

Transcript of interview with Zdzisław Łabedz - Northwich 29th January 2012

Interviewer: Neil Emmott (NE)

Interviewee: Zdzisław Łabedz (ZL)

NE: OK First of all can I say to you thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today as part of our project. Could I ask you first what is your name please?

ZL: Zdzisław Łabedz or Labedz as you don't have the letters in your alphabet. We have the L, the N, the G which you don't have.

NE: OK. Where were you born please?

ZL: 12th October 1922

NE: OK and where were you born?

ZL: In Poznan

NE: Poznan

ZL: Poland yeah.

NE: Yeah. What did your parents do for a living?

ZL: My father was a postmaster. That's it.

NE: Right and your mother?

ZL: My mother, when Poland was reborn after the First World War she also worked in the post office.

NE: In the post office?

ZL: Yeah

NE: OK. Where did you go to school?

ZL: In Jaroczn place, no, no not Jaroczyn in Czarnkow. Czarnkow that is a town on the pre-war border between Germany and Poland.

NE: OK. And what kind of lessons did you do at school?

ZL: What?

NE: What lessons did you do at school? What classes?

ZL: What classes?

NE: Yeah.

ZL: You mean what education I had?

NE: Yeah. What subjects?

ZL: I reached third year of gymnasium.

NE: OK

ZL: That means you have the ordinary school six years and then three, college.

NE: OK How old were you when you finished school?

ZL: Seventeen and a half.

NE: Seventeen and a half. What did you do then?

ZL: On 3rd November I was taken by the Germans for slave labour to Germany.

NE: OK.

ZL: I'd been there for about 8 months and then I returned back to Poland.

NE: OK

ZL: To my mother, because my mother and my father parted through not having enough food for all the family because as my father was a state employee there was nothing coming. There was no wages coming so father went back to his brother, a place called Tarnow, south of Poland and lived over there through the war. My mother stopped in Jaroczyn that's it.

NE: Can I just ask you then, let's remember the war. Can you remember when the Germans invaded?

ZL: Yes. The post office, the post office in Poland or in Europe is a completely different thing than here. Here, post office is a shop. Post offices in Europe are big places. Banking, parcels, letters, everything goes through the post office. Now the post office was evacuated from Jaroczyn to a place called Zdobonow on the Polish/Russian border. But we never got to there as we got to Kutno we were bombed. So father then decided, we'd been bombed because of the German planes coming and bombing railway lines and we were evacuated by trains. So my father decided that we rather walk than go by train which had been all stopped. We got to a place called Wola-Makovska, I cannot remember exactly and the local people had been saying that the Germans are taking men and boys, youth to the army. So my mother and father decided that father and I go to Warsaw and mother stay in that village. When we meet, if we meet, then we

will meet at that farm, the first farm in that Wola-Makowska. After going about 3 or 4 miles I wanted to relieve myself so I went to a farmer's toilet and a man came out and he says "People what are running for? Everything is lost" and my father was listening to that and said to me after a few minutes when we left the place, he says "That man is right" and we decided to come back to the village and we'd been always between the Germans and the Poles fighting each other. Eventually the Germans pushed the Poles at a place called Pyontky, pushed the Poles back and we finished up already on the German side now, which was already occupied by the Germans. They come all from the German Wehrmacht that all state employees or employers, how you say?

NE: Employees.

