

THE MARTYROLOGY OF POLES IN HITLER'S DEATH CAMPS

by Marian Wojciechowski

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MOTTO:

"Who is victorious shall be free, and who has died is already free."
-- words from "Warszawianka"

6 million victims of the Holocaust in Poland in the years 1939-1945:
3 million Christian Poles
3 million Jewish Poles.

The historians of future generations will research the archives, evaluate them and then write of how many additional hundreds of thousands of Polish Christians -- on whose orders, where, by whom and under what circumstances -- were murdered in the years 1939-1989 by the henchmen of Communism.

1. INTRODUCTION

I'm very happy that I came here, because I see many colleagues and friends from past times -- the now pleasant times in America as well as from the times of our national martyrology: the occupation and the concentration camps. I was in three concentration camps, in Auschwitz, Gross Rosen and Leitmeritz, and here I meet after many years my colleague, Mr. Romanski, who was in the same camps and we knew each other in Gross Rosen and met there quite frequently; and with the husband of Mrs. Romanska, who is here today - Zbyszek Romanski and I were friends, and we talked for many hours during the time free from labor in the Gross Rosen camp.

At the beginning I would like to make clear, that I am describing my wartime and concentration camp experiences not for the purpose of inciting any hatred in anyone, or anger, or a desire for revenge. Absolutely not. For a long time, I was unable either to speak or to write on this subject, because there stood before my eyes all the macabre scenes which one saw then, as well as deaths, which took away many of my friends and acquaintances under horrible camp conditions. I was afraid of these memories; I did not want to talk about them.

But time heals wounds, and in the end, we see that it is necessary to touch on this subject, because history repeats itself. History repeats itself especially there, where it is forgotten. We pass it on, to avoid forgetting it and repeating its horrible moments. Some of us (for example, my colleague Romanski) are still in possession of authentic notes written in the heat of the moment, in the camps, in pencil, already faded today. These historical artifacts should not be allowed to disappear; we have to take care for their conservation.

My narration pertains to my own experiences. As those who survived the concentration camps also know very well, in the same camp, and even during the same time period - it was possible to have more luck or less luck, to encounter better or worse conditions and treatment, to survive or to perish. My reminiscences then cannot be related exactly to the fate of other prisoners. Almighty God helped me in these trials, and I survived.

I will begin with my youth, which has a connection with the main topic of my story. I come from the region of Sandomierz. Forty some kilometers to the south of Sandomierz, there is a small town called Polaniec, laid out on sandy soil. In the area, there were two or three mills, and at that time there was no factory or work establishment, besides the Ruszcza estate, where one could get agricultural work. I remember, that in those difficult times after the First World War, the local small landowners ate bread only on such important feast days like Christmas and Easter, or during the harvest. For everyday meals, there was barszcz (borscht) and potatoes for breakfast, lunch and supper. Not until somewhat later, around 1937, did construction begin there (for example, the embankments near the Wisla or Vistula river), which gave people work and better conditions for living. Besides, these people worked very hard and the results were inspiring. Afterwards, industrial centers (COP - Centralny Okreg Przemyslowy or Central Industrial Region) were also built, and the situation was gradually improving.

After finishing elementary school in Polaniec, in 19²9 I studied for my High School diploma in Busko-Zdroj (in the beautiful newly constructed building) and went to the Szkola Glowna Handlowa in Warsaw (Warsaw School of Economics). My parents, who were small farmers, did not have the funds to pay for my tuition, clothes, and room and board. That's why, during the four years of high school, my brother and I earned money for our keep by tutoring for money. I would get up at around five, no later than six in the morning, and I would go to bed after eleven in the evening. During the last two years I was a so-called "Marszalek or Marshall" (the chairman of chairmen) of the High School. During my University studies in Warsaw, I was able to obtain a job as the assistant of the secretary in the Union of Agricultural and Economic Cooperatives (Zwiazek Spoldzielni Rolniczych i Zarobkowo-Gospodarczych), with the benefit of being able to do my work during the day or at night, during the workweek, as well as on Saturdays and Sundays.

Even before the beginning of my studies I belonged to the Polish Scouting movement, I participated in military training, I was interested in various political

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viewpoints and social problems; trying to find answers to the question, how should we manage our country, in order to improve the welfare of the people. During my University studies, I had many colleagues with various persuasions. There were many forms of the so-called "sanacja" of the former Pilsudski camp, such as Straz Przednia, Legion Mlodych, BBWR, OZON, various shades of the Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Party), Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party), Stronnictwo Ludowe (Peasants' Party). There were some who communized (Jerzy Wuensche, Roman Ujma). There were also a few who usually played cards in the restrooms of the library, and some who were not interested in anything beyond their studies.

I studied two faculties simultaneously: cooperatives and business education; and of the required foreign languages, German and English. I joined the group of supporters of the Stronnictwo Ludowe (Peasant's Party).

In discussions then we searched for the appropriate road to improve the conditions in our country. While still in high school, I read a copy of *Kapital* by Marx, translated into Polish, which I borrowed from the local Jewish library. By such searching around, I came to the conclusion that in Poland we must work out our own way, and I found -- the cooperative movement. Working in the co-op movement, first as the secretary's assistant, and later as an auditor of the agricultural cooperatives, I made contacts with many people of the Warsaw and Lodz provinces, which helped me greatly during WWII in the underground resistance.

Immediately after my studies, I performed my military service in the Cavalry Officers' School (Szkola Podchorazych Kawalerii) in Grudziadz, and after finishing there, I was assigned to the 21-st Regiment of the Nadwislanski Lancers/Uhlans (21-szy Pulk Ulanow Nadwislanskich) in Rowne Wolynskie, in the Luck province.

During military service in the cavalry military college in Grudziadz, I taught evening courses after service hours about cooperatives for the non-career soldiers in Grudziadz. I organized courses in grain-product ("zbozowo-towarowe") purchase, cleaning, milling, revision, storage, sale as well as basic bookkeeping. The point was that after returning to their homes from the army, they could join in the co-op work in their hometowns.

That's a broad view of what my prewar past looked like.

2. THE WAR OF 1939

During the war, in 1939, I was with my regiment in the Lodz Army, in the Wolynska Cavalry Brigade, in the region around the locality of Mokra near Czestochowa. History appraises our battle there very positively.

During the retreat towards Warsaw, my platoon was in the rear guard, that is, in shielding formation. Before reaching Warsaw, I received the order to march on Garwolin and further on east for regrouping. But other detachments of my regiment, walking behind us, received an order to remain in the vicinity of Warsaw to defend the capital (I learned about this from the leadership of the regiment after the military

actions of 1939 were over). Because Garwolin was already burning, my platoon and I joined in with various detachments of the Army of General Kleeberg -- the grouping of Lieutenant-Colonel Mossor (*Czas Ulanow*, Bohdan Krolkowski, page 217), and we took part in the successful cavalry charge of Cavalry Captain Burtowy (ibid, page 221) at the same time that Lieutenant-Colonel Mossor surrendered to the Germans with the rest of the grouping in the forest near Osuchowo.

The disbanding of our detachment did not take place until the area near Uchnow or Rawa Ruska at night, when the Germans were attacking us from one side of the forest, and Soviet detachments were attacking from the other side. The order was: bury the weapons and ammunition, give the horses and uniforms to the peasants, change into civilian clothes, march home and await further orders.

Over half of the soldiers of my platoon came from Wolyn. The entire detachment was a well-harmonized group; it fought bravely and heroically. The losses in human lives were great. My deputy, a Wolynian, Corporal Szkurski was killed in the first week of the war. I filled the losses in this way, by putting always-willing volunteers, stray infantrymen, on the horses left by those who were killed. I named as my deputy one of the leaders of the section, a senior lancer. He fulfilled his duties very well.

After changing into civilian clothes, groups of people started to form in a loose march towards different directions: to their homes, to nearby relatives and acquaintances. I proposed a march through Hungary or Romania to the Polish Army in France. Two friends joined in: one a second lieutenant of the reserve of a different detachment, who was originally from Warsaw, and one cadet of the career school of cavalry. As I recall, his name was Bratkowski or Bartkowski, having finished his second year. We agreed to go to Stanislawow, stay there with a friend of Bratkowski's and look for a way to cross the border. After a few hours the Russians detained us, and added us to a group of demobilized soldiers headed for Lwów.

