

Interview with Professor Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski

Part 1

James Jackson for the BBC: Could you introduce yourself and tell us about your background?

Professor Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski: My name is Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski. I'm a Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Texas in El Paso, Texas. I took part in the Warsaw Uprising during the Nazi occupation of Poland. I was a member of the scouting group Szare Szeregi (Grey Ranks), which was a pseudonym for the Polish Scouting Association during wartime. I was also part of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa). I was sworn into both organizations at the age of 15, in March 1943, in the cellars of the Jesuit Church near Warsaw's Cathedral on Jezuitka Street.

By March 1944, at 16 years old, I became a Hufcowy (scout leader), leading three divisions. The leadership at the time had become younger due to arrests made before the war. Despite my young age, I was promoted for my leadership qualities.

Although I knew that there was going to be an uprising, no one knew exactly when. At that point, in late July, the Home Army decided not to mobilize the Zawiszacy (a scouting group under age 15) on the first day of the Warsaw Uprising, fearing heavy casualties. Instead, I was tasked with a significant operation. I stationed my boys along Jerusalem Avenue, one of Warsaw's main streets, to spy on the Germans ten days before the uprising began. Our goal was to observe the movement of German forces - whether they were arriving or leaving the city - and to report on their condition. My kids were pretending to wait for a bus, then reported to me what they saw. I was the one who delivered these reports to Armia Krajowa.

During these first few days, the Germans were fleeing Warsaw. Civilians mixed with the army. But five days before the uprising started on August 1, 1944, things changed. New German troops began marching into Warsaw.

As I said I had no idea that the uprising was going to start on the 1st of August. So, on that day I was still managing my young scouts, stationed along the avenue. On the day of the uprising, around 2 p.m., three hours before the uprising, I got a telephone call that the scout stationed at the Washington Roundabout had to go to the hospital. I had to fill in for that scout. Around 4 p.m., I was there, and just before the fighting broke out, I witnessed the Hermann Göring Division coming to the Skaryszewski Park.

I left the position at 5 p.m. and started walking. When I was in the middle of the Poniatowski Bridge that moment on the bridge between the east and central parts of Warsaw became pivotal for me. I decided to head to central Warsaw instead of the eastern part, Saska Kępa because I feared getting caught by the guards there. Had I gone that way, my fate would have been very different - I might never have left Poland and would never go to America. As I crossed the bridge, machine gun fire broke out. I ran down to Solec and Dobra Streets.

I eventually joined the Krybar Battalion of the Home Army. I thought I would be given a weapon, but all I got were two bottles of gasoline (Molotov cocktails). And it was the only weapon I had during the Warsaw Uprising. Our unit burned two German tanks with those gasoline bottles, though it wasn't easy, especially since our matches didn't always work.

The Germans made a critical mistake. They kept using tanks, which were vulnerable in urban combat. We could easily target them with Molotov cocktails from the ruins. But around the time we burned two tanks, the Germans switched to artillery, and that's when things got worse. At some point, my commander sent me to bring some gasoline with another boy. When we came back, the Germans started shooting artillery and the whole platoon died. Everybody died except two of us.

That was the beginning of the uprising for me. From that point on, the fight became even more intense. Around the sixth or seventh day, I approached my commander and asked if I could officially join scouting units. "Radosław" Battalion and "Zośka" Battalion were fighting in the Wola district. However, I didn't make it because it was impossible to reach the battalions. After all, the Germans had already cut off the district from Central Warsaw. Luckily for me because out of 800 scouts fighting in these battalions, more than half died during the fight.

As a scout, I also had other duties. At one point, I was assigned to help with the scouting post office, delivering letters, and stationed on Sienna Street. I was there for about 10 days. At first, people were euphoric to receive news from their loved ones delivered by us. In total, the scouting post office delivered around 150,000 letters, and about 17 of the scouts were killed while delivering them. But after two weeks, as the situation in Warsaw deteriorated, people started blaming us for the uprising. The mood shifted, and I wanted to go back to fighting.

