

**Z USA do Szubina / From USA to Szubin**

radio coverage by Ryszard Jankowski

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Legend –

Black: Polish translation to English

Blue: English as spoken during the interview

*Narration [00:00-01:20]:*

Szubin, a small county city in Bydgoszcz Voivodeship, was still beautifully decorated after the celebrations of the 26th anniversary of Victory Day (9th May 1945), when the unusual guests arrived at the courtyard of the Reform School. Their long travel route was from the other side of the ocean, from the USA, directly here, where during WWII there used to be the POW camp known as Oflag 64. British, American and Russian officers were imprisoned here. Memories about them will last eternally amongst the citizens of Szubin, since the memorial obelisk standing by the entry to the former camp terrains commemorates it. So, on the 11th of May, about 30 former POWs and Veterans of WWII entered the camp gate for the second time in their lives. It was the first trip in a series organized for the former POWs by Dana Travel Agency from NY and the Polish Travel Office "Orbis". Therefore, we are moving to the site of the former camp. Will this place be recognized by the people who were imprisoned here more than 25 years ago and who today, traveled to this place from the other side of the ocean?

*Reporter (while waiting for a group of ex-Krieges) [01:20-01:30]:* We are waiting for the group of former POWs. They are preceded by Mr. Carter, who is already here. It is not the first time that Mr. Carter has stayed in this city, is it? *Then he talks with Mr. Carter in English.*

*Reporter: Of course you are not here for the first time; this is the second visit I hope.*

*Amon Carter, Jr.:* No, I was....Yes, I was here for 20 months in 1944 and 1945 and we made many friends with our Polish friends and they were living under bad conditions but they tried making our lives more happy here in the camp. They tried helping us and we've always liked the Polish people. We have many good Polish people in America and we wanted to come back and say hello to our Polish friends. There are 50 that are coming from Poznan. There are 50 more. There are 30 prisoners and some of them have their wives with them. But the camp has changed and Szubin has many more people. Szubin is growing.

Reporter: Would you like to have a look?

*Carter:* Oh, I will. We dug a tunnel to try escaping and it collapsed. It was up there. That is a new building. This was the hospital. This was the, we called this the Weissenhaus (the White House), like where our President lives in Washington. And we had a church and a cemetery over there. That was the kitchen where we got our food. We didn't get very much, but when we got it, that's where we got it. And this was my friend at the railroad station. I saw her twice a week and she was very helpful to all the Americans.

*From [03:10]: Mr. Carter introduces a lady from Szubin who lived at the Railroad Station and was very helpful to all the Americans, so the reporter starts talking with her:*

*Reporter:* Are you from here, ma'am?

*Lady:* Yes, and I still live here.

*R:* As Mr. Carter has mentioned you were one of the few people, local residents of Szubin, who used to help them. What kind of help was it and were you in any danger because of it?

*L:* Everything we used to do for the POWs was at the risk of being shot, but we didn't think about it at the time. We tried to support them emotionally. We tried in some way to be in touch with them to show that we sympathized with our American friends, to have an influence on their morale, to make them feel not so lonely here and in this way not to lose their spirit. We were happy when we were able to send them any message, for example about any progress in the direction of the end of the war. We tried to be helpful in case of escape attempts, because several times we were the witnesses of their unsuccessful efforts to get out of the barbed wire compound.

*R:* Mr. Carter has already mentioned the famous flight (famous escape) by means of the sap (tunnel), which the POW's dug here.

*At about [04:25] the Reporter comes back to conversation with Mr. Carter and asks him about the escape.*

Reporter: Do you remember the exact place where you dug (the tunnel)?