After various difficulties we were able to leave the barracks in Lwow and get to a friend's house in Stanislawow. There we were received hospitably, but in fear that the Soviets might find us, because then the whole family was in danger of arrest. After a few days of gathering news, we determined that the Rumanian border was surrounded by the army with dogs, and that crossing it seemed to be impossible at that time. After about a week, we decided we couldn't place Bratkowski's friend's entire family in danger, we had to return to Warsaw. We reached the new Soviet-German border and there we fell into Germans hands. They packed us into autos and conveyed the entire transport to Radom, where we were unloaded onto an empty field fenced in with barbed wire. During the night, the two of us dug our way out under the barbed wire and fled in the direction of Warsaw.

Sometime towards the end of October 1939, we reached the locality of Pyry near Warsaw. The farmer let us sleep in the barn. The next day we were invited in for breakfast, and they told us about the destruction and lack of food in Warsaw. After breakfast my friend and I parted company. He went in the direction of his home, and I

towards my rented Glówna Handlowa room, two other streets up the rest of the house.

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towards my rented room on Narbutta Street. A student friend of mine from the Szkoła Główna Handlowa (Warsaw School of Economics), Hieronim Tatar and I rented one room, two other student acquaintances rented a second room, and the landlords took up the rest of the house.

However, it appeared that the landlords had already signed the volksliste, so that after a few days, my friend, Tatar and I moved in with a friend from school -- Andrzejewski, on Mokotowska Street. The two of us took up one room. The rest of the house was occupied by our friend Andrzejewski, his mother and his elderly grandfather Jakubowski (the mother's father).

3. PROFESSIONAL WORK AND THE UNDERGROUND

Immediately the next day after returning to Warsaw, I went to my place of employment, the Związek Spółdzielni Rolniczych i Zarobkowo-Gospodarczych (the Union of Agricultural and Economic Cooperatives) in Warsaw, 11a Warecka Street. The Kasa Spółdzielcza (Cooperative Cashier) occupied the first floor, the second floor was taken up by the Okręg w Warszawie (Warsaw District), the sections Rolniczo-Handlowy, Jajczarsko-Mleczarski (agricultural-commerce and egg-dairy), as well as the cashiers and Banki Spółdzielcze (Cooperative Banks). The third floor was occupied by the Zarząd Centrali (Central Administration), and the Instytut Spółdzielczy (Cooperative Institute) was on the fourth floor. Many workers "camped out" there with their families, because family members were only slowly finding each other.

During the siege of Warsaw food supplies were exhausted, the prices on the black market were very high, and a large part of the population was starving. Situations were especially difficult in hospitals, children's shelters and so on. Many of my co-workers denied themselves part of what was rightfully their own rationed portion to jointly gather food supplies, for example for hospitals. The director of the section of agricultural-commerce cooperatives was a senior friend, Franciszek Kielan, a very honest individual, unusually generous and universally much respected. He convinced the German commissar on cooperative matters in Warsaw to transport food for the employees from the cooperative in Kutno (the largest cooperative in the Warsaw district).

Along with fellow friend Jan Boniuk, we set out for Kutno and brought to Warsaw, to our office, a food-filled ladder wagon harnessed to three horses. Part of the food was designated for hospitals, and the rest was divided according to the number of members in each family, regardless of the employee's position. A majority of the younger co-op employees began to carry food to the hospitals. In this way, I found in the hospital (probably the Ujazdowski Hospital) the leader of my regiment, the 21-st Regiment of the Nadwislanski Lancers (Uhlans) from the Wolynska Cavalry Brigade - Lieutenant-Colonel Kazimierz Rostwosuski, as well as many officers from

our regiment and brigade. I have to admit, that from that time on the food situation in the hospital improved very much.

After a certain time, we learned that the officers in the hospital were going to be transported somewhere, and that the Germans were already examining the lists of patients. I had many acquaintances in the municipal offices in the former Sandomierski district. So I set out on a circuit and brought back as many as possible of clean, unfilled personal identification documents (identity cards) and municipal seals. I brought all these back to Warsaw and handed them over to the reconnaissance liaison from Sluzba Zwyciestwu Polski (SWP - Service for the Victory of Poland). I already belonged at that time to the underground group "Raclawice." After a few days, the sick officers were released from the hospital and directed to an agreed upon location. The new identity cards turned out to be excellent - they passed the test.

One day, the wife of Lieutenant-Colonel Rostwosuski contacted my office to let me know not to spend the night at home, because her husband was arrested during a street roundup ("lapanka") and would be interrogated by the Gestapo that night. Luckily the next day, she advised me that he had already been released on the basis of a previously issued identity card (as I recall, it was issued to an "agricultural engineer" from an estate somewhere in Podole).

After the end of the September campaign, there began the underground phase of the battle. I was very much engaged in two groups. The first one was the group "Raclawice" belonging to the Peoples' Movement (most from the pre-war "Siew"). In connection with my work in the co-op, I was invited to prepare the statutes and to help with the organizational work of the newly established restaurant in Warsaw, the "Wymiana", on 73 Mokotowska Street. This was going to be a cover for the "Raclawice" group in its underground resistance work. After a few months there occurred a desecration ("wpadka") of a cell of our group in Lublin (from where we received printing paper for the underground press). Using torture, the Germans forced information about our Warsaw group from the arrested members of that cell, but for now did nothing to us as yet.

One day a friend of mine, with remarkably the same first and last name (we called him Marian Wojciechowski number one, I was number two) came and asked if I could help them in the following matter. Apparently there was for sale an entire printing press hidden from the Germans by one of the compositors somewhere in a barn in the countryside. But for this printing press, the compositor wanted money -- which needed to be collected. I didn't promise anything at first, because I didn't have the money, but I began some efforts in that direction. In Rawa Mazowiecka the director of the agricultural cooperative was my friend, Zygmunt Jedlinski. I went to him, explained the situation and asked for his help. Over a time interval of several weeks, Zygmunt sent two ladder wagons loaded with food (all the automobiles were requisitioned by the Germans, and for the Poles they were unattainable). The printing press was purchased for money received from the sale of this food on the black market.

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This was one of the first printing presses in service of the Polish underground in Warsaw.

The Germans in Poland depended very much on the agricultural cooperatives that supplied food for them, as well as for the residents of the Reich. Because of this, they wanted to have exact reports and inventories regarding existing cooperatives. The preparation of such reports also constituted my work. Traveling around the cooperatives as an inspector, I had special privileges in buying tickets for busses and trains, of course only, in work-related matters. I made the most of these trips and contacted other organizations. They were given information and communiqués, meetings and terms were discussed, and so on.

Springtime 1941 was the date set for a meeting of the representatives of the organization "Raclawice". It was to take place in the cooperative restaurant in Warsaw in the evening. I was going to that meeting from Nowe Miasto near Pilica, where I stayed with my brother after a recent surgery for appendicitis. At my departure, my brother asked me to take along his wife who was going to visit her family in Sandomierz and further on to Polaniec, and was going to have to change trains in Warsaw. I agreed readily and promised to help my sister-in-law to transfer from one train station to the other. But she became suddenly sick on the train, so that in Warsaw, instead of escorting her to the second train station, I took her to my residence on the Aleje Niepodleglosci. I called a woman doctor acquaintance of mine, brought medicine from the pharmacy and gave it to my sister-in-law. Soon she felt better. I told her that in the evening I was going to a meeting. But she began to cry; she didn't know my landlord, they didn't know her, she was afraid to remain by herself without my care. She finally convinced me with her lamenting so, that I resigned from attending the evening dinner meeting of our underground organization "Raclawice" in the co-op restaurant. I planned to find out about the details the next day by going there for breakfast.

