

Interview with Kazimir Ladny

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: I think that's a wonderful story. But again, times are very tough for the next couple years in Germany. You're making your living in the black market. I think to try to explain that so we can understand exactly what that meant, you have a story in the book where you talked about deciding that you could make a little money if you had some glass thermometers. Could you tell that story?

Ladny: Yeah, fever thermometers. I don't know who wanted them; somebody had a connection someplace that they wanted fever thermometers. So I thought there was a good price on it. How to get them? I knew that the German most famous glass factories were in eastern Germany in Thuringia.

DePue: Which was now under Russian control.

Ladny: Yeah, it was Russian. So I thought I have to get over there to get a contact. And I did. It was very scary, but I made it, and on this deal I made about 35,000 marks profit. Oh this was nice money.

DePue: That was a lot of money at the time.

Ladny: Oh, yeah.

DePue: I would imagine the toughest part of that trip was crossing the border between western Germany and eastern Germany and then you got to come back again with the load. Were the borders guarded at that time?

Ladny: Oh yeah, yeah.

DePue: So how did you manage that? Here you are a Pole. What kind of papers would you have had at the time?

Ladny: I didn't have any papers. Again, God's help. Miracles happen. Way back, I knew just about where the border might be. I didn't know the distances or what, especially at night. But I just went off the highway in the field, in the direction. I have to go west. So just whatever happened. But then I see, oh, maybe 100 yards away, to the left there is another man who is going in this same direction. So I thought I join him, so at least two of us.

And so in conversation he said that this was his routine. He was going every few days back and forth across the border. So he says, "Listen. Your first time. If you want to go with me, so it costs you fifty marks. Or, you go on your own." I said, "Okay, there you are, fifty marks." He knew his way. Boy. I had 1,200 fever thermometers.

DePue: Twelve hundred.

Ladny: Yeah. In a wooden suitcase. We went through the mountain to climb the mountain. So I put the suitcase and my walking cane on the shoulder. And I was climbing. But then I slipped and the suitcase fell down. So all I heard the drudududu at night, boy. So I thought now hell.

DePue: Where every little sound becomes a huge sound I would think.

Ladny: Yeah. So now what to do? To go try to get whatever? The scraps of it? But maybe over there the border guard will be waiting for you. So this was hard decision to make. But I thought, oh hell, it was worth it. I went through so much difficulties to get it. Now I won't abandon that. I want to get it. So I went. I got it. But when I get up I saw just down there he was running across the border.

DePue: Your guide was.

Ladny: Yeah, with my fifty marks. Now I thought at least now I know where it was. So I ran after him and made it.