Janina Aniołczyk

THEY WORKED AMONG US

Polish Combatants' Association in Canada
Branch nr 18, Calgary

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Stanisław Majcherkiewicz

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Maria Skarżyńska

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Chapter I

THEY WORKED AMONG US

To the young reader:

"If you don't know where you've been, how will you know where to go?"
(Pope John Paul II)

Short stories of wartime wandering of members of our Polonia serve to raise awareness among the younger generation about the kind of youth war forced upon them.

Remember that after the war, they came to Canada, young, tired of war, full of hope to start life anew in a new homeland. They were barely in their twenties.

Their early youth during the war was filled with suffering and struggle for survival, and then military service on the battlefield. History remembers the generals, who gained their fame only thanks to soldiers like the heroes of our stories.

The heroes of these histories, upon arriving in Calgary, did not forget about Poland; they worked together to build a strong Polish community. Today, we continue their work in Polish organizations, in the Polish parish, at the Polish Canadian Cultural Center, in the Polish School.

We will never forget their contributions to future generations of our Polonia.

PREFACE

The year 2022 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of Branch #18 of the Polish Combatants' Association in Canada in Calgary. With each anniversary come memories and reflections. Our generation did not witness the cruel events of the Second World War or the post-war times when the fates of post-war wanderers were unfolding. We know this history from the stories of our parents' generation, which experienced the cruelties of the Nazi and Soviet wartime actions. They witnessed the first Luftwaffe raids on Polish cities, the convoys of civilians leaving bombed cities in September 1939. Hundreds of thousands of young Poles survived the so-called roundups, where they were taken from the streets and deported to Germany for forced labor. Some of them ended up in Germany at the age of only 14 and never returned to their family homes.

The inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands experienced the cruel deportation to Siberia, which began in early 1940. About 2 million Poles were transported there in cattle cars. Those who survived the weeks-long journey were welcomed in the Siberian taiga by "Politruks" (as our interlocutors recalled Soviet NKVD officers), as a condemned nation who had arrived in Siberia to perish. My mother's sister remembered that the first words she heard after leaving the train in Krasnoyarsk were "Wy pohybnyj naród", which loosely translates to “You moving nation” – you nation without a home. But it did not break their Polish spirit. Overcoming hunger, -40C frost, hard work, and above all, cruel treatment, the younger and stronger ones survived. After August 1941, they joined the Polish Army under General Anders, formed in the Soviet Union. Due to the lack of equipment and food, Stalin allowed General Anders' Army command to leave the Soviet Union in August 1942. After crossing the Caspian Sea, through Iran, Egypt, Palestine, the 2nd Corps Army under British patronage arrived in southern Italy, where it fought, paving the way for Allied troops to Rome and defeating the German fortifications on the Monte Cassino hills in May 1944. After the war, about half a million Poles deported to Siberia ended up in Western countries, including Canada.

Millions of young Poles from the German-occupied part of Poland were deported to Germany for forced labor, working for farmers in the countryside, in industrial plants, or building bunkers and wartime fortifications. They encountered cruel treatment, often hungry, poorly dressed, living in harsh conditions. Only the stronger and younger ones were able to overcome and survive the slave-like conditions created by their employers. After the war, most of them ended up in temporary camps for war refugees, waiting for emigration to Western countries. The survivors did not want to return to war-torn Poland, which would

be occupied by the Soviet Union for the next 44 years. Only a small number returned to their family homes in Poland.

This compilation briefly describes the fate of our pioneers, the founders of the Polish Combatants' Association in Canada, the fathers of Branch #18 in Calgary. They were connected by their common experiences of war, and they eagerly met in their spare time, even though the beginnings were not easy. They worked hard, fulfilling mandatory two-year contracts with farmers, which were a condition for obtaining an immigrant visa in Canada. It is worth mentioning that they often ended up in places where German prisoners of war had worked during the war. After completing their contractual work, they sought permanent settlement and stable jobs to provide them with a stable life. Young, lonely individuals started families, bought their first homes. The first meetings took place on Sundays in church, where they eagerly gathered after Mass. They were united by the Polish language and the desire to build a Polish community, to find a place where they could feel Polish. These common motives and the painstaking work of Polonia leaders led to the purchase of the first Combatant's House on Kensington Road in Calgary.

Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of our Branch, I would like to present the stories of wartime wandering from eyewitnesses, a handful of members of our Polonia who still live among us. We know from history lessons the fate of Poland and Poles that World War II bestowed upon us. The individual experiences I will present here are a small part of this great picture of the cruelty of World War II - they are former soldiers of the Polish Army, former forced laborers in Germany, former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps, deprived of the opportunity to return to their beloved Poland, for whose freedom they fought. Let us remember that what we enjoy today - the beautiful Polish Church, the magnificent Polish Centre - is thanks to meritorious and far-sighted vision of our pioneers, Polish post-war wanderers in exile – wanderers without a home.

Józef Władysław Bogucki

The story of Józef Władysław Bogucki is one of remarkable courage and resilience in the face of adversity during World War II. Born in Wołomin on the Eastern Borderlands, he was just 13 years old when the war erupted. Living in Warsaw with his mother since 1935, he was already involved in scouting when the war broke out. With the closure of schools by the Germans, Józef secretly continued his education, eventually joining the Gray Ranks (Szare Szeregi) and being enlisted in the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) as a teenage soldier.

Engaging in various acts of sabotage to disrupt the occupiers, Józef and his comrades undertook risky missions, such as sabotaging German vehicles by pouring sugar into their gasoline tanks and sprinkling their uniforms with sulfuric acid, then carefully watching in glee as the uniforms turned yellow and then fell off in patches. Despite the dangers, they persisted in their resistance efforts. Józef worked at the Philips factory, where, under the orders of the underground command of the AK, he procured radio lamps and other components necessary for clandestine radio stations.

However, six months into his employment, someone informed the Gestapo about his activities. Józef and his mother were forced to flee their home, constantly moving from one hiding place to another. When Józef turned 16, he joined the partisans in the Tuchola Forests. Usually, partisan groups only accepted soldiers who were at least 17 years old, but because Jozef was being hunted by the Gestapo, he and his mother were allowed to officially resettle, and he was accepted. His first task was to observe German barracks. He documented the number of armoured cars which left the German barracks daily, how many soldiers, how many officers, how many motorcycles, and how many personal vehicles. Later, he was transferred to the vicinity of Auschwitz, where he covertly photographed the laboring prisoners of the concentration camp, sending these images to the underground command in London.

Following a harrowing winter in 1943, Józef joined a partisan group near Żyrardów, participating actively in underground operations. Their mission included sabotaging German trains carrying ammunition to the Eastern Front. Józef took part in 11 such actions, eventually being promoted to the rank of

corporal. In 1944, he found himself in Radom, where he and several others were summoned by their commander and sent to Warsaw on August 1, the beginning of the Warsaw Uprising.

During the Uprising, Józef fought bravely, enduring the intense street-to-street combat and witnessing the loss of many comrades. He recalled the desperate retreat, first to the Old Town, then through the sewers from Krasiński Square to the city center, and finally to Three Crosses Square. His final post was on Frascati Street, from where, following the capitulation, he was taken on foot to Babice near Warsaw and, after three days, transported as a prisoner of war to Stalag XB camp in Sandbostel, Germany.

Spending eight months in the POW camp, Józef awaited the war's end. After the camp's liberation by the Allies, he joined the Guard Campaign with the American Army, where he served as a sergeant commanding his guard unit.

In 1947, following demobilization, Józef and his mother emigrated to Belgium, and in 1951, they arrived in Canada. Despite his longing to return to Poland, the reality of post-war Poland, where Home Army soldiers faced persecution, made it impossible. Settling in Calgary, Józef worked as a draftsman and later established his own printing business.

In 1969, his mother passed away, and Józef, never marrying, lived a long life among friends in Calgary. His story, recorded from his memories in 2015 at the age of 90, serves as a testament to the bravery and sacrifice of those who fought for freedom during World War II.

Helena Gawliński

Helena and Jan Gawliński have been residents of Canada since May 1950. Mrs. Helena Gawlińska, who is currently 94 years old and still living independently, shared her experiences with us. She eagerly wanted to share her memories, emphasizing that she remembers everything well. She says that such experiences cannot be erased from memory, and some of them are as vivid as ever, even after 79 years.

Mrs. Helena, née Żukowska, was born near Wilno on April 12, 1928. She keeps information about her birthplace on a small piece of paper, just in case her memory fails her. The exact description of her birthplace is the

township and surrounding area of Juszkiewicze, postal address in the town of Miadziol, district of Postawy, regional territory of Wilno. Miadzioł was about 5 kilometers away from the village of Juszkiewicze, and was the location of the nearest church where the whole family attended Mass every Sunday. Helena's parents were Jadwiga and Julian Żukowski. In addition to her, there were three siblings: the eldest brother, Wiktor, and twins, Zosia and Janek. Helena was a child when the Second World War began. Lithuania was first occupied by the Soviets, and after June 1941, it was occupied by the Germans. By the end of 1943, the Germans began to suffer defeats in their campaign against the Soviet Union. The Red Army slowly began to push them back from the east. It was already known then that the defeat of the Reich was only a matter of time. The balance of power was changing rapidly in Lithuania. Helena remembers being afraid of the Germans during the day and of the partisans and Soviet soldiers at night. Everyone was cruel and merciless. They would come and take their food, and if anyone resisted, they would beat or even kill them.

She particularly remembers October 3, 1943. It was her mother's birthday, a Sunday. They were sitting together at the table having lunch when the Germans entered the house, ordering everyone to leave because they had orders to burn the village before the approaching Red Army. Each of the household members hurriedly packed their personal belongings, and they were all put on a cart, driven by Lithuanians on horseback who were in German service. After a 40-kilometer journey, Helena and her family were brought to the Postawy railway station, where after a long wait, everyone was loaded into cattle cars. They traveled standing up, given nothing to eat, not even water. They traveled west into Germany. Sometimes the train would stop. She was afraid to get off the train during the stops because the train would start moving without any warning, leaving those who had left the cars behind, and she didn't want to be separated from her family. They reached their destination on November 8, 1943.

Upon arriving at the place of their future forced labor, everyone was registered, just like livestock. They were given a German document, Arbeitsbuch Fur Auslander, a black booklet with a Nazi eagle on it, with the inscription Deutche Reich. The Żukowski surname was recorded in German as Schukowsky, and Helena's father stated that her year of birth was 1929, making her one year younger. He thought this would spare his daughter from hard work. Unfortunately, it didn't help. She had to work alongside adults in Heppenheim. She worked on a vegetable farm, where they pickled and canned vegetables. It was hard work. The silos used for pickling were gigantic. Filling them involved lifting a large number of previously prepared cabbage or cucumber heads. After the process was completed, the products were packed into cans and sent to the front for German soldiers. They didn't have work clothes; they only had what

they brought with them. They were given wooden shoes, which were heavy and uncomfortable. They were hungry; they received only one slice of bread a day, sometimes they got baked potatoes, most of which were rotten anyway. When they found one good and not rotten potato, mother sliced it into slices so that everyone could eat at least a little. Sometimes mother went to the chicken coop and collected food from the ground for the chickens, from which she cooked soup for them. They were afraid then that the landlady would come to them because if she noticed that they were eating soup made from chicken feed, the mother could be sent to a concentration camp for disobedience and stealing feed for chickens. They lived in a small house where eight people slept in one small room on bunk beds. They were cold; they tried to warm themselves somehow, wrapping their legs in sheets of old newspapers that they took from the latrine. The landlady placed old newspapers there, which served as toilet paper for slave workers. When the German woman realized what the newspapers were being used for, she replaced them with dry hay, which couldn't warm their legs. At every step, they encountered inhuman treatment from their employers. Nobody cared about their needs, feelings, health, or even life. They were just a workforce, a number that could easily be replaced by another slave.

Helena's father and brother Wiktor worked elsewhere, in Weschnitz, in warehouses, where after a 12-hour working day, they received a slice of bread with jam.

On some Sundays, Helena and her mother were taken to Heppenheim to clean the office. They were watched over by an SS man who was different from the rest of the German supervisors - secretly he brought them something to eat. After liberation, all employees signed a petition to the American command, requesting a milder treatment, as a result, he was released from arrest.

By the end of 1944, the course of the war became unfavorable for Germany. Bombing of German cities and centers supporting the Nazis' war efforts began. During bombings, all workers had to go down to the shelters together with their landlords, but it was not an expression of concern for their lives. German landlords were afraid that the workers would light fires or candles, thus indicating to Allied pilots places for bombing attacks. The biggest bombings occurred at the end of July 1944. The end of Nazi Germany was approaching. Allied troops entered in October 1944.

Liberation came, the end of hard work and daily torment. Surrounded by care, the forced laborers in Germany were placed in special camps for war refugees. The first camp, which became the new home for Helena, her siblings, and parents, was the camp in Lahnstein. Helena remembers an incident that happened before being transported to the camp when Allied soldiers were preparing the first transport of former workers. Her father and brother were not at

home, as they were working for the Germans on a trip. The whole family stayed at home until the return of the father and brother, who then went with the second transport to the camp in Lahnstein.

Six years passed before they arrived in Canada, waiting for a country willing to accept them. During this time, refugees found their families or received offers to go to Western countries. The number of refugees decreased, then the camps were merged, and they were moved to other camps. Mrs. Helena and her family went through four different camps: Lahnstein, Niederlahnstein, Budur Ausmacht (she is not sure about the name of this camp), and finally to Diez, where in March 1950, the family received notification that they could leave for Canada, to a beet farm. They went to Bremerhaven, where they had to undergo a long quarantine. The journey to Canada took 9 days; they sailed by ship and arrived in Halifax on May 28, 1950. From Halifax, they traveled by train for several days to Winnipeg. It was supposed to be their final destination, but it turned out that Winnipeg and the Manitoba farmlands were flooded; it was the year of great floods. The local authorities told them to go further. Eventually, they were sent to Lethbridge, Alberta, where they had to work off a two-year contract on a farm, which was obligatory for all war refugees at that time. During their stay in the camps, Mrs. Helena had met Jan, her future husband, and arrived in Canada as Helena Gawliński.

After completing the two-year contract on the farm near Lethbridge, the family moved to Calgary. In Calgary, Helena's parents, as well as her and her husband, actively participated in Polish community life. Helena's children are Stephen, Marysia, and Geoffrey. Stephen, who lived in Edmonton, where he ran a law office after completing his studies, passed away two years ago. Marysia Gawlińska lives in Calgary and is a family doctor. Their younger son, Geoffrey, is a detective, living and working in Calgary.

Józef Glawdel

I learned his story from an interview with Mrs. Maria Skarżyńska, who conducted a long conversation with him and recorded his account of his wartime journey.

Józef was born in 1918 near Nowogród, close to Lida. At that time, these were the territories of northeastern Poland, now part of Belarus. His father was a farmer, very resourceful, who later established a small brickyard where his sons worked and helped support the family. Józef had many siblings - three sisters and three brothers. They were raised with discipline in a very religious home, where prayer was a daily ritual for the whole family. At the age of eight, Józef left his family home and went to live about 35 kilometres away with his uncle, who succeeded his father as the forester or ranger.

After completing primary school, Józef returned to his family home. Here he met a landowner whose son worked in Warsaw. He befriended the family, who decided to sponsor Józef to attend agricultural school in Lida. These were wonderful times for young Józef, who always showed a solid approach to his duties. In the second year of school, the school organized a month-long trip around Poland - he visited Warsaw, Gdynia, and Poznań.

The year 1939 came. Józef did not have time to finish school; he was conscripted into the Polish Army along with his older brother. The territories of Lida were quickly occupied by the Russians, and the young men living in these areas were drafted into the Red Army. They had no choice; refusal meant execution. After three months of military training, Józef refused to join the Komsomol (the Communist youth organization), was demoted, and sent to repair and build military barracks, and later to Finland, where in the Russo-Finnish War, hundreds of soldiers were killed. Józef and others in the group were tasked with collecting the bodies of the slain soldiers and burying them. They marched through the forests collecting bodies and avoiding mined fields.

In 1941, after the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, soldiers from the Nowogród area were transported to Moscow, and then to the city of Gorki. They were promised to join the Polish Army, which began to form in Russia, but it turned out that they were sent to the gulag to work on the construction of refineries. They worked in very harsh conditions, hungry, living in cold barracks,

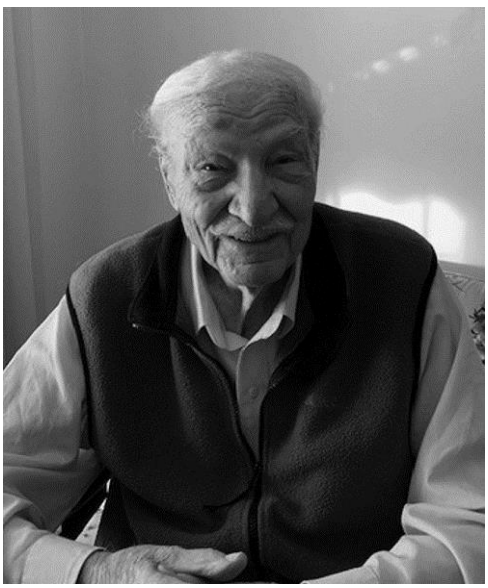
sleeping on wooden bunks without mattresses. When they met a Polish officer recruiting Poles for the Polish Army, they learned that they could not be recruits because they were soldiers of the Red Army. During this time, they were further transported to Sverdlovsk, where they had to prepare trenches. It was September 1941, the ground was frozen, they dug holes seven meters deep and three to seven meters wide. Ill-treated, they lived in harsh conditions, after 5 months out of the group of 900 soldiers, only 250 remained. Some froze to death or died after frostbite of their hands and feet. Józef survived thanks to his resourcefulness and a bit of luck that accompanied him in his enslavement.

In January 1942, they were allowed to join the Polish Army; after a twelve-hour march, they reached the city of Gorki. Here, in barracks, they were allowed to bathe, received two loaves of bread each, and after three days of stationing in barracks, they were loaded onto a train, which took them to the gathering point for Polish citizens in Tocko. They were still surrounded by Soviet soldiers. In Tocko, they were packed into freight cars, traveling standing up, one person next to the other, like sardines in a can. The train stopped from time to time. After 33 days, they reached Kerminet in Uzbekistan. Starving after leaving the train, they ate grass, and out of the whole wagon in which Józef traveled, only two survived this long journey - Józef and another man. They were exhausted, and Józef weighed only 43 kilograms. His rehabilitation after joining the Polish Army lasted two months. Equipment and adequate food for the soldiers were still lacking. The order came to relocate; by train, they reached Krasnovodsk and then crossed the Caspian Sea by old ships to Pahlevi in Iran, where upon arrival some soldiers were so exhausted that they couldn't go down the stairs to the cabins.

