



BTL

Monday, February 8, 2016

His Excellency Marcin Bosacki
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Canada
443 Daly Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N6H3

Dear Ambassador Bosacki,

Thank you for your letter dated 4 February 2016 regarding the grammatical error that appears on page 178 of the book *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada*.

The passage in question that you asked us to examine uses the wording "Polish SS (Schutzstaffel)" to describe the German SS operating in occupied Poland. It should have read simply "the SS (Schutzstaffel)."

The book's authors, Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner, have written their own response assuming responsibility for this error. We would also like to state unequivocally that there was no Schutzstaffel operated by Poland and assure you that we will take action to correct the error.

This correction will be made immediately by issuing an erratum to be inserted in all print copies. The new wording will be used in any reprints of the book. The new wording will also be used in the e-book, which is yet to be published. Further, we will post notice of our error on our social media accounts and on the our website.

We apologize sincerely for any hurt or confusion this error may have caused to you and others.

Sincerely,

Between the Lines

Toronto, February 8, 2016

His Excellency Marcin Bosacki
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland in Canada
443 Daly Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N6H3

Dear Ambassador Bosacki,

Thank you for your letter drawing our attention to an error in our book *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada*.

The passage in question that you asked us to examine uses the wording "Polish SS" (Schutzstaffel) to describe the German SS in occupied Poland (p. 178). We realize this is a significant grammatical error. There is no Polish SS. It was never our intent to imply otherwise.

We apologize to you and others for any hurt and misunderstanding caused by our wording. We sincerely regret the error.

We will correct it by replacing the current wording with "the SS." This new wording is in context, preceded by the explanation that "Wehrmacht troops had taken over in Eastern Poland." This correction will be made immediately by issuing an errata to be inserted in all print copies yet to be sold. The new wording will be used in reprints of the print book. The new wording will also be used in the e-book, which is yet to be published. Further, we will post notice of our error on our social media accounts and on the book and publisher websites.

In *Flight and Freedom*, it was our intent to showcase the remarkable resilience, courage and character of refugees to Canada over the course of this country's history. We regret that our error has caused a shift in focus from the extraordinary narratives of those forced from their homes in search of freedom, and has instead created pain for others.

Finally, we underline that as interviewers and authors, we are responsible for this error. It is ours, and not that of the son of Holocaust survivor Max Farber, in whose story our error falls.

Sincerely,
Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner



Authors, *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada*

Cc:

Canadian Polish Congress
Polish Combatants' Association in Canada
Polish-Canadian Women's Federation
Young Polish-Canadian Professionals Association
Polish-Jewish Heritage Foundation of Canada
Canada Book Fund

Canada Council for the Arts
Ontario Arts Council

September 1942, Sokolow Podlaski, Poland

The first years of the Second World War were relatively quiet for Max Farber, his family, and the other eighteen hundred residents of Botchki, a village with a large Jewish population south of Bialystok in Soviet-controlled Poland. After Russian troops withdrew in 1939, under a treaty with Germany, Wehrmacht troops had taken over in eastern Poland.

At first, a number of Jewish males in the region were sent to local work camps. But in 1941, German troops, Polish SS (Schutzstaffel), and collaborators began herding Jewish families into makeshift ghettos.

Then the Jewish population, almost half of Botchki, was moved to a nearby larger town, Sokolow Podlaski, to a few fenced-in streets around the synagogue, an area of decrepit housing that lacked sewers and running water. In the summer of 1941, it became a closed ghetto with brick walls topped with barbed wire. Several thousand additional families were crowded in. Lack of food became a problem, then starvation. The death rate began rising quickly. To survive meant going beyond the barbed wire to search for food, a terrible risk. Jews caught outside the enclosure were shot on sight.

On a September evening in 1942, Max Farber and his nephew, Victor, crawled under the fence when it was their turn to find food. Undetected and unhurt, they crept back several hours later—into the midst of the camp's liquidation.¹ Sirens wailed, and dogs snarled above a din of human cries. Soldiers and police squads were forcing men, women, and children into cattle trucks. Max ran, shoving through the crowds, desperately searching for his wife and two young sons. No one knew what was happening and Max was forced toward the cars for men before he found his wife Zisela and his sons, Sholom and Yitzhak.

Max remembers the truck leaving and, sometime later, stopping so everyone could crowd aboard a train. It was most likely the junction where a special spur line veered off to the Treblinka camp. SS guards were silent about the destination. While Jews knew that other ghettos in the region were being emptied, they had no idea the Treblinka II death camp even existed.

Max used to say it took a thousand miracles to survive the Holocaust—nine hundred and ninety-nine were not enough. Bernie Farber heard his

father's story in bits and pieces during their time together up until he died in 1990. A thousand miracles. Bernie still shakes his head about it.

Max told Bernie, although the train was moving west, he and other men managed to rip out a floorboard and drop the board onto the blur of gravel and railway ties passing below. They survived while Victor headed elsewhere for refuge, Max fled to a farm near Botchki where Julian, a best friend, lived. Julian wasn't Jewish, but he was sure he would help him hide. Julian did, becoming the kind of hero Holocaust survivors today honour as the Righteous. It was a huge risk. Polish families caught hiding Jews were immediately shot. Max and Julian had to be careful, ingenious—and they had to make Max van

Max called it a "grave." Early each morning he and Julian would cross the farm to a secluded site where they had dug a pit the length and width of a man's body. Placing a long straw in his mouth and holding his lips around it tightly, Max would lie down in the trench up while Julian shoveled dirt over him, covering him, but careful to avoid the straw's tip. From before dawn until after dark every day Max spent three months in his grave, and each night Julian would come and dig him out. He would eat, exercise, and then lie down flat once again. Under the earth, Max would focus on taking even breaths. At that time, he constantly thought about what could have happened to his wife and sons and what would happen if the SS ever literally unearthed him. And he agonized about what the discovery would mean for Julian and his family.

Then Julian heard a rumour. Botchki Jews had been taken to Treblinka that September night. It was still mistakenly believed to be a labour camp, but wild thoughts of what was happening there took hold of Max. He left the farm and wandered the forest. Completely desperate, he wedged his body between two trees and, because suicide was his only option, he prayed to God to take his life. *Let me die*, he pleaded. He waited for the train. Max climbed out of the tree and decided to find another way out.

Max joined Soviet partisans in the forest, hit-and-run fighter who attacked enemy troops—and he was especially good at sabotage and combat missions. Another of the thousand miracles was that Max grew up in a milling family fluent in the business languages of Polish, Russian, and German. Using his flawless German, he once led an unc

Erratum: Page 178 includes the phrase “Polish SS (Schutzstaffel)” and should read “SS (Schutzstaffel)”. The authors’ intent was to reference the German SS in occupied Poland, not in any way to imply there was a Polish SS.