



Author Julian Kulski—1944 (age 15).

PREFACE

When the Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, I was ten and a half years old. I was an enthusiastic and adventurous Boy Scout,¹ and eager to be treated like a man. I did not know that this was the beginning of World War II... and the end of the world as I knew it.

I already had a little girlfriend, Zula. She was Jewish, I was Christian. Other people who were important to me and whom I loved, like my own father and my Scoutmaster Ludwik Berger, had some Jewish ancestry. Religion was irrelevant to us but, tragically, not to the Germans.

When the war began, my father was the Deputy Mayor of Warsaw. I lived at home with my parents, my younger sister and my aunt in the northern part of the city, in the charming tree-lined neighborhood of Żoliborz.

This book is the story of my growing up during five brutal years of German occupation, amidst the catastrophic destruction of my beloved city. As you will see, I resisted the Germans—initially with small acts of sabotage, and then, recruited by my Scoutmaster, I became a full-fledged soldier in the Underground Army.

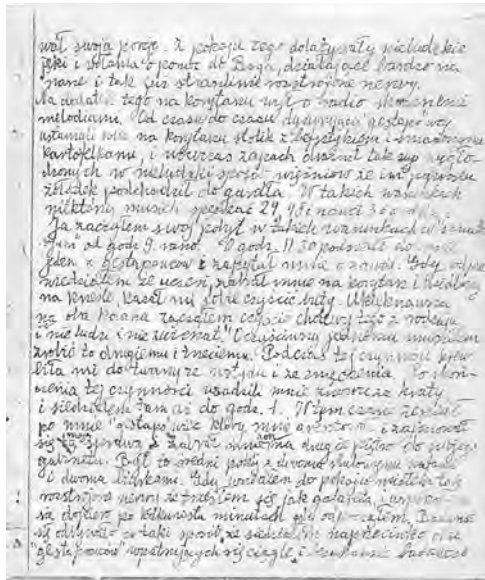
¹The international Scouting Movement grew out of the experience of British General Robert Baden-Powell and American Frederick Russell Burnham, a veteran of the Indian Wars in the American West and an experienced scout, during the Boer Wars in South Africa (1880–1881 and 1899–1902). By 1910, the Boy Scout movement had spread throughout the British Empire to a number of other countries, including Poland, and was quickly followed by the organization of a related movement for girls.

PREFACE

I fought in the Warsaw Uprising, from August 1, 1944 until September 30, 1944, when we were finally forced to surrender. The war ended for me at age fifteen and a half, as a POW in Stalag XI-A near Dörnitz, Germany, about fifty miles southwest of Berlin. I was desperately ill, severely malnourished, and had no idea what had happened to my family.

After liberation, I found myself at age sixteen alone in England, suffering from what today is known as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). My physical health was still fragile. I relived the battles, and the death and devastation, over and over again in my mind. I would be throwing grenades in the middle of a desperate firefight...only to discover I had thrown a bedside lamp in the middle of a violent nightmare.

Finally, a wise army doctor advised me to write down my experiences as accurately as possible, as a way to put the war behind me and start a new life. Thus began my World War II chronicle.



A page from sixteen-year-old Julian Kulski's war diary.

PREFACE

I have often been asked how I could remember things so clearly. I started writing this diary in the summer of 1945, a couple of months after the war had ended. My experiences from the first to the last day of war played out repeatedly in my mind, a kaleidoscope of scenes that tumbled endlessly through my consciousness. My memories were so immediate, so vivid and intense, so searing in their clarity, that those six long years of war sprang to life again over the next three months as they poured out of me onto paper. Later, with the aid of a calendar and reference to the few documents I quote, I was able to add details and approximate dates where specific dates weren't burned into memory. I wrote in longhand, in Polish of course, then put the completed manuscript in a drawer and moved on with building a new life for myself.

Seventy-five years have passed since World War II began, and I find it harder than ever to accept, or even to comprehend, the inhumanity of that period. When it was first suggested that my personal chronicle should be published, I realized that this should be done for two reasons—first, to provide a contemporaneous record of events to which historians can refer (and several historians have already done so), but secondly, and more importantly, to let my experiences stand in memory of my comrades and of the countless other brave people of Warsaw who symbolize the triumph of the human spirit over oppression and terror.

Julian Kulski

Washington, D.C.

August 1, 2014

(The 70th Anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising)