In Iran, they first underwent a bath and purification process, received new underwear and new uniforms. It was warm and there was plenty of food. They also received money, could go to the city, and buy themselves shish kebabs and eggs. From Iran, they were transported to Karikin in Iraq. They lived in tents and underwent serious military training. Józef started making bricks (with experience he gained at home), built a kitchen and dining room for the soldiers, as well as a barracks for the command. He also built an amphitheater, was rewarded with cigarettes, and the colonel offered him positions in his command. Józef did not accept the offer; he preferred to be a soldier, not a servant of the colonel. Their stay in Iraq lasted six months, during which time Józef's regiment performed honorary duties. When General Sikorski arrived in Baghdad, Józef and his regiment welcomed the general at the airport, performed honorary duties during General Sikorski's visit to King Faisal at the palace. After six months, they were transferred to refineries on the Persian border. After six months, they moved to Palestine, and then further to Egypt. They lived in a tent camp and got used to the warm climate. Meanwhile, the families of the soldiers were sent to North Africa,

where camps for war refugees were built - Koji in Uganda and Tengeru in Tanzania. Young boys who were too young to join the ranks of the army were trained as young soldiers in "junaks", where they were taught drill and military discipline. Józef remembered that among these junaks were Janek Kraska, Stanisław Dalkin, and Kazimierz Kowalewski. In Palestine, in Gader, Józef underwent anti-aircraft training and was assigned to the Second Corps as a member of the officers' staff. He was then sent for English and driving courses. After completing the courses, Józef was assigned to the personal protection group of General Anders.

Kazimierz Kowalewski



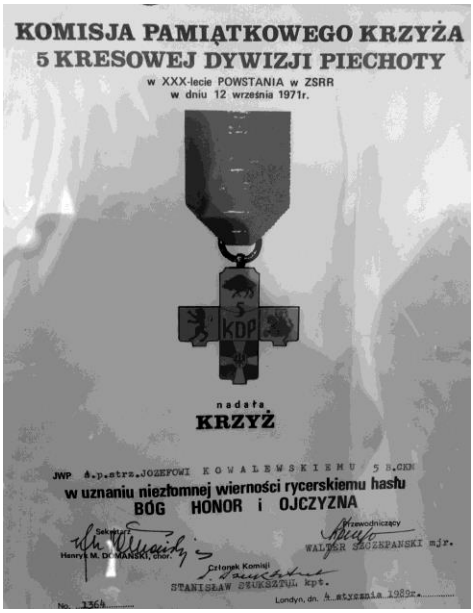
Kazimierz's family was large; he had 4 brothers and two sisters, all living near Nowogródek in the Eastern Borderlands of pre-war Poland, where Kazimierz's father worked as a forester. There was a long history of military service in Kazimierz's family. He was 11 years old when World War II broke out.

On February 10, 1940, the entire family was deported to a forced labor camp in Siberia. It was Posiolok-Zielony Bór in the Vologda Oblast, Vorzhega District, in the taiga near Arkhangelsk. They lived and worked in deadly conditions; many of their companions in this exile did not survive.

In 1941, the family left the northern taiga territories and embarked on a long journey to the mobilization point of the Polish Army under the command of General Władysław Anders.

Around Easter 1942, the Army of the 2nd Corps left Soviet Russia, crossing the Caspian Sea by old ships to Persia, to the port of Pahlavi in present-day Iran.

Kazimierz's older brother became a soldier of the 2nd Corps and went through the war route from Iran to Palestine, Egypt, all the way to Italy, where he took part in the Battle of Monte Cassino. During this offensive, he was seriously wounded and died. He is buried in the Polish Soldiers' Cemetery on the Monte Cassino hill.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BÓG HONOR i OJCZYZNA
Henryk M. DROMANSKI, chor.
STANISŁAW SZUKSZTUL, kpt.
Londyn, dn. 4 stycznia 1989r.

Kazimierz was too young to join the military ranks; he was sent by plane from Tehran to Palestine, where he joined the Junaks and attended Military School. The rest of the family found themselves in a refugee camp in Uganda, where they waited out the end of the war.

After Germany's surrender, Kazimierz found himself in England, where he was demobilized on January 23, 1948.

Mrs. Jadwiga Kowalewska, Kazimierz's wife, comes from Zamość. She was an 11-year-old girl at the end of the war when she and her family were deported to a camp in Austria. After the war, Jadwiga's father did not want to return to Poland, which was under Stalin's control. In 1948, the whole family came to Canada, where she met Kazimierz, who came to Canada in 1952. They settled in Calgary and started a family. Kazimierz has been an active member of the Association of Polish Veterans in Canada since November 20, 1958, serving as Chairman of the Audit Committee for 6 years and organizing cultural events in our branch for 12 years. We sincerely thank him for his work.

Jan Kraska

An active member of the Polish community in Calgary, Jan Kraska, served as the long-time president of the Association of Polish Veterans in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary. He was just a child when his family's wartime odyssey began.

Jan, or "Jasiu," was 11 years old, his sister 9, and his younger brother only 9 months when, in 1941, two Russian soldiers entered their home around two in the morning... The frightened children watched as the

Russians terrorized their parents, placing their father in a corner and allowing their mother to pack, but she could only take a small bundle. In the darkness, they were all led outside to the yard, where horses with sleds were waiting. They traveled, frozen and frightened, to a school where Poles from surrounding villages were being gathered. They waited for three days while Soviet soldiers completed the evacuation of the local Polish population. Then, they were led by armed Russian soldiers on horseback, marching 12 kilometers to the railway station. There, they faced the next leg of their journey into the unknown, a journey in freight cars bound for distant Siberia. The grueling journey lasted almost a month, with four large families crowded into one wagon. Beside a small iron stove in the middle of the wagon were beds where several people slept. The hole in the floor of the wagon served as a toilet. No one provided food or water for the exhausted travelers. They subsisted on what they had brought from home, which was not enough for the month-long journey, continuing their hunger-stricken odyssey. When the train stopped, surrounded by desolate terrain, people went outside to gather snow in containers, which they melted for drinking water. Often, they encountered brutal Russian soldiers who beat them with rifle butts or kicked them with heavy boots. Young Jan witnessed an incident where a Russian soldier smashed a Pole's head with his rifle when he returned to the wagon with a bucket of snow; the poor man died after a few weeks. When water was scarce and the train didn't stop, they resorted to using the snow covering the roof of the wagon.

The final station of their journey was in the far north; the last station was called Sieninga. From there, they were transported to a settlement in the Wielsk region. It was the Jakodim settlement in Arkhangelsk.

Everyone was then placed in wooden barracks, sometimes with 50 people in one barrack. Janek and his family lived with seven other families in a barely standing shed, where a wood-burning stove stood in the middle, and beds lined the sides of the room.

The day after their arrival, his parents were sent to work in the forest. Their job was to cut down trees. They had set quotas, or “norms” they had to meet. Anyone who refused to work was placed in "Tiurma," meaning prison in Polish. Not meeting the "norm" was also punished by docking the already small salary, which was barely enough to feed the family. Life in the camp was hard; hunger, slave labor, harsh conditions in the cold, no medical care, and many people died.

Jan's younger brother also died. Janek remembers how the child cried constantly from hunger until he died.

Janek attended school up to the fourth grade, then moved on to the fifth grade. He attended school together with the son of the camp's chief, who was in

charge of the Polish forced labor camp. Sometimes they played together, and those are the only fond memories from their time in Siberia.

In June 1941, the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, and in July of that year, the Sikorski-Majski agreement was concluded, which changed the situation for Poles deported from Poland to Siberia. They could leave the labor camps and join the emerging Polish Army.

By the end of 1941, Janek, with his parents and younger sister, left the camp in Jakodim and embarked on a long journey to Uzbekistan. Janek's father was heading to the forming Polish Army, the II Corps of General Władysław Anders. The journey was long and exhausting, lasting about two months. They traveled again in freight cars, often hungry. They arrived in Osza near Yekaterinburg. Along the way, his father's documents were stolen. Food, which could be purchased with ration cards, was unobtainable without documents. They stayed in Osza for about half a year, then set out on another train journey. Again, they traveled for about a month to where the Polish Army was forming. They reached Kerminet in Uzbekistan, where the Polish Army was stationed. The journeys were long; Janek doesn't remember the exact hardships and arduous journey or the names of places. He remembers the sea voyage to Pahlevi in Iran. From there, his father continued with the II Corps Army, and Janek, with his mother and sister, traveled by train to Tehran, then to Ahvaz, and then to Bombay in India. From India to East Africa, where their trio survived until the end of the war in a refugee camp.

In Tanzania, near the town of Arusha, there was a transit camp for refugees. About 7,000 Polish refugees lived in Tengeru. Janek graduated from Mechanical High School in Tengeru.

After the war in 1947, Janek, with his mother and sister, sailed to England, where his father awaited them. They settled in Loughborough, northeast of Birmingham.

In the meantime, he met the love of his life, Jadwiga Oleszkiewicz, and they married in 1951. Jadwiga was 16, and Janek was 22. In the UK, Janek worked in mechanical workshops, bought a motorcycle, and went camping with Jadwiga every weekend.

He fondly remembers his youth spent in England.

In 1956, together with his parents, they emigrated to Canada. They settled in Calgary, where Janek got a job at Canadian Pacific Railway. Soon, he was promoted to supervisor of the CP Rail mechanical park. He worked for CP Rail for 34 years.

Janek and Jadwiga Kraska are the parents of four children. Dorotka was a teacher; she passed away four years ago after a long battle with cancer. Teresa and Patrycja also work as teachers. Rysiu is a computer specialist.

Janek, his father, and sister with her husband, were active members of the Association of Polish Veterans in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary. Jan served as president of the SPK Branch #18 for 16 years. For two years, he was Vice-President for Western Canada of the SPK Main Board. For two years, he was a member of the Parish Council of Our Lady Queen of Peace, the Polish church in Calgary. He was also a member of the Polish Canadian Association and the Knights of Columbus.

Janek is still a member of our branch. At the last General Meeting of the SPK, he was awarded Honorary Membership of the SPK.

Władysław Krokosiński

A Knight of the Virtuti Militari Order and a longstanding member of our branch, the Association of Polish Veterans, Władysław Krokosiński was a distinguished figure in our Polish community.

He was born on November 1, 1916, in the Eastern Borderlands, in Dublany near Sambir, to Franciszek Krokosiński and Katarzyna Krokosińska (née Mysak). Władysław's father hailed from a noble family and, after completing his studies in Vienna, returned to Dublany, where he worked as an engineer on the construction of a railway line. His father instilled a strong sense of Polish patriotism in the household.

After completing the seventh grade of middle school, Władysław volunteered for the military. There, he received basic military training while also studying to pass his junior high school exams. In 1934, he was transferred to the Border Protection Corps on the Polish-Russian border, where he completed a two-year training program for Border Corps Minors in Czortków. After completing the school with the rank of Corporal, he was transferred to Stołpcy as a deputy commander of the guard post.

After the outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939, the Soviet invasion of Poland from the east followed on September 17. Władysław and a group of Border Protection soldiers bravely resisted the invaders. After five days of fierce fighting, Władysław and his comrades were taken prisoner. Out of 50 Border Protection soldiers, only 20 survived. They were imprisoned in Kozielsk near Katyn, from where they were transported to Siberia to build the Kotlas-Warakunda-Workuta railway line.

They joined 500 other prisoners, with whom they toiled in the harsh conditions of logging forests, hunger, and cold. Only the strong and resilient could survive the murderous living and working conditions; young prisoners in the Siberian labor camp were decimated by death. There were hundreds of such labor camps along the route of the railway under construction.

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and the signing of the Sikorski-Majski Agreement on July 30, 1941, what Władysław described in his memoirs as the "Day of Joy" occurred. Poles imprisoned in Siberian labor camps gained their freedom and were able to form the Polish Army. Young people with families volunteered at recruitment centers, marking the beginning of the Polish II Corps under the command of General Władysław Anders.

Paratrooper training in Jangi-Jul in Soviet Russia marked the beginning of his service in the II Corps. Following this training, the plan was to drop Polish paratroopers into German-occupied Poland to support the Home Army. However, this idea was abandoned by the London government after the first group of trained paratroopers was dropped.

In 1942, Stalin allowed the Polish Army to leave Russia, as there was not enough food and equipment for them. Over 115,000 people were sent to Iran, including about 37,000 civilians.

Władysław and a group of trained paratroopers were assigned to the 12th Podolian Uhlan Regiment, which was a Motorized Regiment. He was appointed the commander of a Storm Platoon with the rank of Warrant Officer. The Regiment underwent training in armored warfare, and in 1944, II Corps soldiers landed in Italy. The main Allied attack began from the south. The Wehrmacht

forces were driven out of southern Italy to Naples. The Allies' further assault was halted by strong German fortifications on the Monte Cassino hills.

After three unsuccessful Allied attacks, the II Corps soldiers launched their attack. On May 13, before the battle, Corporal Władysław Krokosiński and a group of soldier friends were sent on a reconnaissance mission. During this action, his friend sub-lieutenant Skrzeszewski is shot by enemy fire to the head and dies. After horrendous fighting with the entrenched German army, on the 18th of May 1944 at 7:15 am, the hill known as #569 Monte Cassino is taken by the Polish forces and the 12th Uhlan Regiment, the regiment of our hero, reached the monastery on hill 569 from the west at 9:30 a.m. At 10:30 a.m., the Polish flag was raised on the ruins of the monastery. In this victorious battle, 923 Polish soldiers were killed, and about 3,000 were wounded.

After the end of the war, Władysław was decorated by the Polish Government in London with the following medals:

Virtuti Militari Order

- Cross of Merit
- Cross of Valor - Campaign Medal 1918/1939
- Monte Cassino Cross - Monte Cassino Cross 1944
- Polish Campaign Cross 1939 - Polish Cross 1939 Campaign

The British Government awarded Władysław the following decorations:

- Star Medal 1939/1945
- Africa Star
- Italy Star
- Defence Medal
- War Medal 1939/1945

After demobilization from the Polish Army in 1947, Władysław volunteered and joined the British Army Reserve, being promoted from the rank of Corporal to Warrant Officer.

He was a professional non-commissioned officer and had no civilian profession; he had to prepare for civilian life. In Great Britain, he completed a course in railway mechanics for operating diesel locomotives.

Former soldiers of the II Corps could not return to Poland. Only a small group, those who had families in Poland, returned to the country occupied by the Soviet Union, while the majority emigrated to Western countries. Władysław chose Canada. He docked in Halifax on May 25, 1947, and on June 28, 1947, he began a two-year contract with a farmer in Lethbridge. He earned $45.00 a month, working 16 hours a day.

On January 1, 1949, he met Józefa Olesińska, who he married on April 28 in the Catholic Church of the Redemptorists on Edmonton Trail in Calgary.

After completing his two-year contract on the farm, Władysław took a job on the railway as a mechanic, where he worked until 1980 when he retired.

Władysław was an active member of the Polish community in Calgary. He belonged to the Polish Association (today's Polish-Canadian Association). In the Polish Association, he held important positions - including president of the association. He initiated the funding of a banner for the organization. In 1962, the Polish Association celebrated its 30th anniversary, and Władysław prepared and published a special bulletin for the occasion.

He contributed to the establishment of the Polish Parish. From 1952 to 1969, he was the secretary of the Parish Committee, and until 1984, he was the official collector of Sunday contributions. Thanks to his efforts, today's Polish Church was built after many difficulties.

In March 1969, he was elected Vice-President of the Canadian Polish Congress.

In 1969, he welcomed Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to Calgary, who visited the city on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Canadian Polish Congress.

In 1979, he became a member of the Polish Culture Center Building Committee, which is today's Polish Cultural Center.

We sincerely thank him for his dedication to our Polish community.

Through his work, he contributed to the construction of the Polish church under the patronage of Our Lady Queen of Peace, where to this day we have the pleasure of celebrating Sunday and holiday masses in our native language. Thanks to his efforts, we have one of the most beautiful Polish Centers among the entire Polish community in Canada.

Thanks are also due to Władysław's daughter, Lucyna Assen née Krokosińska. Lucyna followed in her father's footsteps and also dedicated herself to community work. The list of her merits is long; I will mention a few here. She was the founder of the first Polish dance group "Tatry," from which the Polanie group later emerged. She organized Polish Culture Week at the University of Calgary in 1977. As part of the celebrations, a very successful performance by the dance group and our choir took place. Lucyna Liciak-Krokosińska took part in the unveiling of the Nicolaus Copernicus monument in Prince's Island Park.

Once again, we thank her for her work and her father on behalf of our branch and our entire Polish community.

Jan Kuczaj

I summarize Jan's story by reading his notebooks entitled *Ocalić od Zapomnienia*, or "Rescuing from Oblivion", which he published in 1992. In them, he describes in detail the invasion of Nazi Germany into Poland, with particular attention to southern Poland. He was a young man when the war began.

He lived with his family in the village of Raba Wyżna in Podhale, near the southern border of the General Government with Slovakia. The central point of Raba Wyżna was the manor of Mrs. Wanda Głowińska, from whose initiative the first underground organization to fight the German occupiers was established in the village. Since the Germans had a managing office for the occupied territory

near the manor, the first meeting of trusted people willing to resist the invaders took place at the Kuczaj's house. It was January 5, 1940. Pseudonyms were established at this meeting. Thus, Captain Ludwik Mayhre received the pseudonym "Falkowski," Lieutenant Czesław Trybuła received the pseudonym "Olek," Sub-Lieutenant Stanisław Jakubiec received the pseudonym "Mocny," Cadet Juliusz Oszacki received the pseudonym "Julo," and Cadet Jan Kuczaj received the pseudonym "Harnaś." The five conspirators took an oath, holding their hands on a cross. They set goals of gathering weapons, raising awareness and protecting the local population, warning them of dangers, protecting them from deportation to Germany, conducting sabotage, and gathering military and organizational information about the movements of the German occupiers. A local bakery was designated as the contact point. "Julo" was appointed as a liaison with the Kraków underground. Additionally, they all committed to recruiting and swearing in certain trusted further members willing to fight. These were to be five-person groups, all given pseudonyms without revealing personal data. In case of arrests, the captured member could not reveal information about the families of group members to the enemy, and the rest of the five were instructed to immediately suspend their activities and go into hiding until instructed otherwise by the higher command. This was the beginning of the Home Army's activity in the occupied territories of Poland. Jan describes the activities of his underground group.