At five o'clock in the morning I received a phone call from my friend Wegierski (he was my friend from the cooperative and the "konspiracja"), who asked me if I was coming for "breakfast." I answered yes, because I wasn't at the "supper" yesterday, so I should go for "breakfast." And my friend replied: "Better don't go, because last night there was some poisoning with mushrooms." In our language, "mushroom poisoning" meant "deconspiration" or betrayal. It turned out that the Gestapo arrived before the hour designated for the meeting in the restaurant, and planted all the tables as well as the stairway with its people, both in uniforms and in civilian clothes. And afterwards, they admitted all incoming guests, but they were not let out. In this way, they arrested about 30 people. Of this group of arrested individuals, two women (a cook and her daughter assisting her) survived; all those remaining died from exhaustion at labor or were executed by shooting -- the men in Auschwitz, and the women in Ravensbruck. I would undoubtedly have shared their fate, if not for the fact that my sister-in-law's illness and strong pleas kept me at home.

But I survived on luck for some time afterward, until the next year, 1942. Because I was informed that at the Gestapo they were inquiring about Marian Wojciechowski, and I didn't know which one, I began to change my residence often (more or less every 4-6 months). The last residence I rented in Warsaw was in Zoliborz, in a housing co-op of musicians -- the landlord of the residence, who also was a Wojciechowski (but Kazimierz) besides, was a musician.

I continued to travel around the General Government region. One day, shortly after the arrests at the restaurant, Kazik Wegierski came to me and announced, that he would like me to meet his sister who had just arrived from Lodz. I went to visit them. We talked some and when the family went to bed, Kazik's sister told me that she had a task for me. She worked in reconnaissance and needed a place near the border of the General Government on the train line Lowicz-Zychlin-Kutno, where couriers crossing the border could stay the night for some rest and sleep. Her brother advised her to ask me for help. I promised to look around. Under the German occupation, Warsaw, Sochaczew and Lowicz belonged to the General Government, however the next train station -- Zychlin -- was already in the Reich, or territory incorporated into Germany. As quarters for the woman courier, Lowicz seemed the best option to me, especially since I had very good relations there in the local agricultural co-op. That person was a woman courier of the Polish underground (Kazik's sister from Lodz, Wanda Wegierska). Because of the assignment as liaison to the Polish underground, she took on German citizenship, traveled quite often across the border into German territory, met there with our intelligence personnel and brought back information, among other things including the localization of German armament plants. This information was transmitted from Warsaw to London via radio, to be utilized for bombing raids by the British air force. The woman courier (a young girl, about 18-19 years old) realized at one point in Berlin that she was being followed, and she fled to the hotel. Sometimes even very sensible and brave people do tragically stupid things. She did just such a thing. Back in the hotel, she wrote several letters, addressed the envelopes and mailed them. One of those letters was addressed to me. The Gestapo intercepted these letters and copied them along with the addresses. The woman courier was arrested in Berlin only after three or four months, during her third trip. All the recipients of her letters were also arrested. I had already organized a point of transfer for her, everything was prepared, but unfortunately it was too late.

Sometime during the second half of 1940 or even maybe at the beginning of 1941, I believe it was Kazimierz Wegierski himself who came to my office with his friend and asked me to help him as much as I would be able to, after which he left the room, leaving me alone with his friend. I asked what it was all about? It concerned making contact with people through whom he would be able to acquire smaller or larger quantities of a variety of foods. In my travels around the co-ops doing inspections, -- before and even during the occupation -- I knew the amount of stock products in the co-ops, and I tried to get to know people whom I could trust.

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In verifying the percent of so called "tluczek" (breakage) of eggs, "rozsyp" (spillage) of flour, cereal or grain, I knew roughly how much and what it was possible to remove without putting people at risk of suspicion by the German authorities. If there were suspicions about the black market, that was only just half a problem. People were in danger of being thrown out of work, being sent to labor in Germany and so on. However, if there was suspicion that the food was being handed over to partisans or to Jews – then there was the threat of punishment by death, preceded by torture of all suspects and their families. We had to help, but always we had to be cautious. My colleague Wegierski's friend came to me to the office several times, and if I could -- I always told him of contacts in the cooperatives of Warsaw or Radom districts. A contact could be the director of the cooperative, the director of a certain section, a warehouse keeper, a bookkeeper or even an ordinary laborer who was sympathetic to the underground.

Only after the war, looking at a press photograph, I recognized a friend of my colleague Wegierski. It was Julian Grobelny, founder of the Council to Assist the Jews, "Zegota." During the war he was buying bulk food and was more than likely providing it to Jews.

4. ARRESTED BY THE GESTAPO

I was arrested in Radom, where I had moved, because in Warsaw it was "too hot" for me. The Gestapo was tripping over my heels. In Radom, I resided at a local high school teacher's home (as I recall, his name was Oder). On April 23, 1942, at night, the Gestapo battered at the door of the house where I lived. At that moment I was not at home, and the landlord tried to escape through the back door, but they shot him in the leg. His son died from wounds received during the shooting. The Gestapo inquired about me and found that I was working at the cooperative. The next day, they went to the office of the Union of Agricultural and Economic Cooperatives, and without mentioning my name, took a general account of the employees. They made accusations that the office produced false work cards for people who in reality don't work there. Under that pretext, they checked the entire personnel "from a to z". They looked for what and where a given individual did during a given day. By this method they discovered me, and learned at which co-op I was performing an inspection at a certain time. I was in the Wloscianska Agricultural-Commerce Cooperative in Piotrkow Trybunalski. They returned to their headquarters and telephoned an order to arrest me by the local Gestapo. They came to the commissioner of the cooperative during dinner hour asking about me. Meanwhile, not expecting anything, I had just had a secret meeting at the cemetery and returned at noon to the co-op office. There I found a message that the commissioner of the cooperative, a German, wanted to see me in his office. This was nothing unusual, so I calmly went to his bureau, and the Gestapo were there waiting for me. They checked my personal documents and informed me that I was under arrest. The protestations of the German commissioner,

who needed my help in the work of the cooperative, did not help. I was arrested; the Radom Gestapo demanded my immediate transport to Radom. At the moment of the arrest, I had on my person several "trefne" (secret underground) documents, such that they should not, under any circumstances, fall into German hands. Handing over my briefcase to a colleague who was my assistant-apprentice, I told him quietly to burn whatever could be damaging to us. Unfortunately, I also had some papers on me in my clothes; I could not dispose of these without attracting the attention of the Gestapo. We arrived in Radom on April 24, 1942, around 11 pm at night. And here, fate was kind to me in a most miraculous way.

Now, about a month earlier I was taking the train from Radom to Warsaw. At the train station, using my cooperative inspector's identification card, I bought a train ticket without having to wait in line (this was no small matter: there were barely 20 tickets available for about 200 people in the queue). At that time, there came up to me a stranger in the uniform of a prison guard, asking me to help him to buy a ticket: he had received a telegram that his sister in Warsaw was dying and he desperately wanted to visit her (he was going to be at work the next day). I like people and I like to help them. Therefore, I agreed, and I bought him a ticket in the next ticket cashier's window to avoid suspicion. And it so happened, that we were passengers in the same train car and chatted with each other a bit.

When, in accordance with their received orders the Gestapo brought me to the Radom prison that night, it was this "acquaintance" from the train station who was the guard on duty!

On the first floor of the prison building there was a criminal section (for prisoners accused of theft, etc.) and on the upper floor, I believe either on the second or third story, there was a political section. After bringing me in, the Gestapo led me to the guard on duty and told him to sign a document that I had been delivered. After he signed the receipt for my person, they left, leaving me in his custody. We were alone, and we began a discussion as to what to do next. My eventual escape would risk retaliation against both our families (his and mine), as well as against my colleagues from work. I felt it was too dangerous not only for my loved ones, but also for the family of the prison guard. I decided that I do not have the right to place so many people in danger, and I decided not to escape. The guard advised me to destroy anything that was "trefne" (secret underground documents) that I had with me. In the middle of a large hall on the first floor in which we found ourselves, there stood a huge stove (so called "koza") with a fire burning inside. The guard lifted the cover of the stove and said: "Throw it in here." I had with me a notebook with coded names, telephone numbers and addresses. Without knowing the code, it would have been difficult to decode anything. Yet the Gestapo could have come to the conclusion that the information in the notebook was indeed coded, and with additional beatings could possibly get that information from me. Without a moment's hesitation, I took advantage of the "koza" and threw in my notebook along with the rest of the "trefne" papers into the fire.

