incidents and I know for a fact that NSZ militants had murdered Jews. After the liberation, after everything. Let them know it. Shame on them. Nonetheless, I'm polonized. I love Poland and that's why I chose not to emigrate. The woman who kept me, that family, was awarded the Yad Vashem medal. The trees have been planted.

Interviewer: [00:13:50] You mean you submitted the relevant application?

Subject: [00:13:52] Yes, yes, I did. I'm in touch with that family until the present day. They respect me a lot. They call me uncle. I'm like an uncle to them. They are like a sister, like a brother to me. I respect those people. I brought them from that village to Gora Kalwaria later. They live here till the present day.

Interviewer: [00:14:07] Where do they live?

Subject: [00:14:08] In Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:14:09] They do?

Subject: [00:14:10] Yes, they do. They have a flat here. They are all elderly persons, they are already over sixty, seventy, the brother is 70, the sister, Wladka, is over sixty, and the others, too, so they are all elderly persons.

Interviewer: [00:14:24] I understand that when you had been liberated and, thereafter, you were in that Red Army, you did it for status?

Subject: [00:14:32] I had no contact with them.

Interviewer: [00:14:34] I understand. And the Warsaw Uprising broke out in August 1944?[50]

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[50] Warsaw Uprising: the Polish uprising between August 1 and October 2, 1944, an armed uprising orchestrated by the underground Home Army and supported by the civilian population of Warsaw. It was justified by political motives: the calculation was that if the domestic arm of the Polish government-in-exile took possession of the city, the USSR would be forced to recognize Polish sovereignty. The Allies rebuffed requests for support for the campaign. The Polish underground state failed to achieve its aim, and around 20,000 insurrectionists and 150,000 civilians were killed and 70% of the city destroyed.

Subject: [00:14:37] We knew about it. We even saw the fire, very much so. But I didn't take part. They were saying, the Russians were saying, at the time: 'The uprising has started. We'll not help'. I spoke to soldiers on a number of occasions, I asked them: 'Why?' They replied: 'No, if they make an uprising, why should we go help?' That's what they said.

Interviewer: [00:14:55] And did you have any contact with Warsaw? I mean with your family?

Subject: [00:14:57] Absolutely not.

Interviewer: [00:14:58] You didn't know.

Subject: [00:14:59] Nothing. I saw nobody. I didn't even imagine that anybody could have survived the war. I didn't imagine that anybody would... After all, I saw what it was like. Any moment, every every every gesture could betray you. Every gesture could betray you as a Jew. After all, you were given a death penalty for hiding Jews. Not only one person but the whole family. There were towns and villages described, among other things, by Władysław Bartoszewski[51] in his book titled 'The Samaritans: heroes of the Holocaust' [Ten z ojczyzny mojej], where entire families had been executed. Those were very good people. Those were very good people. I wish to stress that once again. I'll say it again, I wish to stress that I went to Sokolka when the Soviet Army was there to buy leather for shoes and uppers. Some Jews were already there, too. There, I saw a family, a Jewish family, that had been kept hidden by a Pole. The Jew wore a *chalat* [Jewish frock] and was bearded, and that Pole would prepare milk and meat meals for him separately. He didn't do it for money. I don't believe that a man would ever do... something like that. He did it in the name of faith. That Pole did it in the name of humanism, in the name of faith. I talked to him. It's pity I don't know his name. He is certainly dead already because he was old at the time. I also spoke to that Jewish family. They were from Sokolka, from Sokolka, that village. I saw that Jew, that, that Jewish woman and one child with

[51] Władysław Bartoszewski (1922-2015) was a Polish politician, social activist, journalist, writer and historian. He was an Auschwitz concentration camp prisoner, a resistance fighter as part of the Polish underground, and participated in the Warsaw Uprising. After the war he was persecuted and imprisoned by the communist Polish People's Republic due to his membership in the Home Army and his opposition activity.

my own eyes. Two of their children died. I don't know in what circumstances. But what is characteristic is that the Pole provided shelter to Jews in that attire. It was different to hide me or another person dressed more or less like a European, a person who like me speaks good Polish. That probably involved less risk. But what what what he did was extremely risky. And still he was not afraid and claimed: 'I did it in the name of faith'. That's what that Pole said to me. Sokolka is a town somewhere in the Bialystok province, that's where the town is. It certainly is part of history, there's no doubt that it is.