They undertook many actions, each of which was dangerous, risking his life and consequently his entire family. During the war, the Germans killed anyone who resisted them and executed entire families of uncovered members of the resistance movement.

Briefly, I will mention the actions of Jan Kuczaj's ZWZ-AK group from Raba Wyżna. They received their first order on January 7, 1940. It involved crossing the border. Raba Wyżna was a border town, and Jan's organization provided invaluable services in organizing smuggling routes and courier routes to reinforce armed resistance in the west and establish contact with the Polish Government in London. The Germans constantly tightened controls in the border area, and smuggling operations were very difficult, but despite the dangers, the local population of Podhale helped in the actions by smuggling young people across the borders, who were heading to the Polish Army in France. The Ursuline Sisters in Rokiciny also helped.

In February 1940, "Julo" received leaflets from Krakow intended for Podhale, written in the mountain dialect. It was a message from the Emigrant Polish Government informing and calling for resistance against the occupiers. The leaflets were scattered at the fair in Nowy Targ.

In May 1940, Jan received information that weapons and ammunition were buried in Krynica cemetery. Travelling by bike with his friend "Mocny," they went to Krynica for the weapons. They did not find any weapons, but on the way back, they were stopped by the police. After two days of interrogation, they were released, bruised, and "Mocny" with cracked ribs. It was a "taste" of possible future interrogations by the Gestapo.

The Courier-Smuggling route was very important in establishing contacts with the Underground Poland and the Supreme Command of the Polish Army in the west. The routes were constantly changing. A great feat was the "Teresa" action aimed at smuggling a dismantled radio station from Budapest to Krakow. The heroes of this action were Jan Kuczaj's underground companions: Maria Szerocka, Eugenia Litwin, Smutek Józef, "Mocny" Stanisław Jakubiec, and Jan Rapacz.

The liaison of the "Julo" group had not given any sign for months. Worried, "Harnaś" went to Krakow to check what might have happened to him. It turned out that the Gestapo had discovered the underground organization under the codename "Grunwald." The Gestapo found explosive materials. So “Julo" had to go into hiding. The Gestapo arrested the Mother Superior of the Ursulines, Klementyna Starzewska, and caught "Julo" when he tried to visit his parents at night. After the investigation, "Julo" was sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In the area of Podhale in 1940, Stanisław Wegner-Romanowski appeared, an artist painter who traveled through villages and towns trying to sell his

paintings while collecting donations for prisoners in the Palace in Zakopane and Montelupich in Krakow. However, he turned out to be a sophisticated Gestapo informer who infiltrated the Tatra Confederation Underground. In January 1942, mass arrests took place, including the arrest of Edward Kuczaj, alias "Ed." The list of detainees was long. The entire underground organization in Rabka was arrested. Jan Kuczaj, alias "Harnaś," survived, because after "Julo" had been arrested, he left Raba Wyżna and went to Krakow. There he was involved in duplicating leaflets and proclamations, and in 1943, newspapers "Na Ucho" and "Watra."

Despite the arrests and the cruelty of the Gestapo, the spirit of resistance in the Polish nation grew, and men, women, and youth joined the fight. The Gestapo pursued the underground with particular zeal. Death, which threatened day and night, was an inseparable companion of every conspirator. Often hiding under false documents or without documents, a conscripted person faced unexpected Gestapo raids. Every action of the AK soldier required courage, vigilance, cunning, caution, and luck. Otherwise, arrest, torture, and most often death, were imminent. Everyone was obliged to remain silent and keep secrets, as the first and main commandment of the conspiracy contained in the "Oath of Allegiance."

In the spring of 1943, the Home Army Headquarters appointed Jerzy Jędrzejewski, alias "Jurek," as the new communications leader, and the courier action revived. Underground army units carried out sabotage actions weakening the activities of the Wehrmacht. The "Storm" action, a partial mobilization, was organized. Genowefa Kuczaj, alias "Mrówka," prepared uniforms and all military equipment for the conspiracy soldiers, with a white and red armband with the inscription "WP" (*Wojsko Polskie*, or Polish Army). From the "Kora" and "Lampart" units, the IV Battalion was formed in the previously organized 1st Podhale Riflemen Regiment. The end of the war was near. With the approaching front in the Podhale region, partisan groups supported by the Soviet Union appeared, whose leaders were NKVD officers.

They introduced a new terror into the liberated areas of Podhale, beginning with the looting of property and the liquidation of wealthy landowners. The houses of ordinary residents were raided and robbed multiple times, and women were raped. A new order was established in Poland - the occupation of the Polish nation by the Soviet Union. This was not what the Home Army fought for; hundreds of Harnaś's companions lost their lives. On January 19, 1945, the Home Army was dissolved. Our "Harnaś," previously warned, set out on foot from Raba Wyżna, trudging through the snow for 2 days to Krakow, avoiding NKVD repression for belonging to the AK. After the war, in the 1960s, Jan Kuczaj and his family emigrated to Canada. They settled in Calgary, where he actively

participated in the Polish community life. His wife was a member of the board of our SPK #18 circle in Calgary, organizing commemorative events.

His son Jacek Kuczaj was a member of the "White Eagles" Football Club and the president of the Polish Branch of the Credit Union in Calgary.

We warmly thank them for their work for the Polish community in Calgary.

Witold Mazur

Along with his family, they were residents of the Eastern Borderlands of Poland. He was a four-year-old child when, in February 1940, in the middle of the night, he heard knocks on the door. Soviet soldiers and the NKVD arrived to evict them from their home, terrorizing everyone in the courtyard, allowing the parents to take a few basic clothes and some food. A group of soldiers with sleds awaited them there.

They were taken away from their beloved home to a gathering point, where crowds of neighbors with families were waiting. None of them ever returned to their farms; they were taken away in freight train wagons to an unknown destination. They endured a long and arduous journey in cold and hunger. They reached Siberia, where the parents were forced into hard labor. Little Witold and a group of his peers were placed in a kindergarten, where they received a bowl of milk or something resembling milk and a bit of bread every day. One day, they were not given their daily ration. An officer of the secret NKVD police appeared before the children and asked if they believed in God. The children unanimously confirmed that, of course, they believed in God. “If so, then pray to your God and ask for food”, the officer said. All the children stood up and recited the Lord's Prayer in unison, after which the officer asked, "Where is the food? Did your God listen to you? You see, your God did not give you milk and bread, but if you pray to Uncle Stalin, he will give you your milk and bread today.” This event stuck in Witold's memory. Young Witold observed the suffering of people who died of hunger, frostbite, or typhus, which decimated people exhausted by hard work in the Taiga.

The fate of his family is similar to the fate of other Poles, former residents of the Eastern Borderlands. After July 1941, they were able to leave their slave

labor and join the Polish Army being formed on the territory of the Soviet Union. The family survived a long journey; in harsh conditions, they traveled to where the Polish Army was forming, but not everyone was able to survive the journey. The father joined the Polish Army, and the mother with the children was sent to one of the camps for war refugees, where Witold attended school. After the war, along with his family, Witold immigrated to Canada, where he completed his studies and started a family.

Witold was an active member of the Polish community in Calgary, and was a longtime member of the Polish Combatants Association, Branch #18 in Calgary.

The description of his fate is very general; Witold was unable to talk about his wartime experiences, even today, after 80 years, the memories evoke many emotions, and it is difficult for Witold to relive the events of those times by telling us about them. Considering his age, we respect his decisions, but we want to tell everyone that as a child, Witold experienced the cruelties of war, witnessed the exile of Poles from the eastern territories of Poland to Siberia, the journey to General Anders' Army, the journey to the refugee camp, life in the camp, and immigration to Canada.

In Canada, he is an exemplary citizen and member of the Polish community. His great merit is the preservation of the SPK property. I will explain why.

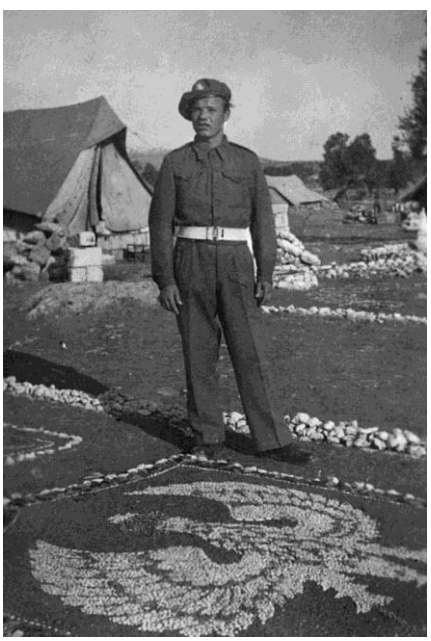
During the term of Wiktor Fortyński as President of our branch, it was decided that due to the decreasing old guard of veterans (young candidates were denied entry into the organization), the Combatant House should be sold, and the accumulated assets of Branch #18 should be transferred to SPK branches in eastern Canada. Witold and Jan Kraska opposed these decisions, for which they were punished and suspended from membership in our SPK branch. Thanks to Witold's efforts, changes soon took place in the board, a new board led by Jan Kraska supported the admission of new members to the organization. Witold and Jan Kraska reached an agreement with the Polish Canadian Association, the Combatant House on Kensington Road was sold, and in 2014, a new Combatant House adjacent to the existing Polish Canadian Cultural Centre, built in 1981, was constructed.

Currently, we enjoy the beautiful new Combatant Hall, which is part of the Polish Canadian Cultural Center in Calgary. We warmly thank him for his entire work for the Polish community in Calgary.

Feliks Osiński

He comes from the Eastern Borderlands. He was born in Żytomierz on August 4, 1925. He is the oldest veteran of the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary.

He was a 15-year-old boy when, in February 1940, along with his family, he was deported to Siberia to a forced labor camp, to the Gulag. He remembers the image from the night when the NKVD, the Soviet Security Service, appeared in their family home. There were several heavy trucks and riders on horseback. With brutality, they loaded all the household members onto the trucks, not allowing the parents to take food supplies or clothing. Feliks sadly watched as they drove away from the courtyard of their family home, watching as NKVD commissioners set their house on fire. He watched the red glow for a long time, fading as the cars approached the railway station. The further journey, which they shared with the rest of the neighbors from their village and a thousand residents from the vicinity of Żytomierz, was made by train in wagons intended for transporting goods and cattle. It was a very long and hungry journey in harsh conditions. Feliks remembers when they reached the final station, Pietropawlowsk. Then began the deadly journey on foot, which lasted two days and two nights. The journey was hard and tragic, and his parents died along the way from cold and exhaustion.



After 1941, better times came, as Poles could leave the forced labor camps. Feliks could not join the forming Polish Army. He was too young, not yet 16.

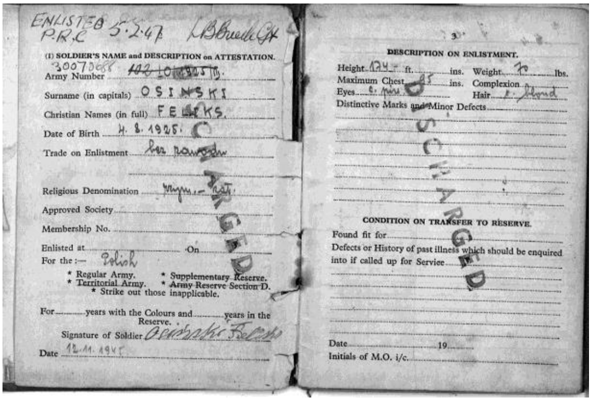
Young Feliks wanted to fight for Poland's liberation, separated from the rest of his siblings. In 1943, at the age of 17, Feliks joined the ranks of the Kościuszko Infantry Division, which was part of

General Berling's Army. General Berling's Army achieved a great victory in the Battle of Lenino in October 1943. In this battle for victory, over 3,000 soldiers of the Kościuszko Infantry Division perished. The further combat path of the First Polish Corps led the First Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division to Warsaw in August 1944. The Army stopped on the eastern bank of the Vistula, on the other side of the river fought insurgents, Soldiers of the Home Army, who on August 1, 1944, started the Warsaw Uprising, rose up in armed attack against the German occupier and heroically fought against the Wehrmacht soldiers for 60 days with the hope of liberating Warsaw.

Young Poles in the ranks of the Soviet Army of General Berling wanted to go to the aid of the fighting insurgents. The command decisively did not allow crossing the Vistula. It was not in Stalin's interest for the insurgents, the soldiers of the Home Army, who were supported by the Polish Government in London and the Western Allies, to win.

Feliks, along with a group of rebellious soldiers, organized a passage by pontoons to the other side of the Vistula, rushing to the aid of the fighting insurgents. The floating pontoons with volunteers were fired upon from both banks of the Vistula, by the Soviets and the Germans, only 2 pontoons out of 12 reached the other side. Feliks and his colleagues, who found themselves under constant fire from the Germans, bravely repelled the attack, but soon ran out of ammunition. Feliks remembered the image of a little boy running away, with a collapsing apartment building in the background, the boy was running calling for his mother, bullets from German soldiers were whistling above him. Feliks tried to shoot in the direction from which the German attack was coming; he wanted to protect the defenseless child. However, the shots from his rifle did not reach the enemy. An anti-tank rifle came within his range, from which he sent a burst and the German shots fell silent. He saved the boy's life. However, the ammunition supplies quickly ran out, and the wounded man was taken prisoner.

He was first taken to the camp in Auschwitz, then transported to a labor camp in Yugoslavia, and finally arrived in Wolfsburg, Austria, to Stalag XVIII Prisoner of War Camp. He was liberated by the US Army there. The Americans took Feliks to Italy, where after healing the wounds from the Warsaw Uprising, Feliks joined the ranks of the 2nd Corps of the Army of general



ENLISTED P.R.C 5.2.47

(I) SOLDIER'S NAME and DESCRIPTION on ATTESTATION.

Army Number 30070688

Surname (in capitals) OSINSKI

Christian Names (in full) FELIKS.

Date of Birth 4. 8. 1925.

Trade on Enlistment

Religious Denomination

Approved Society

Membership No.

Enlisted at .... On ....

For the :— Polish

* Regular Army. * Supplementary Reserve.

* Territorial Army. * Army Reserve Section D.

* Strike out those inapplicable.

For .... years with the Colours and .... years in the Reserve.

Signature of Soldier

Date 12.11.1945

DISCHARGED

3

DESCRIPTION ON ENLISTMENT.

Height 174 ft. .... ins. Weight 70 lbs.

Maximum Chest 85 ins. Complexion

Eyes .... Hair ....

Distinctive Marks and Minor Defects

DISCHARGED

CONDITION ON TRANSFER TO RESERVE.

Found fit for

Defects or History of past illness which should be enquired into if called up for Service

Date .... 19 ....

Initials of M.O. i/c.

Władysław Anders. Trained in mine clearance and disarming unexploded ordinance, he was sent as a private sapper to Monte Cassino. Along with his fellow sappers, he worked on demining the areas of former battles and the ruins of the Benedictine Monastery at Monte Cassino.

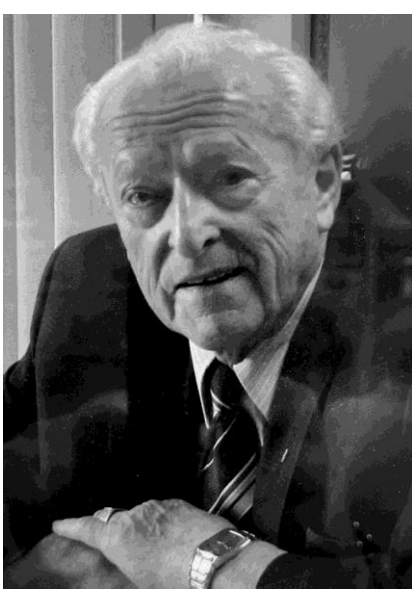
After demobilization in 1947, he immigrated to Canada, where he started a family.

He was awarded the Order of the White Eagle by the Government of the Republic of Poland in 2015.

He is an active member of our Branch. We sincerely thank him for his heroism in the fight for Poland's independence and his social work for the Polish community.

Alfred Pawłowski

He was born on April 28, 1924, in Lublin. Alfred's father was an accountant for the Polish State Railways. Shortly after 1924, he was transferred to Warsaw, to the Finance Department of the Ministry of Communication. Alfred, along with his older brother, spent their very happy childhood in Warsaw. He loved Warsaw, reminiscing about family walks along the Vistula, winter ice skating, and going to the movies with his father. He had wonderful friends from elementary school and never forgot playing with them in the schoolyard. In 1940, Alfred was a high school student when the Germans began closing all Polish schools in Warsaw. He was 16 years old when he was caught in a so-called "round-up" on his way home from school.



Roundups were common in all cities in Poland occupied by the German invaders. The German Gestapo would suddenly arrive in heavy trucks, block the streets, and load everyone who happened to be in the blocked area at the time into the trucks.

Alfred, along with other people from the street, was packed into a truck and taken to forced labor in Germany. It was in the vicinity of the eastern borders of Germany, in the town of Küstrin on the Oder, now Kostrzyn, which after 1945 belonged to

Poland, part of the so-called "Recovered Territories". After the war, Poland's borders underwent major changes. The Soviet Union seized our eastern territories, the Eastern Borderlands, and joined Western lands to Poland, which before World War II were part of Germany. Most of these territories belonged to Poland centuries ago, it should be remembered that for example Szczecin was founded by Polish Piasts, in 1646 it was occupied by the Swedes, then handed over to the Prussians in 1720 until 1945, when it again became part of Poland.

In the vicinity of Kostrzyn, young Alfred, still a teenager, had to perform heavy manual labour on a farm. German men were mobilized into the army and sent to the front. German farms lacked manpower, so Germans brought in workers from occupied Poland, in a brutal manner, simply by forcibly collecting people from the street and taking them away into the unknown.