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5. INTERROGATION AND TORTURE IN RADOM

And so I fell into the hands of the Gestapo, but with the exception of what they already knew, I did not provide them with anything else. Everything I possessed was "clean," because everything had been burned.

During the first few days of my stay in the prison, I received a package with a large pot of buckwheat cereal. The Gestapo checked the cereal rather thoroughly, but fortunately, they did not find the tiny rolled up ball of paper hidden inside it. It contained only a small piece of information - that Wegierski had been arrested with their entire family. I did not receive any additional information: why, who and how. Kazik Wegierski, a scout instructor (I believe from the scout troop "Wigry") was a colleague from work and the underground, who had informed me earlier in Warsaw about the "mushroom poisoning," or "wpadka" ("deconspiracy" of a cell of my underground organization). He was very actively engaged in the Polish underground, and his sister was the courier who had traveled to Germany for reconnaissance.

I wasn't sure what the Gestapo already knew or what it didn't know, but just in case, I didn't admit to anything. During the first interrogation, there arrived at the prison a special envoy from German intelligence who spoke Polish perfectly. As it turned out, he knew Poland, and about two weeks earlier, that is, right before the outbreak of war, he had returned to Germany from a ski trip from Zakopane. He wanted me to tell him everything that I knew about people who were acquainted with me, where they work, what they do. Naturally, when it came to Wegierski, I pretended not to know anything. At that point, there was no beating or anything of that sort. The one leading the interrogation said, "that's too bad", that I don't know anything, and left. About two weeks later at the next interrogation I was beaten so horribly, that after finishing they threw me into the cell completely bruised.

Interrogation usually took place in this way. In the attic of the Gestapo headquarters, they put handcuffs on the prisoner's hands in back of him, tied the handcuffs to a rope hanging from a ceiling, and pulled the rope upward so that he would hang above the floor of the attic at a height of a chair or table. Then, there would take place a beating over the entire body, including the head and legs. A person was completely covered in blood. Because I hung by my hands bearing the entire weight of my body, and was sometimes pulled downward by my legs, I lost complete use of my fingers and hands already after the second interrogation. It was possible to prick me in the fingers, and I was unable to feel it. I could not bend my arms at the elbows, so that when eating, for example, a piece of bread, I had to use a spoon, because I could not reach my mouth with my hand. They maltreated me horribly. Luckily, my prison guard acquaintance alerted my friends about my imprisonment. These individuals tried to help me through the commissioner of the co-op union where I worked, and also through his secretary. As I learned later in the Gross Rosen camp, where I met the son-in-law of my Radom landlords, it was the German woman secretary who sug-

gested that one of the Gestapo (he had a high position and loved to play around) be bribed. Of course, there could in no way be any agreement about my release from prison, but it was all about sending me to Auschwitz without a death sentence. Normally in similar situations the prisoner, after the interrogations were concluded, was shot in the prison or in a nearby forest, or sent to Auschwitz with a death sentence. This sentence was completed by shooting in the camp after a two- or several-month stay. Such a sentence was not given me. I was transported to Auschwitz, but all my personal things were returned to my mother with the announcement of my death. They didn't want to release the body, but sent a message that I am no longer of this earth.

6. AUSCHWITZ

In the camp I met with a series of events that appeared to be miraculous, or perhaps accidental coincidences ordained by the Providence of God. It is difficult for me to say that God wanted to save my person, because there were so many who were so much better and so much more needed. But it all happened so that I was saved.

I arrived at Auschwitz as a complete human ruin: I could not bend or move my hands. At the camp roll-calls, when the orders "caps off" or "caps on" were issued, I put the cap on my head without feeling it in my fingers. Not obeying the command risked being beaten or even being killed on the spot.

They took me to Block 11, the block of death. Had they learned about my condition and that I was unable to work, a death sentence would have been immediate. I was unfit for work, so there was no reason why I should be kept alive. In such a state, I was held in the death block for a day or two. I was hit over the head with a club several times, but after about a week they sent me, in a group of about 20 prisoners, to the kitchen for food, for the afternoon soup. This soup -- a bit of water with something like nettle in it -- and yet hot, was carried on poles in barrels of various dimensions (25, 50 liters) by two prisoners. They sent a few too many people to carry the soup, under the assumption that there would be more barrels. But as it turned out, the barrels were larger and a few of us didn't have to carry anything. I tried to walk in the back, so that they would not select me when changing carriers, because I knew that I would be unable to carry the barrel. And spilling the soup, especially a barrel of soup -- that would have been death on the spot for certain, for the reckless denial of food for many people. And after all, I could not tell them that I had no feeling in my hands. So I walked in the back of these carriers down a street leading to Block 11, and suddenly I saw a man in front of me, coming closer, also wearing prison garb, but shaped and well-fitting. We got closer to each other and both of us stood: "Marian, is that you?" and I answered, "Zdzisiek, is that you?" It turned out that this was my friend, with whom I shared a room in 1937-1938 at the cavalry training center in Grudziadz for a period of about 9 months. At that time, after military service, I returned to work in the co-op movement, and he remained in the army as a candidate

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for a career officer. During the occupation, he was rounded up along with all the remaining men on a train on the Krakow-Tarnow line and sent to Auschwitz. Because the man was strong and healthy, he survived the first few months in the camp not all that badly, and then people like that, if they were able to do something, were assigned to various positions in maintaining the camp. My friend Zdzisiek Wroblewski was appointed as the block scribe: he had the responsibility of keeping the prisoner register up to date, where and what each one was doing at each hour. We briefly recounted to each other our histories; he decided to accompany me. He went with me to my block monitor -- a German criminal, who beat and killed people without hesitation; he told him not to do me any harm, because I was his friend.

In about a week, Zdzisiek arranged to have me transferred to his block. I don't know how he did that, but at this new place there were many former colleagues and acquaintances from various political parties and factions, from various universities and various cities. They already had formed an entire underground organization in Auschwitz, and everyone helped each other as much as was possible. Zdzisiek drew me to him and said that he would make me a "sztubowy." The "sztubowy" was responsible for one large camp ward. I told him that I was not suitable for that function; I saw that a "sztubowy" beats people, hitting them with a ladle wherever it fell. I was not suited for this. Zdzisiek replied, "Listen, this is the way it is here, that either you will beat, or you will be beaten." But I refused; I wanted to be in the middle, not to beat and not to be beaten. So I bounced here and there, working for different comandos in the camp territory.

A typhus epidemic broke out. Two blocks were reserved for the sick. The Germans were not at all that concerned about the prisoners, who were dying in masses from the typhus, but they were afraid of getting infected themselves. Because the prisoners worked in many sections, for example, in the canteens where they had contact with SS-men, they could infect them. One day, two large trucks arrived, onto which were loaded all the people in those two "typhus" blocks: the sick, the convalescents and the orderlies. They were all gassed. Less than a week later, I fell ill with typhus myself. My companions in adversity took me arm in arm and led me to the receiving hall for the sick, and then they themselves had to quickly report to work. The doctor in the reception, a young Jew just after medical studies (probably from Hungary) had already been alerted about my coming by my colleagues or their acquaintances. At that very moment an SS-man appeared. He was an older man, who went about the camp and observed the prisoners, writing down the numbers of those who were working poorly -- as well those who were so weak that they could not work. These numbers were then passed on to the camp registry office. All those recorded prisoners were then immediately murdered in the gas chambers or (more frequently) by injection with phenol. At the moment of the SS-man's arrival, I had already been examined by the doctor, with a filled out health card. The SS-man came up and took my card, and noticed the high fever. Seeing this, and knowing that in a moment my number would be recorded and passed on for execution, the doctor

quickly reported: "High fever, for observation." In the Auschwitz camp, in Block 10, there were performed various types of observations and medical experiments. German doctors inoculated male and female prisoners with bacteria of various diseases, performed research and observations, and then of course they killed the subjects. In connection with this, the visiting SS-man understood that I would be sent there for observation; he put away his notebook and did not record my number. At that time, I was already semiconscious.