I told my commanders I wanted the hardest and most dangerous job. I was assigned as a carrier. On August 14th, General Bór-Komorowski issued the famous Warsaw Appeal for all the partisan units to attack the German units. At that time the German units were bombing us about every half an hour. The Home Army didn't know if the messages sent to partisans through Radio would reach them. That is why I was sent as a courier through the sewers to deliver a cyphered message to partisans outside Warsaw. The message was sewn into my jacket. When I came to Mokotowska 14 Street, where a barricade and guards were watching it, they made me wait for a commander of the barricade for his permission to enter the sewer. When half an hour later he came, to my surprise it was my Jewish friend Adam Tepper, who once told me that as a Jew he would never join the Home Army. Three days later there was an attack on the barricade and from what I've heard he died.

When I left the sewer in Mokotów, I had to enter another sewer to Czerniaków and then came out of that at the end in Czerniaków, on Mączna Street, which doesn't exist right now. At that point, I decided to change the method of traveling. I decided to simply walk through the street and said that I was looking for my mother. I approached a German guard and told the story. He didn't believe me and arrested me immediately. At that time, I didn't realize that but because of the sewers, I was smelling. He led me to Wilanów and jailed me there. Besides me, there were about 30 Home Army soldiers with me. Our guard was a very old German soldier, probably around 70 years old. Because I learned German in high school I started

speaking to him. He looked at me and told me to escape, adding that he was not a Hitler follower, and all of the soldiers were going to be shot in 3 days.

If he didn't do that, I wouldn't be talking to you right now. At that time, I wasn't thinking about escaping but delivering that secret message. So, I waited that night and decided to read the message, learn it by heart, and deliver the message orally. Unfortunately, it was all in ciphers and I couldn't understand what it was saying. There was only one sentence in Polish: "Możesz to zrobić szydełkiem albo na drutach". No sense in that.

In that case, I removed the cipher from my jacket and put it in my sock. So, in case I would be searched, I could throw this away. At that time, I decided to plan my escape. I had only three days to plan my escape. Amazingly enough, I was able to escape miraculously.

At some point, the German soldiers decided to lead us somewhere, where we could dig ditches. It was all because at that time Germans thought that the Polish army, the Berling Army under Russian control would attack Warsaw from south across the Vistula. That is why they started digging some trenches. They made us do it very late, it was dark. After that, they led us back to the prison through a very narrow street. When the column was turning from straight right, I decided to take action. I jumped into the cellar. Amazingly enough, I got away.

I ran through several houses. I remember that only in an amok: women shouting at me, some children crying. I ran through several buildings and finally delivered the message.

When I delivered the message, Colonel Roman in Milanówek informed me that he couldn't attack from behind Warsaw due to insufficient machine guns and artillery. Therefore, my mission was a failure.

They asked me to stay with the Kampinos partisans, but I refused. I had to deliver an order because I was a scouting commander. So, I went back to Warsaw, crawling through the sewers once again, this time through Ursynów, which was just open fields back then. Today, 100,000 people live there in high-rise buildings.

When I reached the Polish lines, they asked me for the military signal to cross that night. I didn't know the signal, so they thought I was a spy. I told them I had been sent by Colonel Karol, commander of Mokotów, and explained myself. They finally let me through. I had to go back and forth through the sewers, a journey of about five kilometers each way, three times. It was exhausting, and I was so weak that I survived on the little sugar I had in my pocket.

The sewers were full of gas from military grenades, and there were dead bodies everywhere. A girl named Marta, only 18 years old, was leading me. At one point, I told her I would just stay and die, but she wouldn't let me. She said, "You're a man, you have to rebuild scouting after the war. You must survive."

When we reached the end of the channel, I was too weak to stand, and they had to pull me out of the sewer. That night, I wrote my report, and when I returned to my unit, they were surprised I had survived after being gone for almost 10 days. Afterward, I was assigned to the "Miłosz" Battalion, which was attacking the Polish Parliament building. I stayed with the

“Bradl” company until the end of the uprising, which lasted 63 days. I was slightly wounded in the face.

James Jackson: How were you wounded?