Alfred did the worst jobs, cleaning stables, hauling manure, feeding cattle. He had to hustle around the barns with cattle from dawn till late dusk. He also had to take care of the horses. He cried when his school uniform, in which he was caught on the streets of Warsaw, was stained and destroyed while he carried out his arduous duties in forced slave labor for the "bauers" (that's what Poles called their German "landlords"). His parents had no idea what had happened to him – he went to school and did not return. He couldn't even tell them that he was alive. He kept hearing from the Germans that Poland no longer existed and would never exist again. He missed his parents very much, so he decided to escape and return to Warsaw. He left at night towards the railway station and managed to get into a freight train car heading east. But the escape failed, as he was caught by the railway police and ended up back with the bauer. He tried to escape two more times, and being caught the third time, was labelled a Polish spy attempting to cross into Poland to send information to the underground fighting in Poland. This time he was not sent back to the bauer. He was placed in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Upper Austria, which in 1938 was incorporated into the Third Reich. This camp bordered the "Winer Graben" quarries, where prisoners from the Mauthausen and Gusen camps worked every day. There were prisoners from Poland, Spain, Austrian opponents of Nazism, Yugoslavs, and Jews. Alfred did not like to recall his difficult experiences from the camp. He said the cruelty of some of the soldiers was worse than anyone could ever imagine. He mentioned New Year's Eve 1943. It was bitterly cold, and some drunk SS men were returning to their own barracks at night. They stopped at the barrack next to Alfred's, woke up the young prisoners, and rushed them out into the cold, where they made them undress, lined them up, took a watering hose, and sprayed them with cold water until they all froze to death. The cries of the poor boys spread through the night across the entire camp square, mingling with the cruel laughter of the amused SS men, keeping everyone from sleep.

Alfred survived only because he was young and strong. Hundreds of his fellow sufferers in the camp did not live to see the end of the war. They don't even have graves; their bodies went up in smoke in the crematorium.

The camp was liberated by American forces on May 5, 1945. Most Poles who survived decided to move to Western countries. Alfred and his friend headed towards Spain. It was a difficult decision to make, but along the way, homesickness for the family prevailed. Alfred turned back from the road to Spain and went east to Poland, to Warsaw, to his parents. He found Warsaw bombed, burned, and leveled to the ground, only ruins and remnants of buildings sticking out of the rubble. It turned out that the family had returned to Lublin where with immense joy they were reunited.

Alfred's further fate was to finish school and work. He settled in Silesia (Śląsk). He worked and went to school, and after graduating from a mining technical school, he started working as a foreman in a mine. He then completed his part-time studies at the Polytechnic. The years of work underground took a toll on his health, as he contracted lung silicosis, which troubled him greatly, especially towards the end of his life.

He came to Canada in 1984 with his wife, Krystyna. His wife's sister had been living in Calgary for years and brought Alfred and Krystyna to Canada. He missed Poland, but he made Calgary his home.

He was an active member of the Polish community in Calgary, a member of the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary. He served as secretary and was a member of the Board for many years.

He passed away in 2014 at the age of 90.

Paweł Renz

Paweł was born in Grudziądz on February 23, 1923. He was only 16 when the Germans began World War II with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. Paweł's mother was German, and her family did not accept his Polish father, Szczepański. Therefore, Paweł was given the German surname Renz at baptism. He was raised by his father's mother.

In 1943, as the son of a German woman, Paweł was forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht, the German army. As he was raised by his paternal grandmother in the spirit of Polish

patriotism, he found it very difficult to serve in the army of the aggressor. He was first sent with the Wehrmacht to France, and then to Belgium, where he deserted from the German army and, with the help of Belgian partisans, reached the Allied forces, then surrendered to a British officer.

In October 1944, Paweł was sent to Scotland, where in February 1942 the Polish First Armored Division had been formed under the command of General Stanisław Maczek. Paweł was trained at a sapper school, and after some time, he was assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division. As a sapper, he was sent to disarm mines, unexploded ordinance, and duds in the fields of battle. These were dangerous actions, some carried out during offensive operations.

Fortunately, Paweł survived all the actions and was demobilized in 1948. He remained in Scotland, working as a welder. There he met his first wife, Izabela Szkotka, a former Allied soldier.

They married in 1953.They arrived in Canada in 1955 and settled in Calgary in Brentwood. Their firstborn son, born in 1954, died in an accident in 1982. In 1989, Izabela passed away. Paweł and his daughter Arleen were plunged into grief after the loss of their wife and mother. After some time, he met Genowefa, who was visiting from Poland. Paweł and Genia, his second wife, became active members of the Polish community in Calgary.

From 1991, Paweł was a member of the Board of the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary. For many years, he was responsible for organizing the annual fundraiser for The Poppy Campaign before Remembrance Day. His contribution to this work was boundless. We will never forget his dedication and the time he devoted to community work in our branch. On February 23, 2023, we celebrated Paweł's 100th birthday with him.

He passed away two months later, on May 8, at a veterans' care home.

Unfortunately, our account is very general; we do not have exact data, as Paweł did not remember many details.

Kazimierz Skarżyński

He was born on December 15, 1887, in Kroczew near Warsaw, in the Mazowieckie region. He attended school in Warsaw and after completing his junior high education, he was sent in 1902 to Austria, to Kalksburg near Vienna, where for centuries there had been a renowned boarding school for boys, run by the Jesuit Fathers. It was an academic school of a high standard - students were required to study diligently. He spent 5 years there. He obtained his high school diploma in 1907.

From Kalksburg, Kazimierz went on to further his education at the School of Political Sciences in Paris. He then studied at the Supreme Commercial Institute in Antwerp.

In July 1920, the Moscow invasion was approaching the capital of the country from the east. Those who could, rose up to fight. Kazimierz and all the young Skarżyński's enlisted in the 203rd Volunteer Ulan Regiment. After heavy fighting in Lviv, Zamość, and Warsaw, a Polish-Soviet armistice was signed. Corporal Kazimierz Skarżyński was awarded the Cross of Valor for his service as a 'very brave lancer'. Crosses of Valor were also awarded to Kazimierz's cousins: Edmund Skarżyński, Stefan Skarżyński, and Stefan Czarnowski.

In 1936, Kazimierz Skarżyński married the great love of his life, Zofia Zamoyska - the daughter of Maurycy and Maria Zamoyski. In 1937, their son Marek was born, and in 1939, their daughter Maria.

During World War II, Kazimierz Skarżyński, then 53 years old, joined the Polish Red Cross (*PCK – Polski Czerwony Krzyż*) and within a few days became its Secretary General. In 1943 he was one of the first Polish people who witnessed the site of the Soviet crime against Polish officers in Katyn, murdered by Stalin's NKVD in 1940. On behalf of the Polish Red Cross, he participated in the April 1943 trip organized by the Germans to the Katyn forest. From April 17 to June 7, a team of emissaries under his leadership worked

on the exhumation of Polish officers and civilians, as well as the classification of the possessions, medals, and documents on their person. Upon returning to Warsaw, he wrote an extensive and documented "Report from Katyn," which is one of the fundamental testimonies to the crime to this day. Kazimierz Skarżyński wrote, among other things:

"Near Smolensk, in the village of Katyn, there are partially excavated mass graves of Polish officers."

"Based on the examination of about 300 bodies unearthed so far, it can be stated that these officers were shot in the back of the head, the identical type of wound on all of them undoubtedly indicating a mass execution."

"The murder did not have a looting character, as the bodies are in uniforms, in boots, with orders, and a significant quantity of Polish coins and banknotes were found with the bodies."

"Judging from the documents found with the bodies, the murder took place in the months of March-April 1940."

- Excerpt from Minutes of the 332 PCK Presidium Meeting
(page 17 of K. Skarżyński's "Katyn" report.)

On April 20, 1943, the Main Board of the PCK in Warsaw sent Kazimierz Skarżyński's report to the International Committee in Geneva. Shortly thereafter, the report was forwarded by the service of American Ambassador Arthur Bliss-Lane to the Polish Government in London, the British Government, and the American Government. In a note read on April 25, 1943, to Ambassador Tadeusz Romer, the Soviet authorities severed diplomatic relations with the Polish government in London.

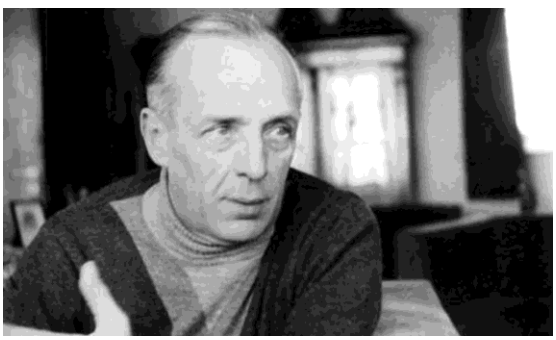
The history described above became a death sentence for Kazimierz in the post-war period. After the end of World War II, Poland did not achieve the freedom for which Polish soldiers fought. It fell under the occupation of the Soviet Union, where the dictatorship of Joseph Stalin prevailed, responsible for the destruction and murder of opponents and critics of communism and representatives of the upper classes of society. During his rule, over 30 million citizens of the Soviet Union perished. Similar methods of removing opponents of communism were used after the war in Poland. Poles from

higher classes were imprisoned, sentenced to death, and their property was confiscated. Kazimierz Skarżyński was under a double death sentence because he belonged to the higher classes of Polish society, and in his "Report from Katyn," he identified the perpetrators of the Katyn massacre as the Soviet NKVD, while the Soviets tried to blame the Germans - which was the official information given in Poland until 1990 when Poland freed itself from Soviet dictatorship.

Fleeing mortal danger as he faced arrest by the UB (Soviet Secret Service), Kazimierz, with his wife and two young children - eight-year-old son Marek and six-year-old Marysia, left Poland in 1946. They traveled to Nuremberg with the help of a 'white captain' and then reached Paris - all with French documents obtained through his former employer, a French financial company. The children were forbidden to speak Polish in the truck of the white captain who transported them.

In 1947, Kazimierz moved to Kisbey in southern Saskatchewan to manage a ranch purchased by Credit Foncier bank. It was not an easy job. He was assisted by his brother-in-law, the husband of his wife's sister, Piotr Czartoryski.

After two years, his wife Zofia and two children joined Kazimierz in Canada. Ten-year-old Marysia and her brother Marek went to school while their parents worked hard to support the family. In 1951, they settled in Calgary. In 1957, their 20-year-old son died in an accident.



Kazimierz became involved in Polish community life. Thanks to his efforts, in 1954, Polonia gained a Polish priest, and Poles could participate in Masses in Polish. As an employee of a financial company (he continued to work for his former employer, a French financial loan company), Kazimierz helped Poles obtain mortgage loans to buy their first homes in Calgary. He passed away in 1962 at the age of 75.

Marysia Skarżyńska continues to serve the Polish community in Calgary. She is an active member of our Polonia and a member of the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary. I would like to thank her for her work in preparing English translations of the histories of members of our Polonia.

Piotr Czartoryski later settled in Edmonton, where he was a longtime president of the Polish Congress of Alberta and a dedicated activist of Polonia. Piotr's nephew, Jerzy Czartoryski, was a long-time dedicated member of Polonia in Ottawa.

Chapter II

HEROES ARE AMONG US

INTRODUCTION

The facts and events described in this study have their roots in the history of the Second World War, a history distant from today by several decades - for most people living today, an event very distant in time. It is most often recalled in numerous stories about the Holocaust, which depict the tragic, wartime fate of only one ethnic group – the mass murder of the Jews, with the number of those exterminated reaching six million. The death toll of this cruel war was ten times higher and affected all nationalities, not only European ones. In both world wars, Poland was the battleground through which warring armies passed, and therefore suffered the most damage, with millions of Poles perishing, not to mention the destruction of their property, sources of livelihood, and the infrastructure of entire villages and cities.

There are still among us a few individuals who experienced this history firsthand, and for them, the events of the Second World War have been deeply engrained in their memory and psyche, becoming an important part of their life lessons. Their numbers are dwindling, which makes their personal accounts of wartime all the more valuable, unembellished by any literary fiction. They represent a small sample of everyday reality for millions of their compatriots at that time. Through this statistical sample, we seek to honor all the silent heroes who never publicly raised their voices, but managed to rise almost from the edge of the grave to fight for the right to a life worthy of a free human being, through the power of the human spirit.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, interwar Poland was slowly recovering from the ruins of the First World War, in somewhat different borders than today. After 123 years of partitions, the young Polish state was surrounded by hostile neighbors and had to constantly fight to maintain its borders, especially in the Eastern Borderlands, where the Polish population was a minority and native Ukrainian and German nationalism began to raise its voice. The fascist Germany of Hitler, dissatisfied with the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, was preparing for war, which was initiated by Germany's attack on Poland on September 1, 1939. A few days later, on the basis of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, on September 17, 1939, the invasion of Soviet Russia from the east occurred. Caught in a vice from both sides, Poland had no chance. The retreating Polish troops fell into the hands of the red adversary, who paid no heed to any international treaties regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. As a result, almost the entire military elite and uniformed services, numbering 25 thousand officers, and non-commissioned officers, were brutally murdered by the NKVD (*Naródny Komissariát Vnútrennih Del* – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) or Soviet secret service, in the vicinity of Katyn. Poland fell

victim to two totalitarian regimes - Nazi and Soviet - which celebrated together their victory over the Poles in Brześć nad Bugiem on September 22-23, 1939.

This temporary brotherhood of the Nazi swastika and the Soviet red star did not survive the agreed-upon 10 years; it ended in June 1941 with the invasion of Soviet Russia by Hitler's Germany. However, it allowed in 1940 a series of deportations of Poles from the Eastern Borderlands into the depths of Russia, affecting over 1.2 million people (according to some estimates, the number was much higher, and the official data from the NKVD conveniently give a number smaller than 300 thousand). Many of the deported did not survive the long journey, and upon arrival at forced labor camps, they were decimated by hunger, cold, diseases, and hard work. Only the strongest and youngest survived. Most of our heroes, who went through the battle route with the Anders Army, come precisely from among those deported in 1940-1941. The rest, who for various reasons failed to reach the mobilization points of General Anders' Army, returned to the country with General Berling's Army, and fought in the 1st Polish Army Corps, the so-called Kościuszko Army.

After the war, the "Andersites" could not return to liberated Poland. Their homeland for whose freedom they fought was not free. Poland was handed over by the Allies to the control of Soviet Russia, the regime of Stalin. The return of the soldiers of the II Corps, the Army of General Anders, to Poland, threatened them with imprisonment or death; they were considered social enemies simply because they fought for liberation from the Nazis under British command. Poland found itself in the Soviet sphere of influence, which had negative consequences for those who fought for freedom on the side of the Allies. A long period of the so-called Cold War began.

Our heroes, therefore, had no choice but to find a new homeland after the end of hostilities. Although their contribution to the final victory was enormous, and often decisive, as in the battles of Monte Cassino or Squadron 303 in the defense of Great Britain, after the war, the soldiers of the II Corps ceased to be of great value to the victorious Allies. Thanks to the efforts of General Anders, they were not denied accommodation in the West. However, it did not come too easily; they had to work hard for it.

And they did. Those with whom we had the chance to speak about those tragic times survived without complaining the worst conditions in Siberia or forced labor in Germany, strengthening themselves with the hope of returning to the homeland of their ancestors. But when this was not possible, they carried their love for their country to foreign lands, where in Polish organizations they could still promote their culture, contributing at the same time on many levels to enriching the country that became their new homeland. The history of Polish Combatants in Calgary is one of many scattered around the world that illustrates

this aspect of the Polish spirit, shaped in the nightmarish realities of the Second World War.

We hereby extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to the creation of this sketch of the post-war Polish emigration. May the memory of them shine on all the celebrations of the Independence Day of our Homeland, and their patriotism serve as an example for younger generations of Poles at home and abroad.

HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE POLISH COMBATANTS IN CANADA, BRANCH NUMBER 18, AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE POLISH COMMUNITY IN CALGARY.

The Association of Polish Combatants was established in Italy after the end of World War II. Polish soldiers fighting on all fronts of the cruel war came from all over pre-war Poland, but most were those who survived the mass deportation from the Eastern Borderlands to Siberia in 1940. There were also young Poles living in the western territories of Poland, who were forcibly conscripted into the Wehrmacht by the Germans, and from there, they were captured by the Allies, who later incorporated them into the 2nd Corps of General Anders.

The tragic fate that befell the Polish Nation during World War II changed the lives of millions of Poles. It deprived them of their homes, freedom, condemned them to forced emigration to Siberia or deep into the Reich, where hunger, diseases, and above all, the brutal treatment of man by man decimated them in inhumane conditions. It is hard to imagine young people, full of hope for the future, suddenly finding themselves in freight cars, defenseless, stripped of everything, life suddenly became a nightmare for them and their entire families. When the opportunity arose to join the Polish Army, a ray of hope for Free Poland emerged. Anyone who could, volunteered at recruitment points, where they could speak Polish again, found themselves among their compatriots, and the camp that was created at the recruitment points reminded them of their lost Homeland. Then came the transport to the Middle East, feelings of joy that Siberia was behind them, while at the same time, they were a little worried that they wouldn’t arrive to their destination in the old run-down ships in which they crossed the Caspian Sea. After their arrival came the general disinfection by sprinkling with lice powder, haircuts, new uniforms, military training, and real combat.

Young Polish soldiers were different, wherever they fought; they were among the best, characterized by courage and unparalleled heroism. They fought under the banner of the Allies, and those who did not manage to reach the forming Army of Anders joined the Army of General Berling and fought in the Kościuszko Division of the 1st Polish Army Corps on the Eastern Front. They all fought for a free Polish homeland. However, after the war ended, it turned out, unfortunately, that there was no free Poland, and there was no return to their former family homes. They faced an uncertain fate... the Western countries offered them the opportunity to immigrate. Before parting, young veteran soldiers established the Association of Polish Combatants in Italy on October 3, 1946. They were all united by similar wartime experiences, and above all, they were united by patriotism and love for the lost Homeland. In the same year, Canada agreed to accept 5,000 former Polish soldiers.