Interviewer: [00:17:05] Earlier, you talked about the meetings with your brother and sister. You said that you had met them.

Subject: [00:17:12] In 1940. Yes, I met my brother, Unfortunately, my brother...

Interviewer: [00:17:15] What year was it?

Subject: [00:17:17] It was..., I was in Ostrow at the time. I was working as a tailor in somebody's workshop or at Cwyl's. He came to me because he knew that I was from that village as we used to...

Interviewer: [00:17:23] What year was it, nineteen forty what?

Subject: [00:17:26] In nineteen forty-three.

Interviewer: [00:17:27] In 1943?

Subject: [00:17:28] Yes, yes. He was wandering from one place to another.

Subject: [00:17:29] Was it already after the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto or earlier?

Subject: [00:17:31] Later, later, already after the uprising. Yes, he came to me.

Interviewer: [00:17:37] You didn't see your brother for how long? Over a year, right?

Subject: [00:17:40] At the time? No, I saw him because he was also in that, he was in Magnuszow, he was at my place in the ghetto, too. We just didn't stay together because he went closer to Gora Kalwaria. He lived in this area here.

Interviewer: [00:17:50] But your brother had previously been in the Warsaw ghetto?

Subject: [00:17:52] In the Warsaw ghetto. He had escaped from the ghetto but he knew I was here. Magnuszow is in province as well so he came and we talked. And he went somewhere. He was hiding at farmhouses. He did some sewing. Well, he didn't really because he did his saddlery work. And my sister, I hadn't seen my sister until we met in Glowaczow ahead of the forced relocation.

Interviewer: [00:18:13] Please tell us, with your brother, did your brother talk to you about the situation in the ghetto?

Subject: [00:18:19] Yes, he did. He visited me, yes, and he came to me in 1943, maybe one or two months before his death, and we talked. And as far as, he says, as far as... I couldn't provide for him because those people barely managed to support me. It would have been different in summer but it was winter. So he left. We said goodbyes with tears in our eyes. I learned later because my neighbor told me that German Jerke had marched my brother to the cemetery and that's where they killed him, in the Jewish cemetery in Gora Kalwaria. I made a symbolic grave there for my mother, my sister and my brother. It's there. It's standing there.

Interviewer: [00:18:59] Because you didn't see your sister afterwards?

Subject: [00:19:01] No, I never saw my sister again.

Interviewer: [00:19:03] I see. Let's now go back to the period when you had been liberated by the Soviet Army and stayed with them as, well, a soldier?

Subject: [00:19:11] Yes, as a, not as a soldier.

Interviewer: [00:19:13] As a civilian, yes.

Subject: [00:19:13] As a regular civilian. Only I didn't have civilian clothes so they gave me a coat that I altered and wore afterward.

Interviewer: [00:19:24] People, I mean the Jews, said that when the liberation had come, although they referred mainly to the liberation from the Germans in 1945, many of them had the feeling as if they were the only Jews left in the world.

Subject: [00:19:38] Yes, yes, yes. Just like me.

Interviewer: [00:19:39] You also had that feeling?