Professor: The Germans had begun using more artillery. They were shooting from the Polish Parliament building when a wall collapsed on us. Luckily, it was mostly bricks, which is why we survived. If it had been ammunition, we wouldn't have.

After 63 days, we capitulated. I asked Captain Bradl what I should do. He advised me to go to a German POW camp because otherwise, I might be sent to Auschwitz or another concentration camp. During the uprising, my mother had begged a German officer not to separate her from my grandmother, and for that, she was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she died.

James Jackson: Could you tell me about your aunt and the Wola massacre?

Professor: Wola was one of the first places the Germans attacked during the Warsaw Uprising, and it was a terrible massacre. The best battalions fought there, but they couldn't save the civilians. Hitler and Himmler had ordered that everyone, including women and children, be killed. In just one week, they murdered between 30,000 and 50,000 people. The Germans committed horrifying atrocities, like cutting babies from their mothers' bodies.

They burned the buildings, and my grandmother, who lived in an old people's home, was burned alive when they set fire to it.

James Jackson: And when that happened, you were in the scouts trying to reach Wola, but you couldn't.

Professor: Well, I never reached Wola, and that's why I survived. I stayed in the central part of the city, on Sienna Street, where the Palace of Culture stands today.

After one week after the beginning of the Uprising, the Germans realized that they didn't have enough ammunition to kill everyone, so they changed their orders. Instead of killing everyone, they began selecting who to kill, to save ammunition to kill us, the soldiers. Even after that of course, many senseless executions were carried out by the Wehrmacht, SS, and the Russian Liberation Army, which had collaborated with the Germans.

Captain Bradl, my battalion commander, was a hero. During the Warsaw occupation, he spied on the Germans while dressed as a German general and delivered important documents to the French about the Normandy invasion. He spoke five languages and had been involved in constructing two Polish submarines. After the war, he was arrested by the communists as an enemy of Poland, but thankfully, he survived. He was the one who advised me to go to the POW camp. I was sent to Sandbostel, between Bremen and Hamburg, which held 30,000 soldiers from all nationalities. I was liberated in April 1945 by the Canadians.

Part 2

Maria Kolarska for the Pilecki Institute: Professor, could you introduce yourself?

Professor Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski: My name is Zbigniew Anthony Kruszewski. I'm a retired political science professor from the University of Texas, El Paso, in the United States.

I was exiled after being freed by the Canadians, II Canadian Corps. In the Corps, it was General Maczek's 1st Armoured Division. I didn't join General Maczek's Division because my mother had always told me to focus on my education first. She had planned for me to become a professor. I remember being on a tram with her in Warsaw, she showed me the university and said here you will go.

Because Polish schools were in England, I wanted to go to England. Around that time, I met Auberon Herbert, an Englishman, and an aristocrat, who spoke quite good Polish. They didn't want him in the English army, and for that reason, he signed up for the Polish army. He said that he was going to take me to Paris with him.

There I went to the Polish Embassy in Paris and wanted to go to England, but at that point, the country didn't want to increase the number of refugees. Ambassador Morawski said that I have to sign up for the Polish Army because then I wouldn't be just one of 2 million refugees coming to England.

I signed up for the Polish Army, and they sent me to a camp in southern France where the Polish flag was already folded, and the French flag was up since the French had already started cooperating with the Polish Communist government. Because of that, they were going to hand all 50 of us over as war criminals for "burning down Warsaw". Fortunately, Polish intelligence, in collaboration with British intelligence, managed to smuggle me and others across the border. It lasted 5 days, and each day a jeep would arrive, and they would take us under a tarpaulin and move us across the Italian-French border. On the border, there were only people from Polish intelligence and English intelligence. And that is how we entered into General Anders' 2nd Corps.

There, I was assigned to the 12th Uhlan Regiment, General Anders' auxiliary regiment. They wanted to send me to cadet school, but I decided to prioritize my education. Eventually, I was sent to Camino, in southern Italy for a year, where I did my matriculation courses. At the time of the Uprising, I had a small Matura exam and missed two years of high school. In 1946 they sent us to England, telling us that we were going there for rearmament because there was going to be 3rd World War. In reality, the English just needed cheap labor, to work at mines and factories. But the command of the II Corps claimed that there was going to be a conflict with Soviet Russia, and in order to prepare we had to go to England.