On November 11, 1946, the first transport of Polish veterans arrived in Halifax on the ship S/S Sea Robin. In December 1946, a group of 52 Poles arrived in Calgary. They were housed at Currie Barracks in the military barracks, where representatives of the local Polish community under the name Polish Alliance welcomed them, Mr. Władysław Chuchla recalled in an interview in 1976 for a book prepared by the Polonia in Edmonton, titled "Polish Settlers in Alberta". The Polish Alliance organization was established in Calgary in 1931 when the census registered 807 Calgarians of Polish descent. In 1946, this number had already reached 1500. The welcome of our new veteran immigrants by the local press was not too joyful. The Calgary Herald and the local radio announced that they were carriers of tuberculosis and venereal diseases. At the request of the Polish Alliance, the local chaplain Father Ritza (a Pole of the 3rd generation of our earlier Polish emigration) conducted an investigation into the matter, and it turned out that among the newcomers there were two cases of tuberculosis, which were immediately treated. The Calgary Herald and the radio station apologized to our Polonia for the false judgment of the arriving Polish immigrants - veterans.

Life in immigration in Canada did not start easily; every young immigrant had to sign a 2-year work contract. It often involved digging up stones on vast prairie farms; stones damaged combines, so to be able to efficiently harvest large agricultural areas, stones had to be removed from the fields. It was painstaking work for $0.25 an hour. Polish soldiers often replaced former German prisoners of war. They were not always well-treated by their employers; Mr. Krokosiński recounts in his memories that the work was very hard, and the lodgings were often in a barn or a shack with no heat. He worked on a farm near Lethbridge, from which he finally escaped and found other work approved according to the

terms of his contract. After completing their contracts, they found better-paying jobs, mostly on railways or in mines in southern Alberta.

They worked hard all week, and on Saturday and Sunday, they gathered at St. Mary's Church in Calgary. They were united by shared memories and war experiences, and these Sunday meetings were the beginning of a community, a new post-war Polonia.

In the autumn of 1947, the newcomers established the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch Number 18, in Calgary. At their initiative, the Saturday Polish School was established, which previously existed as a Polish language school for children of Polish descent born in Canada. The new school in Polish had an expanded curriculum, including history and learning about Poland. Antoni Sumiński (brother of Michał Sumiński from the well-known Polish television series "Zwierzyniec") was responsible for organizing and running the school. Our late colleague Czesław Mędrek organized the Polish Theatre.

At the first General Meeting of the SPK (*Stowarzyszenie Polskich Kombatantów* – Polish Combatants Association) Branch #18, at the initiative of colleague Jan Zwierzchowski, an Educational and Cultural Cell was established, chaired by Antoni Sumiński, which included Jan Zwierzchowski, Antoni Nieumierzycki, Stanisław Bielecki, Jerzy Rybkowski, J. Knapik, Władysław Chuchla, K. Kuldanek, Tadeusz Balcerzak. The first major event organized by them was the Christmas celebration in 1948, where Polish Nativity (*Jasełka*) scenes were displayed according to the text written by Antoni Sumiński and Jan Zwierzchowski, following which they prepared the first presentation-ceremony (*akademia*) celebrating the Constitution of May 3 and commemorations of the 10th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II in September 1949. The active members of our Association of Polish Combatants Branch #18 in Calgary at that time were (unfortunately, I do not know some names): Alicja Szulz, Helena Nieumierzycka, Barbara Kowalewska, J. Zagórska, J. Trzeciak, Mrs. Figiel, Mrs. Mędrek, Mrs. Kulka, and Mrs. Doszycka, Mr. K. Kuldanek, W. Krahel, J. Moryś, T. Balcerzak, J. Lichwała, W. Zabiełło, Władysław Krokosiński, Stanisław Węgrzynek, W. Mazur, and Piotr Mainowski.

Their activity changed the profile of the existing older Polonia in Calgary. The post-war immigration brought new vigor and new ideas to the life of the existing older Polonia. New organizations sprang up and the old organizations took on new life. Polonian activity became more cohesive and better organized. Young people, former soldiers, and their families were full of energy and new ideas. Their deep patriotism and love for the lost Homeland, as well as the anti-communist attitude shaped by the "hardship of being in Siberia", meant that despite the hard work throughout the week, they devoted all their free time to social activities for the good of Polonia in Calgary. The Polish community in

Calgary experienced a "cultural shock". Spreading Polish culture manifested itself in organized historical anniversary celebrations; famous Polish artists and scientists were invited to performances and lectures. In the Polish School, children learned in Polish, history, geography, and patriotism. This encouraged children from Polish families to study diligently; the young generation became educated Polish Canadians, for whom life in the new homeland was much easier.

A folk-dance group was formed, as well as the White Eagles Soccer Club. The Polish Credit Union was organized to help new immigrants buy their first homes.

The Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18, resumed the previous efforts of the older Polonia activists to establish a Polish Parish. They negotiated with Bishop Carroll for several years, brought Father Leon Trawicki from England, who persistently continued efforts to establish a Polish Parish, interrupted by his sudden tragic death in August 1956 at Pigeon Lake, at a camp for young Poles at the age of 32. In 1957, thanks to the generous donations of the young Polish immigrants, an old church was bought from the Greek Catholics, and registered under the patronage of Our Lady Queen of Poland. The parish priest was former Chaplain of the 2nd Corps, Monsignor (Prelate) Władysław Słapa, who soon passed away. The next parish priest was theology professor Jan Otłowski. The number of Polonia members continued to grow; veterans of World War II and families of earlier exiles who could not return to their homeland were brought to Calgary from all over the world. The need for a larger church arose. At the initiative of Władysław Krokosiński, in 1963, the New Church Building Committee was formed under the direction of Dr. Julian Oko. His personal contacts in the local Curia facilitated the negotiations, as a result of which Polonia in Calgary received permission to build a new temple, and on April 20, 1968, the new church under the patronage of Our Lady Queen of Peace was solemnly consecrated, where we worship to this day.

In 1963, on October 7, the SPK Branch #18 moved into their own Combatant House at 1127 Kensington Road NW. It was then a suburb of Calgary, today almost downtown. This house was bought from the Salvation Army, enlarged, and renovated by our pioneer colleagues from SPK.

The members of SPK #18 expanded their relations by joining other Polish organizations such as the Polish Canadian Association, to which immigrants without a military past belonged. They often worked simultaneously in both organizations; despite differences of opinions, they could stand united in key decisions. The Polish Centre belonging to the Polish Canadian Association on Edmonton Trail became too small for the constantly growing number of our Polonia members. A plan was made to build a new Polish Centre outside the city, in the green fields surrounding the last communities in the north of Calgary,

where there was open land, to the north of which was the airport. The city agreed to give the land for construction for a 10-year free lease, and after 10 years, it had to be paid for. The funds from the sale of the old Polish centre were supposed to be sufficient to build the new building. The construction began on a grand scale; the new building was designed to look like a Polish eagle from a bird's eye view. Many construction details had to be unfortunately changed due to the lack of funds. A significant contribution to the organization of the construction was made, among others, by colleagues Jan Kubok, Stanisław Bielecki, Władysław Niewiński, Władysław Krokosiński, and Anatol Nieumierzycki. These are the names I know; if I omitted others involved in the construction of the current Polish Centre, I apologize; I have no other knowledge or sources.

n 1982, the Polish Canadian Cultural Centre was built, which was and is known for being the largest and most magnificent of all other ethnic group centres in Calgary, and even in Alberta. Managing such a huge facility turned out to be expensive, and it constantly encountered financial problems. Despite the growing number of our Polonia members, especially with a wave of immigration of Solidarity members expelled from Poland after 1981, financial support for the Polish Centre did not increase. Young immigrants were focused on establishing their future in Canada; they were unable to financially support Polish organizations. The Polish Centre began to operate commercially; it was rented out and is still so to this day for weddings, parties, and artistic performances of other ethnic groups.

The commercial activity of the Combatant House also declined; Kensington Road, once a suburb, became part of the city center, and parking became a problem. The interior of the Combatant House became unattractive, dark with furnishings from the 60s. Renovation would be very expensive due to asbestos contained in building elements. In April 2007, the Combatant House on Kensington Road was sold for $2,000,000, and the assets of the Polish Canadian Association in Calgary and the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary, were merged. The funds from the sale of the Combatant House and a grant from the Alberta Government in the amount of $725,000 were allocated for repairing the roof and renovating the parking lot of the Polish Centre and building a new Combatant Hall at the Polish Canadian Cultural Center at 3015-15 Street NE (the official name of the Polish Centre in Calgary).

Our fellow Combatants, the fathers of our Association, have now reached an older age. Today, as we print a second edition of this brochure about the history of our Branch, the eldest members of our Association are gone. Our Branch is now joined by younger members – they are not veterans of World War II, but the next generation - anyone who is close to the tradition and history of the fight for freedom, independence, and democracy. Anyone who undertakes the

duty of preserving the memory of those who died on the fronts, fighting for peace in the world, is welcome in the ranks of our organization. The Association of Polish Combatants in Canada is an organization that in 1946 admitted to its ranks young soldiers deprived of the right to return to the Homeland they fought for freedom. Fate forced them to emigrate to foreign and unknown lands, far from beloved Poland, and arriving in Calgary, they did not forget about their culture, and in every aspect of their lives, they remembered that they were Poles. Here, with tremendous time and effort, they strengthened the existing Polonia, making it powerful and leaving behind a great legacy. Thanks to the achievements of our veterans, the young generation of our Polonia can now enjoy the fruits of their community work, and develop their own activities so that Polonia is always visible in our city, where the number of residents of Polish origin currently reaches about 48,000.

The achievements of Branch #18 of the Association of Polish Combatants in Canada are the result of the long-term work of the following member-presidents and their families.

The following is a list of presidents (unfortunately some first names are unknown to me – J.A.):

1. T. Kołecki	1947	17. Franciszek Kisielewicz	1970
2. K. Wielobob	1948	18. Jan Młodzianowski	1971
3. Jan Zwierzchowski	1949	19. Stanisław Bielecki	1972
4. Antoni Sumiński	1950–1952	20. Marian Baranowski	1973
5. Jan Lichwała	1953–1954	21. Tadeusz Kamiński	1974
6. Zbigniew Szulz	1955–1957	22. Stanisław Olszowy	1975–1979
7. Jerzy Rybkowski	1958	23. Witold Fortyński	1980–1982
8. W. Zabieło	1959–1960	24. Tadeusz Kamiński	1983
9. Jerzy Rybkowki	1961	25. Wakoluk Aleksander	1984–1986
10. Tadeusz Kamiński	1961	26. Fortyński Witold	1987–1992
11. Henryk Grajewski	1962–1963	27. Jan Kraska	1993–1994
12. Tadeusz Kamiński	1964	28. Witold Fortyński	1995–2000
13. Józef Zaigner	1965	29. Jan Kraska	2001–2017
14. Antoni Sumiński	1966	30. Zbigniew Starczyk	2017–2022
15. Stanisław Olszowy	1967–1968	31. Janina Aniolczyk	2022–
16. Zbigniew Karcher	1969		

Following are short stories of the fates of members of our organization who agreed to speak to me and share their stories with us.

Jan Ferensowicz

Before the approaching Remembrance Day, I pay a visit to one of our 'silent heroes' - Mr. Jan Ferensowicz. At the threshold of the house on Suffolk Drive SW, an elderly gentleman greets me with a cane. I know that he is close to ninety years old, but I didn't realize that his birthday falls just two days before Remembrance Day.

I'm invited into the living room, where I sit across from our hero and ask him to take a stroll down memory lane, into the distant past and the events that led to his emigration to Canada.

Jan Ferensowicz was born on November 9, 1919, in Złoczów, a county town of the former Tarnopol Voivodeship, located halfway between Lviv and Tarnopol. Since childhood, he was surrounded by ancient history there, as these areas are rich in Proto-Slavic archeological excavations. Złoczów was granted city rights by King Zygmunt Stary in 1523, and the city's history is dotted with prominent Polish names, such as the Sobieski, Rzewuski, and Koniecpolski families. In Złoczów and its surroundings, many old castles and palaces of the Polish magnates have been preserved. Tarnopol's cultural and religious influences were mixed, as the native Polish population was one of the ethnic minorities here in the early 20th century, with a greater prevalence of Ruthenians, Jews, and Armenians. In the years before the war, there was a strong rise of nationalism and fascism in these areas, which was intensified by the outbreak of World War II, dividing the previously coexisting mixed population into irreconcilable hostile camps.

The Ferensowicz family, consisting of father, mother, and four children - Józef, Jan, Antonina, and Janina - later moved to the Borszczów county, Dżwiniaczka commune, located only 16 km from the border with Soviet Russia. In the interwar years, throughout the territory of the Second Polish Republic, units of the Riflemen's Association, which had been established before World War I, were reactivated to prepare young people for responsible citizenship and defense of the nation's newly regained independence. At the outbreak of World War II, these units numbered nearly half a million members throughout Poland. The Association aimed to deepen the patriotism of youth (almost 70% of members came from rural areas), combat illiteracy, organize vocational courses, as well as promote culture through community centers, reading rooms, amateur

artistic groups, and organizing excursions around the country. Thus, it was not only a paramilitary organization, although emphasis was placed on sports training and preparation for military service; it was an organization of higher public utility aimed at fostering the awareness of young citizens, teaching them patriotism and responsibility. As such, it had to be the first target for elimination by the occupier, whether from the East or the West.

Jan belonged to the Riflemen's Association in Dźwiniaczka in the last years before the war, and with the occupation of these territories by Soviet forces, he was temporarily conscripted into the Red Army. A similar fate befell over 200,000 young Poles at that time. The rest of the family was deported to Siberia for exile. Only after the German invasion of the USSR in June 1941 did Jan manage to join the Polish Army. He headed towards the Polish Army forming in the Soviet territories under General Władysław Anders. Recruitment points for the forming II Corps were established in September 1941 in several places, including Busuluk, Tatiszczew, Tocki, and several other locations in the Soviet republics, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

In February 1942, Jan reached one of the mobilization points and joined the 1st Regiment of Uhlans (lancers in light cavalry units) under the command of Kazimierz Zaorski, one of the few Polish officers who managed to avoid the Katyn massacre because he was imprisoned by the Soviets at that time. Thanks to the Sikorski-Majski Agreement, Kazimierz Zaorski was released and took part in the formation of the Polish Army. The 1st Krechowiecki Uhlan Regiment, a Polish cavalry regiment from the interwar period, was reconstituted as part of the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR along with other formations. It was formed by merging the 6th Cavalry Squadron, 1st Uhlan Regiment, 5th Armored Division Cavalry Regiment, and 7th Cavalry Squadron. After the departure of General Anders' Army from the Soviet Union, this regiment later became part of the 2nd Armored Brigade, initially transformed into the 5th Tank Battalion and then into the 1st Armored Cavalry Regiment.

The evacuation of the II Corps, General Anders' Army, took place in two stages, and Jan participated in the first crossing, from Krasnovodsk across the

Caspian Sea to the Iranian port of Pahlevi (today's Bandar Anzali) at the turn of March and April 1942. The port of Pahlevi was then jointly occupied by Soviet and British forces. After reorganization, rearmament, and convalescence of the soldiers, they were sent to Iraq, where they guarded the strategic oil fields of Iraq against German sabotage, and then followed a combat route through Palestine and Egypt to southern Italy, where they drove out the Wehrmacht forces, advancing as far as Monte Cassino. Here, they were stopped by strong German fortifications on the hill of Monte Cassino, which prevented the Allied forces from further advancing to liberate Rome.

Three assaults by Allied forces ended in failure. The first offensive by French and US forces took place from January 17 to February 11, followed by the next from February 15-18 by New Zealand and Indian forces, then another attempt by Allied forces from March 15-26 was repelled by the Germans.

The II Corps began its attack on May 11, culminating in victory on May 18, 1944, at the cost of about 1000 Polish soldiers' lives. Jan's regiment, during the assault, remained in reserve, controlling the remaining sections of the Gothic Line.

After the war, from 1946-47, Polish soldiers served in the occupied territories until the dissolution of the Polish Armed Forces by the British in 1947. For Poles who did not want to return to communist Poland, the PKPR (Polish Resettlement Corps) was created. The soldiers who returned to Poland often fell victim to Stalinist terror. Jan belonged to the group, which chose emigration to the West - to Canada. The rest of Jan's family was resettled from Siberia to the vicinity of Gorzów Wielkopolski, where his two younger sisters still live to this day.

The first year in Canada was spent on contract work harvesting beets on a large farm near Lethbridge. Four veterans of the II Corps worked there, which somewhat facilitated their acclimatization to the new homeland before they could learn enough English to communicate without a translator. Two colleagues from that period still live in Alberta. Since 1950, Jan worked in Calgary, doing contract work for CPR (Canadian Pacific Railways), and then for the last 6 years before retirement, he worked for the City of Calgary Conservation Board.

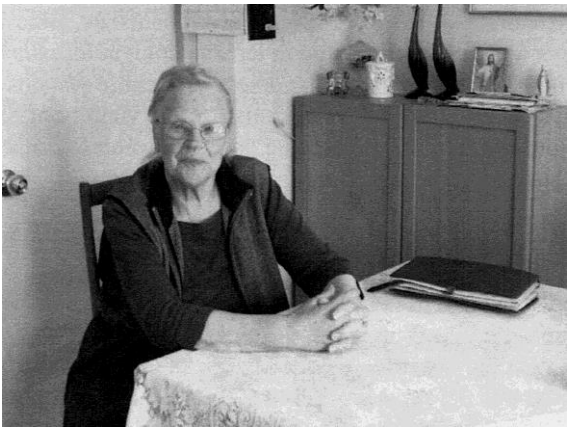
He started a family in 1961; during a visit to Poland, Jan met his future wife, Janina from Mogilno, whom he married there. Three children were born of this marriage: son Paweł in 1962, daughter Maria in 1964, and son Andrzej in 1966. Unfortunately, his wife passed away early, in 1993, due to advanced diabetes.

He retired in 1994. Since arriving in Calgary, Jan and his wife were active members of the Polish community. His close friend was Jan Węgrzynek, with whom he helped organize the activities of the newly created Polish Combatants' Association in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary, where his other veteran colleagues were also involved. Currently, his age does not allow him to be actively involved in the branch, but he still eagerly participates in Polish ceremonies, especially academic ones, such as the upcoming one on the occasion of Poland's National Independence Day.