Subject: [00:19:41] I felt the same, too. The same. Identical. In general, I didn't imagine that anybody could have hidden anywhere during the Holocaust. The people who didn't live through the Holocaust cannot even conceive what it was like although sometimes this or that is being said, why this, why that. Even though those camps were set up in Poland, the Poles are not to be blamed. Let those Jews once and for all... and I mean all Jews because there are also nationalists among Jews. There are even chauvinists. Let's tell each other the truth. Maybe not to the same extent as in other nations because a Jew would never assault anyone. This is another issue. But

there are nationalists. They have their views. But it was not like that. Who would want to welcome the Jews if they knew, just like such Polish families did, that they risked their life? We, Jews who lived through the war, talk about it because we know it. We've seen it. I say so confidently as an elderly man because I know it. So they shouldn't be surprised that people hold grudges against this or that person. I don't want to dwell on it too long but I put the same question again to Jews, since I speak objectively, I ask all those who talk this way: would they be willing to take that risk? Would they take a Pole home knowing that … if this did not come with the death penalty?. Let me stress that word – death - because Jews coexisted very well with Poles and so did Poles with Jews before the war. They traded and had business dealings, and were happy with it. But when the death penalty comes into play - is there a higher price than death? Nevertheless, they did it, like Mrs. Pokorska who welcomed me, that mother with so many children. One, two, three, four, six children. They still chose to take that risk. I had my Kennkarte but eventually somebody could have claimed that she had known I was a Jew. If I [inaudible] am I not fond of that person till the present day? She's like a mother to me. Once it was over, I told her: 'Let me call you mother'. She's my second mother. Let Jews remember that. Those who understand this recording and who see this recording should acknowledge that fact. Let them hold no grudges. Yes, there were also *shmaltsovniks* [persons blackmailing the Jews who were hiding, or blackmailing Poles who protected the Jews during the Nazi occupation], there were such incidents for sure. The truth must be told because I speak objectively. I'm telling the truth. They did exist, some even hid Jews, I know one case from Ryczywol.[52] Two Jews were murdered there. By Poles from Ryczywol, none other.

Interviewer: [00:22:27] How do you know that fact? How did you learn it?

Subject: [00:22:30] How? Because they were together in Magnuszow. They were reloc... because they lived in Magnuszow. They were relocated to Kozienice, just like me. They stayed in Ryczywol. Those two because they had their businesses or such there. Nobody saw them afterward. Obviously, they denounced each other claiming that this one or that one committed the murder. Those are the facts of life. Let them hear. Ryczywol, a village near Magnuszow.

[52] Ryczywół is a village on the left bank of the Vistula River, close to Magnuszew. The literature on the subject does not mention the murder in Ryczywół.

Interviewer: [00:22:55] But you personally had no contact with *shmaltsovniks*? Nobody ever threatened you?

Subject: [00:22:59] No, no. I didn't experience that. There were such persons also. They would demand money from them [Jews] and later spend it. There were instances where, after the liberation, after everything, they would keep [Jews] in hiding for two or three months, with the Red Army already there, with Poland liberated, because they stood to gain financially from the situation. There were such individual cases. That was not common, only sporadic. But, nonetheless, it happened. Unfortunately, the truth must be told.

Interviewer: [00:23:29] I understand. Please tell us…

Subject: [00:23:32] Therefore, I'm simply…, I'm proud that I can tell the truth. I may not be the only one to tell that truth because I read a lot. But this, unfortunately, is how it is. There was also such moment, described by Bartoszewski, when a mother, a pre-war mother at that, a convert if I'm not mistaken, had children and her children were not recognized, and she approached a teacher, a scout leader, and asked him to let her child join a local scouts organization. The man replied that it was for Polish scouts only. And Bartoszewski describes the situation. Was he right Absolutely not. And that mother denounces that fact too and she tells the truth. I say the same thing. Was he right [to say so]? Absolutely not. And that Tejkowski?[53] Can I talk here about…? Take that Tejkowski who makes public appearances nowadays as a sworn anti-Semite. Is he right? In my view and in the opinion of good people, he is absolutely wrong. What is the point of being against anything? If he is against Jews or those skinheads, they are against each other. They hate themselves. They fight each other with knives, bats and such. So I'm asking him the question, here during this TV interview: 'Are you right?' Absolutely not. Isn't it better to have a positive attitude towards other people, regardless of whether that person is a Gypsy, a Pole, a Russian or a German? I even have respect for that German. He may already be dead but I have respect for him and I'll always keep him in my thoughts. If I were to see him after the war, I would certainly give him not only bread but also my bed and everything. Because he was a Germ… because he was a human being. Is this relevant? Him being German isn't relevant. He was born that way. Was my mother inferior to somebody else's mother? This is how

[53] Bolesław Tejkowski, born 1933, Polish radical right-wing activist.

