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### My wartime experiences

War... this word brings many thoughts and sad memories. Before the war, during history lessons we learned about different wars and battles fought in Poland. Now we saw with our own eyes what sort of damages were caused by war.

In 1939, the information about the war with the Germans spread like wildfire. People started to panic, mobilization began, families were driven to despair, as they feared losing their sons, and wives worried about their husbands, knowing they might never see them again. Many people had embraced each other for the last time, for shortly afterwards they fell into eternal sleep, cradled by the earth.

On 1 September, among white clouds in the blue sky we saw German planes and heard their menacing whirr. The ground trembled from the exploding bombs dropping on Lublin and its environs. From then on, our days were filled with uncertainty and fear of death. Many of our friends from the nearby Motycz railway station moved in with us. Every time we heard a sound of planes, we hid in the forest with our hearts pounding, in a shelter which we had dug ourselves. Countless people were fleeing towards the east through the road. In the evening silence we could hear the blasts of cannons.

Constant air raids turned our country into ruins. Two weeks later we saw a German patrol which encountered a small group of Polish soldiers in the forest. A shoot-out ensued, accompanied by grenade explosions. Everyone put their hands down, dumbfounded from fear, but there was still a flicker of hope in our hearts.

On the following day, plenty of Germans and motorized units appeared on the road a kilometer from us. They were attacking Lublin, and only the boys from the Military Training were defending the city. This is when the cathedral was partly destroyed and so were

numerous other buildings. Many people died on the battlefield, paying their debt to our Homeland with blood and life.

Once Poland had been taken over in its entirety, all hope for freedom vanished. People wandered around in the dark and disappeared without a trace. Across the entire country, covered in blood and tears, graves were scattered like red poppies which grew on the soil watered by blood spilled in the fight for freedom. Sad days of our lives were going by. The Gestapo men – especially migrants – stuck their devilish black paws everywhere, tormenting people.

On the memorable day of 16 June 1940, a local German migrant was killed. He used to rob the people travelling on the road of all of their belongings. Chaos ensued, because the punishment for killing one Nazi henchman in other villages was that all residents had been murdered – from tiny babies in cradles to grey-haired elderly and women. All men had escaped, but my family members stayed.

The Gestapo arrived on the following day and proceeded to round people up, searching for them in the fields and forests. They took my daddy and my brother. I was now on my own in the house. Our German acquaintances were selecting people who were to be killed and those who were to be released. My brother and dad were released. More than a hundred men were loaded onto a truck and transported to the Radawiec forest, where [the Germans] behaved like beasts, wounding or killing the innocent people who were begging for mercy. The ground kept moving after the half-dead, groaning people had been buried underneath. The enemy spilled so much innocent blood to avenge one person.

The locals couldn't let such injustice pass. Lots of partisans hid in the forests like wood sprites, so that no evil man would turn them in to the black, scrawny hands of the Germans. Just like white eagles are eager to fly, their young hearts were itching to fight, even though many people were arrested and murdered in prisons, camps and forests. They sacrificed everything for their Homeland – their blood and white bones were scattered around fields and forests, where only a passing bird might warble a sad lullaby for the Polish heroes. Many mothers cried while waiting for their sons. Many a child asked about their father, waiting in vain, as they would never get to embrace him and press their little heart against him – the heart that would break or even stop beating at the terrible news.

Days were getting worse and more uncertain, as large quotas were established. The gendarmes were going around the villages and taking away everything – even people. On one October day in 1942, an attack was organized against a group of German robbers who were on their way back from the village. Among them was a local village mayor – a German. A driver and commandant of the Polish police were killed, while the village mayor was taken to the forest and subjected to a beating. I get shivers when I recall this frightening moment – a cloud of dust and a corpse lying on the road.

Later in the evening there was a search. My brother and neighbors were arrested and taken straight to Lublin Castle. For about six weeks we kept looking for them and trying to get them out. After many attempts, the long-awaited moment came – the prisoners returned.

People were deported from prisons and executed in forests, ditches and meadows to avoid witnesses. On 11 November 1941, on our national holiday, the German criminals killed 120 people in the forest next to the road in Konopnica. One of them managed to escape but a German chased after him, shooting at him. The man looked back, crossed himself and kept running. The relentless German had designs on the Pole's life – like the Devil has on a human soul. As he was running, he did not notice that he had lost his hat with the vile, black emblem – the eagle with a swastika. With God's help, the hero survived to fight and avenge his brothers.

Our suffering was coming to an end – the arrogant and proud Nazis turned into fearful, fleeing cowards. The smoke from the burning searchlights and cannons was all around, because the Germans were destroying everything that they could not take with them. Artillery shells were flying from the direction of Lublin. We buried all the clothes and underwear at home.

On the next day, we were woken up by the loud noise and gunfire – a fight broke out in the forest. I began to hide my school diplomas and notebook. Oddly enough, as I was standing by the window, I suddenly saw an unknown army driving in the forest and all around. I was told that these were the Russians, who were catching the last survivors and burying German corpses like animals, because these Germans were bloodthirsty beasts who hunted innocent Poles.

The front reached the Vistula next to our beautiful capital – Warsaw. The brave residents of Warsaw, who had been defending the city since the very beginning, got crushed along with it and were now faithfully lying under the rubble.

The enemy did not remain among Warsaw's ruins, but was chased away and crushed, while Poland reclaimed its old lands of the Piast and sapphire waters of the Baltic Sea, with the beautiful harbors in Gdynia and Szczecin.

Even with Majdanek, Auschwitz and other death camps, the Germans did not manage to execute their plan to conquer the whole world. God saw the horrific crimes committed in churches and camps, from where souls depart to appear before His throne, crying out for vengeance. The Poles are capable of suffering, making sacrifices and dying for their Homeland. Our soldiers, the Slavs from long ago and those living presently, marched into battle praying out loud and were victorious. Poles fought everywhere. Their white bones lie even in the hot sand of the Sahara Desert in Africa. Our land is precious because it is soaked in the sea of blood that had been spilled during all these wars, and enriched by the bones of our martyrs.

So let us stand guard and serve our Homeland faithfully, rekindle our love for Her, and develop hatred for those who wish to steal, destroy and crush Her. If we always believe in our strength and the power of our spirit, we shall bravely go into battle, if need be.

We will not fear the enemy,

Every doorsill shall be a fortress.

So help us God!