Genowefa and Edward Łazowski

At the threshold, an elderly lady greets me with a disarming smile. She looks surprisingly young for her age, considering she was already an adult during World War II and is now among the dwindling list of veterans from that period. Mrs. Genowefa Łazowska is 87 years old and has been a widow for several years. After brief preliminary formalities, we sit down at the table in a meticulously maintained house. Numerous family photographs adorn the walls, capturing the smiles of a younger generation.

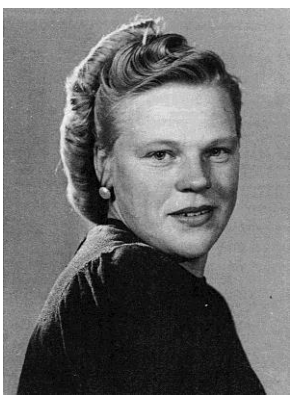
The purpose of my visit had been explained earlier, and Mrs. Genia was the first on the list of veteran-silent heroes of the wartime past, described countless times in thousands of books. For those of us born after the war, these were always just stories from history, seen through the prism of over 60 million casualties, destruction, and personal tragedies that instilled in our generation a natural reflex: "Never again!"



How many times had we thanked Providence for allowing us to survive those post-war decades in relative peace, even though wars were always being fought somewhere far away and only reached us through sanitized media reports? And now we were about to meet with that tragic part of history once again, with people whom the war robbed of their youth, condemning some to wander and forced labor and others to torture, poverty, and death. And here stands before me one of those individuals who not only survived all the degradations of that time but emerged from those trials stronger, beginning a new life in a distant land, and finding kindred souls with similar histories who helped heal wounds, restore love and faith in humanity, and bring into the world a generation for whom war could only be known from history books.

It's not easy to ask an older person to revisit the worst period of their life and reopen long-healed wounds, but the story ultimately has a positive outcome and serves as another testimony to the triumph of the human spirit over the horrors of the past, from which it sometimes emerges stronger and toughened for further struggles. It is a story of true love, in which two wartime survivors come together to create a new, better life for themselves and their loved ones. A life crowned with success, where one can see in family photographs young and beautiful people who have attained education and started families based on values instilled in them by their upbringing.

Recalling her husband, Mrs. Genia's voice is warm as she pronounces his name, "Eddie," while a handsome, slightly mischiefvous man gazes at me from the photographs. There are many black and white photos from the wartime periods, showing Mr. Edward in the uniform of the II Corps, General Anders' Army.



Edward Łazowski was sent to western Germany in 1940 to work in quarries. We do not know the exact circumstances of his transition from forced labor in quarries to the ranks of Anders' Army, as Mrs. Genowefa does not remember. From the photos in the album, I see Edward among the soldiers of the II Corps. He was one of the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Monte Cassino and, after the war, visited the cemetery of those who fell at Monte Cassino on one of the anniversaries of the victory. There are photos of Edward from those commemorations in the album.

Recalling her husband’s story, Mrs. Genia's voice trembles slightly, but when I ask about her own history of displacement, there are flashes of anger in her eyes as she recounts the events in the Kielce region that initiated her wartime odyssey.

It was in 1941, just after Easter, when trucks filled with Germans in green uniforms arrived in her family's village near Kielce. Genowefa was 18 at the time. The roundup caught her within the confines of the rural school. Her mother had passed away some time before, and only her father was responsible for raising three children. Her sisters and brother were not nearby at that time, so they avoided sharing Genowefa’s fate.

As she recounts the events that separated her from her loved ones for the rest of her life, Genowefa's voice trembles.

"These 'greens' (she couldn't remember which formation they were, but the description resembled SS uniforms) loaded us onto trucks and first took us to Częstochowa, where their warehouses and assembly point for future slaves were located. There was a preliminary selection there, during which most of our clothes were taken away, our hair was cut, and we were loaded onto trains bound for Germany. It's impossible to describe the atmosphere of terror that accompanied this process. It was the second year of occupation, and news from various parts of the country did not promise anything good to come. Genowefa and her fellow sufferers in the wagons heading towards Germany didn't know what awaited them, and this uncertainty was perhaps the worst. They traveled into the unknown, guarded by those 'greens'.

The journey ended in Bavaria, in the town of Schongau, on the estate of a wealthy landowner. In total, she spent 7.5 years in Germany before repatriating

to Canada. Along with other people deported for forced labor in Germany, she worked from dawn to dusk in exchange for less than meager food. Once a month, the local authorities assessed the work of the slaves brought from the occupied territories, and each of them knew that it was better not to complain about the existing working conditions because it was easy to find oneself in even worse conditions, or even be sent to a concentration camp. Over 300 concentration camps in Germany were overcrowded with thousands of people considered undesirable to for the Third Reich - disobedient, sick, differently thinking and believing people, and with all shades not befitting the new Nazi ideology.

In silence and fear, the years passed until the Allied forces entered. Rare rumors sometimes reached them about the new reality in Poland, to which many were afraid to return. Those who wanted to stay in the West had to go through the hardships of repatriation camps for war refugees, which turned out to be another hell. Thousands of lost people sought the safety of a new homeland, being moved from one camp to another. Genowefa met a few of them in the post-war years on German soil. Transferred from Schongau to Altenstadt, and then to Murnau, Augsburg, and back to Altenstadt. Finally, she was lucky. She received a visa to go to Canada, signed a one-year contract to work on a Canadian farm, and after a long journey by ship and trains, arrived in southern Alberta.

Working on the farm was tough with 100 wild horses and 300 head of cattle, but the Atlantic Ocean and the expanse of North America's land separated her from the post-war reality of Europe. And the contract was limited to just one year, the work, although hard, no longer bore the characteristics of forced labor as it had been in Germany before. Hope for a better future began to emerge.

At the same time, on a neighboring farm, Mr. Edward Łazowski was working off his two-year contract, a veteran of the II Corps of General Anders' Army. He had heard somewhere that a Polish woman was working nearby, and along with two colleagues, he decided to visit her. And that's how a girl from Kielce met her life's destiny, originally from Tomaszów Mazowiecki. When their work contracts ended, they decided to move to the city, to Calgary.

When Edward asked her to marry him, she treated it with disbelief. Once again, recalling those times, Genowefa becomes for a moment that young, embarrassed, shy girl from the Kielce village, whom fate had treated so cruelly that she couldn't believe her dreams could simply come true. But Edward repeated his proposal, and then Genowefa said yes.

Edward turned out to be a 'jack of all trades'. He bought an old Ford, which he had to repair before the car was usable. It didn't cause him too much trouble. Calgary in the mid-20th century was only a fragment of the present city, in 1947 it had 100 thousand inhabitants. Genowefa remembered a horse-drawn tram in the city center, alongside automobiles, which soon eliminated horse-drawn vehicles from the city streets. The young Łazowski couple, after a wedding that took place on Thanksgiving Day in 1949, first lived in a rented garage, then in a rented room, until finally, when they were expecting their first child, they made the decision to start a family in their own home—they bought an old cottage, which Edward renovated, and then in 1953, they bought a newly built house in NW Calgary for $13,000. They both worked hard to meet the payments. They were a happy family, gradually growing. The horrors of war made them stronger, and together they strove to ensure that their four children had an easier life in Canada.

They were also active members of the Polish community organizations in Calgary, as well as members of the Polish Combatants' Association, Branch #18 in Calgary.

Of the four children—three daughters and a son—only three remain today, as the eldest daughter is no longer alive. Edward passed away in 1994, but before he left, he took his wife and son on a second trip to Europe. The first was in 1967, when they visited their homeland. The second trip took place in 1989, for the 45th anniversary of the victorious battle at the Monte Cassino hill in Italy. Restored from the wartime ruins, the monastery towers over several Allied cemeteries, and the slopes of the mountain in May are covered with blooming red poppies. In one of the cemeteries lie about a thousand Poles who did not live to see the peace they fought for. Mother Nature covered the war scars with lush vegetation and flowers, for this stern mother allows only those who bravely face the vicissitudes of fate to survive, and sometimes rewards them with beauty.

Family chronology:

Genowefa Łazowska

- Born on November 9, 1922, in Kakonie near Kielce.
- In 1941, she was deported to Germany for forced labor.
- In 1948, she came to Canada, where she worked on a farm in southern Alberta for a one-year work contract.

Edward Łazowski

- Born on February 23, 1924, in Tomaszów Mazowiecki.
- In 1940, he was deported to Germany near the border with France for forced labor in quarries. (The method of his release from forced labor is unknown to us; his wife does not remember this part of Edward's wartime fate.)
- In 1944, he joined the II Corps of General Anders' Army.
- In May 1944, he participated in the Battle of Monte Cassino.
- In 1946, he came to Canada and worked for 2 years on a farm in Alberta.

Marta Jezierska-Mańkowska

For Marta Jezierska-Mańkowska, August 1944 will remain an indelible memory.

She was born in Warsaw on June 20, 1920. Raised in the patriotic traditions of interwar Poland, in a family where the previous four successive generations fought for freedom.

Marta graduated from the Humanistic Girls' Gymnasium of Józefa Gagatnicka on Senatorska Street in Warsaw and began studying law at the University of Warsaw, but her studies were interrupted by the German invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Marta, along with her older sister Olcha, engaged in defense activities from the beginning of the war, organizing provisions for soldiers on the Warsaw front during the siege of the capital, which surrendered only on September 28, 1939.

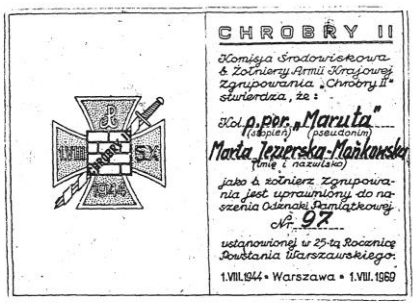
She remembers the difficulties her group faced in transporting food for the fighting units in Warsaw. One of the girls came up with the idea to ask Prince Zdzisław Lubomirski (a former member of the Regency Council), who was

known to have a car, for assistance. The Prince agreed and provided his Chevrolet to the young female fighters, along with his driver. The soldiers began receiving soup, which they highly appreciated, and which was often their only meal of the day.

Shortly after establishing contacts with the resistance, Marta completed a nursing course at the Children of Jesus Hospital, as well as training as an educational officer.

During the Warsaw Uprising, the insurgents rested in the clubroom organized by Marta and her sister in Śródmieście on Mazowiecka Street. In the clubroom, coffee and bread with jam awaited the exhausted insurgents, along with occasional entertainment by makeshift artistic groups.

For Marta, Śródmieście was too "quiet," so after two weeks, she moved to the front on Grzybowska Street, where she remained until the fall of the Uprising. Her main activity in the Economic Platoon of the 2nd Battalion "Chrobry II" involved running a kitchen for the fighting soldiers and procuring food, which was not an easy task in those times. Her sister remained in the clubroom on Mazowiecka Street, and after the Uprising fell, she managed to leave Warsaw with the civilian population.

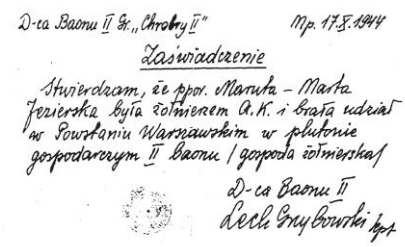

CHROBRY II

Komisja Środowiskowa b. Żołnierzy Armii Krajowej Zgrupowania „Chrobry II" stwierdza, że:

Kol. p.por. „Maruta"
(stopień) (pseudonim)
Marta Jezierska-Mańkowska
(imię i nazwisko)

jako b. żołnierz Zgrupowania jest uprawniony do noszenia Odznaki Pamiątkowej Nr. 97 ustanowionej w 25-tą Rocznicę Powstania Warszawskiego.

1.VIII.1944 • Warszawa • 1.VIII.1969


D-ca Baonu II Gr. „Chrobry II" Mp. 17.8.1944

Zaświadczenie

Stwierdzam, że ppor. Maruta – Marta Jezierska była żołnierzem A.K. i brała udział w Powstaniu Warszawskim w plutonie gospodarczym II Baonu / gospoda żołnierska /

D-ca Baonu II
Lech Grzybowski ppłk

Marta's wartime past is well documented. She managed to smuggle her notes to the West, along with an insurgent armband and diaries written with a pencil during the war. The atmosphere of those days is vividly reflected in those faded pages, written "on the fly" in the heat of battle:

September 6. Terrible, immense fatigue. Enduring only by sheer willpower and determination, in the evening, we go with Tenia to Ceglana, a bit later than usual. We slog through piles of rubble and bomb craters resembling high mountains. With such a burden, it's impossible to run. Terribly exhausted, drenched in sweat, we reach our destination. As we return, it's already dark (...) Our outposts at both ends, us in the middle. We've passed the most difficult stretch, only a leap

through the gate left. I rush first, a shot. After a moment, Tenia says the bullet passed just above me. New shots ring out in the shattered home (...).

Marta also possesses poems written on scraps of paper by her friend, Platoon Leader "Janka" Bogdańska, during the fighting of the Uprising, which capture the poignant mood...

Snapshots of the Uprising

August 6 on Grzybowska Street
Crack of rifles, whistling bombs,
Roar of fire, bullets whizzing...
Chaos, despair, pain squeezing the throat with a sobbing knot
Warsaw is burning! No time for despair...
Is that fallen tree groaning? Or is the cry within me
Longing, fear for home, also engulfed in flames?
Again the roar: For God's sake!!! Don't stand in the way...
They carry the wounded, lifeless masses
In an abandoned gate, footsteps can be heard,
Command "to the fire." Help!!! The house is burning
Warehouses and wounded, cries flow from the rubble.
Oh God! Perhaps enough suffering.
Crack! A horrifying roar and new tumults,
Basia is gone, son is dying... And again, machine guns
Played their reveille on Grzybowska Street
Our men in action, so few... Oh, for God's sake,
Lieutenant, what shall we do? They will be crushed...
"Enough, daughter, you escaped from your mother
Before the hour, not to comprehend war…
Look at me, everything's fine, after all, I'm calm".
…
Alexander was right, because from that moment on
We survived many such moments
*And despite the 'cows'(*Nebelwerfer), grenades, enemy onslaught,*
We did not surrender Grzybowska Street.

When asked what stood out most in her memory from those tragic moments, Marta paused for a moment and replied, "I didn't feel the same fear as most people who sheltered in cellars. At least twice I was a target of snipers (we called them 'Pigeon Shooters'), and I won't forget the whistle of bullets near my

ear, but there was no time for fear during the action. I think in such moments, a person with a strong sense of duty doesn't think about themselves, only about others. Perhaps such an attitude helps one to emerge unscathed from danger."

Marta was not destined to die young... After the capitulation, Marta was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant.

Those who did not perish in the Uprising or did not blend in with the civilian population faced captivity. Along with thousands of other insurgents, Marta was taken by the Germans first to Ożarów, where they were loaded onto trains bound for the camp in Lamsdorf. It was one of the largest and worst prisoner of war camps, gathering people of many nationalities, although the majorities were Russians and Poles.

The Germans gave the newcomers antiseptic injections and kept precise records of the prisoners, among who were many children from the Warsaw Uprising, as well as a significant number of officers, including about 500 women. Held separately, they awaited transfer to a POW camp, where conditions were supposed to be better. Marta deliberately concealed her officer rank so that by giving up better conditions in the POW camp, she could take care of the children and prevent their transfer to labor camps for minors (the so-called "Komenderówki" where children aged 13 to 15 were forced into heavy labor). Marta did not avoid transfer; with other women, she was transported deeper into Germany, to the camp in Mühlberg on the Elbe and then to Altenburg in Thuringia, where despite the Geneva Convention, prisoners of war were forced into slave labor. They worked at lathes for 12 hours a day and were not allowed to sit down even for a moment. They were liberated from this slave labor on April 24, 1945, by the US Army under General Patton. The German overseers attempted to evacuate the prisoners from Altenburg, but they fled from the advancing Allied forces, and the entire group of evacuated women was left to fend for themselves in an open field. Marta recalls, "We were afraid that Nazi remnants or Hitler Youth might attack us, so we hid in a barn for 2-3 days until we saw American tanks." The Americans placed the women in a transit camp near Jena and then transported them by car sequentially north towards Cologne. Marta's intention was to make her way to England and enlist in the army there to continue her studies. Marta, along with four brave companions, escaped from the care of the Americans from the transit camp and, traveling through Germany, managed to safely reach General Maczek's division. There, they were taken care of by sappers and managed to smuggle themselves across the Dutch and Belgian borders to France. In France, they reached the town of Lannoy near Lille, where there were temporary camps for former soldiers of the Home Army. Here, Marta survived the next four years because after their arrival in Lannoy, it turned out that the last transport to England had just sailed, and no further departures were

planned. Knowing French from Poland, Marta studied literature at the University of Lille in France. In France, she met her husband, Tadeusz Mańkowski, who was an officer in the 2nd Division and fought in the French campaign, then was interned until the end of the war in Switzerland, from where he returned to France after the war ended. They married on French soil, and in 1948, they moved to England. They spent the next four years in London, and in 1952, they immigrated permanently to Canada. They settled in Calgary, where a few years later, their daughter Barbara was born. Barbara, along with her husband Adam Gorzkowski, and their three children, resides in Calgary. The entire family actively participates in the Polish community.

Marta's husband passed away in 1970. Marta passed away in 2019.

Honorata and Bronisław Mikosz

Various paths led to the emigration of World War II veterans; reminding ourselves of the wartime experiences of our silent heroes automatically connects us with the part of history that tends to be forgotten. The infamous Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 1939 divided Poland into two occupation zones. Seventeen days after the German invasion of Poland from the West by the Nazi Germans, the second invasion took place by the Soviets from the East, who then occupied the eastern Polish Kresy. After massacring all military partisan opposition who fought to preserve their homeland, the Soviets turned their attention to civilians living in this area, and mass deportations began. For many Kresy residents, the road to the West often led through Siberia.

My next meeting is with Mrs. Honorata Mikosz, whose fate followed this journey. Born in 1920 in Wesołówka in the Tarnopol Voivodeship, she was deported with her entire family to Siberia during the first of the mass deportations, which took place on the night of February 9/10, 1940. After this first deportation, three more occurred, in April and June 1940, and in June 1941, just before the German offensive against the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). In total, 1.2-1.5 million Poles living in the eastern territories of pre-war Poland were subjected to deportation to Siberia. The exact number of deportees is unknown; the above data comes from the Polish Government in exile in London. On the internet, the number of deported individuals is currently listed as less than 300,000 – a number provided by the NKVD (Soviet Secret Service). The numbers provided by this organization are not to be trusted, as after the war half a million 'Siberians' (prisoners liberated from Siberia) found themselves in Western countries. Many Polish deportees did not survive the long journey to distant Siberia, and thousands of others remained in the 'inhuman Siberian land,' lacking the health and strength to endure the harsh conditions, cold, and hunger.