Eventually, I completed my high school education in England. In 1947 they already sent me to work, as I mentioned the worst job was in a mine or factory, and I just wanted to work and study. I went on vacation to London, and I found a job. I worked in the city of London for a couple of years in the Underground Railroad, then I was a pasty chef. I had to take evening

courses. I also went to the Polish Higher Diplomatic School in London, where they were training future diplomats.

Maria Kolarska: Did you ever consider returning to Poland? Did you have such thoughts?

Professor: We received a message that a few scouts had been killed. So, we were a little afraid. Not even a little, we were very scared. I stayed in touch with my brother, who had survived the war and attack on Służewiec by hiding in a lower seat. He later on fled to Kraków on foot. He survived the war and went to Polytechnic School. He finished engineering, as his mother wanted him to.

I used a fake name to correspond with him through Australia. I was afraid that if I contacted him in the West, he would lose his job. The communist knew that I was, as his brother, abroad.

After the army, after I was demobilized, I started attending evening English courses but I couldn't afford to finish higher education in England. There were only 20 universities, and they were for the rich with no possibility of getting a visa. So, I decided to go to America. I went to the American consulate but didn't get a visa. Still don't know why. I had to wait four years to get a visa.

Eventually, 18,000 Polish soldiers were allowed to immigrate to America, thanks to the efforts of the Polish-American Congress. They forced the American authorities to include the Home Army's soldiers as emigrants to America. Luckily, I was one of them. At that point, not all of them wanted to go. They preferred to stay in England or go back to Poland. So only 11,000 went to the States, and the rest were chosen among other people who wanted to go. So, I went to America. It was the best decision of my life.

When I arrived, I received a scholarship to study at the University of Chicago. At first, I studied economics because I hoped that it would help me to get a good job. Later it turned out that I could get a PhD in political science. I wanted that. Although I thought that I would have to study a bit longer. While I was at the University of Chicago, I worked as a bookkeeper in the office of the rector of the University of Chicago.

As I was at the University of Chicago, at some point they set up Slavic studies. I went to the head of the Slavic department and asked him if he had any Polish books. He said no, and that they only had Russian books, because of the lack of money. I told him to call it a Russian department, not a Slavic one because they only had books in Russian there. I asked him where the Polish books are, and again he said that they didn't have money for Polish ones.

It pushed me to start a campaign among Polish Polonia to establish a Polish Literature Department, and with the help of the Polish community (Polonia), we succeeded. I found an organization called "Legion Młodych Polek", which offered to donate money. It turned out that we didn't have a professor, so I said that I would bring one from London. I brought over the famous Polish writer Maria Kuncewicz to teach, and she did a fantastic job. She spoke English very well. When I was working at the university's rectorate, I managed to make a correspondence for her with the media, television, and the radio. She promoted the Polish

Literature Academy very well. A few years later, returned to Poland to get back her home in Kazimierz.

At the Polish Literature Academy, I introduced Tymon Terlecki, a professor of theatre from London. He became my political colleague. I was in the political party NIT, Independence and Democracy, which was a federal, democratic organization. Back then, we were afraid that there would be a dictatorship in Poland, as it was before the war. We were afraid that there would be a nationalist government.

Maria Kolarska: And did young people discuss what Poland should be like after the war?

Professor: Yes, there were many different opinions. Of course, all political parties were organized in emigration. The very strong lobby was the continuation of pre-war relations. Let's keep in mind that now the Second Polish Republic is glorified but Poland was only four years old, and a democracy lasted until May 1926. Then it was a dictatorship. But we tend to glorify Piłsudski and Piłsudski's successors. We were a little afraid then. My political party Independence and Democracy was formed mainly by the intelligence of Polish underground couriers. There were a number of people, including very prominent professors. We were afraid that General Anders would be the new dictator in Poland, that he would come back to Poland with the Americans. But of course, all these thoughts fell apart because until 1956 we were hoping to return to Poland. After Gomułka, a year later, it turned out that it is not possible. Still, they conducted research and accepted us in Warsaw as a political party.