I was born, this is who I am and will be. I'll always keep my nationality. Because I have no need whatsoever to say that I'm not a Jew.

Interviewer: [00:25:37] So you never felt that need to, 'need' is not the right word. Let's change the subject [inaudible] During that period until 1944, the liberation, did you ever hear about concentration camps?

Subject: [00:25:52] Yes, I did.

Interviewer: [00:25:52] Extermination camps?

Subject: [00:25:52] We knew everything.

Interviewer: [00:25:53] But how?

Subject: [00:25:54] We knew. How? Because there were individuals who had escaped. That's how we knew.

Interviewer: [00:25:58] And they reached out to you?

Subject: [00:25:59] Some escaped. Individual persons managed to escape from Treblinka or here. People talked. And we were not dumb. There were newspapers and underground news bulletins and we knew about it [concentration camps].

Interviewer: [00:26:10] Did you read them?

Subject: [00:26:13] A few. But there were also lampoons. There were those anti-Jewish newspapers, that sword, no wait wait, of King Chrobry, King Chrobry [Boleslaw the Great], am I right?

Interviewer: [00:26:25] Szczerbiec [the jagged sword]?

Subject: [00:26:28] Announcement, Szczerbiec. of King Chrobry, isn't it?

Interviewer: [00:26:31] Well, yes.

Subject: [00:26:32] It was an anti-Jewish newspaper. There were those those those different anti-Jewish photographs.

Interviewer: [00:26:35] Did you read it during the Nazi occupation?

Subject: [00:26:37] I did. I was allowed to read. I saw them. My heart ached right away. Such things happening after the Holocaust?

Interviewer: [00:26:45] Oswiecim [Auschwitz] and Majdanek. It was [all clear] to you?

Subject: [00:26:47] Yes. We [knew] it all, I mean, maybe I hadn't known it literally or in detail because I only became familiar with the subject after the war. But it wasn't like that under the [Nazi] occupation, it wasn't defined as such. It wasn't until after everything that we learned about it, the whole truth. We knew that there were lagers, labor camps. We knew about Majdanek. We knew about Auschwitz. We knew about Treblinka.[54] There's no doubt about it. There was even a moment when Hungarian Jews escaped from a train car they crashed

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[54] Majdanek, Oświęcim and Treblinka were Nazi death camps.

somewhere in the vicinity of Garwolin while they were being taken to Treblinka. They were all caught. They died. They all died. Germans caught some. Poles caught some.

Interviewer: [00:27:29] And how do you know that?

Subject: [00:27:29] Well, people talked.

Interviewer: [00:27:30] At the time?

Subject: [00:27:31] Word of mouth, at the time.

Interviewer: [00:27:32] Back then.

Subject: [00:27:33] Because there were some very good people too back then. At the time, I heard a conversation between two Poles. They didn't know I could overhear them. One Pole said to another: 'Still, I feel sorry for those Jews'. Because they talked about this and that in general. Of course, we know, unfortunately, those those those things are true, and he said: 'Still, I feel sorry for those Jews'. Because it was common knowledge that the Polish population was not rich either before the war. Peasants, in particular. They had greatly limited options. So they preferred to engage with those those Jews. When he [a Pole] came to a Jewish tailor, he was shown respect and was offered proper service. Therefore, the Pole was pleased to go to Jews. When he went to see a Polish craftsman, this was not always the case.

Interviewer: [00:28:20] Please tell me one more thing, when the Russians marched further east, west, yes, in the direction of Warsaw, did you go with them?

Subject: [00:07:54] No, I didn't.

Interviewer: [00:28:29] You stayed behind?