Honorata remembers vividly the details of the day preceding the night of February 9/10, 1940. Etched in her memory is the unusual behavior of domestic animals throughout the village. She believes that the barking and howling of dogs and the honking of geese was a warning before the knocking on the doors at night – when for the first time in her life, she saw the face of a Kalmyk up close (Kalmyk was a former resident of part of the USSR in Asia). First, there was a house search - the NKVD usually started the action by "searching for weapons."

Then the whole family was packed onto sleighs waiting in the yard, which took them to the railway station in Mikulice, where everyone was packed into cattle cars: both parents, Karolina and Jan Tarczyński, and seven children; Julian, Honorata, Aleksander, Stanisław, Stanisława, Bolesław, and Janina. The last two were still young children; Bolesław was 10, and Janina was 9 years old. For the next three days, the train moved slowly, often being shunted onto sidings, and the passengers waited in the cold without food for their further fate. Then they were loaded into other

cattle cars, which were to travel for the next 46 days across the Ural Mountains to Krasnoyarsk, and in which they received 'kipiatok' (hot water for drinking) daily and occasionally some thin soup.

The land of Krasnoyarsk along the Yenisei River was renowned for the deportation of Poles from the November and January Uprisings. Whoever survived the hardships of the long journey was effectively cut off from the civilized world - escape was not possible. At the destination station, the deportees were greeted by an NKVD officer, and his first words were: "You Poles are a 'pohybnyj naród' (a lost, condemned nation), you have come here to die," Honorata remembers with tears in her eyes.

The deportees lived in mud-caked, primitive barracks; to survive, they had to go to work immediately to earn a meager living. They found employment in the nearby Glassworks or in logging. Honorata's father survived only a few months of exile; he died in December 1940 of exhaustion, although the official diagnosis indicated that he died of appendicitis. The mother died in 1942, and one of the younger brothers, Aleksander, in 1943, both died of so-called "hunger diarrhea," which was one of the types of typhus. The underage children, Stanisław, Stanisława, Bolesław, and Janina, were placed in an orphanage. They returned to Poland in 1948.

Honorata endured three years in brutal conditions, working in logging, and at the end of the exile, in timber floating, where earnings were slightly higher. Finally, news came of the formation of the Polish army in the USSR - the eldest brother, Julian, enlisted in General Anders' Army and with the II Corps went through the entire combat route from entering Iran to under Monte Cassino. After the victorious battle, Julian was riding a motorcycle with a letter from the command, when he hit a mine on the way to his destination, near Massimo. He was severely wounded, deprived of the muscles in the entire right side of his face. He was hospitalized for several months, first in Italy and then in England, undergoing several plastic surgeries and transplants until his face was completely reconstructed, all thanks to the help of a young British military doctor who took special care of Julian.

Bronisław Mikosz, Honorata's future husband, also served in General Anders' Army. Bronisław came from the village of Kopanki near Kałusz in the Stanisławów Voivodeship (today's Ivano-Frankivsk), who emigrated to Canada in 1947 to work on a farm in New Brigden in Alberta. But it would be many years before Honorata met him.

Honorata did not have a chance to join the II Corps; together with other deportees, she sought a way back from cold Siberia to Poland, returning to the homeland with the I Corps, the Kosciuszko Army, under the command of General Berling. (The 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division was part of the

Red Army, led by former Colonel Zygmunt Berling, a deserter from the Polish Army, a former soldier of the Legions. Berling was one of the handful of officers who cooperated with the Soviets and did not share the fate of the thousands of officers shot in the forests near Katyn). All volunteers who reported for military service did so with the goal of liberating Poland; they were not communists, as they were sometimes called by their fellow veterans of the II Corps after the war. Honorata went through the entire combat route, from Lenino to Berlin. After the war, she settled in the Recovered Territories in the village of Wisełka on the Wolin Island. As a veteran-soldier, she was given a house and a farm from former German residents, who after the war had to leave the Recovered Territories and move to Germany. There she met her first husband, Teodor Strózik, who was of German descent; his father was Polish, and his mother was German. They married in 1949, but after only five years, Teodor, Honorata's great love, extorted property from her, and then asked her to leave. With this betrayal, Honorata packed her things and went to her family, her older sister Maria in Brzeżnica, who was the only one to avoid deportation to Siberia and lived then in the Rzeszów Voivodeship. Maria Uczeń, nee Tarczyńska, was already married when World War II began. She lived with her whole family in Wesołówka when in the fall of 1939, a Ukrainian admirer from her maiden days, warned her that the Soviet authorities were planning mass deportations of Poles to Siberia. He knew that their father had family in central Poland and that they should move to the family, brother and sisters of Jan Tarczyński, to the west to avoid deportation. After receiving the warning, Jan Tarczyński concluded that the family was too large for anyone, even close family, to provide them with permanent shelter, especially during the wartime occupation. He stated that he was willing to share the fate of his fellow residents of Wesołówka, where everyone was very close, but Marysia with her husband and two children, 2-year-old Danusia and 6-month-old Krysia, should go to his family, because the little grandchildren may not survive deportation. And so, Maria, along with her husband Jan and two little girls, undertook the difficult journey west. They first reached the Bieszczady Mountains, where her husband's sister lived. And after a few months, they moved to Brzeżnica, near Dębica, where Jan Tarczyński's family lived. Maria described their journey; they walked only at night to avoid

capture by NKVD units, and during the day, they slept under the cover of reeds or cornfields. At the border between the German and Soviet occupation zones, they were caught by a Red Army soldier who mistook them for 'spies' and led them to execution; but they were saved by a young officer who noticed civilians with children, ordered the leading soldier to report to his office - a compartment in a military train. The officer listened to them, looked at the little girls, and with tears in his eyes, said that he had left such daughters at home. He decided to wait until dusk and led them across the border at night into the German occupation zone. Maria and her family survived the war and settled permanently in Brzeżnica. Jan Tarczyński, Jan's brother, was shot along with his entire family in May 1943 by the Gestapo for the involvement of one of his sons in the resistance movement.

Honorata's further fate was the beginning of a new life. First, she lived in Warsaw, but after a year, she returned to her sister's, found a job as a head chef in a restaurant in Czarna Tarnowska. Her army experience, where she had served as a cook, helped her in her further career.

One of Honorata's old friends, a fellow from Wesołówka, Czesław Dumanowski, was going to Canada with his family to his older brother Frank Dumanowski. Franciszek, who was the same age as Maria's sister, was a neighbor of the Tarczyński family in Wesołówka; their families were deported to Siberia near Krasnoyarsk. Franek served in General Anders' Army with Honorata's older brother Julian. At the farewell meeting, before leaving to his brother in Canada, Czesław promised Honorata that he would find her a fiancé, and this is how Honorata stumbled upon her true destiny. Through correspondence, she met Bronisław Mikosz. They married in 1966 in Oyen, Alberta, and lived happily together until Bronisław's passing in 1997.

Bronisław Mikosz was deported from the village of Kopanki, near Stanisławów, with his parents and siblings Jan, Maria, and Franciszka to Siberia near Archangel. The older brother Karol was in the army, and after the fall of Poland in the fall, he escaped to Romania and then made his way to France, where he fought in the French underground. During the formation of General Anders' Army, brothers Jan and Bronisław voluntee-red, taking the rest of the family with them. Bronisław recalled the crossing of the Caspian Sea on an old, smelly ship, which looked as though it could fall apart at any moment. He

remembered how women knelt and prayed the rosary and various litanies, asking God to safely reach the shore. Upon arrival at the port of Bandar Pahlavi, there was a total disinfection of the newcomers, shaving, bathing, and new uniforms for the soldiers. Bronisław's family, mother, father, and sisters Maria and Franciszka, survived the end of the war in the "Coja" camp for war refugees in Uganda. After the war, Bronisław's parents with his older brother Jan emigrated to Great Britain, Karol settled permanently in Lille, France, with his wife Stasia, and Bronisław emigrated to Canada, where he found work on the Wilson family farm in New Brigden, Alberta. In 1950, his sister Franciszka joined him with her family, which she had started in the "Coja" camp. She came with her husband Jan Garszczał, five-year-old Zofia, four-year-old Krystyna, and three-year-old son Ryszard.

Honorata worked with Bronisław on the farm he bought from the Wilsons in 1966. She remembered how she helped her husband cultivate the land by throwing heavy bales of hay onto the tractor trailer to make the work go faster, while Bronisław drove the tractor because she didn't know how to. That year, they earned $11,000, of which $10,000 was a down payment on the farm. After ten years of work, they sold the farm and settled in Oyen, where they bought a new house where Honorata lived until 1998. In Oyen, they were active members of the Legion branch # 208, played curling in winter, and took care of a beautiful garden in summer, where Honorata planted all kinds of vegetables and many flowers; often products from her garden took first place in exhibitions organized by the town of Oyen. A year after Bronisław's death, Honorata moved to Calgary, to a senior citizen home. She joined SPK #18 and was an active member. Every year she took part in standing guard at the grave of Jesus in our Church on Holy Saturday. The last few years of her life she spent in a nursing home. She passed away at the age of 99.

Władysław Niewiński

Next, I am visiting the veteran of the Battle of Monte Cassino, a member of the Polish Combatants Association in Canada, Branch #18 in Calgary, Władysław Niewiński. Ela Rysz is with us, and for the first time, the story of our comrade veteran about his wartime experiences is captured on film.

One of the rooms in his house serves as a small museum of his Polish activities in Calgary, filled with commemorative photos and diplomas. There are also mementos from his wartime past.

Władysław was born on March 9, 1918, in Bielsko Podlaskie, to the family of Karol Niewiński and Józefa Malinowska. It was a tumultuous period of Poland's reformation after the partitions, and the Niewiński family survived this time by working on the Malinówka estate, where they lived with five children in a large house.

At the outbreak of World War II, Władysław was already 21 years old and therefore subject to compulsory military service. The Germans invaded Poland from the west, and after 17 days, the Soviet Red Army entered Polish territories from the east. The civilian population was subjected to a new wave of Soviet terror, worse than the Tsarist oppression during the partitions.

Soon after, Władysław received an order to report to the military command in Bielsko Podlaskie, which also served as the local NKVD office. After registration and haircutting, he was given a few hours to return home, where he could pack a few necessary things, and in the evening, he had to be ready to leave. There were about 400 other young men his age at the station. They were loaded into eight wagons, and more wagons were attached in Białystok. They traveled northeast towards the Latvian border, where the assembly and training point for this 'draft' was located in Idrica. Among them were not only Poles but also Jews, Belarusians, Rusyns, and Lithuanians, although they shared the common fate of conquered nations, not all were equally trustworthy, as Władysław soon found out. In daily conversations with his Polish comrades, the fate of the homeland and dreams of returning to their native land were the main topics, which did not escape the attention of spies. Thus, after the start of the exercises, Władysław was taken by the commander, the "political officer" (or *politruk*, as they called their tormentors), into the forest for a practical lesson in true NKVD style. The politruk told him to sit on a stump, sat down on another, and placed a pistol within reach on a third. Without beating around the bush, he went into the

substance of these conversations about a free Poland, concluding with the statement that just as no one can see their own ear without a mirror, Poles will never see a free Poland, and if such rebellious conversations reach him again, he will kill Władysław with his own hands in the same forest, reminding him that these are facts, not just threats. Władysław and others already knew about the cruelty and terror of the NKVD service, and he realized the seriousness of the political officer's words. The NKVD terror destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people; the lives of those imprisoned had no value, and thousands of people disappeared without a trace.

Upon returning from the "trip" with the political officer, he warned his comrades about similar conversations, even among their closest friends.

They were then transferred to the town of Gorky. Here, there was a selection based on the requirement to swear allegiance to Soviet citizenship. Those who agreed to accept Soviet Russian citizenship were enlisted in the army. Władysław found himself in a larger group of Poles who refused to take the oath. They were disarmed and taken to Moscow, which was just being bombed for the first time by the German Luftwaffe. There were about 500 of them, starving, left temporarily unattended, but with nowhere to escape. Soon, new NKVD guards arrived, loaded them into wagons, and set off on a long journey to Siberia, through Chelyabinsk, Sverdlovsk, all the way to Novosibirsk. There they were housed in leaky and unheated barracks and immediately put to slave labor. To survive on meager rations, they ate tree bark. The only drink, "kipiatok", or hot water, prevented them from freezing to death. Władysław worked on laying tracks for a narrow-gauge railway used to transport timber. The winter conditions were indescribable, with temperatures dropping to minus 62 degrees Celsius causing the trees to crack. The barrack where 70 people lived had only a small iron stove. Hungry, frozen, and exhausted, they somehow survived the first Siberian winter. Many of his companions endured this winter with the misfortune of frostbitten limbs.

One winter morning, they were awakened at 4 a.m. Their politruk read out names from a list, about 500 Poles and Polish Jews out of almost 3000 prisoners inhabiting the barracks. Another politruk, a Georgian, announced that, by virtue of an agreement between General Sikorski and Comrade Stalin, the Polish Armed Forces were being formed in the USSR to fight German aggression. Cut off from the world, they had no idea that the mentioned Sikorski-Majski agreement had taken place almost six months earlier, and no one was in a hurry to inform them, until a February morning in 1942. This time, they even received a better breakfast, and Władysław could finally confront his first politruk, who threatened him with death for talking about a free Poland that supposedly would never exist.

This time, the political officer did not threaten him with a pistol and was no longer as confident.

They were loaded onto wagons again and taken somewhere near the border with Turkey to Buzułtuk. It was already the end of winter 1942 when they reached the camp, where they were greeted by the sight of Polish uniforms. Conditions in the camp where the Polish army was being formed were not the best, but much better than in the Siberian barracks. This time, the main enemy for the hungry young men was spreading disease; dysentery, and typhus transmitted by countless lice, which were not easy to get rid of in conditions of extreme poverty. Władysław was assigned to the artillery, but he was temporarily employed in the food supply department, where alcohol was plentiful. He admits that he drank every day, which he believes saved him from dysentery and typhus, as he often had to help bury his deceased comrades. In the first days in the camp, he met a sergeant from 1939, who helped him orient himself and taught him how to live in military camp conditions. Anyone who survived Siberian exile learned a good lesson in survival in any conditions.

Finally, the time came to leave Russia for the Middle East; it was Easter time. First, they crossed the Caspian Sea to the Iranian port of Pahlevi. In Pahlevi, after disembarking from the ship, they immediately underwent complete disinfection; they had to strip off the ragged uniforms they received during mobilization in Soviet Russia, the clothes were burned, and the soldiers themselves were directed to the bathhouse and subjected to complete disinfection before receiving new uniforms. Here, Władysław met a familiar doctor, Tworkowski, who was a county doctor in Bielsko before the war. Dr. Tworkowski warned Władysław against further travel on English ships, as they were often sunk by the Germans. The doctor wanted to keep Władysław to work on the committee for the repatriation of Poles from Russia, whose task was to register all those returning from exile in Siberia and note who and where they were sent from Tehran. Transportations with families of former exiles were sent to India, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, and New Zealand. About 700 children were sent to the latter, and none of them returned. Władysław still has notes from those times, which indicate, among other things, that about 3000 Jews who left Russia with General Anders' Army remained in Palestine, starting fights with Arabs and the British, laying the foundations for the future state of Israel.

In Tel Aviv, the final chapter was reached, and Władysław applied to the air force, where he would have been accepted if not for a serious knee injury, which required two months of hospital treatment. From the hospital, he was sent to an armored brigade in Iraq, where Polish troops guarded the Kirkuk oil fields against German sabotage, allowing the British to move part of their army from Iraq to the front. The transfer of the II Corps to Italy took place between

December 1943 and April 1944, where they finally had to face the enemy in open combat. Władysław participated twice in the first line of attack on Monte Cassino, sustaining numerous wounds, which later changed his category from "D" to "E". Being a corporal, he suffered severe burns to his back when their tank was shelled with phosphorus projectiles by the Germans. Władysław recalls an interesting and little-known incident: before the attack, all soldiers were given a tiny cup of some substance "for courage." Whatever it was, it effectively eliminated normal fear and tendencies to panic in such conditions, without diminishing their ability to think and act rationally.

After the final attack on the Monte Cassino fortress and its capture, Władysław spent the last months, until the end of the war, in the Corps' supply leadership.

Demobilization followed; the British wanted to get rid of those who helped them achieve their hard-won victory. They simply told them to scatter wherever they wanted. Those who wanted could return to Poland, but few chose this path, hearing how veterans of the Western Front were treated in the new conditions of Soviet domination in liberated Poland. They already knew Soviet "care" from their time in Siberia. When General Anders learned that the British were trying to get rid of Polish troops, he insisted that they allow his former soldiers to settle in Great Britain or in one of the British Commonwealth countries. This applied only to those who had gone through the entire combat path with him from the USSR to Italy. Soldiers who joined the Italian front, such as young Poles living in western Poland, often at the beginning of the war, were forcibly recruited into the Wehrmacht, surrendering and joining the Polish army in combat against the Allies' forces. They were not covered by this privilege.

Władysław was in the first of the two groups sent to Canada. In total, about 6000 veterans of the II Corps arrived in Canada. He sailed from Italy from Porto Recanto and landed in Halifax in 1946. Here he was received by another commission, questioned about his experiences; he did not understand why... he later understood that it was about separating the chaff from the battlefield in this vast country. His best friend was sent to Ontario, while Władysław was directed to Alberta, to a farm near Lethbridge. After a long journey by train, an almost Siberian winter and slightly better camp barracks, which lacked fuel, awaited him in Lethbridge. So, the first impressions were not too pleasant - a new, free country and again camps from which local farmers took them away like slaves. In addition, Lethbridge housed a camp of German prisoners of war. However, as it happened, he did not stay long in Lethbridge, as during a medical examination, tuberculosis was detected in him. He was sent to Calgary, where he was ordered to lie down and sleep in hospital barracks. It wasn't an easy task, as he felt completely healthy, but he couldn't express himself as he had no knowledge of

English - until Colonel Dr. Ryc arrived from Edmonton. He immediately asked if he had ever had pneumonia before, and Władysław answered yes, he had pneumonia twice, once in his early youth. It turned out that pneumonia leaves a mark on them for life, which can later be mistaken for tuberculosis, so he was sent to peel potatoes in the kitchen.