*Carter:* It was over in that direction, but the barracks are all gone. Where we lived is destroyed. And there was another tunnel in here that the British built, but the other boys on the bus will know where the tunnel is. I did not dig it. My friends dug it, I think for one year. And the big problem was where to put the dirt. We had dirt up in the roof. We put it on the ground. But we never finished the tunnel because in other lagers, the Germans murdered about 50 air force officers. They shot them when they came out of the tunnel, so we knew we were winning the war (*referring to The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III in Sagan*). And it was best to stay in the camp. We only had one man who ever escaped. You say flight, we say escaped, from the camp and he is also from Teksasu (*Texas*). And he is on the bus, Mr. Chappell, but he did not get very far. He got out of the camp and then they turned die Hunde or the dogs on him.

*Reporter: What are your most personal impressions standing here in the very place where you were a prisoner during the war?*

*Carter: With my friends? I have forgotten all the bad things. You know time heals many wounds. And I just remember there were many bad things, but I remember the good things only and this was 27 years ago, so you forget a lot, but I still have a fond memory in my heart for Szubin and the people of Poland. I'm surprised that Szubin has more people than when I was here. I think Szubin had maybe four or five thousand people. What is the population of Szubin now?*

*Reporter: Six and a half thousand.*

*Carter: Well, it has grown.*

*Reporter: Yes, rebuilt as you see.*

*Carter: It must be a good place to live.*

*Reporter: Before the war, there were only three and a half thousand people living here, so it has doubled.*

*Carter: Over there was the SS, the barracks, the Gestapo "Barracken" and Oberst Schneider, the Deutsch Kommandant, he lived over there.*

*Reporter: And where did you live?*

*Carter: I lived in this house and then in a barracks up there. It is gone now. I'm just one person and we have 30 others and every one has got a different story.*

*Then [07:25], the reporter has put a question to Mr. Jachalski, who was the Principal of the Reform School and asks him to share his recollections:*

*Mr. Jachalski [07:49]: Regarding this place, as far back as I can remember, I have a lot of memories I can share, dating back even to my youthful years. I have been here (*The Reform School*) for 36 years (since 1935), when I started my first job here as a teacher. There is also a lot to be said about the Nazi German occupation era. We have cooperated in conspiratorial groups with some people who I also hope to meet today. We provided our aid to Prisoners of War who were in the camp established in the buildings of the Reform School for boys. I can mention Mrs. Maludzińska and Mr. Kowalski who used to come to POWs aid in secrecy. There were, actually, three persons (three of us) who literally provided aid to Kriegies. {*Note that these memories mostly refer to the era when French and British Officers were in camp*}. We provided cameras to the camp and Mrs. Maludzińska developed photographs for the fake IDs. We knew people who were able to steal forms of ID papers from the town council. After preparing all of the papers, we made it easier for the escape of a group of POWs, which took place on the 6th of March 1943. It was a long process of laborious preparations. The POW's dug a tunnel about 40 meters long, with an*

exit outside the barbed wire. There was a group of 48 POWs billeted in one of the barracks who successfully escaped via the tunnel. Most of them were recaptured on the same day, but three of them (or maybe six) were well organized and they stayed hidden for several days by local people in the city of Szubin, specifically in Szubin-Wieś (*which means the village closely neighboring the city*) – at the Szubin outskirts.

*Question [10:17]:* How many POWs in general were then in Szubin and what nationalities were they?

*Mr. Jachalski:* It varied at times during the entire war. The first I can remember was a large group the POW's captured at Dunkirk (1940). They traveled in cattle wagons – for 6 days in closed boxcars, about 80 people in each boxcar, and they were so exhausted that, as they left the boxcars, many of them fell hard to the ground. The distance from the railway station to the camp, which is about 1500 to 1800 meters long, took them more than three hours to walk because of serious exhaustion. It's worth noting that they intuitively recognized who of the passersby was a Pole and who was a German citizen of Altburgund. They gladly accepted help from Poles, but steadfastly refused any help from Germans, even if it was offered in case of one's falling to the ground (*the unknown voice from the background confirms that fact*). They rejected any help from German civilians. After three days in the camp, as I can recall, they were completely different. I can remember it because, of course, we were curious and we tried to get closer to the camp... we couldn't really believe that these were the same people... they were washed, shaved, rested. No one looked like three days before.