Subject: [00:28:30] I remained where I already was, in that village.

Interviewer: [00:28:32] You waited until the liberation, until the end of the war?

Subject: [00:28:34] There was general liberation, I continued to live in that village for almost one year, we all did.

Interviewer: [00:28:39] Another year?

Subject: [00:28:39] [inaudible] Almost a year.

Interviewer: [00:28:42] And then you...

Subject: [00:28:43] Only when I had learned that there were still Jews in Gora Kalwaria, I made up my mind and travelled to Gora Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:28:48] You mean from that village, Podwierzybie?

Subject: [00:28:50] Podwierzbie.

Interviewer: [00:28:51] Podwierzbie. And, at that point, you went to Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:28:53] Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: [00:28:54] What year was it? As late as 1946?

Subject: [00:28:55] No, in 1945.

Interviewer: [00:28:56] 1945, right?

Subject: [00:28:56] Already after the liberation.

Interviewer: [00:28:59] And you...

Crew member: [00:29:00] Let's change [the tape].

Interviewer: [00:29:01] Let's change [the tape].

Part 5

Subject: [00:00:37] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:00:40] So you went back to Gora Kalwaria in 1945?

Subject: [00:00:42] Me?

Interviewer: [00:00:43] You went back, didn't you? In 1945?

Subject: [00:00:44] Yes, yes. I did.

Interviewer: [00:00:45] But why?

Subject: [00:00:46] Why did I go back? Well, it was my hometown. I was born there.

Interviewer: [00:00:50] And you learned that there were Jews in Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:00:53] Yes, I was still there when about 15 or more persons returned from Russia and later emigrated, some to Israel and some to America.

Interviewer: [00:01:04] And that prompted you to come here? That was the only reason?

Subject: [00:01:07] No, that was not the only reason. I came because I later brought here that family and I still had an uncle there who also made it through the German occupation here.

Interviewer: [00:01:15] In Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:01:16] In Gora Kalwaria. He lived through the occupation in Zawichost.

Interviewer: [00:01:19] And not your mother and siblings?

Subject: [00:01:22] Nobody more.

Interviewer: [00:01:23] I understand but you didn't try to look for them?

Subject: [00:01:26] What do you mean I didn't look for them?

Interviewer: [00:01:27] So how was it?

Subject: [00:01:27] I looked everywhere for them, I asked people I knew. My mother was ill. She most certainly was. She may have died in the Warsaw ghetto. I don't know. I knew about my brother but I don't know where my sister died, whether in Treblinka or in Majdanek. I don't know what had happened to my sister. I have her photo from school. It's a nice photo. She was a very gifted and good-looking girl.

Interviewer: [00:01:46] Did you go to the [Central] Committee of Jews in Poland after the war looking for them?

Subject: [00:01:51] I looked everywhere. I definitely looked for them with the help of the Institute and I wrote to Israel, to Ben Yehuda Street, everywhere. No no no, they would also have been looking for me.

Interviewer: [00:02:00] And you got married in Podwierzbie or already in Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:02:07] No, I got married in Kalwaria.

Interviewer: [00:02:08] That means that you came to Kalwaria in 1945?

Subject: [00:02:11] Yes, yes.

Interviewer: [00:02:11] Where to exactly? Your home?

Subject: [00:02:13] Well, not to my home. No. I just arrived in Gora Kalwaria. First, I went to see my neighbor. Rytko. I talked to him and spent the night there. The following day I started searching because my house was no longer there. The Germans demolished it. The Germans or somebody else or the Poles. [inaudible] I don't know. Anyway, there was no joy in that house. There was nothing in there but poverty. Old beds and an old wardrobe. It was a small wooden house. I rented a flat for myself. I lived properly. There was no problem.

Interviewer: [00:02:53] You rented a house or a flat?

Subject: [00:02:55] No, at somebody's place.

Interviewer: [00:02:56] In a large apartment building?