ZL: Employees must return to their place of work on that day. So my mother decided then or went to a place called Skirinivitsa to the German commander and reported father and us all, me and sister that we were there and we cannot get back from that place to Jaroczyn. My mother spoke very well German because she had only German schools. Because, Poland didn't exist when she was a young girl because Poland was 120 years, 122 years not existing. It was only after the Versailles pact that Poland was reborn. So when she got to Skirinivitsa to this German commander that they offered her transport back to Ostrow Wielkopolski on top of tanks, German tanks. When we were returning back to there to the border again because Hitler threw all his panzer divisions on Poland at that time. So we got to Ostrow and then from Ostrow we walked back to Jaroczyn. And on the 3rd November I was caught by the German Wehrmacht and sent to Labour in a place called Grolz-Errechen that's the shire was called Niederlausitz and I worked in a glass factory, 12 hours a day which I was not used to it and so it was not too hard but it was hard. The food, we had to provide ourselves that means we had the coupons but there was no way of cooking because we were all young lads. There's more complicated afterwards but my mother. Go back again, my parents lost everything in the war, what they possessed because father didn't want to be a person which was seen by another Pole as getting ready to leave the place and sending all his stuff what he possessed somewhere in a safe place. So he left it a bit too late and 13 cases, bookcases which represented all our possessions have been destroyed in the place called Tarnow on the railway station magazines except one case, the rest was all destroyed. My mother went then to the Landrats in Jaroczyn and asked for help, that she's in a bad situation; we have no food or house. That she had no food to keep herself and he gave her a job in the Landratsamt this was in the town council or something there. He was a high officer, SS officer named Bliss of the town of Jaroczyn. My mother worked in the department which was called Deutsche Volks Liste that is how to how to transfer that in English I don't know. It was about people who, German people which lived in Poland before the war. He pressed... I'll go again different. My mother comes from a mixed family. That means she married a Pole called Kowalski, her mother was a German woman named Göbbler. As my grandfather, they married they had children so they were 4 girls and 2 boys. My mother finished her higher business school in Germany because Poland was not there. Now that SS man pressed my mother to apply for the German nationality. There was 4 groups in the German nationality in the shire of Poznan. Because there was 3 shires: Silesia, Pommern, that's the north and Posen that's where I come from. My mother at first didn't want to accept the German nationality but he forced her and she had a piece of paper that she was forced to accept the German nationality. As I said before there was 4 groups of Germans: the ones which come from, with their army, and they occupied, the second lot was the Germans which lived in Poland before, during Poland's existence, the third

lot and the fourth lot. Now the fourth lot had their Ausweis that is the document of red colour which had practically no benefits except coupons for living, for food, The third one was green which the children of the parents or like in this case mother and me got a third and then the second was the Germans which lived in Poland before the war. Now, the third group, that's the green had to serve in the army so I found myself in 1942 in the German army. I served one year and was released on that ground that my father was a Pole so I should not serve in the army. So I returned back home and got a job in the council of the town. After 6 months because there was many casualties on the Russian front they took us back to the army. But, there was lots of us or in the same position like me which escaped to the Russians. But the Russians didn't treat them decent, they shot them and things like that. Once you'd been in German uniform, you'd been shot, that's the end. But the Germans noticed that and took all the Poles which had been in the army, the German Army, on the French Front, to France. And the German soldiers, pure Germans went to Russia. And so after 6 or 7 months, I can't really remember, I found myself in France. There I escaped during a battle with the French Underground Army. I tried to escape three times, twice I returned and the third I succeeded because I had to take in consideration when I escape what would happen to my parents. So twice I returned because it was not right, I could be accused of, the Germans could accuse me of escaping, but the third time during a battle with the Germans moving back, I stopped lying on the ground. I joined the French Underground Army only for about 3 weeks and there at nights the Dakotas, English planes had been landing in the valleys, here there and everywhere bringing ammunition and taking volunteers to the Polish Army and so in 1943 I found myself in Eastbourne. After interrogation one thing with another, it was very, very strict I got released and could join the Polish Army and I joined the Polish Commando. After a period of time I found myself in Italy and did the campaign in Italy and finished in Bologna. In Bologna, that was '45, 1945. In 1946 we've been all evacuated to England. I found myself in York, Beverley, a place called Beverley near Hull. There I went to school in Scotland, forestry school. I finished that school and come back to my unit. But my unit was already decapitated you know what they say?

NE: Disbanded.

ZL: Disbanded yeah. There was only I think about 20 people left and I could not believe, I could not that America and England would let the Russians rule the east of Europe because Poland actually is the centre of Europe. So I said in the end; "I would be the last one to be demobbed". So after a week or two or maybe longer I was transported to.

NE: Near here?

ZL: Near here.

NE: Delamere?

ZL: No, no, no still army camp, American camp. It might come to me.

NE: OK

ZL: And there I was sent to, where's the racing place? Alton.

NE: Yeah.

ZL: To Alton Park and I was demobbed there and I got a job in I.C.I at Lostock where I spent 33 years.

NE: Yeah.

ZL: I got married, married an English girl. Had 4 children and that's my story.

NE: So when did you come to live in Northwich?

ZL: I didn't live in Northwich, I live in Middlewich.

NE: Oh Middlewich sorry.

ZL: I.C.I had 2 or 3 places where they had hostels. One was in Middlewich, the nicest one and there was only 60 people there and what was called that the.... Oh God in Marbury here and from there I got married and lived in Middlewich all the time.

NE: You lived in Middlewich. OK So and how long were you in Middlewich for?

ZL: I've been in Middlewich since 1948.

NE: So a long time. OK well can I say to you thank you very much for your story today. It's been very, very interesting. Thank you very much Sir.

ZL: Yeah.