Next, they sent me to a newly opened "revir" (sick room) for those who were sick with typhus. I was visited there by my friend and one of the leaders of the conspiracy -- Kazimierz Wegierski, who was arrested even earlier than I. During his interrogation, the Gestapo beat him so severely that his kidneys, liver and other internal organs were damaged. As a result, this very slender man was so badly swollen that I could not recognize him. He died the next day, without betraying anyone to the very end.

From the entire group that was arrested along with him, not one person broke under cruel interrogation, no one was betrayed. His sister, Wanda Wegierska, caught by the Germans and accused of spying, was sentenced to death and executed by beheading in the prison in Berlin. Working for Polish intelligence, she presented herself as a German citizen and that kind of death was administered to her. For her achievements in the underground resistance movement, she received the Virtuti Military Cross posthumously after the war, and was also promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. She was the woman courier about whom I spoke earlier at the beginning of my lecture.

After getting well, I was sent back to the block of my friend Zdzisiek, who started to look for work for me. He found a position for me as bookkeeper for a German civilian -- an engineer, assigned to supervise the storage of building and construction materials intended for the camp, as well as for military objectives. At the Auschwitz camp there was a main warehouse of that type. At the beginning, we observed each other; on the third day, the engineer placed a piece of bread with marmalade on my table, and later we began to talk with each other. Of course, I did not admit to my underground connections. Our conversations were held cautiously and only inside the building. The German warned me that if our contacts were revealed, then he would become a prisoner like myself, and I would end up in the crematorium. We worked together, we exchanged words of greeting, the relationship between us was arranged on a level plane of not so much as work colleague or friend, but human being nonetheless.

After about two weeks, my work changed: at the Sunday morning roll-call, I was assigned along with about a hundred other prisoners to clean the overgrown drainage ditches outside the camp. Standing on the bottom of the ditch with water up to the knees, one had to deepen the trench and hand the soil up to people located higher. The work assigned to me was at the bottom of the ditch, and any kind of protest would of course risk a beating. At that time I already had enough feeling in my

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hands so that I could hold a shovel, but my fingers were still not fully functional (moreover, that condition has persisted till this day). I worked this way for a full day; it was already the middle of November, the water was very cold. After returning to the camp I was shaking with the cold, but the next day I went to do the same work, not saying anything to the German engineer with whom I had worked previously. After the second day of working in the ditches, I got a very high fever during the night, and they took me for a medical examination. It was pure luck that there were Polish doctors there, who, even though they had no medicines, were able to advise me what to do. They diagnosed pneumonia, pleurisy, water in the side as well as inflammation of the kidneys. They had no medicinal supplies, because people were held in the camp to be finished off, completely without any care for their medical condition. And once again, I met with Divine Providence. In this so-called hospital to which I was taken, there worked a prisoner -- called the block tailor, who had been arrested along with one of my friends. This friend, like me, was a recipient of one of the letters from our woman courier, which had been intercepted by the Gestapo. The Gestapo came for him at his place of work -- a tailor shop on Wiejska Street right nearby the Sejm. He was arrested along with other workers. A good tailor from just that group by the name of Wladek Dabrowski was presently in Auschwitz. He performed a series of tailoring tasks for the camp "dignitaries" -- the functionaries and the SS-men. Wladek and I recognized each other and he helped me in the treatment. Once again, God showed His mercy. How was I treated? They cut off a small barrel and installed heating elements in the form of several light bulbs. They would place me on blankets on the ground, they would place the so "armed" barrel on my chest, and they would connect the electrical wire conduit to the electrical contact. After a half hour of such heating, I was almost unconscious, but the blanket on which I was laying was completely wet from the water coming out from within my body. Besides this, the water from my side was extracted with the help of a syringe. When the SS-man who was writing down the numbers of the prisoners for execution, because they were very sick and not fit for work, would draw near us, a well-organized camp intelligence would warn us ahead of time. Then I would be pulled out of bed, wrapped in a blanket and placed on the ground by a wall. That was done with prisoners who had already died, because at the morning, afternoon and evening "apel" (roll-call) every man in every block had to be accounted for. After the SS-man left, my friend the tailor, along with his friends, put me back into bed. This would be repeated during my entire stay at the hospital.

Meanwhile on the block to which I belonged, Zdzisiek had a fatal fallout. He organized contacts from outside the camp for the purpose of bringing in medicine for so many sick prisoners. This was realized in the following way: Some of the specialists (for example, welders, plumbers, and so on) needed in the camp were imported as civilian workers from outside the camp. Zdzisiek would pass on a list of needed medicines to them, which they would bring to the camp at the next opportunity. One of those workers was caught with such a list during inspection, and under torture revealed who had given it to him. Zdzisiek was arrested immediately along with the

two "sztubowy" who were responsible for the wards, which Zdzisiek frequented most. Despite the tortures, all three did not betray anyone and did not admit to anything; they all perished either from starvation, or by phenol injection. Had it not been for my stay in the hospital, because I was so closely connected to them, I would have probably been also taken, tortured and bestially murdered.

I stayed in the hospital until the moment that my fever dropped, then I had to go back to work. I was released from the hospital one Sunday and assigned to a different block. This was the block of the so-called "Zugange" (prisoners newly-arrived to the camp as well as prisoners discharged from the hospital). The ward of the block I was assigned to was located on the second floor; I was so exhausted by the illness that I would walk up the wide stairs on all fours. I had a card of discharge from the hospital and was assigned to work the next day. This time the work consisted of arranging in layers boards, still wet, freshly brought in from the mill, in tall stacks with some air draft to dry the boards. To accomplish this, some of the workers had to climb upwards and pull up heavy boards handed up from below. I barely managed to drag myself to the place of work; I was assigned the work at the top, but I lacked the strength to climb up the stack. Even if I had been able to do so, with the frosty weather (and it was about the middle of January) I would undoubtedly have frozen to death or, unable to climb down, would have been pushed off to the ground, breaking my bones. I thought to myself then, there is no point in climbing up, better let them kill me here on the ground and it will be the end of it. I decided not to go to the top of the stack - this was a refusal to work, which in the camp meant inevitable death.

At that time there was in Auschwitz an obercapo of the Bauhoff (building section), a German criminal prisoner known as "Bloody August," who was renowned for his cruelty. Tall, thin, with long hands like an ape. It was enough for him to smack a prisoner with such a hand, to make a corpse out of him. I suddenly saw that "Bloody August" from a distance of about 10 meters. I thought that this is the end of me; but he suddenly became interested in someone else, jumped to the side and reached him, getting further away from me. However, the other person accompanying him came up to me. Normally, a prisoner of the concentration camp when approached by anyone from the camp administration, was obligated to take off his cap and stand at attention. I did not do this; it was a matter of complete indifference to me whether they would kill me or not. The person approaching me noticed that, came up closer, looked at me and said in German: "Marian, is that you?" I recognized that it was the German engineer, for whom I had worked as a bookkeeper. He asked what I was doing here, why I didn't come to him to work. I answered, that they assigned me to different work, that I had been in the hospital and then they told me to report to the present work site. I added, that I could not perform the work, because I did not have the strength to do it, therefore because of that they will kill me. The engineer looked at me and told me to come with him. He took me to a huge storage place for pipes and other plumbing parts. Outside the building there were all kinds of concrete pipes, and inside there were copper and nickel pipes, as well as all sorts of joints for pipes. The manager of

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this whole warehouse was a prisoner from Stalowa Wola, engineer Sledziewski or maybe Sledzinski. The German led me to him and said that he is leaving me with him as his responsibility, turned around and left. Sledziewski knew nothing about me, but he saw that I was barely able to stand on my feet. He told me to sit down, brought me a piece of bread, pointed to the hot water for bread soup. And I sat like that next to him, by the hot stove, not doing anything for about two or three days.