*Question [11:53]:* Tell me more in detail, about what aid was given from the citizens of Szubin to the POWs?

*Mr. Jachalski:* It varied through the various stages of functioning of the camp. At the beginning, when Kriegies got no parcels from the Red Cross, they were truly hungry, so we used to share our food with them. At that time I was working as a road worker and I used to pass the camp while riding to work and many times I gave them my own breakfast. Many people used to do the same. Well, we also tried to support them spiritually.

*The female chimed in [12:25]:* After all, at the beginning it was very hard for us to provide any food. Literally, we shared every single potato or slice of dry bread, because after all we also didn't have much. We were living in very poor conditions.

*Mr. Jachalski again [12:36]:* Later we also tried to boost their morale. We used to transmit them important information from the radio. Luckily I had my own radio, which was hidden during the entire time of occupation, because it was forbidden. Concealing a radio was punishable by being sent to a concentration camp or even death by firing squad. I think that sometimes that news from the radio was more precious for them than the slice of bread.

*Reporter: [What was your fate after the war?](#)*

*Carter: [I'm in the newspaper business. My family owns the largest newspaper in Texas. We've got a television station and a radio station.](#)*

*Reporter:* Are you a journalist yourself?

*Carter:* No, I'm a businessman. I'm not a writer. I'm the businessman. I'm not a reporter. We've got the newspaper. We've got 900 people working on the newspaper.

*[13:34]:* and now the coach is approaching... with all the expected guests. Mr. Carter starts recording this moment with his camera. He introduces the travel agent, Mrs. Wanda Rudzińska. *(There is a little mess for few seconds at about [14:15] and the welcoming committee gives a bunch of flowers to the wife of Mr. Slack).* The travel agent introduced Mr. Slack *(Capt John F. Slack)* and his wife, and the radio reporter seeks to speak with Mr. Chappell about his successful escape attempt... and Mr. Chappell talks with him up to *[17:53]*.

*Carter continues:* This is Miss Rudzińska. She's in charge of the tour; she's the travel agent. Wanda, she speaks Polish.

*(A brief discussion in Polish follows - they say something like "Hello, nice to meet you", they introduce each other in Polish. Someone wants to give a bunch of flowers to Miss Rudzińska who explains that she is only the guide. They look for someone else from the bus.)*

*Carter:* She would like to talk to you and John.

*Miss Rudzińska:* And John, yes.

*John Slack:* Very glad to meet you.

*Reporter:* Nice to see you.

*Unknown person:* Nice to meet you.

*Reporter:* So, you have come here with your wives, I see. Were you the man who happened to escape from these camps successfully?

*Slack:* No

*Reporter:* Who is the man? Is he here?

*Slack:* Yes, I think so. Roy, the man would like to talk to you because you got out of the camp.

*Roy Chappell:* Huh?

*Slack:* You're the hero.

*Chappell:* Talk to those other "damn" people.

*Slack:* You got out of the camp; you're the man.

Reporter: Well, Mr. Chappell (reporter introduces himself), how are you? So you were the man who was happy enough to escape from this terrible place. How did it happen? What do you remember of it?

*Chappell:* I remember it all quite well, naturally. There were two times. Once over on that side area, we cut through the barbed wire and three others came. And once we pulled a fake drunk to get outside the gate and go over to that barracks. In that far corner was the solitary confinement block. And we had concealed some saws in our shoes and we cut out of the backside of that and dropped down in that big ditch and went out to that field over yonder.

*Reporter:* And then?

*Chappell:* And then, of course, as always they picked you back up. The first time, we hid over here in this cemetery. The second time, they had the dogs and the guards out and they picked us up down there and brought us back and put us in more solitary and took off our pants and our shoes and put a guard in there with us so that we couldn't do anything else. Our idea, you know, was to try to move by night to the coast and somehow get a boat and go to Sweden. That was the plan.

