

**Engineer Memoirs**

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL EDWARD L. ROWNY**

**Former Ambassador**

This manuscript consists of edited selections from a series of tape-recorded interviews conducted by Barry W. Fowle with Edward L. Rowny, Former Ambassador and Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (ret.), in Washington, D.C. between 9 July 1986 and 12 September 1990. The original tapes and unedited transcript are in the Research Collections, Office of History, Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alexandria, Virginia.



*Ambassador Edward L. Rowny in front of a map of the Soviet Union hanging in his office at the State Department, 1985.*

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**Lieutenant General Edward L. Rowny**  
Former Ambassador

**Early Years**

Q: Ambassador Rowny, would you please describe your background and early life? That is, who your parents were, where and when you were born, and your growing-up years.

A: I was born on April 3, 1917, in Baltimore. My father migrated from the farm village of Nagoszevo, 40 kilometers northeast of Warsaw in Poland. He was born in 1893 and came to this country in 1912. He died two months short of his 98th birthday. His father, Andrew, born in 1862, lived to be 91. After a healthy life my grandfather died when he fell off his horse. My father succeeded in his ambition of outliving his father.

On one of my father's several trips to his homeland, he found records of his **family**, with the same spelling, going back to 1657. Before that time it may have been spelled Rowne. The name has two meanings, one more flattering than the other. The more favorable meaning is "straight and true." The less favorable meaning is "plain"

My mother's parents were from Poland; her father from the Austrian portion, and her mother from the Prussian portion of divided Poland.

My father, having had only a grade-school education, went to work as a laborer on the docks in Baltimore. He then "**graduated,**" as he put it, to the easier job of digging ditches for the Baltimore Gas Company. Several years later he went to Fargo, North Dakota, where he worked on a threshing machine for a year. There he developed from a 100-pound youth to a strong 200-pound man. When he returned to Baltimore he went to work as a carpenter in the Sun Shipyard. He also started going to night school, something he continued to do for 14 years. He earned a diploma as an architectural draftsman from the Maryland Institute of Arts.

My father's landlady's daughter, who became my mother, wouldn't marry him until he became a U.S. citizen. As my father tells it, he went before a sleepy examiner in the Baltimore immigration office. He was asked to describe the separation of powers in the United States. He began rattling off the answers when the examiner interrupted him. "You know all that," he said. "What ship did you come over on?" My father, in his typical independent manner, sensing the dullness of the examiner, answered: "the *Mayflower*." My father's application for citizenship reads: "Ship travelled to the United States: *Mayflower*."

He married my mother in 1916 and I was born a year later. He volunteered for the Army during World War I, but was deferred because shipyard workers were exempt.

When I was six years old my younger brother was born. My mother became quite ill and I was sent to live with my mother's parents. My grandfather died a year later and I lived with my grandmother until I finished high school. By this time, my mother had recovered her health, and I went back to live at home.

My high school was the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute from which I was graduated in 1933. I then went to Johns Hopkins University from which I was graduated in 1937 with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering.

Q: You must have attended Johns Hopkins at an early age. How old were you when you graduated?

A: I entered Johns Hopkins when I was 16 and graduated when I was 20 in 1937. While at Hopkins, I spent part of my junior year on a scholarship in Europe. I met my paternal grandparents at their farm home in Nagoszevo. My grandfather was a local magistrate, the head man of his village.

My academic studies were at the Jagellion University in Krakow. Part of my scholarship was the equivalent of a Eurail pass which allowed me travel throughout Europe. I went to Rome, Prague, Budapest, Paris, and Berlin. While in Berlin I went to see the 1936 Olympics where Jesse Owens earned four gold medals. But what shocked me was the stridency and militancy of the Nazis. I was deeply concerned and became convinced that there would be another world war. When I got back home I decided to get in on the ground floor of the war effort and attend West Point. When I was graduated from Hopkins in 1937, I gave up my commission as a reserve second lieutenant and on the first of July 1937, entered West Point.