Under camp conditions this was something completely unheard of and meant inevitable death. Soon we began to talk with each other; I told him everything about myself honestly. When I had rested some, I started to help him more and more. I worked in this way to approximately the middle of March, 1943, when the transfer of prisoners from Auschwitz to other camps was begun, because the Auschwitz camp was already overloaded.

7. GROSS ROSEN - ROGOZNICA

I was sent to the camp in Gross Rosen. The stay in Gross Rosen began as usual with a quarantine. Even before it was over, I was sent to Hirshberg (today, Jelenia Góra) to work on the construction of a factory to make products from wood fibers. The task of the workers was construction of timbering for cement walls. I volunteered as a carpenter, trying to avoid work with sand or cement, where one had to work full speed running with filled wheelbarrows; along with this, one received a lot of lashes. The work of a carpenter, requiring precision in matching timber or boards, was slower. Later, I was even appointed the secretary of the entire group, because it turned out that the former candidate for the position was unable to write well and quickly. So I held the position of carpenter and secretary until about November, when they brought us from Hirschberg back to the mother camp of Gross Rosen. There I was again employed as a carpenter in the construction of new barracks. One had to work very fast, because everyday there arrived new transports of thousands of prisoners pulled from many other camps (from Majdanek and others). In the construction of the barracks there were used ready-made slabs which had to be put together, next the windows were mounted, and also finishing work was performed. Part of the work was done in the interiors, where it was hot, and for other types of work one had to run, and fast at that, outside. Under these conditions I caught a very severe cold, I was close to pneumonia, I had trouble with breathing and speaking. My colleagues decided to help me, taking me to the "revir" where I could rest. I stayed there, and already on the second day there came to my bed the "revir" kapo by the name of Siehsdumich and started a conversation with me. I told him a bit of this and that about myself, of course hiding my activity in the underground; he asked me from where do I know German so well, and learning about my education he proposed a more responsible job. He suggested a project employing me in the camp post office, in the parcel section. This change suited me very much and I began the new work of receiving and delivering parcels.

Some time later there came to Gross Rosen a transport of prisoners from Majdanek. Right after that, a few weeks later, this was followed by a large shipment from Majdanek of food parcels, which had been sent to these prisoners by their families. The director of the post office, SS Unterscharfuhrer Layer, decided to send the packages back to the families, because some of the addresses were no longer current. The parcels were delivered to the prisoners in accordance with their prisoner number as well as the number of the block in which they slept and ate. The first and last names of the prisoners were not important, it was only those numbers that mattered. However, after arrival in Gross Rosen from Majdanek, prisoners were located in a new block and received a new prisoner number, so that finding the original addressees among so many thousands of prisoners was unusually complicated. Therefore, the director of the post office decided to send back the entire transport of parcels to the senders. I knew that with the hunger prevailing in the camp, the return of the food packages constituted a huge loss; in addition, the families of the prisoners receiving the returns will be convinced that the addressees were dead. This type of explanation would not be effective with the director of the post office, who was an SS-man. Certainly he was not concerned with the hunger of the prisoners and the pain of the families. I decided then, to propose other arguments to him. I told him that returning the packages places an additional burden on the communication centers, whose main purpose should be services for the German populace and armed forces. I cited the slogan placed on German trains: "Die Rader rollen für den Sieg" ("The wheels are rolling for victory.") With this I convinced the German, who asked me for advice what to do, because it would be difficult to just distribute the packages at random. I offered to help: if I received permission from the commandant of the camp and his deputy (Raportfuhrer Eschner) to spend additional hours during the week working in the camp chancellery after normal work hours, then I would attempt to find the addressees of the parcels, by comparing their former registered numbers with the currently assigned numbers, as well as searching for the block in which they were presently residing.

In the camp registry office, there were card index files of the mother camp Gross Rosen and all the subcamps of this region, all living and dead prisoners with their new numbers, occupation, and cause of death in case the prisoners were no longer alive. After receiving the consent of the camp authorities, I spent the next week working additionally until about 11 or 12 at night, in search of the owners of the parcels. The beginning was the hardest, that is, finding the first few. Next, those who were found helped me to find the next addressees. And in this way during the week we unloaded the entire shipment of parcels, additionally earning the confidence of the director of the post office, SS-man Layer, and of Rapportfuhrer Eschner with this work well done.

Shortly thereafter, this SS-man's goodwill, earned in this way, became very useful to me. For one of the prisoners, it pains me to say -- a Pole (he currently resides in Warsaw), supplemented his food rations by stealing the best foodstuffs from

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some of the packages, for example, pieces of sausage. Noticing this process, of course I did not denounce him, but I sharply called his attention to it to have him stop doing this. I even threatened him, that the next time this offense occurred, he would receive from me a healthy lesson. The angry prisoner, along with another Polish "volks-deutch," wrote a denunciation about me, that I was taking advantage of my work at the post office to send letters outside the camp, even though I was under the so-called "Postsperre" (forbidden to write letters, and to receive letters and packages). I knew nothing about this denunciation. One day, when I arrived at work, the SS-man, director of the post office Unterscharfuhrer, called me to his office and told me from whom and what kind of denunciation was deposed about me. The main chief of the political section of the camp, representing the highest authority of the Gestapo in the camp, came to him to verify this and to eventually take me in for interrogation. "My" SS-man supervisor guaranteed that it was not true, that I am a very good worker, and that the denunciation was probably caused by jealousy. In the conversation with me he added, that he was not asking me if the accusation is true, but warned me not to do anything like that, and also not to mention our conversation to anyone. This SS-man saved my life then, because the denunciation about me was true. Of course, having correspondence forbidden to me (camp authorities ordered such types of prohibition concerning certain dangerous prisoners), I would occasionally send letters, availing myself of the kindness of my colleagues, who were able to write once or twice a month to their loved ones. From time to time (for example, once a year) they would give up one of their own letters so I could send one of my own, signed with their name and number (and to these same numbers there could also come a reply to me from my family, which they then transmitted to me later).

Luckily, the matter of the denunciation ended on this note without any consequences. Additionally in my favor there was also the following fact from the recent work time spent building the warehouse in Hirschberg. Due to intervention from the International Red Cross to the highest German authorities in Berlin, it was required that all prisoners have one Sunday to write a letter home. I reflected on what I should do. Since I had the "Postsperre" (under penalty of death, it was forbidden to send out or receive any kind of correspondence or parcel, which effectively made the prisoner "dead" to the outside world), I delayed with writing the letter, in fear of the consequences. So I went to the commandant of the subcamp Hirschberg and asked what I should do. After consulting with the main camp, he said that the prohibition is binding and that I am not allowed to write. This proof of subordination was registered in my records, and also helped me to survive in face of the denunciation.

A group of prisoners from Majdanek, who received food parcels thanks to my work, was most grateful to me. Hunger ruled in the camp; food parcels were unbelievably valuable. They invited me most warmly for a tasty treat, but I declined -- not accepting even a piece from anyone. At that time, I worked inside the building and not that hard, so it wasn't very exhausting for me; if they wanted to, then they could share the food products with their friends and colleagues. Helping my colleagues I

saw as my duty, without accepting even the smallest payment, not even in the form of food.

8. LEITMERITZ

In January 1945, the German-Russian front line already moved to the west of Wroclaw. The prisoners were transported by train and on foot to the west. As I recall, on the 4th or 5th of February 1945 there occurred the final liquidation of the concentration camp Gross Rosen. They loaded us into uncovered train cars (for example, coal cars). They packed as many of us as possible into each, putting in one or two SS-men with machine guns. All prisoners were told to kneel or to sit, and whoever raised himself or stood up was immediately shot. The train drew near several locations where there were concentration camps, but they were already overfilled. On some stops, the bodies of dead prisoners were removed from the wagons. Finally we reached Flossenburg, and from there the subcamp Leitmeritz. It was a camp of murderous labor in digging tunnels into rock walls, into which were then placed machines to produce armaments and ammunition. The mountains protected the production against bombing explosions. Those prisoners who were still alive in the last few train cars, where I also found myself, received orders to take the corpses out of the wagons outside, and lay them out on the embankments along the railroad tracks. This caused a considerable delay in entering the camp itself. Walking in through the gate, I heard someone calling my name. It turned out that they were the former prisoners of the Majdanek camp, and later Gross Rosen, whose parcels from their families I had rescued in Gross Rosen, with that additional night work in the camp registry office.