*Reporter:* Oh!

*Chappell:* Each time we planned it that way. But, it's just, it's impossible. See, all night movement was strictly controlled. You had to have the proper kind of *ausweisen* (*proper identification*) and so on. And the other pair with us got about 10-12 kilometers and were in the forest and a night patrol picked them up, you see, and brought them right back. We were delayed trying to get a third man out of his cell. He didn't know how to operate his key. So we waited until the guards almost came and we only got down there in the field a few kilometers.

*Chappell continues:* This really looks amazing here. You see, we had a tunnel started down here under one of the barracks in the latrine. We went down in the latrine and sat right above the pool and started one through there, but the ferret we called him, you know, (ferret is a word for a little animal) punched rocks in the ground. They discovered that one. You see there had been many a tunnel started from this camp by the British, the French, and even the first Poles were prisoners in this camp way back in 1939. They took over this place early, the Germans did, and we were about the fifth set of allied prisoners to come here to this camp.

*Reporter:* Well, thank you very much.

*Chappell:* Thank you!!

*Someone else is speaking up to [18:52] (can anyone recognize the voice)?*

*Unnamed American interviewee speaks: We came here in June of 1943.*

*Reporter:* So you were here for two years?

*Unnamed:* Almost two years, yes. And we left on January 4, 1945 (*actual date was January 21, 1945*) and we went this way to Exin. Now being here, of course, I had never seen the town.

*Reporter:* Never?

*Unnamed:* Never, because we were never allowed out of here. We walked out but we walked to a town called Exin, which I think is over this way. And we kept walking right into Germany.

*Rudzińska:* Under German control you were then?

*Unnamed:* Yes, the only Poles that I can remember, they use to follow with a big black hat that used to come in and clean the chimney. That's the one, I remember him.

*Reporter:* Well, there were some people in constant contact with the Polish people living here.

*Unnamed:* I was not one of those. Yes, there were a few. There were a few, those that had occasion to go to the railroad station to bring in the Red Cross supplies.

*From [18:53] - The narration in Polish:* The guests are coming to the obelisk, commemorating this place of martyrdom, which was erected as a tribute to the victims of WWII. After laying a wreath at the monument, they gave the representative of the local community a commemorative badge with an etched inscription as a token of gratitude to the Poles, who during very difficult times more than once showed their concern for the Allies imprisoned here. Words of thanks for the gift on behalf of the Szubin society were delivered by the Director of the Reform School, Mr. Alfons Jachalski:

*Mr. Jachalski's speech [19:29]:* On behalf of all citizens of the city of Szubin I'd like to warmly thank you for this kind gift. In the same manner, I would like to emphasize, that we always think highly about all those who always remember the tragedy that has befallen our country and other nations. We are always friends of those who stand by one another to fight against fascism. When you go back home I'd like to ask you to convey to your younger generations kind regards from the Polish nation. I hope they also will always fight for peace, in the same way as we do. So let there be peace for the whole world [20:20].

*From [20:25] The group photos were in the front of the monument and the reporter speaks to one lady and her husband, who was in the camp for 4 months: She introduced herself as Mrs. Gardner M. Simes from Roselyn, Long Island (Contact me, please, if anyone have such photos, please).*

Following Mr. Jachalski's speech, an American speaks.



*Unnamed person:* Would all of you Kriegies come up here? We want to get a picture by the monument.

*Reporter:* I beg your pardon. Have you got any personal reason for coming here?

*Mrs. Simes:* My husband was a prisoner of war here at Oflag 64.

*Reporter:* You've made a great effort coming here as I see. A special invalid courage. Did you come here with your husband? Is he still living?

*Mrs. Simes:* Yes, he is. He's right there.

*Mr. Simes:* It's been quite interesting to notice what we've been through and to see the place that we had our time here. I wasn't here as long as some of the others were.

*Reporter:* How long did you live here?