Subject: [00:02:58] No. There were no buildings like that in Gora Kalwaria. There are some nowadays but at the time there were none. No, it was a farmhouse. In a small house. I had [inaudible] and I started to sew. There was one more tailor. His name was Pelc [?]. He returned from Auschwitz. And we... we set up a tailor's shop together. I worked with him for some time and then it just went on.

Interviewer: [00:03:25] How many Jews were there at the time?

Subject: [00:03:27] And later. How many Jews?

Interviewer: [00:03:28] At the time.

Subject: [00:03:29] I don't know how many there may have been in total. All of those who returned from Russia, from Auschwitz, those who had gone into hiding. Some twenty persons maybe.

Interviewer: [00:03:37] OK.

Subject: [00:03:38] And out of those, only four are still alive. There are Jewish residents [of Gora Kalwaria] living here till the present day.

Interviewer: [00:03:46] Apart from you, there are four persons still alive?

Subject: [00:03:48] They are still there. Feliks Karpman, Henryk Majewski and Wladyslaw Helman. They are around, they still are around but they are not very active. Karpman is a bit more active than the others. The others are less involved. You can't force them. But they admit to being Jews. It doesn't matter any more. I was fond of my mother-in-law. She loved me dearly.

Interviewer: [00:04:12] Mother-in-law?

Subject: [00:04:13] Mother-in-law.

Interviewer: [00:04:14] And when did you get married?

Subject: [00:04:16] I married the daughter, her daughter. Just like she asked me to. She gave us a sense of purpose, so we could find our way

Interviewer: [00:04:23] You mean your mother in law is originally from Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:04:26] Yes, yes, yes, yes. She was my neighbor.

Interviewer: [00:04:28] Oh, your neighbor.

Subject: [00:04:29] Yes, we lived... We made a very good married couple and spent 41 years together. We have a beautiful daughter who lives in Piaseczno. We have three sweet grandchildren. Michal has met them, too. Mateusz, Ola and Jula. Ola recently travelled to Israel. She was delighted. The younger one, Jula, will probably go there this year. They are active. They go to... they belong to Shalom. That...

Interviewer: [00:04:59] I understand.

Subject: [00:05:00] They are part of it. They do different... they take part in those trips to Sobibor [?] etc. They have this great honor that... they are proud of their grandfather. They love him. I love them too very much. My wife passed away and it's hard coping with her death. I'm alone at present.

Interviewer: [00:05:22] Did your wife die a long time ago?

Subject: [00:05:23] Yes, she did. I live now with somebody. Well, I can call her my wife. She's like my second wife. She is Jewish. Her surname is Slowik. She has a son in America.

Interviewer: [00:05:38] Where is she from? She also comes from Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:05:40] No, not at all. She comes from, she was even born in Russia. She came back with her mother from Russia. She lived in Zagan. We met in Warsaw. She was married. Her husband died. She's a widow. Her son belongs to the Bobov's group in America. He is a Hasidic Jew, among other things.

Interviewer: [00:05:59] Oh, so he is a Hasidic Jew?

Subject: [00:06:00] Yes, he is a Hasidic Jew. He belongs to that group. She is progressive. She is with me at present. We live a very good life. We love each other. What else can I say. This is our life for all to see. Various groups come to Gora Kalwaria, mostly Hasidic Jews. Lots of young people from Israel, France and the United States. Mostly. In general, to visit the tzaddiks' place. That's what of particular interest to them. The synagogue and the cemetery. What else is there to see? I tell them about the history of Gora Kalwaria. I tell them about everything. But those things have been so well documented that everybody knows about them. Even the youngest Jewish child knows what the Holocaust was. So when they come sometimes, I say certain things because there are some points, for instance [inaudible]. It may even be inappropriate for me to talk about it because in the Jewish religion we pray 'Blessed are you God who have not created me a woman'. And I ask them a question 'Me'ayin ata? Me'ayin at or ata?' [Where are you from?]. And she responds: 'I'm from Holon' or 'I'm from Tel Aviv'. And then I ask her 'Lo. Ima' 'Wo kommst du her?' [Where do you come from?] Like your mother. They start laughing. Like I started laughing now. It just happens that I know Torah a little, a little because I studied it a bit. I can even speak some Hebrew, too. I talk to them and they are very pleased. You won't find a Jew in the whole of the Warsaw province. People tend to keep to themselves the fact that they are Jewish. From the whole of Warsaw. And Gora Kalwaria is privileged in the sense that everybody knows about us and they respect us. We are well liked. Everybody likes us in Gora Kalwaria, whoever they are. Even Majewski who is a farmer. He owns many morgens of orchards. He is one of the best growers of fruit in the area. I also got involved in fruit growing some time ago when I stopped working as a tailor. I was a fruit grower. Well, I was.