After the quarantine, the entire transport of prisoners was sent to set up camp Leitmeritz, and many of them now occupied good positions (for example, as functionaries of the camp's firefighting service). Out of gratitude, they fed me and my colleagues, assigned me a bed to sleep on (many of the prisoners slept two or three on one bed or on the ground) and arranged work for me outside the main camp, under good conditions, at the construction of a house for the camp commandant. Because the German criminal prisoners, and especially those so-called "kapo," had already been dismissed by then from the camps (and after a short training were sent to the eastern front) they made me the "kapo" of that group. I chose the following individuals for the group:

- (1) Kazimierz Wisniewski, former student of the Szkola Glowna Handlowa in Warsaw (Warsaw School of Economics), still sick after typhus.
- (2) Jerzy Cesarski, pre-war activist of the PPS (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna) and an active member of the underground.
- (3) A German (whose name I do not remember) "kapo" of the electricians in the commando "Steinbruch," the exploitation of the quarries in camp Gross Rosen. He was known for secretly constructing a radio receiver together with a few Poles

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and Germans; they jointly listened to the radio broadcasts from London and also news about the situation of battles on the fronts, and passed them on by word of mouth to their colleagues in the camp, by which they really raised their hopes for survival. And that was a great deal. Caught red-handed listening to this radio, despite terrible beating and other tortures, he did not betray anyone, taking the entire responsibility on himself. The liquidation of camp Gross Rosen probably saved him from death.

One evening, a group of Polish colleagues at work digging a tunnel, reported to me -- explaining, that the German supervisor working there, who murdered people at work, had already promised one Pole that he would finish him off the next day. This Pole, already sentenced for extermination, was engineer Dr. Henryk Stankiewicz, docent lecturer of the Warsaw Polytechnic School (as I recall, before the war he specialized in research on the endurance of building materials). Because I could not take more than three people to work, I had to release someone in order to take in Stankiewicz. I decided to dismiss Jerzy Cesarski, who scolded me terribly, that I was sacrificing a political activist in favor of some kind of engineer. Fortunately, both survived and both returned to Poland. On a marginal note on this matter, I will only add that as I recall, the 68-year old SS-man who watched us, of Czech origin, and who knew the Czech, German, Russian and even the Polish language rather well, stated to us at the very beginning, that in his presence we can say whatever we like about Hitler and the Germans, but if his wife or his daughters arrived, we were not allowed to say anything, because they were real Germans and would immediately report this fact to the Gestapo.

To build the house for the commandant of the camp (it was already under roofing) we had absolutely no materials and no desire. We spent our whole time looking for wood scraps nearby, which we exchanged with the local residents for a beet, a turnip, a few potatoes, or a piece of bread. From these products we would make a soup, which we shared honestly with our guard. This commando was kept for me for a long time, so that I think that it was due to the gratitude shown me for that time in Gross Rosen. I have great respect and gratitude for my colleagues.

9. ESCAPE FROM THE TRANSPORT ON FOOT

In the months of March and April 1945, the Russian armies were pressing to the west. One could hear in the distance somewhere the bombs bursting and the cannonade of the artillery. All work outside the barbed wire of the camp was halted, and also within our commando. Whole columns of prisoners were prepared to march out one after the other somewhere to the west. On May 5, 1945, my colleagues Wisniewski and Stankiewicz, and I were included in such a column marching on foot. In the camp it was already a public secret that the prisoners in the transports on foot, who no longer had the strength to continue further, were finished off with a rifle shot

and left by the roadside to be buried by the local residents. Long marches, often without food and water, left numerous victims. Therefore, at the first occasion during the night, walking through a dense forest, at a given password all three of us jumped into the roadside thicket. We waited until the entire column passed us and then we hid ourselves in even thicker shrubs and waited for sunrise. In the morning, we turned into the first forest path crossing, which led us to a Czech village, where we were greeted very, very hospitably. Bathed, fed and dressed in clean undergarments, and in clean albeit old clothes, we finally felt like human beings. The Czechs informed us that the Russian armies were already in Prague (or in the vicinity of Prague), and the American armies were in the area of Pilzno.

While still in the concentration camps, we all knew about the fate of the Polish officers at Katyn. The German press made this known, and it was confirmed by the Polish underground press, with the exception of procommunist gazettes. We already knew about the mass arrests of Poles on territories taken over by Russia and of their transports under terrible conditions to Siberia. We already knew what would be waiting for us there, if we believed in the communist prattle and headed east. That's why we had already planned earlier to head west. The roads were already obstructed with German deserters and other nationalities in all directions. Almost everywhere there were organized kitchens for the fugitives. Without greater obstacles, we made it to the vicinity of Pilzno. There, on the main road to Germany, we were stopped by an American patrol. Only those who had documents proving that they resided in the west were allowed to go on. Residents of Central and Eastern Europe were to return to their homes. The three of us went off to the side to consult on what to do. A young Czech boy was listening in on our conversation. Apparently he understood our situation, because he informed us that he could show us where to cross the border. He returned with us part of the way towards the village, then turned off to the side through the field boundary strips, in the direction of some small shrubs and thickets, and said that beyond those shrubs we would reach a grove, and beyond that would be Germany. That's how we made it to the German locality in the area of Schwandorf, and then further on to the town of Amberg, where a Polish DP (Displaced Persons) camp was being formed. There the commandant of the camp, a prisoner of concentration camps, a major in the AK (Armia Krajowa - Polish Home Army), Wojcik (Jozef was his first name, I think) greeted us, and in a pleasant, friendly new-camp atmosphere we slowly regained our old selves mentally and physically, after the tragic experiences of the preceding years. The nightmare of German concentration camps still remained in our subconscious for decades and even now after more than fifty years of freedom, sometimes I wake up from a terrible dream and I see the silent pleading eyes of my friends standing in front of the camp administration office in Gross Rosen, under the guard of SS-men. I hear the shots into the back of their skulls, and I sense and I see in the dream the black cloud of smoke weaving lazily out of the crematorium. Those who survived this hell did not speak of it for a long time. But it is necessary to

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10. THE POLISH CIVILIAN GUARD

In August and September 1945, the news spread around in Amberg that:

- (1) the Polish DP camp in Amberg would be transferred to a larger camp in Wildflecken,
- (2) the Americans were organizing the Polish Civilian Guard and Transitional Training Camps.

The commandant of our camp, Major Jozef Wojcik, became the commandant of one of such camps (Wincer) and asked me to help in enrolling participants. I traveled around the DP camps, made speeches and kept sending to Wincer even more candidates for the Civilian Guard. Finally, late in the autumn of 1945, I also went through a period of training as a second lieutenant, and at the beginning of 1946, our Civilian Guard company was sent into service at Bad Aibling (near Rosenheim by Munich). As I recall, there were three companies altogether. We performed our duty by guarding German POWs, vehicles and their spare parts; and stores of weapons, ammunition, etc. In the summer of 1946, they transferred our company for repeat short training to Mannheim Kafertal. There I found many young officers and soldiers whom I knew from my college years, my military service and during my professional work. I became friends with the deputy of the leader of the Civilian Guard of the American Army, Lieutenant-Colonel Wladyslaw Rylko, and he, knowing that I am a member of the cooperative movement, asked me for help in organizing co-ops in the Civilian Guard companies. I began work on preparing the statutes as well as the accounting forms and cash settlements. However, since part of the company to which I was assigned was transferred to Buttelborn near Gross Gerau in the vicinity of Darmstadt, in order to guard the warehouses of automobile parts and automotive service columns, I went along with them. After a few days in Buttelborn, I became aware of two things:

- (1) the members of the companies and their families were still somewhat malnourished;
- (2) the American army would employ the Civilian Guard only for as long as they needed us. In case of dismissal, our soldiers would go looking for work in Germany or through emigration, without possessing any practical skills.