*Mr. Simes:* I was here for about four months. I arrived about September 15, 1944 and, of course, we marched out on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 1945.

*Reporter:* You were taken prisoner as a soldier?

*Mr. Simes:* In Mortagne France. Yes, I was a battalion executive officer in the 120<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. We were cold but we overcame that with some ingenuity. My son was asked for an electric blanket recently and I told him he shouldn't take an electric blanket. He should take a leaf out of my book, take two blankets, put paper between, sew them together, bend them into a cocoon, sew the edges together and crawl in that. He'd be warm.

*Reporter:* Now you know personally the place where he lived during the war.

*Mrs. Simes:* Yes.

*Reporter:* What are your special impressions, may I ask you?

*Mrs. Simes:* Well, it's a little overwhelming. It was a very upsetting time for me when he was here. It's very moving.

*Reporter:* I see.

*Mrs. Simes:* It brings back many memories, let me say.

*Reporter:* Definitely everything finished good.

*Mrs. Simes:* Yes, and we've had a nice family since. We had two sons after he came home.



*Reporter:* Thank you very much, but could you introduce yourself?

*Mrs. Simes:* I'm Mrs. Gardner M. Simes from Roselyn, Long Island.

*Reporter:* Well, thank you very much.

*Mrs. Simes:* You're welcome, I'm sure.

*Reporter:* I wish you all good things here.

*Mrs. Simes:* Thank you.

*From [23:08] – The narration:* The next part of the meeting was in Bydgoszcz where a conference was held, hosted by the Local Commission for the Prosecution of Nazi Crimes. On the invitation to meet the guests from USA, the residents of Szubin during the war have arrived, especially those who provided aid to the Prisoners of War in the Szubin camp.

*From [23:36] – interview with Mr. Henryk Szalczyński (officer of Polish Navy, who also 26 years ago used to provide aid to the POWs:* I had contact with the POWs between 1940 and 1943, when I worked in a local German bakery and I used to deliver bread to the camp. During several talks with the citizens of Szubin, who were forced workers in the camp, I was asked to start developing ID photographs for Kriegies, who intended to use them in the fake ID's they would need in case of escape. I used to develop the photographs in my parent's home, in the cellar and in the kitchen. My parents lived in city district in Szubin for Poles only (*in German: Polen Siedlung, which means subdivision - kind of housing development sectioned from the city where the Polish citizens lived segregated from Germans*). They lived in a small flat (apartment) consisting of one room and a small kitchen and the flat (apartment) was occupied by several people. Germans never suspected that the ID photographs, as well as the private pictures taken by POWs in the camp, could be developed in a Polish house in such primitive conditions. At the beginning, I delivered two photo cameras to the camp and I successively delivered negatives. As I remember, I developed about 3000 photographs during a period of one and a half years. (*The reporter was surprised by the number of photographs developed by Mr. Szalczyński and asks with amazement: How Many? When Mr. Szalczyński confirms saying again: "3000 photos during the period of one and a half years", and the reporter says: "Oh my Goodness, it's unbelievable"*).

*From [26:00] – interview with Mrs. Stefania Rakoczy nee Maludzińska, who was mentioned earlier in the radio feature (she apparently has died very recently on the 9th of August 2014):* Well, I can tell a lot. I'd like to tell, as much as possible, maybe at least, from the year of 1943 when British Officers still were in the camp. They were very poor and hungry and badly treated. When they marched through the streets, they begged for pieces of bread and any help. My mother was arrested because she gave them four rolls, and she was sentenced to 4 months of solitary, but actually never came back home. Later I established contact with one of the officers, Major Bryks, who had Czech roots. I used to write letters to his family in Czechoslovakia for him and also his family used to write letters back to him. The letters were delivered to the shop where I worked. At the time I worked in the local colonial shop.