Interviewer: [00:08:15] Please tell me one more thing: Mrs. Popl... Poplawska, right? Was she awarded the Righteous Among the Nations medal?

Subject: [00:08:20] Pokorska.

Interviewer: [00:08:20] Pokorska, I'm sorry, Pokorska.

Subject: [00:08:22] Pokorska. She received a medal in Yad Vashem.

Interviewer: [00:08:24] When was it?

Subject: [00:08:25] In the 1960s.

Interviewer: [00:08:26] In the 1960s. You mean that's when you submitted the application?

Subject: [00:08:28] Yes, yes, yes. I submitted the application using the standard procedure. Yes, it's there. She's got hers there.

Interviewer: [00:08:31] And you have

Subject: [00:08:32] I'm very happy for her. She truly deserves the title. No mother, no Jewish mother would have done more for me than she has. I firmly believe that. I think I may not be the only one to say so but I wish to put it on record.

Interviewer: [00:08:49] And you also have family in Israel in Holon, don't you?

Subject: [00:08:54] I have a cousin in Holon.

Interviewer: [00:08:57] They lived through the war here in Poland?

Subject: [00:08:58] No, in Russia.

Interviewer: [00:09:00] I see. OK.

Subject: [00:09:03] I have cousins in Israel in Benej Brak. They survived Auschwitz.

Interviewer: [00:09:08] Are they Hasidic Jews?

Subject: [00:09:08] Yes, they are.

Interviewer: [00:09:09] Are they followers of the rabbi, that tsaddik from Gora Kalwaria?

Subject: [00:09:12] No, I mean yes, they are Hasidic Jews of the rabbi from Gora Kalwaria. His name is Aron Szyniawer.

Interviewer: [00:09:18] I see.

Subject: [00:09:19] They have children, too. They are aware of my existence. I met them. I have just returned from Israel. We met there.

Interviewer: [00:09:26] Have you been to Israel recently?

Subject: [00:09:28] Yes, I have.

Interviewer: [00:09:30] How are you welcomed in Israel? After all, you are...

Subject: [00:09:32] Very warmly.

Interviewer: [00:09:33] You come from an almost sacred place for them.

Subject: [00:09:35] True, they welcome me very nicely, I am welcomed wherever I go, I have such disposition that they welcome me warmly everywhere. I no, no, I'm always an optimist and I'm never biased, nothing and never. When I say something, I like to say it objectively and I don't like to say it intentionally with any bias or hatred toward this or that person. I know about it. I know that in many cases, during the Nazi occupation, maybe not all people treated me decently. No, no, I'm not talking about the period after the war. But I forgive forgive them. I forgive and that's it. Such were the times and maybe they didn't know what they were doing.

Interviewer: [00:10:06] I have only one more question to conclude, the post-war period, let's say from the Kielce pogrom in 1946[55] until March 1968.[56] Did it have any impact on you?