Władysław's life in his new homeland is similar to that of other veterans: acclimatization, learning the language, creating his own home. In Calgary, he meets his wife, they start a family. Both worked to buy their first home. At the same time, they actively participated in Polish community life. Władysław served as the chairman of the Collegial Court in the organization of the Polish Combatants Association branch #18 in Calgary. He was also a member of the Committee for the Construction of the new Polish Canadian Cultural Center, which we all still use today.

Anastazja and Stanisław Sokołowski

Mrs. Anastazja Sokołowska greets me at the door of her home in Southwest Calgary, along with her friend Mrs. Irena Miłosz. Due to her health condition, Anastazja's son Marek is present during my interview. At the age of 88, Anastazja is doing reasonably well, although some names and details have faded from her memory, but albums with photos and newspaper clippings help refresh the memories of wartime adventures.

Anastazja, née Smal, was born on February 22, 1922, in the village of Howiłow Mały, Trembowla County, Tarnopol Voivodeship. She was the only

daughter among five brothers: Teodor, Bogdan, Jarosław, and Grzegorz, in the family of Maria and Marcin Smal, Polish settlers in the Eastern Borderlands.

On the fateful night of February 9/10, 1940, the village was asleep when the banging of NKVD rifle butts on doors echoed. An order was given for immediate evacuation from their homes; they were given a few minutes to dress and pack a few necessary things before being put on sleighs, which took them to the waiting train at the railway station in Mszańec, about 5 kilometers away. At that time, Anastazja's brother Grzegorz was absent from home. He had gone to buy bags for grain, and upon his return, he noticed NKVD officials near the house. He watched the entire evacuation event from hiding and saw the family escorted by NKVD officers to the train, suspecting that he might be seeing them for the last time. He also saw that as soon as the sleighs left the house, looting began, and Ukrainian neighbors took everything usable. After such looting, most of the Polish houses were set on fire, and those who managed to avoid deportation were brutally murdered by UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army, Ukrainian nationalists). Grzegorz miraculously escaped with his life and made his way to western Poland, where he later started a family.

Anastazja's family endured a several-week-long exhausting journey in cattle wagons to the East until they reached their destination, a cotton collective farm in Kazakhstan. There they were put to slave labor in cotton harvesting - from early morning until late at night - with only one break for a meal per day, which came in the evening when they received a bowl of soup and a piece of bread. Hunger tormented them terribly throughout their stay on the *kolkoz*, or settlement. Anastazja recalls how once she tried to save a slice of bread to eat the next day, so she put the slice under her pillow before going to sleep. Upon waking up in the morning, she was horrified to discover that the slice had disappeared, leaving only a few crumbs under the pillow... no one stole her bread, she unknowingly ate it in her sleep, driven by uncontrollable hunger.

In those inhuman conditions, they persevered for over a year until the political situation changed in June 1941, after the German invasion of the USSR, which provided the basis for the formation of the Polish Army under agreements

signed by General Sikorski with Stalin. Anyone from the Poles imprisoned in forced labor camps in the vast territories of Siberia or Kazakhstan was now free, and all who were capable of embarking on long journeys headed to mobilization points, where general Władysław Anders' Army was being formed.

The three eldest - Teodor, Anastazja, and Bogdan - immediately set out to join the newly formed Polish army. Bogdan, being younger, was initially assigned to the cadet school, and after 1942 and the transfer of the II Corps to Iran, he served in the RAF (Royal Air Force). Anastazja joined the women's transport corps under number 303 (later 316), where she completed a driving course. Their unit was equipped with Allied trucks, and Anastazja began working as a driver, transporting soldiers, weapons, and ammunition, and reaching the rear of the front lines to supply Polish units with food. In this role, she survived until the end of the war through the entire Italian campaign, including the Battle of Monte Cassino, where she delivered essential supplies to the foot of the monastery hill, from where they were further carried upward on the backs of donkeys. Anastazja recalls how during an attack on Monte Cassino, she once got lost on one of her deliveries and almost fell into the hands of the Germans; fortunately, she encountered local people along the way who stopped her and showed her the right direction.

After the end of hostilities in June 1945, Anastazja got married to Stanisław Sokołowski, whom she met during military training in Palestine. Both were soldiers, veterans of the II Corps. Two borderland natives, after experiencing deportation from their beloved Poland, enduring work in Soviet gulags, and serving with distinction in the Polish Army, joined together to spend the rest of their lives happily.

Stanisław Sokołowski passed away several years ago, while we were documenting Anastazja's stories. Stanisław left behind a handwritten autobiography, thanks to which I can present the story of his wartime wanderings. Stanisław Sokołowski was born on April 6, 1916, in St. Petersburg, into a family of a Polish railway worker servicing the railway line from Petersburg to Helsinki. After the end of World War I in 1918, Poland regained its independence. Stanisław's father decided to move the family to the territories of the Reborn Poland. In 1919, the Sokołowski family settled in the Vilnius Voivodeship, in the village of Kurzeniec, where they lived happily until the outbreak of World War II.

After completing elementary school, Stanisław joined the Shooting Association, where he actively participated until 1937 when he was drafted into the army. He served in the Border Protection Corps, from where he later transferred in December of that year to the 3rd Gendarmerie Division in Grodno. After a short service in Grodno, he was selected for further training in Grudziądz, where he completed a non-commissioned officer school. After completing

compulsory military service, he remained in the army permanently. Two weeks before the outbreak of the war in 1939, he was assigned to the 29th Transport Division, from where he went to the Warsaw-Spała front. Despite the great heroism of Polish soldiers, the poorly armed Polish army was unable to defend itself against the armored divisions of the German Wehrmacht. After the lost battle near Garwolin, he made his way to Lublin and, together with his commander, reached Chełmno, where they joined Colonel Szalewicz's group. Stanisław and his friend took part in the battles of this unit, which fought against the Germans near Hrubieszów, Wojsławice, Rachodno, and as far as Suchowola.

On September 17, Colonel Szalewicz informed his soldiers about the entry of the Soviet Red Army into the territories of eastern Poland. Further fighting of the ill-equipped Polish army against two enemies, Germans armed with modern armor from the West and Soviets from the East, had no chance. Colonel Szalewicz advised all his subordinates to try to reach their families or cross into Romania to avoid capture and captivity. Stanisław was riding a bicycle, trying to reach his family in Kurzeniec, when he was captured and disarmed by the Russians near Suchowola, 100 km north of Lviv. He was allowed to continue his journey home, where upon arrival, he worked as an electrician for several weeks. Local Soviet security services (NKVD) learned that Stanisław had once served in the Gendarmerie, and he was arrested along with three thousand other captured Poles and taken east to Russia, through Minsk to Borisov, where the Russians loaded all the prisoners into cattle wagons, and further through Orsha, Smolensk, and Moscow, until they reached Ryazan southeast of Moscow. In Ryazan in 1941, Stanisław was put on trial and sentenced to 8 years in prison in the Gulags (forced labor camps). After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Sikorski-Majski agreement was signed, and all deported and imprisoned Poles in Russia were granted amnesty. Stanisław headed to the forming Polish Army, to the recruitment point in Buzułuk (southeast of Samarkand). From there, they headed towards the Caspian Sea, and on August 28, 1942, they left the Soviet Union, crossed into Iran at the port of Pahlevi, where they joined the British Armed Forces. Before the arduous journey to Iran,

Stanisław suffered from typhus fever, then contracted infectious jaundice, and night blindness. He was cured in Iran by British doctors. On the way to Iraq, he contracted malaria. But there, the soldiers were surrounded by good medical care, unlike in Russia, where there was a lack of food and medicine.

From Iraq, they traveled by Allied vehicles to Palestine, and then through Egypt, and across the Mediterranean Sea, they reached southern Italy, where the final Allied offensive began. Stanisław fought on the front lines until the end of the war, successively at Monte Cassino, Osimo, Loretto, Ancona, Rimini, and Bologna.

After getting married, Stanisław and Anastazja Sokołowski moved to England in 1946, where their eldest daughter Bożenna was born in 1947.

They arrived in Canada in 1948, initially working on a beet farm near Lethbridge. After completing their contract, the family moved to Colman, where Stanisław worked in a coal mine; here, their next two daughters, Maria, and Lucy were born. Son Marek was born in Calgary. In 1958, they moved to Calgary, where Stanisław took a job at CON-Force, where he worked for 25 years until the age of 67 when he retired.

Upon arrival in Canada, the London Government granted Stanisław the rank of Warrant Officer (Sergeant), and in March 2002, the Government of the Republic of Poland promoted Stanisław to the rank of Second Lieutenant.

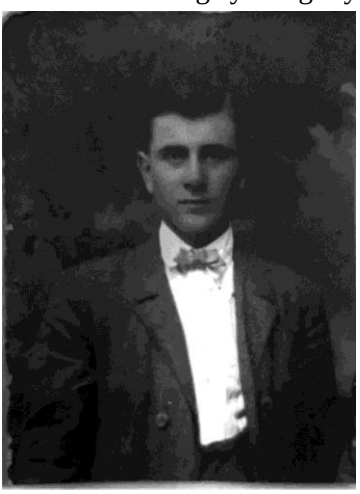
In Calgary, Stanisław and Anastazja actively participated in the Polish community life; they were long-time members of the Polish Combatants Association branch #18. We sincerely thank them for their work.

Thanks to Anastazja's efforts and the help of the Red Cross, Anastazja's parents, along with her youngest brother Władysław, returned from Kazakhstan to Poland after the war. They settled in Drzewiany, in the Babolice commune near Koszalin. The parents lived to a ripe old age in Poland, the father passed away at the age of 86, and the mother at 92.

Piotr Okrasa

(by Tadeusz, Piotr's son)

Our home was in Piaseczna, near Warsaw. It was June or the beginning of July 1939 when my father was called to report to his army detachment. I recall that day, as my father said such a tender goodbye to us. A day like this one remembers forever, when your father takes you in his arms and hugs you tightly. I was 5 years old, my brother Zbyszek was 8, and my sister Barbara was 2. I remember that he hugged me in a special way – he lifted me high and then put his arms around me and pressed me tightly to his heart. Tears were flowing from my mother Genowefa's eyes who was 31 years old then – she stood nearby and cried. He took a small package, stood in the door and looked at us and then left. We were left alone. Mother sat in a chair and hugged us to her. That is how the long years of separation started. On the 1st. of September was the darkest time of our lives. We would constantly ask 'what is happening with our daddy' 'where is he now' 'is he alive' 'where can we find out where he is? My mother kept trying but was unable to find out where his detachment was and especially anything about our daddy. She went many times to the office of the Red Cross, but was unable to attain any information.



The time of German occupation was very hard to bear and often very dangerous. All of our religious holidays – especially Wigilja - the night before Christmas, were extremely hard emotionally. When we shared the Oplatek, my mother prayed for safety, health, life and return of my father – we all cried, so the Christmas holidays were always sad.

At the end of 1944 and beginning of 1945, the Germans behaved in an unusual manner for them. We did not know what was the reason for this. In January 1945 at about 4:00 pm there was an unusual quiet. Mother forbade us to go outside the house. She sewed our names and dates of birth to our clothes. We sat at home full of anxiety – we did not even undress to go to bed. In the early morning we heard strange noises and looked carefully out of the window. In front of the house a tank had stopped and soldiers exited onto the street. They were not German soldiers and my mother thought they were Russians. We left the house and ran onto the street, thinking that it was a strange but joyous end of the war. There appeared some Polish soldiers and my mother, full of hope that her husband was among them, started to ask about him. Unfortunately, there was no information. We lived full of hope that our father was alive and is somewhere

until he can come home. The Red Cross said that they had no information about his name in the list of those who had died.

And so 1945 and 1946 passed – when suddenly in May 1947, I think it was the 14th. or 15th, a student came running into the school and called to me that my father has arrived and has just left the railroad station and is heading home. I ran from Swietojanski St. to Kolejowa St. and ran along the railroad tract when I stopped because a soldier was coming. He was still a few dozen yards away but I did not recognize the uniform and he was stooped as he had two sailors' bags on his back. He stopped also and looked at me and suddenly started walking towards me. I ran as fast as I could and threw myself into his arms... 'daddy, daddy!' I hadn't seen my father in eight years and yet I recognized him immediately. My mother arrived as well as Zbyszek and Basia. We hugged each other, cried – it seemed endless. With our arms around each other and surrounding my father, we all went home.

At home we continued to greet him and examine his uniform, his badges of service, his beret with a crowned eagle (for which we later had a lot of trouble.) My father pulled out some bars of chocolate and delicious fruit.

The news of his return spread quickly to our neighbors and we were inundated with many people – some good friends of ours, some less so. The chocolate disappeared very quickly.

We were all very interested in his experiences from the time we said goodbye in 1939 to his return in 1947. After a few days father started to tell us about his odyssey – in some cases he had trouble relating.

I was a thirteen year old then – now I try to recall all that he said. I know that certain things were etched forever into my mind.

After his mobilization his unit was sent eastward and in the second part of September, they were surrounded by Soviet troops and were taken prisoner. They were put into rail baggage cars and headed east for a few days, with sanitary stops and bread thrown into the waggons and barely enough water. They arrived, his father presumed, in Kazachstan. The camp was surrounded by barbed wire and they lived in tents. The worst was the winter, as the temperatures sometimes plummeted to -50C. My father told us that when they peed the urine froze before it hit the ground – to his amusement. Their clothes and uniforms were not enough

to keep them warm. They wrapped themselves in whatever they could find – although their clothes were falling apart as were their shoes, which they wrapped in pieces of cloth. They were very hungry as the rations were minimal and became even smaller as time went on. They were sad to see Polish women and children, who had been deported with their families, begging for food at their camp. My father said that they gave them what they could. The extreme hunger and lack of sanitary conditions caused an outbreak of typhus. Death and fear were everywhere. People dressed in torn and tattered rags and were barely moving.

At the beginning of 1942, my father said they heard rumours that a Polish Army was forming. He wondered if they themselves were going to form this army. Emaciated, barely moving and looking like skeletons – would they be sent to the front?

My father reminisced that it was April or May 1942 when the wonderful news arrived that General Anders was forming a Polish Army and that a few thousand soldiers had already been transported to Iran from Russia. My father accepted the idea that his unit, however they are, are being asked to join the army General Anders is leading from Russia to Iran. In 1942 there were already transports to Iran.

At the beginning of 1943, my father found himself in a hospital in Iran under the care of Polish doctors and nurses. He was there for over a month and had probably contracted malaria. For a long time the Polish soldiers from Russia were recuperating slowly by eating well and undergoing treatment for their many wounds and frozen digits. After this they started to train for battle. They trained and trained for hours.

At the beginning of 1943, the Second Corps of Polish Armed Forces was transported to Italy to fight with the German army occupying this land. As per the order of General Anders, the Polish Army was ordered to conquer the Germans at Monte Cassino and thereby open the road for the Allies to Rome. We learned later, said my father, that other Allied armies had tried to conquer the Germans at Monte Cassino, but had suffered great losses and so were forced to retreat. In May 1944, the Polish Army stood before this mountain. My father remembered exactly the 18th of May 1944 when they started the attack. First was a long artillery fire – the mountain seemed to be on fire. Everywhere a torrent of fire, smoke – hell. This was followed by the Land Forces who took very heavy opposition from the Germans, who were above them and able to observe. The Polish forces endured very heavy losses – they had to go back to carry out their wounded and dead – which was also an extremely dangerous maneuver. Then the second and third attack started. Finally Polish forces reached the top and entered the cloister and chapel on top of Monte Cassino. They had achieved their aim! Victory! They were happy, but the number of casualties was enormous.


LEGITYMACJA
Nr. Str 19682
upoważniająca do noszenia
KRZYŻA PAMIĄTKOWEGO
MONTE CASSINO
wydana na podstawie
Dekretu Naczelnego Wodza
L. dz. 3504/Pers. 44
z dnia 26 lipca 1944

Rozkazem Dtwa 5. K. D. P.
Nr. 18 z dnia 22. II. 1945 r.
został nadany strzel.
(stopień)
Okrasa Piotr.
(nazwisko i imię)
18. Lw. Baon Strzel.
(pododdział)
KRZYŻ PAMIĄTKOWY
MONTE CASSINO
Nr. 19682
W polu, dnia 9. marca 1945
18. Lw. Baon Strz.
DOWÓDCA
(pieczęć)
PPŁK.

They had other smaller actions, together with Allied forces which freed the next towns and terrains. Everywhere there were ovations and flowers thrown at them by the Italians – the joy was palpable. They stayed in Italy until May 1946, when the demobilization of the Polish Armed Forces was announced and the members of the Second Corps were all transported to Great Britain.

In England my father had numerous possibilities: to stay in Great Britain, to emigrate to the USA or Canada or to return to Poland – where there was a communist regime which spread terror, jail to members of the AK (Polish Home Army) and often executions.

My father did not hesitate. He had a loving wife and children – and he longed to be with them. “What did I do wrong that I should be afraid to return to my homeland”? he said.

As is shown in his documents, Peter Okrasa registered in the arrivals at Gdansk Port on the 13th. of May, 1947.

He quickly came to know the communist regime, which hated General Anders and his soldiers. This my father felt on his own skin – how the

communist system works. He was dragged to the police station, many strange people interviewed him, next door neighbors were questioned about him. This lasted quite a long time, but he never regretted his return – as he was a happy husband and father.

My father died on October 21st 1982. The same regime in power then wanted to bury him in a 'place of honor' but my mother absolutely refused.

Following are the Medals of Honor received by my father:

- The Monte Cassino Cross – awarded 28th February, 1945- nr. 19683
- Distinguished Badge of the II Kresy Armored Division – awarded 28th November, 1946 – nr.18982
- Distinguished Army Medal – awarded 22nd November, 1946 – nr. 238
- Star of War 1939-1945 – awarded 28th December, 1945 – nr. 474
- The Cross of the Valiant – awarded 22nd November, 1946 – nr. 237
- The British War Medal 1939/45 – awarded 21st January, 1947 – nr. 588