We had hoped to return to Poland but by 1956, it was clear that it wouldn't happen.

Maria Kolarska: So, despite the stay in the West, there were still inner desires to return to the homeland?

Professor: Yes, yes. I became a U.S. citizen in 1957. It was the best decision of mine because I decided to work in the Polish American Congress. I met the president of the Congress, Karol Rozmarek. He told me that he never went to a Polish school, and because I did, I would be his secretary and write the speeches for him. I wrote an anti-communist speech, which he read on the radio and so on.

So, from 1952 I belonged to the Polish American Congress. In Chicago, which was called Central, and later in Texas, as a professor of Texas. In 1992 there were elections for the vice-president of the Polish American Congress for the whole of America. I won with Nowak-Jeziorański with five votes and became the vice president of the Polish American Congress for the whole country.

When everything changed in 1989, I was sent to Polish settlements in Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania to help Polish people in these soviet countries. So, I was in the Polish American Congress from 1952 to 1992. I resigned later because the new president of the Congress was very anti-Semitic. And it destroyed the Polish opinion in the States. Before him, we would be asked to the White House and meet with American presidents. After he became the president of Congress, they wanted us to visit the White House only once a year, and still to come without him. When I became the vice president, I contacted the White House. I was in the

president's office several times. I talked to Daniel Fried, who was the vice secretary of foreign affairs in the White House. He was in charge of Polish and Russian affairs.

Then I got a PhD. First, I was a lecturer in northern New York, on the Canadian border. And then I got a second job at the University of Texas in Texas, El Paso. There I started studying the borders. At first, I did a PhD on Odra and Nysa. The first book in English on Odra and Nysa was written at the University of Chicago as my doctoral thesis. It was called "The Oder-Neisse Boundary and Poland's Modernization". The shift in Poland led to the modernization of Poland.

Then I concentrated on studying the borders. I accepted an offer from Texas because the issue of the southern border was equally important. Immigration and so on. Around 1976 I was elected a chairman of the political science committee. I was a chairman for 9 years.

One time we went for a coffee and said that there is no scientific association studying borders. In America, it's done like this. In Poland, it would be impossible to do it this way because of the permits and so on. So, we set up the world's first scientific association for border studies. At first, it was in Texas, El Paso, then the headquarters went to San Diego, then to Copenhagen, then to Helsinki, and then to New Delhi, India. Our organization grew and eventually hosted international conferences attended by thousands of scientists. I remember congress in Helsinki in 2005 or 2006, thousands of scientists greeted me as the founder of the World Scientific Association for Border Research.

Maria Kolarska: Speaking of boundaries, not just literal ones, but in terms of time - the date May 8th, 1945, marking the end of World War II. Of course, for Poland, it didn't signify the start of freedom, but rather the beginning of another era of oppression, this time under Soviet rule. I wanted to ask, what did this date mean to you?

Professor: The end of the war was, of course, the end of horror, the end of the tragedy, the massacre by Hitler, the tragedy of Poland, and the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising. I was released from captivity on 29th April and arrived in Paris in May, when it was already free.

On the other hand, it was the end of the war and a failure to recognize the legitimate Polish government in London. It was clear that most of us would not return to Poland, because we would be recognized as enemies. And it turned out to be true. I remember that together with my colleagues from the 12th Regiment, with whom I demolished the communist consulate in Ancona, Italy, were called "the criminals" and refused to eventually let us into Poland by Warsaw Radio. Such things happen.

So, this date was to some extent censorship, that it was the end of a certain period of war, but freedom did not come to us. I lost everything. The only thing I still have is a photograph of my mother that I carried in my wallet. I lost my whole family and everything we had. And I lost my homeland because I was expelled to some extent, I could not return to my country. So, the 8th of May was less important to me. It was important to release the prisoners from the camp and then it was possible to function and do political work for Poland in America.