Subject: [00:10:17] Yes. There's no doubt about that. I must stress that I felt quite strongly about the events of 1968. I say: I had to make it through the war and live until the time when the Communist party - allegedly communist, since the sort of communism we had was… but that'a a different issue - told Jews to go into hiding or had Jews expelled just because they were Jews. Shame on you! Shame on you, gentlemen, shame on you for March 68 if any of you are still alive. This is a great shame for you! Great shame for your, your state system! And your political system. Even though Moczar [the Polish minister of interior, a Communist][57] is no longer alive, if anyone from his fraction is still here they should be ashamed for 1968What we, Jews, had to live through. We who lived in that… You can't even imagine what we were going

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[55] Kielce Pogrom: on July 4, 1946, the alleged kidnapping of a Polish boy led to a pogrom in which 42 people were killed and over 40 wounded. The pogrom also prompted other anti-Jewish incidents in the Kielce region. These events caused mass emigrations of Jews to Israel and other countries.

[56] The 'events of 1968' were associated with the involvement of the Socialist Bloc countries with the Arab states in the Middle East conflict. On June 19, 1967, at a trade union congress, the then First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR], Władysław Gomułka, accused the Jews of lacking loyalty to the state and of publicly demonstrating their enthusiasm for Israel's victory in the Six-Day War. This address marked the start of purges among journalists and the creative professions. Poland also severed diplomatic relations with Israel. On March 8, 1968 a protest occurred at Warsaw University. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Mieczysław Moczar, responded by launching a press campaign and organizing mass demonstrations in factories and workplaces in which 'Zionists' and 'trouble-makers' were indicted and antisemitic and anti-intelligentsia slogans shouted. After the events of March, purges were also staged in all state institutions, from factories to universities, on criteria of nationality and race. Jews were forced to emigrate. The antisemitic campaign led to the emigration of 13,000 people between 1968 and 1970. Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968* (Warsaw: IPN 2006), 462-630.

[57] Mieczysław Moczar (1913-1986) was a Communist activist and politician. In 1968, as the Minister of Internal Affairs, he initiated the "anti-Zionist campaign."

through at the time. I wish to stress the fact that if it were not for Wyszynski[58], Cardinal Wyszynski, there would have been a general pogrom against Jews. There would have been a pogrom. But it didn't take place because Wyszynski told people: 'Don't be fooled. It's not Jews, no, Jews are not the guilty ones here'. I don't know if you know it, Michal?

Interviewer: [00:11:27] Yes, I do. We're basically done. Unless you wish to say something at the end?

Subject: [00:11:35] Well, what can I say to conclude? I wish you plenty of good health. I salute all residents of Gora Kalwaria. I'm truly happy that I can say that about you. I know that you respect me. I'm even emotional when I say it. And I say the same to all people of good will because there's nothing better than a good man. There's nothing better in the world than a man with good disposition when he is, when he is friendly toward people, animals and everything around us. Isn't this much more important than being biased. 'Look, here comes a Jew!' or 'Look, here comes a Gypsy!' [sic] or 'Look, here comes such and such!'. That is just ugly. There was also a man like that by the name of Wysocki in Gora Kalwaria after the war. I bore no grudge against him either. His experiences were similar to many others. I experienced his longing because he had survived. He behaved very decently during the Nazi occupation. He was not afraid of anybody. But he was lonely, lonely. That man died alone. Did I feel sorry for him? As a Jew, I felt sorry for him because it was a man who simply had nobody. He was alone. He died alone, alone. The Protestant cemetery in Gora Kalwaria is in terrible condition. It's a tragedy. Why? If you could see the state of the Jewish cemetery in Gora Kalwaria. It was demolished. It was demolished by no one else but the Poles. Shame on you, Poles, for demolishing that cem... park and building houses on the grounds. I'm on record here. These are the things that simply are not done. You're not allowed to do such things. This is a sacred place. Unfortunately, such were the people. Graves were dug up. If someone had been recently buried, they would have even stripped the body of the linen in early 1945. It's a shame! It's a shame for Catholic faith.

Interviewer: [00:13:43] Thank you very much.

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[58] Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (1901–1981) served as the bishop of Lublin from 1946 to 1948, archbishop of Warsaw and archbishop of Gniezno from 1948, and as cardinal from 1953.

Subject: [00:13:48] I thank you, Michal. I told you what I could. It's good that I can still talk. This is, this is important.