I resolved to do something to remedy both these cases. Regarding the suffering due to hunger, I again started up the company cooperative, making the bookkeeping, the accounting, and the periodic rights of control by members (the auditing

committee) more efficient. Regarding the guardsmen's lack of professional skills, I held a meeting of the soldiers and asked them, who would like to learn which profession. Next, I applied to the local village resident Germans individually, owners of trade workshops, with a request to accept our candidates for training in the profession. In this way I was able to accommodate all who wanted to learn. Next, I sat down with my friend, the leader of the company, Captain Roman Wcislo-Winnicki, to work out the scheduling of guard service for afternoon or evening hours, so that those who wanted to learn could go to work during the day in the trade workshops and learn the trade skills. With the help of the educational officer of our center, Captain Jerzy Wilski (my colleague from the concentration camp Gross Rosen), a scouting instructor before the war, we founded clubs for soccer, basketball, volleyball, and an educational club with a handy reference library and so on. The work came out just fine. It was time to think about myself, too. Lieutenant-Colonel Wladyslaw Rylko suggested that I transfer to the center of civilian guard training in Mannheim Kafertal. I applied to the University (Wirtschaftshochschule) in Mannheim for admission to studies and to work on a doctorate in economics (Wirtschaftswissenschaft). They accepted me and assigned study subjects and an amount of time for two semesters, that is, with a possibility of finishing studies in one year. Unfortunately, just after I passed the examinations for the first doctoral semester, I was dismissed from the Civilian Guard of the American army in the summer of 1947 (Reduction In Force). Because this was equivalent to depriving me of financial resources for me and my entire family (wife and daughter), I had to resign from further studies. Luckily, before the dismissal, and with a greater cooperation of a special co-op committee, I was able to work out the statutes, bookkeeping, and plant the seed of trade courses in very many guard companies, so that the Civilian Guard of the American Army could rightly be proud of formidable attainments in education, culture, charity and finances -- and always in the spirit of the true independence of Poland.

During the autumn of 1947, I moved with my family to the Polish DP camp in Hohenfels (Lechów) near Regensburg, where I was drawn immediately into collaborative work with a circle of farmers; and I began lectures on economics and accounting subjects. After a few months, they offered me a position with the chief Polonian organization in the American-occupied zone in Germany, called "Zjednoczenie Polskie" ("Polish Union") with headquarters in Regensburg - Brunnleite 7. But that is a completely different topic.

11. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, WHICH WAS NOT PRESENTED AT THE DISCUSSION CLUB

Due to lack of time and the huge amount of material to discuss, I did not touch on many details. Having that opportunity presently, I would like to complete some of the topics in short fashion.

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While working in the Post Office in Gross Rosen in parcel reception, I was also on a block with other prisoners working at the camp Registry Office, such as:

In the Political Section, which settled prisoner affairs in the course of further interrogations (and torture!), verified the records of prisoners sentenced to death, kept under surveillance those prisoners suspected of enemy anti-Nazi propaganda or even anti-camp, and hunted after secret underground organizations in the same camp, as well as checked every so often whether prisoners with death sentences were really executed (by phenol injections, gassing or shooting).

In the Labor Section, which located and controlled the status of prisoners in all commandos of the mother camp Gross Rosen and in all its subcamps.

In the Camp Enlargement Section.

In the Post Office Section, and so forth.

However, the most important was the Political Section and the Labor Section. It depended on them whether one would eventually survive the camp or not.

In periods free from work tasks, there were many occasions for conversation between prisoners on various topics, discrete exchanges of opinion, getting to know each other. The highest figure of the not very numerous Polish presence in the camp registry office was Jan Dolinski, a political prisoner who spoke German excellently, but who did not blindly serve the Germans. He did what he had to. He was polite but he kept his distance. In the group of foreigners, a young Ukrainian from the Polish territories, Antoni Kaminski attracted attention (he was friendly, but something told me to avoid him); and also a tall, stout, middle-aged resident of Belgium or Denmark (I don't remember exactly), with whom I quickly formed a friendship (unfortunately, I don't remember his name either). After a short time he told me, that he worked in the Political Section of the camp (Politische Abteilung), that I am on the list of prisoners who are under surveillance at least once a month without knowing about it - by other prisoners, mostly Germans. He gave me the name of my "guardian angel," warning me not to give away that I know anything about it. Such a prisoner-spy would try to make friends, would bring up certain questions during a conversation, such as who will win the war, who is losing the war, why and whom do I wish victory, what was my attitude towards the communists, and of course the whole time he would agree with my opinions. Afterwards the entire content of that conversation would be reported where he was so told. The information from this Belgian protected me from painful consequences and increased my vigilance and caution in pronouncements to strangers. Shortly after the first warnings, "my" Belgian told me that he has access to a list of individuals of Polish nationality, who, after interrogation by Gestapo in various cities are sent to the camp in Gross Rosen, but with a sentence of death. These individuals after a few months were called to the Political Section; after their identity had been verified, they were made to stand at attention before the camp administration office, until a designated SS-man would lead them to the crematorium and there kill them with a phenol injection, gas or a bullet. Then on the prisoner's card file in

the camp registry office would be noted the date and the letters "ABE" which meant "Auf Befehl Erschossen" -- shot on orders.

Because Polish names are difficult to remember for foreigners, the Belgian prepared a short list with the names of the new Polish prisoners that were under a sentence of death. On one of the first lists was the name Antoni Suchon, my younger brother's friend from the Stopnica high school. I had already met with him before in camp. During the German occupation he belonged to the peoples' movement and was a member of the underground organization. One day, a meeting of that organization was scheduled in a village during a dance party. The Germans surrounded all the participants, and Suchon had with him a loaded revolver, which he tossed out unnoticed. The Germans found the revolver, and in order not to put the others in jeopardy of interrogation, torture and maybe even death, he himself confessed during the search that it was he who tossed the gun and that the weapon is his. All were set free, and after interrogation he was sent to camp Gross Rosen with a death sentence.

The camp in Gross Rosen had many subcamps. In some of them mortality was so high, that rarely were prisoners transferred from them to the mother camp in Gross Rosen in order to execute death sentences. Usually the prisoners died themselves from exhaustion or poisoning (for example from the exhaust fumes in the factory of poison gases). The manager of the Labor Section was a small, slender, middle-aged hunchback "Krieger," who wore the pink triangle (pederast). For a piece of cake, bacon, lard or onion, he agreed to send -- without any publicizing -- a Polish prisoner to a subcamp designated by me. In this way the lives of certain worthy people were saved. Unfortunately, I was unable to save the life of my younger (he was about 26 years old) colleague Antoni Suchon. After several months, during the afternoon "apel", I noticed him standing at attention before the administration office. He didn't look too badly, he was calm, resigned. Next to him stood the SS-man who was to lead him to the crematorium for execution. I wept for Antoni like a child.

Unfortunately one day, probably already in autumn of 1944, as I was returning from work for the afternoon "apel", I noticed my friend the Belgian standing at attention in front of the camp administration office. I walked slowly across to the other side of the camp street and looked at him. He also looked at me and with his head signaled "no." I understood: he did not betray anyone. Someone denounced him and the SS searched his pockets when leaving work and found some names. He was handed over to the penal company of the horrible murderer "Vogel." My friends and I had to put in a lot of effort, and lived through much fear, to save "my" Belgian as well as another of my friends from college years, Stanislaw Dziadus. Dziadus, who was sent from Gross Rosen to the subcamp in Biedrusk near Poznan, escaped from there and was caught by the Gestapo and returned to camp Gross Rosen. We were able to arrange that he would not be killed, only sent to the penal block. Since the camp in Gross Rosen was overloaded with prisoners, they were sending transports to other camps, located further west. For a bit more cake, bacon and other items received from colleagues, we were able to include our friend the Belgian and Stas Dziadus (later, a

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