The POWs, under escort, used to come to the shop for supplies for the camp. Major Bryks also started to write letters to me. It lasted quite a long time. In one of the letters he asked if he could trust me because they were preparing to escape and needed my help. He asked me for a photo camera. I knew that Mr. Jachalski had one, so I borrowed it and smuggled it into the camp. Then they used to bring me negatives, which I forwarded to Mr. Szalczyński, who developed them. They talked about the preparations for the escape, and when the day came it was incredible. It was hard for me to believe that such an escape from the camp was, in fact, possible. Mr. Lewandowski took 2 Kriegies out through the main gate of the camp inside the sewage wagon. In the evening he came to me at the shop and said that Bryks wanted to see me. For a moment I was surprised that he knew him, but later I learned they're both good guys, so they might also know each other, so I trusted him and went with him to meet Bryks. When I entered the place, I saw two men dressed in uniforms, but the uniforms were dyed in a dark color. I asked if anyone spoke Polish, because I was not able to speak English. The other language I was able to speak was German. Bryks asked me in the Czech language about the latest letters from his parents, which I was not able to deliver to him for some time. I replied that I did not have them with me, but I had them at home. He said "Let's take a walk and you can give them to me". I asked very surprised "To my place?" the answer was "Yes", so I said, "So, let's go". Then he turned to Mr. Lewandowski and said something to him, and then he came to the wardrobe, opened it, put on a coat and hat, linked his arm through mine and we left the place. We walked toward my parents' house. My parents were not expecting such a guest. When we entered, my father glanced at us while Bryks removed his coat and hat. My mother made coffee for us all, but no one was able to even to drink it because they were nervous, because of the strange visitor. Bryks lounged comfortably in an armchair and he felt very comfortable there. He told the whole story to my parents, about our acquaintance and their escape and their plans to go to Warsaw. At the time, the escape had not yet been discovered by Germans. It was about 6 p.m., so I told him that there was a curfew for Poles and that we were not allowed to be on the street after 8 p.m., that I must see him off to the hiding place and come safely back home. He put on his hat and coat, thanked everyone, and we left. While we were walking the streets, we met a German police patrol. I became nervous, because there was a custom that Poles must bow to Germans, so I told him so. While we were passing them, he just tipped his hat and said in a perfect German accent "Guten Abend" (*Good Evening*). The Germans policemen knew me very well, because I worked in the German shop, so they only looked back and walked away. When they walked away, he asked me if I would like to go to the cinema or for a walk closer to the camp. "I said no, we must hurry" I felt that he didn't want to go to the hiding place. He just wanted to enjoy freedom a bit longer. I walked him to the Lewandowski's and during the night the rest of 40 Kriegies escaped via tunnel. When the Germans learned about the escape, an alarming atmosphere awakened in the town. The Gestapo was searching for escapees through the whole city and many people were arrested for questioning. I luckily was not called for any interrogation, but the next day in the shop, I was very nervous, because I was afraid, that every person who entered was coming to take me for questioning. After some time, things calmed down a little in the city. Bryks and the other POW stayed hidden in town for about 14 days and I was in touch with them, but then they disappeared. Americans also planned an escape through the tunnel. They also tried to get in touch with me. Once one of them waved his hand at me and I waved back. Unfortunately one of German guards saw it and I was immediately arrested by the Germans.

I was judged and condemned to 8 months in prison. I was imprisoned in Inowrocław (*German name: Hohensalza*) and after two months I was able to escape and hide. I walked back via Bydgoszcz and stayed hidden in Szubin at Karczewski's until the liberation on the 21st of January 1945.

*The final question from the reporter:* Do you recognize anyone in the group of Ex-Kriegies who arrived today? I showed them the group photo I had gotten from the Americans as a keepsake and one of men recognized himself in the photograph. It's hard to recognize each other; everyone is about 30 years older, isn't it true?

More about Major Josef Bryks:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef\\_Bryks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josef_Bryks)

and about his escape can be read following the link:

<http://fcafa.wordpress.com/2011/02/20/josef-bryks/>

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