I dedicated my whole life, not only to being a professor of political science, I had 15,000 American students, but also to political activities in huge numbers. So, to some extent, I was more of a diplomat than a professor. I was in the Polish American Congress until the very end. I was working in Texas.

I met my wife in Chicago. My wife and I didn't have children, so we decided to dedicate our income to scholarships and university programs and faculties in Texas. We established three endowed academic chairs at a university in Texas. One of them was founded in the name of the Kruszewski family. The second one was founded in the name of Antoni Grabowski, my grandfather, who was an Esperantist and translated "Pan Tadeusz" into Esperanto. He endowed a professorship in Spanish. The third faculty was found in the name of my wife, who was a wonderful woman. She kept telling me, that I was doing too little, that I could do more. And for 15 years Jadzia was an actress in our theatre, "Reduta", which was in Warsaw before the war. The actors from "Reduta" landed in Chicago. I met my wife, while she was travelling the America for 15 years.

When I got my professorship, she said, that now she would play in bridge and so on. But she started studying. She did her master's, wrote a thesis in Spanish, "Calderón and Słowacki". And for 15 years, she was teaching Spanish in El Paso, Texas, which is a Spanish speaking city. And 23 years ago, as a reward, the university thanked for this. They informed me, that the theatre at the university was named after my wife. June Sadowska-Kruszewska Theatre at the University of Texas, El Paso. The only theatre in America with a Polish name. There is a photo of her, and the whole family.

So, I did this kind of work all my life. I taught Americans, a lot of students. I was a chairman for 9 years of political science. And for 50 years taught Americans, had international meetings, political activities, and so on. And I finally came to Poland.

Maria Kolarska: So, it seems that you fulfilled the promise Marta made you keep during the war - that you had to survive and rebuild Poland. Because you were doing it abroad.

Professor: It turned out that you can do a lot for Poland. You have to want it, and you have to be able to do it. And you have to do it well. If you are deserving of a certain position, you can accomplish a lot. It turned out that I always managed to be supported in my goals. And I did a lot of good things for Poland.

I have one interesting story. At the time Odra-Nysa was considered to be Poland for good. But at that time there were conversations that the Germans could take it back. Because they held a big conference in Chicago. They claimed that the border on Odra-Nysa had to be lifted and moved eastwards. They sent me all the best revisionists and didn't inform the Polish American Congress. I went to the president of the Congress – Paul Mark Mazewski, an American lawyer. I said, Mr. President, we have to either boycott the Germans or demand from them, to let us say what the Poles have to say about Odra-Nysa. The Germans finally agreed that I would speak for 8 minutes before the meeting.

They let me speak for 5 minutes and then turned off the microphone. But I spoke mainly about non-historical elements, not about Piast. Because when you talk about Szczecin and

Piast, New York would have to be given to the Indians. I was talking about economic and dynamic issues, that there are a lot of Poles there. At that time, there were already 6 million people. A lot of children were born, and everything was slowly rebuilt. Although at the beginning it was stolen by the Russians and the looters.

So, I said that Poland needs to maintain Odra-Nysa because otherwise, it will become a Duchy of Warsaw, it will lose the East and only Central Poland will remain. I remember that the German ambassador came up to me and said, you are an American, but you support communist Poland. I said, yes, in this case, yes. At this conference, a second gentleman stood up and said, sir, you talked a lot about Odra-Nysa and about Poland. You have to go to Poland and write a book in America about Odra-Nysa. And because the University of Chicago demanded that they give me a doctorate as long as I researched a given subject.

So, it turned out that this gentleman was the secretary of the communist Polish embassy, Kmiecik. I said to him, I am an activist, you will not give me a visa, because I am anti-communist. He responded that he would give me a visa. And so, he did, for a whole year. In 1959 I was the first American who came to Poland to study the recovered territories, which allowed me to complete my doctoral research at the University of Chicago. So such an action could be done. And that's why, among other things, I thought that there was more help in America than if I came back to Poland.